

Abbeycwmhir

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Introduction

Abbeycwmhir lies on the south-facing side of a U-shaped valley which is followed by the Cwm Hir, and is overshadowed by the surrounding hills. The site of the abbey is on the valley floor, the village occupying a higher terrace where the Coed Poeth stream runs down to the small river. The settlement is 10km to the north of Llandrindod Wells.

This brief report examines its emergence and development up to 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 may 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

The earliest references to the spot are as *Kwmhir* in 1198 and *Cumhyr* in c.1200, and simply mean the 'long valley'. The modern name may well have been coined by Sir William Fowler around the time that he created the hall here, and as *Abby Cwmheare* it appeared in 1752. A variant form, *Mynachlog* (monastery) *y Cwm Hir* seems to have originated with Lewis Morris in 1796.

The origin of Abbeycwmhir focuses on the Cistercian abbey which was perhaps founded in 1143, but properly established in 1176. Its importance was enhanced when Llywelyn ap Gruffudd was buried here in 1282. It was partially destroyed by Owain Glyndŵr in 1402 and probably never recovered from this, as it was worth only a very small amount when dissolved by Henry VIII in 1535. Unlike some other Cistercian foundations (e.g. Valle Crucis) there is no evidence at all for a pre-existing settlement which was cleared away to make space for the monastery.

The Fowler family acquired the land and the abbey ruins in about 1562, and the 'manor howse at Cumheere' was referred to about 1600. A new house was built at some stage, but this was reportedly destroyed by Parliamentarians in 1644. The family continued to reside in the area and Richard Fowler, Sheriff of Radnorshire in 1655 built a new house, Devannor (also known as Ty Faenor), about 1670, about 1.6km to the east.

In the wake of the Restoration, too, he built a small church in 1680, closer to the abbey ruin; this was constituted a chapelry to Llanbister, and continued as such perhaps into the 19th

century. The Tithe Survey of 1839 considered Abbeycwmhir to be a part of Llanbister parish, but Samuel Lewis several years earlier had classed it as a parish in its own right.

A London businessman, Thomas Wilson, acquired the estate in 1822 and promptly built a new house on the site of the present hall. It was sold in 1837 to the Philips family who then rebuilt the hall in or soon after 1867. The landscaping of the grounds is likely to have taken place during the 19th century.

The tithe survey of 1839-42 reveals a pattern of settlement which was even sparser than today: the farm, the church, a mill and a cottage, the last of these subsequently replaced by the hall. On the basis of the available evidence, then, the presence of a settlement at Abbeycwmhir during the medieval and early modern era appears unlikely.

The heritage to 1750

The first church of St Mary (16000) was erected in 1680. It was completely replaced in 1866, and nothing of the earlier building survives above ground. Features of an earlier age include the tympanum over the south door, a coffin lid of Abbot Mabli dated to *c.*1200, and a significant number of architectural fragments. All of these were salvaged from the abbey at one point or another.

Of Cwmhir Abbey (245; SAM Rd012), little of the abbey church remains and the surrounding area is largely devoid of surface traces of the conventual buildings. However, there are a few rather slight linear banks of unknown origin in the field to the east. As the abbey is not strictly speaking a part of the settlement, though it is the reason why the settlement is here, description here is limited, and fuller statements can be found elsewhere. Similarly, landscape features associated with the abbey including the Great and Little Parks, a rabbit warren which may or may not be earlier than the 19th century, and the abbey mill downstream of the ruins, all fall outside the remit of this report.

The present Hall (16001) was built in or after 1867. The designed gardens on the north and east sides of the hall, which were registered as Grade II in 1999, are 19th-century in origin.

Home Farm farmhouse, beside the abbey ruins, is believed to have features suggestive of an 18th-century origin, but information on these is sparse. This could be the winged storeyed house that is shown in a 19th-century drawing and the present farm could be a development from this.

Low ridge and furrow is visible on aerial photos in the field to the west of Home Farm, and further ridge and furrow was noted through geophysical survey to the east. The date of these cultivation traces is unknown, but a post-Dissolution origin seems more likely.



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