

Bryneglwys

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Introduction

A small settlement lying to the south of the A5104 that links Bala and Chester, Bryneglwys lies beneath Llantysilio Mountain, 8km north-east of Corwen. The church surmounts a knoll projecting northwards into the valley of Afon Morwynion. The rest of the village lies to the south of it, mostly at a slightly lower altitude, on a spur between small streams that drop down off the mountain.

This brief report examines the emergence and development of Bryneglwys 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

Nothing is known of the origins of this small settlement. The name is an apposite one, literally meaning 'hill church', and is first documented in 1284 as *Breneglus*. In the Taxation of 1291 it was *Ecclia de Bryn Eglwys*.

There is little to suggest that the church is an early medieval foundation, other than its dedication to a British saint, yet this remains a possibility. Its medieval growth, if there was any, is unchronicled, and by the standards of rural Denbighshire, its post-medieval development is not well charted. If Thomas Badelsade's map can be trusted, the church and the parson's house represented Bryneglwys in its entirety in 1740, but the map's small scale calls for caution, and is probably misleading in that Edward Lhuyd's correspondent at the end of the 17th century claimed that there were five houses by the church. The shortage of information continues even into the mid-19th century for Bryneglwys' tithe map is poor and unusually does not even depict individual dwellings.

As a consequence there is virtually nothing that can be said about how the village reached its present form.

The heritage to 1750

The single-chambered church (100951), dedicated to St Tysilio, is mainly Perpendicular (i.e. later 15th or early 16th-century) with a chapel, the Yale Chapel, added to the south side in the later 16th century. Since that time the church has seen some rebuilding, possibly in the 1730s and certainly in 1875. Internally there is a 14th-century grave slab, and some 17th-century

woodwork including pulpit and stall fragments, and a coat-of-arms from the reign of George III. To Samuel Lewis in 1833 it was 'a small edifice, having no claim to architectural notice', an unreasonable observation.



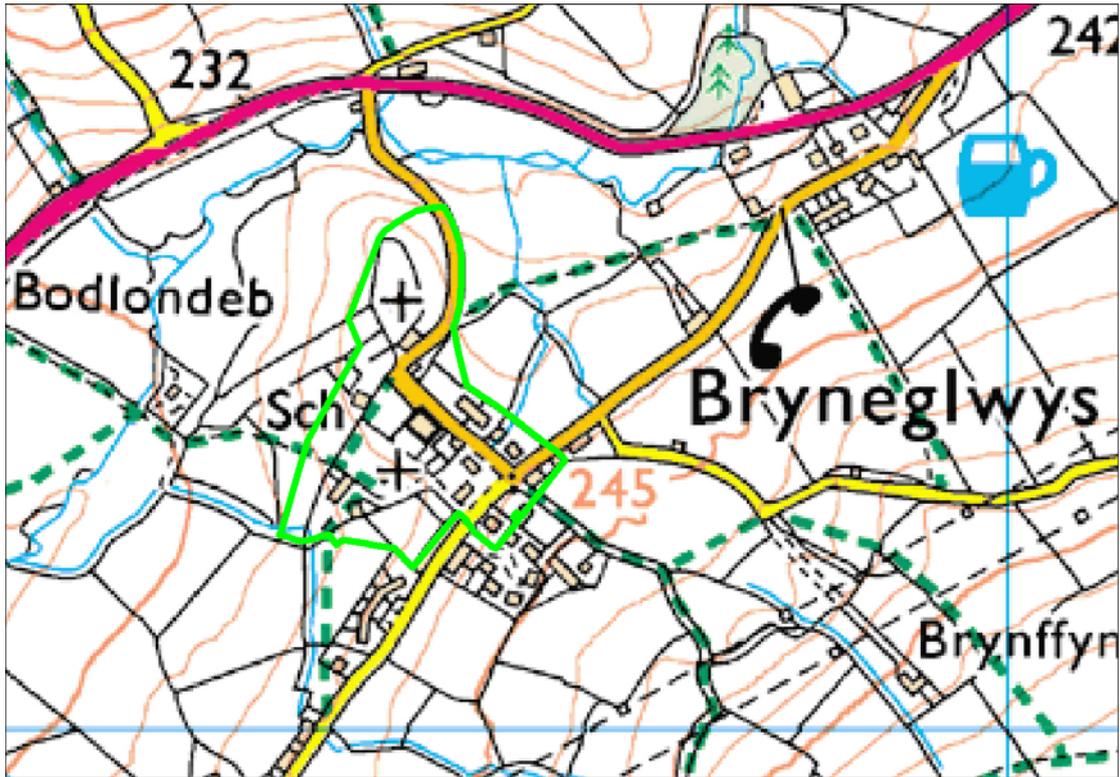
Bryneglwys Church, photo 95-C-0130 © CPAT, 2013

The churchyard (19728) forms an irregular polygon, slightly raised, and also extended a little to the north since the end of the 19th century. There is no convincing ground evidence of an inner and more curvilinear 'llan' or a diminution of the original enclosure. Yet we might note that in the late 18th century Thomas Pennant contended that the church was built inside an enclosure or camp; Derek Pratt considered that this might be a reference to the platform which he believed the church was built on.

There are a few small cottages of 19th or even 18th-century date, but nothing of any architectural significance, and Bryneglwys in the main consists of modern houses.

No earthworks of any significance can be recognised in the immediate environs.

The road pattern in the village has changed and this perhaps accounts at least in part for the absence of early dwellings. The A5104, passing to the north of the village, is a turnpike road, and thus likely to date to the second half of the 18th century or even later as it does not appear in its entirety on John Evans' map of 1795. Indeed it was classed as the 'new road' on the Tithe map. The older road is the lane entering the village from the north-east, running from Llandegla down to Llansantffraid (now Carrog). The lane entering the village from the north runs off the turnpike road and is thus likely to be of a similar date to it, but it follows a pre-existing holloway and this accounts for its sinuous course and its dog's-leg bend immediately to the south of the church where a new street has been introduced. The holloway, traceable further north beyond Afon Morwynion and the mill, and further south as it curves around the western edge of the modern settlement of Bryneglwys, would prior to the 18th century have been a more major thoroughfare through the village and some earlier houses are likely to have been located along it.



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