

PARTRISHOW

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Introduction

Partrishow lies in a remote valley in the Black Mountains, 8km north of Abergavenny. The church is terraced into a moderately steep, south-facing slope above the valley of Nant Mair at 300m above sea level, with the rising ground of a spur running off Crug Mawr behind it.

This brief report examines the emergence and development of Partrishow 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).

History of development

In the 12th century Partrishow was known as *Merthyr Issui*, but it was not until the Tudor period that references became common, with *pertrissw* (in c.1566), *Patryssowe* (1556-8) and even *Llanysho* (1555). The name means the grave or shrine (*merthyr*) of St Isio (or Ishaw, Isho, Isw, etc), the ‘M’ perhaps transmuting into a ‘P’ over the centuries by accident rather than design. St Isio (Ishow) was reputedly murdered close by.

Merthyr Issui was consecrated by Herewald, Bishop of Llandaf (1056-1104) soon after his consecration. It is unlikely, however, that the consecration signalled the arrival of a new church on a new site, instead marking one episode in a dispute between the dioceses of St Davids and Llandaf over the ecclesiastical control of the border region. An early medieval origin for the church at Partrishow cannot be doubted.

There is no historic evidence to suggest that a settlement ever developed around the church, just as today the nearest dwelling (Ty’n-y-llwyn) is around 200m away, although the earliest map of the area, an estate map from the second half of the 18th century does reveal that there was a cottage lower down the lane which has now disappeared.

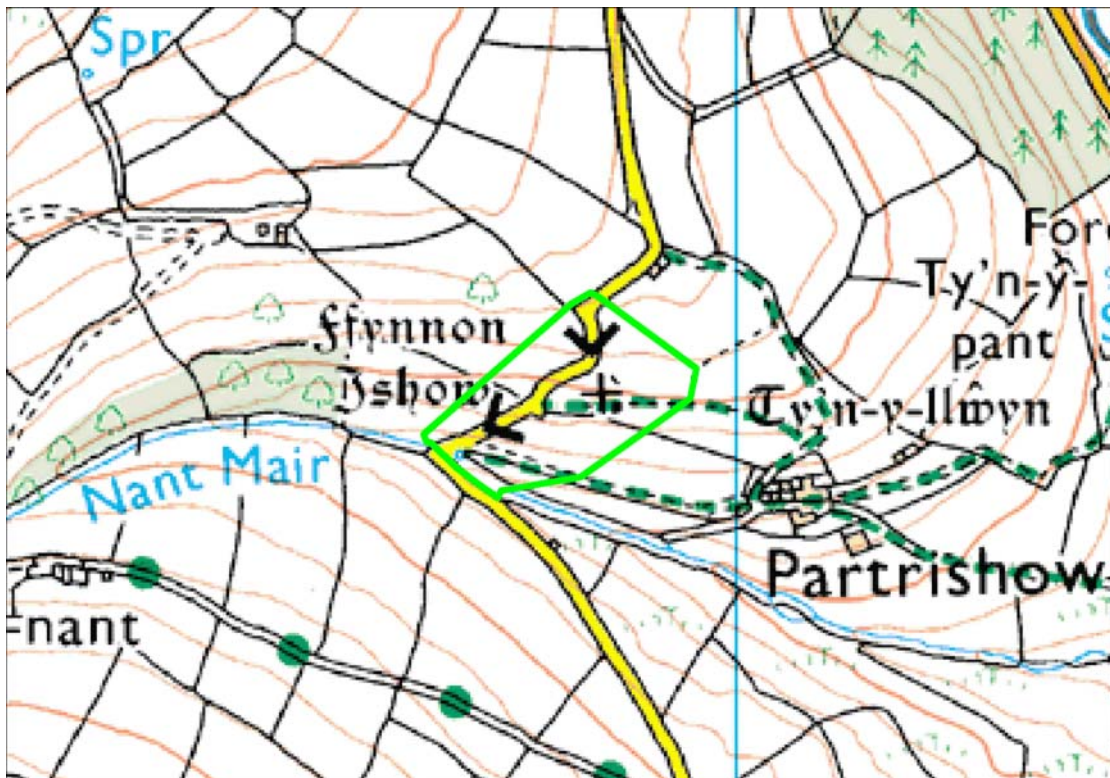
The heritage to 1750

The church has a supposedly Norman nave and a 16th-century chancel, together with an *eglwys-y-bedd* with 13th- and 14th-century architectural features and a 15th-century porch. The church contains a fine range of furnishings and fittings including a superb screen and rood loft of c.1500, a font with an inscription which dates to the early 12th century, i.e. c.1100 (though an alternative of c.1060 has also been proposed), two early stone *mensae* (altar tops), altar rails and a pulpit from the middle of the 17th century and a range of decorated mural tablets.

The churchyard in the late 19th century was small and sub-oval with a strong curve to its western side. It has now been extended westwards as far as the lane, giving it an elongated, almost elliptical shape. Within its confines is a medieval preaching cross.

A holy well called Ffynnon Ishow lies in the valley below where the lane turns back on itself and is traditionally the site of the saint's oratory. A stone with an incised cross, perhaps 9th- to 13th-century, has recently been relocated close to it.

The church is deeply terraced into the hillside and it is likely that had there been any dwellings in and around the church in past centuries, their platforms would still be recognisable.



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