

Llanwrthwl

SN 976637
2587

Introduction

Llanwrthwl is a small, modern nucleation focused on a church of much greater antiquity. It lies on the west bank of the River Wye, at the mouth of a short tributary valley of the Dulas system, some 4km to the south of Rhayader. The village has grown up on the edge of the first river terrace at the junction of three minor roads.

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).

History of development

Little is known of the early history of the settlement although it has been suggested that there was a 'pre-Christian' focus here, this assertion being based on the presence of a large, supposedly prehistoric, standing stone erected in the churchyard. The 'church of Gwrthwl' is first documented as *Lannochul* in 1280 and *Llanwrthwl* in 1283, but St Gwrthwl is otherwise unattested in the literature.

The church dedication, the riverine location and the vestigial circularity of the churchyard points to an early medieval date for the ecclesiastical presence here. There is, though, no surviving evidence as to the nature of any settlement that might have accompanied the early church, or its medieval successor.

While the modern village extends north of the church as far as the Old Rectory, the assumed historic core of Llanwrthwl was more tightly focused. At the time of the 1847 tithe survey only three houses lay around the churchyard.

The heritage to 1750

St Gwrthwl's Church (20142), a simple two-celled plan with a projecting vestry, appears to be entirely the result of 19th-century rebuilding. It contains an impressive Romanesque font, a survivor of the earlier, medieval structure on the site, but no other real signs of antiquity

The church stands centrally in a raised churchyard (2900), which although altered and enlarged on the south and west, appears to have once been sub-circular. The large irregular stone block (883) standing outside the south porch of the church has been said to be a prehistoric standing stone, leading to speculation about its relationship with the early

Christian centre. Samuel Lewis's view in the 19th century that it is the remains of a cross shaft seems highly improbable.

Apart from the church the only pre-modern buildings are the 'Old Post Office' and 'Rose Cottage', though neither appears to be of any great age. Rose Cottage is shown on the tithe map of 1847, and is probably 18th-century. This map also depicts a building where the Old Post Office now stands, although the plan is somewhat different and it is probably the present building's predecessor, named as the Bell Inn on Ordnance Survey maps of the late 19th century. School House to the north of the church, is a 19th-century school building now converted into dwelling.

The remains of a single earthwork platform (2901), presumably the site of a building, survive on the north of the village. There is no evidence as to the date of this feature, and it is perhaps post-medieval rather than earlier.

The fields immediately to the north of the village are generally smaller than those to the south, and are contained by large earth and stone banks. They might represent a medieval or early post-medieval field system (2902), though firm dating evidence is absent.

In summary, Llanwrthwl appears to be a church settlement and there is currently no evidence for a community developing around the church until the 20th century.



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