

Llangernyw

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Introduction

Llangernyw lies on the A548, six miles north-east of Llanrwst and eight miles south-west of Abergele. The majority of the houses in the settlement are clustered about a crossroads on the west side of the valley of the River Elwy, a short distance away from the river, where the land begins to rise. The Elwy is joined here by the Afon Gallen from the south-west, and another small stream, the Afon Collen, from the west. The church stands on higher ground above a tributary of the River Elwy, and the old road through the village winds around it and down to cross the river; the modern village has extended beyond its original small nucleus, with new housing estates to the south and west.

This brief report examines the emergence and development of Llangernyw up to the year 1750. For the more recent history of the settlement, it will be necessary to look at other sources of information and particularly at the origins and nature of the buildings within it.

The accompanying map is offered only as an indicative guide to the historic settlement. The continuous line defining the historic core offers a visual interpretation of the area within which the settlement developed, based on our interpretation of the evidence currently to hand. It is not an immutable boundary line, and will require modification as new discoveries are made. The map does not show those areas or buildings that are statutorily designated, nor does it pick out those sites or features that are specifically mentioned in the text.

We have not referenced the sources that have been examined to produce this report, but that information will be available in the Historic Environment Record (HER) maintained by the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust. The HER can be accessed on-line through the Archwilio website (www.archwilio.org.uk).

History of development

The ‘church of Cernyw’ is first recorded in 1261, its name form then being exactly the same as today. Minor variations appeared on later occasions as with *Nangernew* in 1284, an example of the not infrequent interchange of *llan* and *nant* in Welsh place-names, and *Llan Gernyw* in the 16th century.

Archdeacon Thomas, historian of the diocese of St Asaph, claimed that the church was founded by Digain, a saint of the fifth century, and there are even hints that it could have had a more important status, as the mother church or *clas* for the area. At what point a settlement developed around the church is unknown.

No evidence is available as to the appearance of Llangernyw in the centuries before the beginning of the 19th century. One or two points can be made about the village’s topography. The causeway from the Bridge Inn northwards to the churchyard is clearly an addition, and probably one that had been introduced early in the 19th century or perhaps a little before, its predecessor still visible on both sides of the stream. The Stag Hotel was probably erected on the triangle of open space at the lane junction; there is though no evidence to suggest that Llangernyw ever had a market.

The centre of the village does not appear to have changed much since the time of the Tithe survey in 1841. Houses then were strung along both sides of the north-south road, but there

were very few along the roads running east and west out of the village. The only crossing of the tributary of the River Elwy was just downhill and south of the church (where the present day footbridge is, east of the A458).



Llangernyw church, photo CS03-037-0025 © CPAT 2014

The heritage to 1750

St Digain's church (100432) is not thought to be earlier than the 13th or even the 14th century, even though its site has been in use for ecclesiastical purposes for a lot longer. An initial single-chambered structure was extended in the late medieval period, creating the distinct cruciform building now visible. In contrast, the interior is something of a disappointment, apart from the arched-braced roof of the 16th century; the font is Perpendicular, there is a stoup traditionally thought to be 14th-century, altar rails of the 17th century, benefaction boards of the 18th, and a number of 17th-century ledgers around the walls.

The elongated churchyard (105532) was enlarged to the east in 1854 and again in 1884, but there is an overall curvilinearity to its core which points to a former circular outline. Two cross-carved stones (100433) are positioned in the churchyard in the angle between the nave and the south transept, one dating from the 7th to 9th century, the other probably from the 9th to the 11th century. It is reasonably likely that they were originally positioned in what was to become the churchyard, it is rather less likely that they are in their original positions. The churchyard also contains an ancient yew, classed as one of 50 Great British Trees by the Tree Council; whether in reality it is 4000 years old is a moot point.

The lychgate (105533) is an 18th-century structure. Elias Owen at the end of the 19th century recounted how the annual fairs at Llangernyw were held in the churchyard until 1750, the lychgate (or churchyard porch) being favoured by the butchers to display their produce.

Pont Faen (105562), to the east of the village, bridges the Elwy. It is an 18th-century structure, perhaps late in that century, and is in stone, with three segmental arches the middle of which is the largest.

The majority of the houses standing in the village centre do not appear to be any earlier than the late 18th or even the 19th century. Neither the Royal Commission nor Cadw have identified any of great age (other than the church) within the village.

Hafodunos, (100439) lying half a mile west-south-west of the village centre, was rebuilt between 1861-6 by Sir George Gilbert Scott. The earliest reference to a mansion here was in 1615. It suffered a disastrous fire in 2004, but is reputedly now being restored.



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