

CANTREF

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Introduction

Cantref lies on the north bank of the Afon Cynrig, a small tributary of the Usk. It is served by a minor road from Brecon which lies around 3km to the north. The church, even today is accompanied only by a house which shares the name.

This brief report examines the emergence and development of Cantref 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

The name, recalling the medieval administrative unit known as the *cantref*, derives its name from *Cantref Tewdos*, the second element being a personal name that distinguished it from Cantref Mawr which was much larger and lay to the north of the Usk. But there is an alternative name which surfaces in a document of 1404, *Cantref al' Llankenedre*, and refers to the church's earlier dedication to St Cynidr. Two years earlier it had simply been named as *Cantref* and in 1372, the earliest reference, as *Cantr'*.

There is no evidence of a settlement developing around the church in the medieval era or after the Reformation. In this respect Cantref appears to be a reasonably typical church settlement.

The heritage to 1750

St Mary's church is thought to have been largely rebuilt in 1829, the sole survivor of its predecessor being the tower which though architecturally undistinguished, is believed to date to around 1600. Possibly large parts of it were further replaced when the church was renovated in 1867. As with many churches in the region, only the font was retained from the earlier building, this one of simple design but probably of 12th-century origin. 18th-century gravestones in the tower floor and the porch are the only other survivals.

The churchyard is polygonal in shape and there is nothing within its boundary to suggest that it was originally circular. However, Cantref House (below) has a curving edge to its garden which was originally longer and is matched by a similar boundary on the east against the river. A semi-circular enclosure, similar to that proposed for Llanspyddid, might be suggested.

The house now known as Cantref House lying to the west of the church was the vicarage which is believed to have been rebuilt in the 1790s. From this it can be assumed that there was an earlier vicarage on the site though its date has not been recorded.



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