

## LLANFRYNACH

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### *Introduction*

Llanfrynach has grown up beside Nant Menasgin, an east-flowing tributary of the Usk. The river itself is 1.5km away to the north and Brecon lies 4km to the north-west. The village lies on a flattish plain between streams that run down from the steeper foothills of the Brecon Beacons. A gentle ridge separates the spot from the River Usk.

This brief report examines the emergence and development of Llanfrynach 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 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. The HER can be accessed on-line through the Archwilio website ([www.archwilio.org.uk](http://www.archwilio.org.uk)).

### *History of development*

The attractiveness of the locality is emphasised by the discovery in 1775 of coins and a Roman bath-house with mosaics by Maesderwen, less than one kilometre to the west of the village, perhaps the only known Roman villa site in the county. Samuel Lewis recorded, too, ancient smelting works in this locality, popularly deemed to be Roman and this has been confirmed by modern investigations.

The 'church of Brynach' referred to in the modern place-name appears first as *Lanbernach* in 1291, and as *Sci Brenaci juxta Brechon* in 1408/9. The modern form is more immediately identifiable in the Tudor era when around 1566 we read of *ll. Frynach*.

The church's dedication, its location beside Nant Menasgin, and several early medieval slabs collectively suggest that this was a pre-Conquest ecclesiastical foundation. As to whether a settlement developed around it in the Middle Ages is a very different matter. At present there is no evidence one way or the other.

The first maps of the area are no earlier than the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and only confirm that there was a small amount of housing to the north-west and south-west of the churchyard and that it was already spreading to the south of the stream. The historic core of the village is perhaps more likely to lie to the south of the church where the houses are tightly concentrated, and those to the north are more likely to reflect later infilling.

***The heritage to 1750***

St Brynach's church has a tower that is generally attributed to the 14<sup>th</sup> century, while the rest of the building dates from 1885. Within the church is a decorated pillar stone of 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup>-century origin; it is the only extant stone of three that were discovered during the demolition of the earlier building, one of the others being buried in the foundations of the new church. The only other survival, other than some 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century memorials and two stained glass windows is the font which is also believed to have been made during the 14<sup>th</sup> century.



*St Brynach's Church, photo 1938-0043 © CPAT, 2013*

St Brynach's church is set centrally in a large sub-square churchyard. It gives the impression of having originally been more circular with sections shaved off the south-west and south-east sides. The north-east side has been modified too for the earlier boundary can be seen in the grounds of Ty-mawr.

East of the church is the gentry house of Ty-mawr, with walling and a blocked archway possibly of 15<sup>th</sup>-century origin to the east of the house and a masonry gateway incorporated into the early 19<sup>th</sup>-century Gothic Revival house. Linked to the 14<sup>th</sup>-century *uchelwyr* Howell Gam, this may originally have been a fortified medieval manor house.

Ty Fry to the west of the church is an early 17<sup>th</sup>-century gentry house that was enlarged later in the century. Now a farm its ancillary buildings are late 18<sup>th</sup>- or early 19<sup>th</sup>-century in date.

The road pattern implies that the church has long been a focal point where routeways met or crossed. The dwellings in Church Row may mark an early expansion of houses along the southern edge of the churchyard. The extension of the road north-eastwards to the B4558, however, could perhaps be more recent, serving only Ty-mawr. This might account for the curious masonry-edged constriction of the road close to the east corner of the churchyard.



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