

St Harmon

SN 98857281
16195

Introduction

St Harmon in the western part of the historic county lies on the gravel terraces that fringe Afon Marteg, the older part of the village on the east bank, more modern developments on the west. The valley here is broad and open with high hills to east and west. Rhayader is some 5km off to the south-south-west.

This brief report examines St Harmon'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).



St Harmon church, photo 3247-0002, © CPAT, 2011

History of development

St Garmon's monastery (1665) was reputedly founded here in the 6th century AD, and later, perhaps in the 9th century it evolved as a mother church (or clas) serving the cantref of Gwerthrynion, its presence being recalled in one of the township names in the parish, Clas-Garmon. The clas community was probably dissolved sometime after the coming of the Normans, but prior to that was certainly one of the most important churches in the region, and Giraldus Cambrensis wrote of St Curig's staff (crozier) housed in the church which effected miracles. The location of that early establishment is unknown, although the present churchyard is a strong contender.

It first appears in the record in about 1191 as *Sancti Germani*, and by the late 15th century was being termed *Sanharmon*.

The subsequent history of the settlement at St Harmon is as obscure as most other small Radnorshire villages, and there is no convincing evidence to indicate that a nucleated settlement developed here in the Middle Ages.

The Tithe map of the mid-19th century depicts the church and a small group of houses on the south side of Afon Marteg, and the Sun Inn and a couple more dwellings on the north side.

The heritage to 1750

St Garmon's church (16053), now consists of a nave, chancel and south porch. The 'low, long and dark' church of medieval date was replaced in 1821 and a new chancel and vestry were added in 1908. It contains a font of 11th/12th-century date, but nothing else of pre-Reformation origin. Some of the stone from the earlier building was probably used in the construction of the adjacent Llawr-llan farmhouse which bears a datestone of 1821.

The churchyard (16106) is near circular and distinctively raised, so much so on the west that the house backing on to the churchyard - Llan View - is appositely named for its upper windows are on a level with the gravestones! Variations in height on the south side of the church also suggest that it may have been constructed on an artificial platform.

In common with other Welsh settlements with St Garmon dedications, the churchyard formerly contained a mound (3376), frequently interpreted as a preaching mound, in its south-west quadrant. This may have been deliberately levelled in the recent past for it is no longer detectable.

There are no early vernacular buildings in the settlement, and nothing to suggest that the Llawr-llan farmhouse complex was erected on an earlier site.

No earthworks can be discerned in the open fields abutting the churchyard, and the ridges and other low banks in fields on the south side of the road initially appeared to be related either to flood prevention (OS plot 7969) or to be of uncertain origin (OS plot 8665). Recent evaluation has suggested that some of the earthworks may be recent cultivation ridging of uncertain date.



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