

Upper Chapel

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Introduction

Upper Chapel is a small settlement, focused on its church at a minor crossroads on the B4520 Builth Wells to Brecon road. Sited on a slight spur on the eastern side of the Afon Honddu valley it is some 10km to the south of Builth Wells.

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).



Upper Chapel village, photo 3247-0044 © CPAT 2011

History of development

The history of Upper Chapel has gone largely unrecorded. Like its neighbour Lower Chapel, further down the Honddu valley, it does not appear to have been a significant parish centre and was rather a chapel-of-ease within Merthyr Cynog parish than a parish church in its own

right. It is clearly documented as a chapel in the 16th and 17th centuries and therefore is likely to have been in existence in the Middle Ages.

It is conceivable that the settlement may have an early medieval origin (a circular churchyard might be postulated), but there is now no definite indication of any great age to the village.

Presumably the English name merely distinguishes it from its neighbour Lower Chapel; the Welsh name being Capel Dyffryn Honddu. *Capel defrune honthye* was recorded in 1578 and its link to this settlement is confirmed by the 1798 reference to *Capel Dyffrin Honddu or Upper Chapel*.

The heritage to 1750

The church at Upper Chapel (20106), which appears to have been re-built in relatively recent times, perhaps in the 18th or early 19th century, is a simple single-celled building and, although the plan is typically medieval, there are no outward signs of any surviving structure from this period. Nor are there any furnishings or fittings that pre-date the 19th century.

The church is now set in a roughly square churchyard (2656) with memorials that are almost entirely of the 20th century. However, within this, the position of a number of large yew trees, follow the line of a faint bank, revealing a more oval enclosure which was flattened out only on its east side against the road (2657). The tithe survey of 1840 reveals that roads once passed around all sides of the churchyard and both this map and the later large-scale Ordnance Survey maps confirm the oval shape. It is tempting to suggest that this curvilinearity signals an early medieval date.

Of the other buildings in Upper Chapel there is none which appears to be significantly older than the 18th or even the 19th century. Whether Penybont Farm (2658) or the Plough and Harrow public house (2659) opposite the church contain any earlier elements has not been established. These were the only secular buildings shown on the tithe map. The same maps hint at the possibility but do not confirm that a small common may have existed beside the chapel.

