

Nantmel

SO 034663
16180

Introduction

Nantmel overlooks the River Dulas from a south-facing spur defined by shallow valleys which offers flattish ground for the church and the two houses that accompany it. Northwards the settlement is overshadowed by the escarpment of Cefnnantmel. Rhayader lies just over 6km to the west, and the main A40 linking that town with Leominster follows the valley below the settlement.

This brief report examines Nantmel's 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).



Nantmel church, photo 95-C-0320, © CPAT, 2011

History of development

Like many other small settlements in Radnorshire, the early history of Nantmel remains a mystery. There is a tradition that the church was founded by St Cynllo in the 5th century, but how much credence should be given to this is a moot point. Certainly the church dedication and the general shape of the churchyard signal a beginning for ecclesiastical activity here in the early medieval era, but a more specific date can only be speculation. .

The name is first recorded as *Nantmayl* in 1259 and in its present form in 1513. Incorporating a personal name which is also found in the Radnorshire cantref of Maelienydd, Nantmel signifies 'Mael's valley', with the prefix indicating a valley rather than the more normal stream.

The village consisted of no more than the church and two houses in the middle of the last century, and at present there is no convincing evidence that it was any larger in earlier centuries.

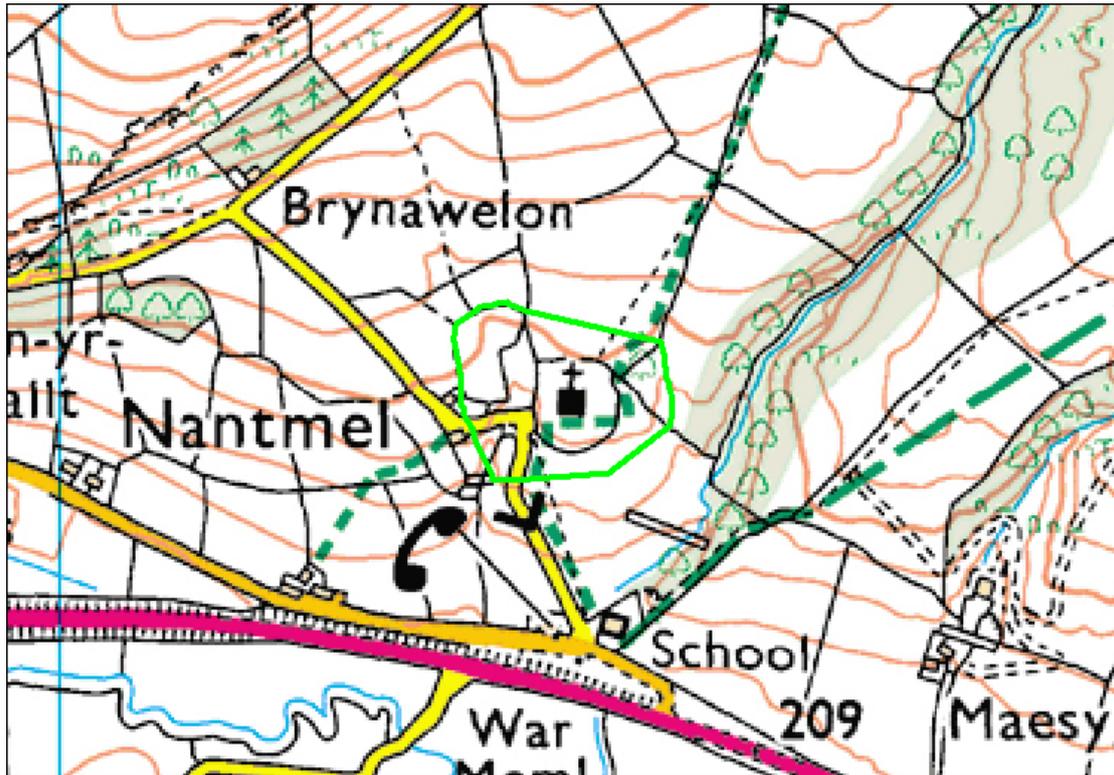
The heritage to 1750

St Cynllo's church (16041) may have early beginnings but much of it was rebuilt in 1792. Only the base of the west tower is 17th century or earlier. A 13th-century capital from a pillar, once re-fashioned into a stoup, was recovered from the vicarage garden and is believed to have originated at Cwmhir Abbey. The church chest is thought to be of 17th-century date but little else surviving the Georgian reconstruction.

The churchyard (16099) has a somewhat irregular shape, but there is an internal bank on the north side, probably an earlier 'llan' boundary which provides a more circular perimeter, closer to what is shown on the Tithe map in the middle of the 19th century. A small part of this earlier boundary bank appears to have been cut away in 2008 during churchyard access works without being properly recorded.

Convincing traces of earlier habitation sites are entirely absent. Nevertheless, the ground on all but the west side is sufficiently flat to have allowed building. Platforms on the west side at a level below the churchyard wall are thought to have been naturally formed.

Church Cottage (16042) was a small cruck building perhaps of around 1700, but it has been demolished in recent years to make way for a wooden bungalow.



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