

Llanelian

SH 8635 7639
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Introduction

Llanelian-yn-Rhos, usually shortened to Llanelian, is situated at the crossing of two minor roads, a mile and a quarter to the south of Old Colwyn, and just inland from the coast. The settlement lies on a hilltop with small stream valleys to the east and west. The present-day village, dominated by the White Lion public house, has a small nucleus of dwellings about the crossroads, though new housing has extended the village along the roads to the south-east and to the south-west.

This brief report examines the emergence and development of Llanelian 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 require modification 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

For the ‘church of Elian in the cantref of Rhos’, early forms of the name are rare and in the 13th century, the parish was originally known by the name of *Bodlenyn*, the township in which the church stands. This name was superseded sometime after 1291 by that of the church’s dedicatee, St Elian, so that in the period 1556 to 1564 it is recorded as *Ll. elian* and in 1590 as *Llanelian*.

Archdeacon Thomas claimed that the church was founded in the 6th century by a pilgrim Elian Geimiad. There is no means by which this tradition might be confirmed, yet equally there is no doubt that Llanelian as the site of a chapel or church originated before the Norman Conquest. Whether a settlement grew up around it during the Middle Ages is also obscure, and it is not until the end of the 17th century, when Edward Lhuyd was collecting information that we learn that there were five or six houses in the village.

The village has altered very little in size since the time of the Tithe survey of the mid-19th century, when there were just a few houses at the crossroads, with dispersed farms across the neighbourhood.

The heritage to 1750

St Elian or, in English, St Hilary’s church (100461), is a double-naved building, the northern portion earlier, perhaps 13th- or 14th-century, to which the southern nave was added in the 15th century, a time when it was a pilgrimage centre. The surviving medieval windows are Perpendicular, but the doorways of massive limestone blocks are inherently undateable. Inside the roofs are late medieval and that over the southern sanctuary has significant surviving paintings. Lower portions of the medieval rood screen survive, together with some

painted panels from the rood loft, and the rood beam has recently been dated to 1489 by dendrochronology. Fuller details of both can be found on the Royal Commission's Coflein website. There is a now disused medieval font bowl and some 18th-century wooden furnishings. The wall monument sequence starts at the very beginning of the 18th century.

The churchyard is rectilinear in shape and relatively small, but on its south and east sides significantly elevated above its surroundings. If there was a circular churchyard here originally, all trace of it has disappeared. A late 18th-century or perhaps later sundial is set in the extreme south-eastern corner of the churchyard.

The White Lion public house immediately to the south-west of the church is largely 19th-century but has 17th-century origins as a lateral chimney, storeyed house.

Llan Farm (105466), immediately to the south of the crossroads in the village is a three-unit, four-bay, cruck-framed hall-house, its outer walls rebuilt in stone in the late 15th or early 16th century, and originally had an open two-bay hall in the late medieval period. Lateral chimneys and a wing have been added, and the house has been modernised, though many early features remain. At a greater distance Ysgubor Newydd building (102833), three hundred metres to the south-east of the village centre, is reputed to be a cruck-framed building, but this has not been confirmed.

Ffynnon Elian (100460) became known as 'The Cursing Well' in the 18th century, but prior to that it had a reputation as a healing well. Situated a quarter of a mile north of the parish church, it is now covered over. Rather more is known about this well, or at least its more recent history, than many comparable wells.

Distinctive ridge and furrow cultivation ridges in two fields to the west and north-west of the church (105473 and 105474) were visible in the 1990s, but their period of formation cannot be established: they could be of medieval origin, but a later date is perhaps more likely.

