

Llandefalle

SO 107355
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Introduction

Llandefalle is a small isolated settlement, focused on its church. It has grown up on a south-facing slope above the Afon Dulas river system some 5km north of Brecon.

This brief report examines its 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).



Llandefalle church, photo 3247-0040 © CPAT 2011

History of development

According to some early authorities, Llandefalle was the *Llangurnart* noted in the *Liber Landavensis* which was 'restored to God' in AD 566 by Aust, King of Brecknock, one of the witnesses being Bishop Cadoceus. While the integrity of this place-name association does not

now appear watertight (with Llandeilo'r Fan being the preferred candidate), the formerly oval churchyard is in accord with an early medieval origin.

The earliest reference to this place is in 1241 when *Landewathlan* appears to testify to an otherwise unrecorded saint called *Tyfathan* or *Tywathan*. It is thought that the present dedication to St Matthew may have emerged as a confused rendering of the original. There is also an uncorroborated belief that the church could have been dedicated to St Maelog, but the source of this idea has yet to be established and for the present can be dismissed.

Today the village is little more than an isolated medieval church, its former rectory, and a few houses.

The Heritage to 1750

Llandefalle Church, which was at one time a possession of Clifford Priory in Herefordshire lies within an embanked circular churchyard set on a south-facing slope. The present building as visible (20178) probably originated in the 14th century, if not earlier (though most of the surviving work is 15th-century) and exhibits a complicated structural sequence that has yet to be fully elucidated. It contains a fine rood screen (dating from about 1500) and several medieval and later wall paintings. Taking into account its furnishings and the absence of wide-ranging Victorian restoration, this is one of the more important medieval churches in the region.

The churchyard (20196) although now squared off on the south was perhaps of a more curvilinear shape in the past. However, possibly there was a much larger enclosure here in the early centuries. An abandoned holloway (9243) runs around the northern side of the present churchyard and, on the evidence of the tithe survey map, formerly connected with the curving lane that serves the Old Rectory. Beyond the lane on the eastern side of the modern churchyard a continuous boundary still arcs around Church House, dropping down to the stream, and continues the line adopted by the holloway. Within it, small field boundaries run up to it and abut it, indicating its primacy. All this could be a set of coincidences, but the putative presence of a larger enclosure of nearly 3ha in area and abutting the stream cannot be lightly dismissed.

Local records maintain that the churchyard once had a fives court (2925) against the north wall of the nave. Hinges for external shutters, designed to protect the church windows are still visible, though these may be associated with the use of the yard as the school playground in the 19th century.

The northern part of the churchyard contains the remains of a well (4485) – presumably viewed as a holy well though it is not listed by Francis Jones in his standard work on the subject – which takes the form of a square stone-lined basin. The segment of the churchyard that contains it is divided from the main enclosure by a bank and ditch and is presently much overgrown. The purpose of this bank and ditch are obscure.

The Old Rectory, the only secular building known to be of any age in the settlement, is of the earlier 18th century for it was recorded in 1717, though there are also indications that its origins go back into the 16th century. Church House, however, was the Llandefalle Inn in the middle of the 19th century.

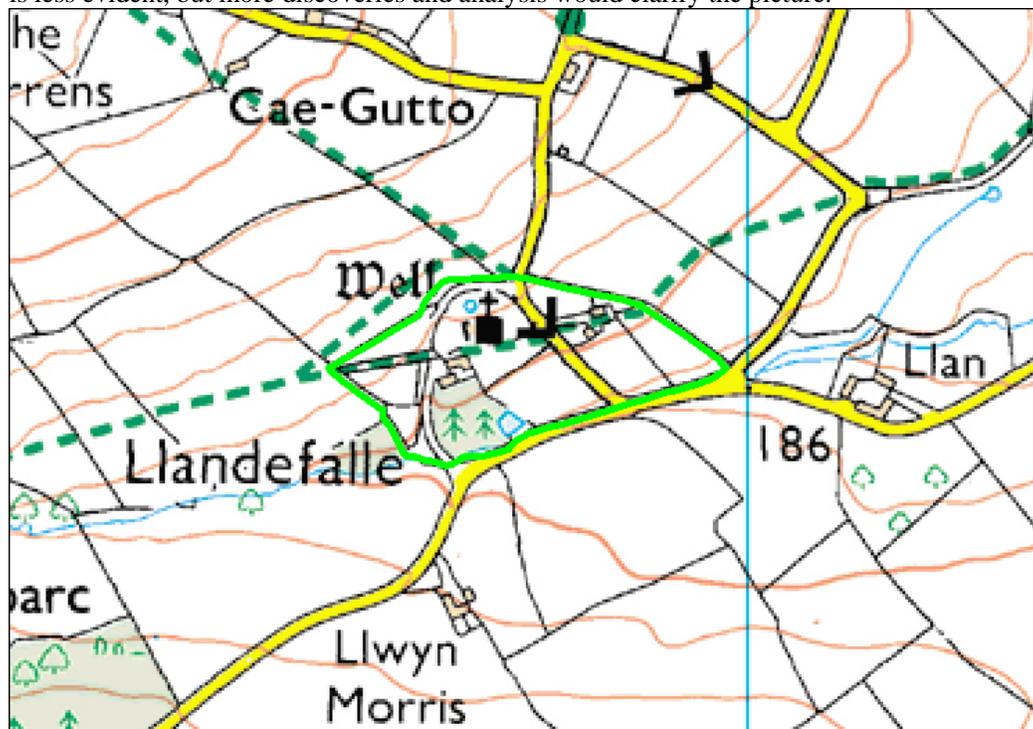
The former medieval street pattern is still perhaps visible encircling the church and two fields to the south, suggesting Llandefalle was rather larger than it is now. In the field south of the church and below it are earthworks (4486) comprising at least two and possibly three house platforms and adjacent terrace plots. The adjacent area now occupied by the Old Rectory and its gardens may well have once contained similar remains which have disappeared under modern landscaping.

It is possible that the other areas of the village also once contained medieval settlement. To the east of the church around the site of Llandefalle Inn (Church House) and the sloping

ground to the south, is a likely situation though no traces now survive. To the west of the church a disturbed area may represent further but as yet uncorroborated medieval house platforms (2926). A single building platform (PAR2927) survives to the north of the churchyard.

Significant tracts of apparently medieval field systems associated with the settlement survive on the slopes to the north-east of the church (2928), where there are a series of embanked fields which might contain further settlement, and areas of ridge and furrow lie to the north-west though these are likely to be of post-medieval origin (2929).

In summary, Llandefalle was almost certainly a more extensive settlement in the past than it is today. The morphology or layout of that settlement, of medieval or earlier post-medieval date, is less evident, but more discoveries and analysis would clarify the picture.



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