

Llanarmon-yn-Iâl

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Introduction

Llanarmon-yn-Iâl is set high in the valley of the River Alyn as it courses northwards off the Clwydian Hills. Church and village occupy the northern lip of the valley side close to where the changing alignment of the river has created a spur. Behind the settlement the undulating limestone plateau rises gradually. Llanarmon's mill and motte lie in the valley below, the latter on the far bank from the settlement.

Two secondary roads, the B5431 running up from the south and the B5430 from Wrexham to Ruthin, converge just to the east of the village. Ruthin itself is less than 7km to the west.

This brief report examines the emergence and development of Llanarmon-yn-Iâl 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 in particular 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

Llanarmon-yn-Iâl first appears as *Lanarmavn* in the ecclesiastical taxation of 1291, while in the earlier Norwich Taxation of 1254 it is recorded simply as *Sancto Garmano*. Its commotal name – as *Thlanharmon in Yal* – is revealed in a document of 1314. The name is of course a simple reference to the 'church of Garmon', but its appearance in this abbreviated form in 1254 is perhaps an indication of the status and ready recognition of the church.

The church of St Garmon has long been held to be the leading church in the commote of Yale, and this dedication alone points to an early medieval beginning. As the ecclesiastical centre it would have functioned in the early medieval period as a 'mother church' with a *clas* community comprised of individual clerics whose successors claiming portions of the church's revenues are attested in the early 14th century. Suggestions that the earlier church lay on the east bank of the river where the foundation marks of a rectangular building have been seen in the valley floor field beside Plas-isaf cannot be verified.

The late Glanville Jones argued that on the west side of the river around the church was a *maerdref* or bond settlement in an area known as Tre'r Llan. The unfree bondmen provided the local labour on the lord's demesne attached to his *llys* or court.

On the east bank of the river is the earthwork castle or motte known as Tomen y Faerdre which was presumably established in the 12th century. Here too was the manorial court or *caput* of the lord of Yale (Îâl) complete with a mill and demesne land, all recorded in an Extent of Bromfield and Yale in 1315. The court at that time consisted of (or perhaps should

have consisted of) 'one hall, one chamber, one stable, one grange and one cattle shed, and each house shall be 64 feet in length, and in breadth as best fitting, except that they ought not to thatch, but they roof the said house with lathes'. A plausible but largely circumstantial case can then be made for an earlier, pre-12th-century *llys* or court here, the motte being a deliberately positioned successor, although the Royal Commission back in 1914 argued that the motte itself would have been the *llys*.

With these fairly disparate elements it is possible to construct a feasible early history for the emergence of Llanarmon, but much of it for the present remains speculation rather than fact. And supporting this hypothetical settlement framework for the village, there is little solid fact about its early origins and development.

Strangely for a village with such an august origin, Edward Lhuyd refers to only four houses by the church in the late 17th century which can be compared with the larger number for the lesser neighbouring village of Llandegla. A century and a half earlier John Leland had referred to it simply and without explanation as the most 'famous' parish in Yale, though it is likely that this was tied to his additional comment that 'greate pilgrimage and offering was a late to S. Armon' which probably relates to an image of St Garmon which was remarked on in the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* of 1535.

The Tithe survey prepared in 1844/45 shows only a slightly larger scatter of dwellings.



Llanarmon-yn-Ial, photo 08-C-0240, © CPAT 2014

The heritage to 1750

St Garmon's church is a double-naved structure, a type relatively common in and around the Vale of Clwyd. It has been suggested that the chancel may be 15th-century, but much of the building was replaced in about 1736, probably on the earlier foundations, and the windows are distinctively 18th-century. Internally there is an early 14th-century effigy of an ecclesiastic and another of a contemporary secular lord of Bodidris; an interesting mural monument of

1639; a pre-Reformation chandelier comparable to that in Llandegla; an oak chest; royal arms of 1740 and a font of 1734; and retained from the earlier church the plain, late medieval roofs.

The churchyard is raised, by one metre on the west and considerably more on the south above the river. It now has straight sides with rounded corners, the exception being on the south where it was curved. A segment of the churchyard has been cut off on this side and has reverted to secular use. This most southerly portion of the churchyard was walled off, prior to the first mapping of the area in the earlier 19th century, and the most logical explanation is that it occurred either when the school was built in 1777, a date well attested on the Benefaction boards in the old school, or in the thirty years before that date when there are references to bequests for educational purposes at both Llanarmon and Llandegla. Evaluation in this segment of the former church failed in 2010 to identify any earlier burials, although fragments of human bone were found in the deposits of soil that had built up.

Internally there are traces of an inner platform around the church, on all sides but the east. Does this indicate a smaller and earlier *llan* or is it perhaps a relic of the earlier church and its demolition? The shaft of the churchyard cross, set in the south-west segment of the enclosure, has been used for a sundial, reputedly erected in 1774.

Unlike neighbouring Llandegla there is no holy well close to the church and though it is generally conceded that there was a Fynnon Garmon, its precise location is disputed (for which see internet sites such as wellhopper), with all the candidates some distance from the village.



Tomen-y-faerdre motte, photo 95-C-0193, © CPAT 2014

Housing in the settlement is a mixture of 18th/19th-century cottages and modern houses. Several of the former have date stones, the earliest of 1749 being that for Llwyn Onn. The Raven Inn, now much altered, was constructed in 1722 and initially had a Grade III listing.

The pattern of lanes converging on the churchyard is an interesting one. It seems to signal that the church enclosure as a nodal point was once completely ringed by lanes, though that on the south has partially disappeared, and that tracks – one now a footpath – accessed this ring at

each of the four corners. That leading off from the south-east corner runs down to a crossing point of the Alyn with access to the castle and the mill and their predecessors. Probably as important is the north to south track that passes a few hundred metres to the west of Llanarmon. An arterial route along the Alyn valley and below the Clwydian Range its overall line is much less clear as a result of modern road alterations, but in the 18th century it was one of the most direct routes in the region and directly linked Basingwerk Abbey and Holywell with Valle Crucis Abbey.

The motte of Tomen-y-faerdre, scarped from a natural knoll, lies on the east side of the village. The motte and its buildings have been attributed to the Norman Earl of Chester in the earlier 12th century if not earlier. One authority considers that this was the castle burnt by Iorweth Goch in 1157 and restored by King John in 1212, another that these written references refer to another castle in the parish, Tomen y Rhodwydd. Adjacent to the manorial centre was a park, still recognisable from local place-names.

Documentary evidence reveals a manor house here from at least 1315. Jones has argued that at that time the bond settlement was focused on the church in an area known as Tre'r Llan, while the court was on the opposite bank of the river and consisted of 'one hall, one chamber, one stable, one grange and one cattle shed'. Each house was to be 19.5m long with a width 'as is best fitting'. It has been postulated that the hall was located in the bailey of Tomen y Faerdre. However, it has also been claimed though not satisfactorily documented that the foundations of a rectangular building can be recognised at certain times of year in the valley floor field beside Plas-isaf.

A mill is set close to the River Alun. It is claimed that this spot has been the site of an earlier mill back at least to 1315.

Llanarmon Bridge, single-arched, is probably 18th-century in origin, but a more specific date is not possible.



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