

CWMDU

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Introduction

Cwmdu is located beside the A479 trunk road as it descends the valley of the Rhiangoll, 10km south of Talgarth and 6km north-west of Crickhowell. The church occupies a spur projecting westwards into the valley, while the modern settlement lies at a lower level just to the south.

This brief report examines the emergence and development of Cwmdu 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

Cwmdu means 'dark valley', but it is the church that first appears in documentary sources, with *Sancti Michaelis* in the late 12th century and *Miheleschurche* in 1331. *Cwmde* is encountered for the first time fifty years later in 1383. Cwmdu is a descriptive term, but there was another – *Stradewi* (or *Estrateu* in 1130) which incorporates *ystrad* (valley) and possibly the personal name *Dewi* or *yw* meaning 'yew-tree' – the use of which was particularly prevalent in the Middle Ages in relation to the sub-lordship centred on nearby Tretower. Further complexity is provided by the possibility evinced by place-name authorities that this should be the documented *Lann mihaegel meibion gratlaun* and *Lann Michacgel trefceriav*, referred to in the book of charters known as the *Liber Landeveis* in the middle of the 12th century.

The earliest reference to Cwmdu, in *Liber Llandavensis*, concerns the consecration of the church by Herewald in or around 1060. Taken at face value this would imply that the church was a new foundation immediately prior to the arrival of the Normans, but an alternative view, preferred here, would be that Herewald was establishing a new church on an older ecclesiastical site, the case almost certainly with the three others – Llanbedr, Llangenny and Partrishow – that he consecrated at the same time.

As with so many of these small villages it is impossible to determine on the basis of presently available evidence whether a nucleated settlement developed here in the Middle Ages.

Theophilus Jones called the parish the granary of Brecknockshire, a reflection of the arable capability of the vale of Rhiangoll.

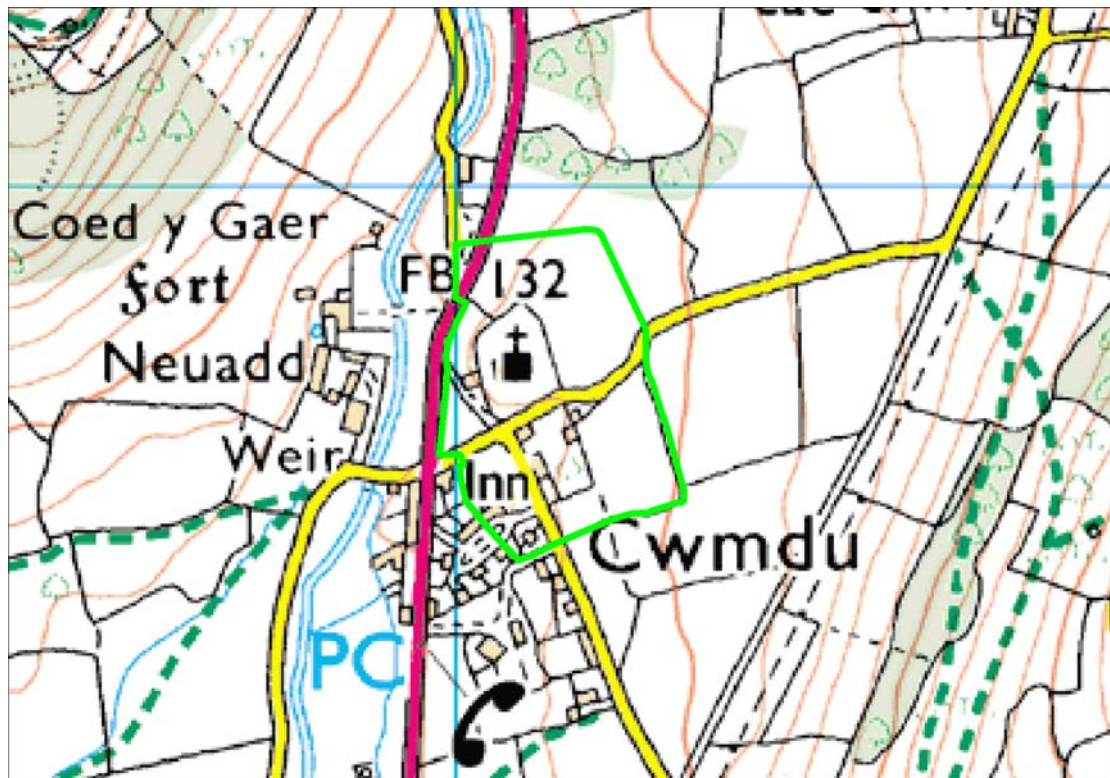
The heritage to 1750

St Michael's Church is largely of 15th-century date, though some writers have suggested that earlier masonry dating back to the 11th century could be encased in the existing structure. Extensive rebuilding occurred in 1831-33 and again in 1907. A pillar stone with Latin and Ogam inscriptions and of late 6th-early 7th century date was built into a buttress on the south side of the church in the 19th century, having been found a mile away; and fragments of two 11-12th century crosses are stored in the priest's porch. There is no evidence in the building itself or in the layout of the churchyard to suggest an origin earlier than the 11th century.

There are no other buildings of significance in its immediate neighbourhood.

The modern A479 is almost certainly a replacement for an earlier road which wandered along the valley side and is apparent in the lane which passes just to the west of the church and continues on southwards.

No tangible evidence survives of early settlement around the church, although the field to the east contains at least two terraces or platforms whose function and date are unknown.



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