

Llanfechain

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Introduction

Llanfechain lies beside the B4393 in north-eastern Montgomeryshire. It is about 5km east of Llanfyllin and around 3km to the west of Llansanffraid-ym-Mechain. The village has developed in the broad valley of the River Cain, a tributary of the River Vyrnwy. The church and the village's historic core occupy a gravel terrace position on the south side of the river, while the motte and bailey is placed on a steep-sided spur overlooking it. Modern housing expansion is fundamentally altering the appearance of this village, most dramatically to the south of the church and on the east side of the motte.

This brief report examines the emergence and development of Llanfechain 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 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 need to be modified 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. Numbers in brackets are primary record numbers used in the HER to provide information that is specific to individual sites and features. These can be accessed on-line through the Archwilio website (www.archwilio.org.uk).

History of development

An early medieval origin can be assumed on the basis of the church dedication and the morphology of the churchyard. The pre-Conquest llys (or court) of the local lord is believed to have lain in the vicinity of Llys farm less than one kilometre to the west where research in the 1990s may have located the physical remains of the enclosure around it.

The name in the form Llanveccheyn is first encountered in 1254 and refers to the church in the cantref of Mechian. What is interesting but not of course unique is that the church's dedication to St Garmon is not reflected in the place-name. This did appear as ll.armon ymechain but as late as c.1566.

After the Norman Conquest, an earthwork castle was a strategically placed above the valley of the Cain to control the area.

Identifying the subsequent development of the settlement is at best speculative. By the middle of the 19th century Llanfechain consisted of dwellings on three sides of the churchyard and small groups of houses running down to Llanfechain Bridge over the River Cain as well as almost all the cottages now grouped together just beyond the bridge. The main road is a product of the turnpike era, probably 18th century, though admitting the possibility that there could have been a medieval predecessor. Nevertheless, the straight lane leading off the road and down to the church is so straight and adopts the alignment of the adjacent fields that it could well be a late addition to the landscape. None of this tells us anything about the appearance of the village in earlier centuries with any certainty, but the main focus of settlement looks to have been from the church northwards.

The heritage to 1750

St Garmon's church (7602) is a single-chambered, 12th century structure with surviving Romanesque windows in the east wall and two doorways in the south wall. It has been claimed by Haslam to be 'in some respects the most complete Norman church remaining to Montgomeryshire', though if we are being honest this is rather a hollow plaudit, given the dearth of such buildings in the county. There were some Victorian alterations including the addition of a western bell turret. Inside the roof is of the 15th century, the font from c.1500, the pulpit carries a date of 1636, and at the western end its gallery remains.



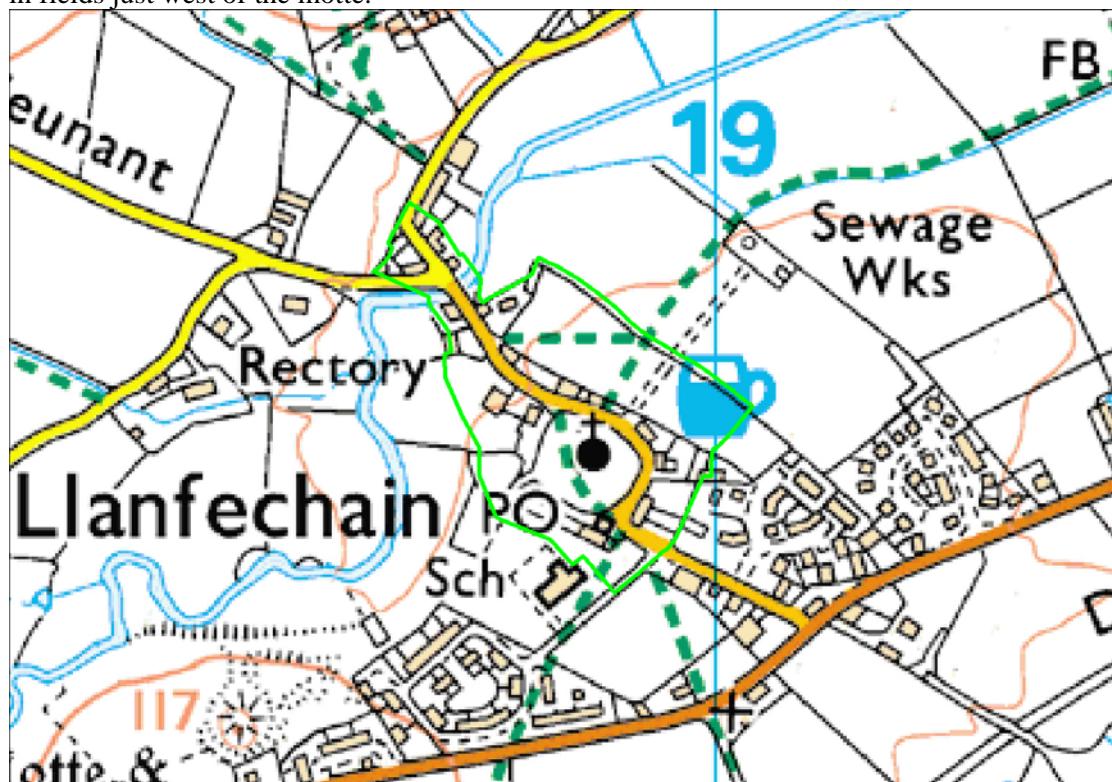
St Garmon's Church, photo 1955-0006, © CPAT, 2012

The raised churchyard (7603) appears to retain its original sub-circular form. In addition there is a mound (1487) behind the church traditionally interpreted as a preaching mound associated with St Garmon, though just possibly a prehistoric round barrow. The cock-pit which was positioned next to it has now disappeared.

Ty Coch (7698) on the main road opposite the lane leading down to the church and village is a restored 15th century hall-house with 17th century modifications. Plas-yn-dinas Inn (7697), opposite the church, is a Grade II, late 17th century, half-timbered building. An adjacent building is reported to have had crucks which could have been of an earlier date, but these have now gone. Plas Cain beside Llanfechain Bridge is a timber-framed dwelling thought to be from the 17th century. Away from the village core and on the north side of the Cain is the Old Rectory (40607) believed to have had its origins around 1620.

Domen Gastell, a fine motte and bailey earthwork (1486; SAM Mont5) represents a second cultural heritage focus in the village. There is nothing for the present to suggest that the castle and the church were integrated within a single settlement layout.

A holloway (7604), the course of a former track on the south side of the river, runs below the castle in the general direction of the village, and ridge and furrow cultivation (7604) is visible in fields just west of the motte.



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