

Llyswen

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Introduction

Llyswen is a small but expanding nucleated settlement surrounding its church at the junction of the A470 and A479 trunk roads. The village lies on the south bank of a large meander in the river Wye to the north-west of Talgarth.

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).



Llyswen village, photo 00-C-0136 © CPAT 2011

History of development

Llyswen is reputedly focused on a *clas* church founded in the 6th century, and it was claimed by Theophilus Jones, the early 19th-century Brecknock antiquary, that a religious site here was

granted to the see of Llandaff in about AD 560. Both of these claims need to be treated with circumspection. The site of this early centre is not known but the present sub-circular churchyard, of St Gwendoline (a local 9th-century saint who is reputedly buried at Talgarth), is almost certainly early medieval in date.

The name Llyswen (literally 'white court') was first recorded around 1127 as *Lisewan*. It reputedly derives from the palace of Rhodri Mawr, one of the great 9th-century princes of south Wales, which is said to have existed here. The site of the palace is not recorded, though local tradition has it that it was in the *warren field* near Dderw to the south-east of the village. Rhodri Mawr's will requested the 're-edification and adornment' of the area's religious houses and it is believed locally that Llyswen church was substantially rebuilt as a result of this, a belief that is entirely uncorroborated.

Little is known about the medieval history of Llyswen, although it reputedly had a 'Norman' castle and has been identified as one of the marcher lords' demenses in the 14th century. No visible remains of this period survive within the village today.

The heritage to 1750

St Gwendoline's Church (20179) was wholly rebuilt in 1863, and no fabric of the putative Norman church that it replaced now survives, although the simple font may be of this period. The present church retaining a medieval plan, may reflect that of its predecessor. Early prints and photographs show that the previous church comprised a simple divided chancel and nave with a barrel vaulted roof, a southern porch and a bellcote.

The church lies within a raised and embanked sub-circular churchyard (2549) some 45m across. This is much smaller than other alleged *clas* churches, but there is no clear indication that it was ever any larger, though the mid-19th-century tithe map does hint at a larger curvilinear enclosure around the village.

The area surrounding the church where older settlement might be expected is partially clear, and comprises the extensive gardens of Tymawr. Modern infill has encroached on the south-west and east. It is not possible to say that medieval or earlier, settlement definitely existed in this area, but appropriate archaeological investigation may give some indication.

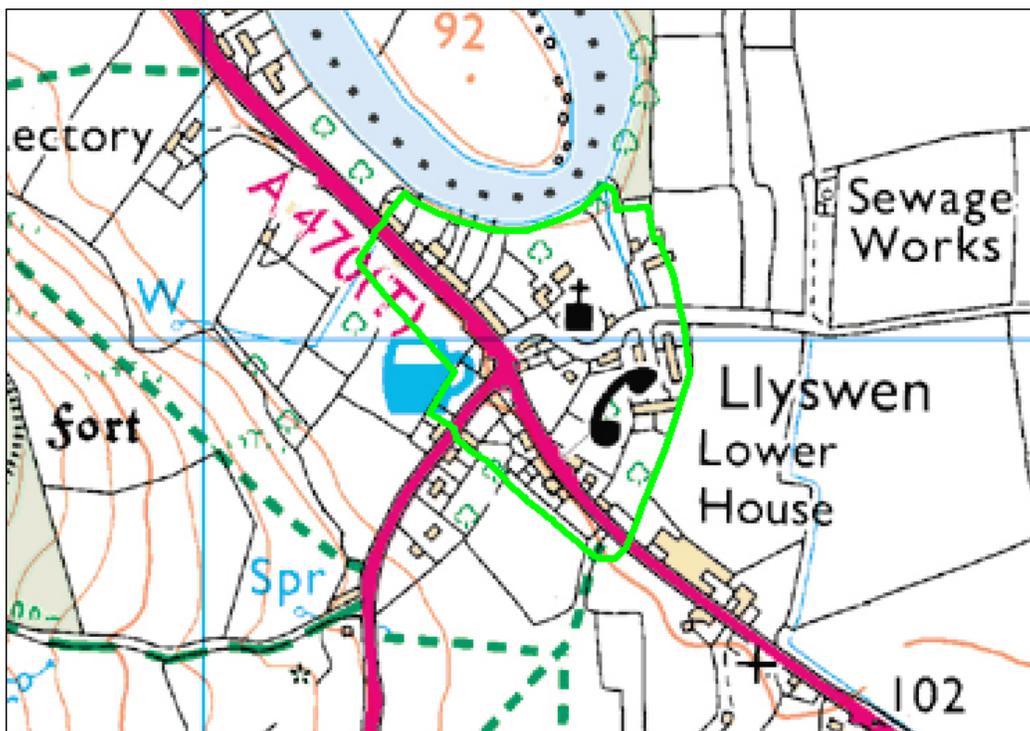
With the exception of the church, the Griffin Inn (20814), Upper House Farm (2539) and the Tymawr (2931), the last three all 18th-century, there are very few buildings of any age surviving in Llyswen, and the village now has a very modern character. This is presumably due to Llyswen's location at the junction of two main roads and reflects the increasing importance of road transport in the 19th century. A watching brief at Cross House identified some ambiguous evidence for medieval building, but at present neither the building stock in Llyswen nor archaeological interventions have shed any light on the origins and development of a medieval settlement here.

An alleged motte, which is a scheduled ancient monument (506; SAM B48), lies some 400m to the south-west, on the fringe of the village, just beyond Upper Danyllan. This has been claimed as Llyswen's castle, but authorities differ as to its significance and authenticity. Unsubstantiated is the belief that the present Llangoed Castle, nearly two miles to the north, marks the position of a Norman castle which in its turn had been placed where Rhodri Mawr's court was situated.

An extensive and complex area of strip fields is depicted on the tithe survey to the east (5552) of the village, with further, smaller areas to the north (5553) and west (2932). It is claimed that there are surviving patches of ridge and furrow cultivation. These strip fields were the remnants of an extensive open field system belonging to the medieval settlement.

In summary, little is known about the origins and development of the settlement of Llyswen. The extensive open field systems to the east and to a lesser extent the north-west must have related to the settlement and therefore suggest a reasonably sized community which was

presumably focused around the church and perhaps along the thoroughfare running along the edge of the river valley on a north-west to south-east axis. Now adopted by the A470 and the A479, this was surely the main routeway, with other tracks of subsidiary importance.



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