

## **Llandegla**

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### ***Introduction***

Llandegla lies on the eastern slopes of the Clwydians in the upper valley of the River Alyn, here running northwards with the church established on its eastern bank. The village occupies a north-west-facing hillside with the church at the bottom of the slope on the lip of a river terrace. To the south-east, the more recent settlement of Pen-y-stryt has developed on a spur above Llandegla. The nearest town, Ruthin, lies 9km to the north-west.

This brief report examines the emergence and development of Llandegla up to the year 1750. For the more recent history of the settlement, it might 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](http://www.archwilio.org.uk)).



*Llandegla, photo 08-C-0241, © CPAT 2014*

### **History of development**

The church of the female saint Tegla appears first as *landeglan* in 1277-8, as *Llanddegla* in 1284, and as *Landegla* in 1291. Around the year 1700 it was committed to paper as *Lhan Dekla*. The present spelling is initially encountered as late as 1838.

Little is known of the origin and subsequent development of Llandegla. An early medieval foundation for the church seems plausible, based on a dedication which looks British but which conventionally is linked to a 1<sup>st</sup>-century Middle Eastern saint, Thecla, and the fossilised churchyard shape (see below), but whether a settlement then grew up around it before the Norman Conquest, or indeed in the centuries after that event has yet to be determined by archaeological investigations.

In the 13<sup>th</sup> century Llandegla was acknowledged as little more than a chapelry dependent on the former mother church at Llangollen, and as such it belonged to the Abbey of Valle Crucis, but its annual value of more than £5 as given in the 1291 *Taxatio* suggests that it was not amongst the poorest churches in the region. The view of the late Dr Glanville Jones was that one of two priests attributed to the commote of Iâl (Yale) in Domesday Book may have served the church at Llandegla, an interesting speculation, but one for which Dr Jones could offer no supporting evidence. There is, however, a reference in John Leland's *Itinerary* in the 1530s to the parishes of Iâl and that after Llanarmon, Llandegla was (for reasons unstated) the most famous.

The village as seen today developed initially around the church and one of Edward Lhuyd's correspondents noted at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century that there were thirteen houses by the church. Subsequent expansion was up the slope south-eastwards towards Pen-y-stryd and the main arterial roads, but dating this is difficult for there are no known maps of the village prior to the Ordnance Survey's drawing of 1835 and the even smaller scale map of north Wales prepared by John Evans in 1795, both of which do show this southern extension of settlement away from the church.

In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century the church was grouped with Mill Farm and the present Hand Inn, together with a couple of buildings, presumably dwellings, on the south and south-west edge of the churchyard, the National School being added to the group in 1791. A second focus of surely more recent origin lay to the south around the Bethania Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Chapel, first erected in 1827.

### **The heritage to 1750**

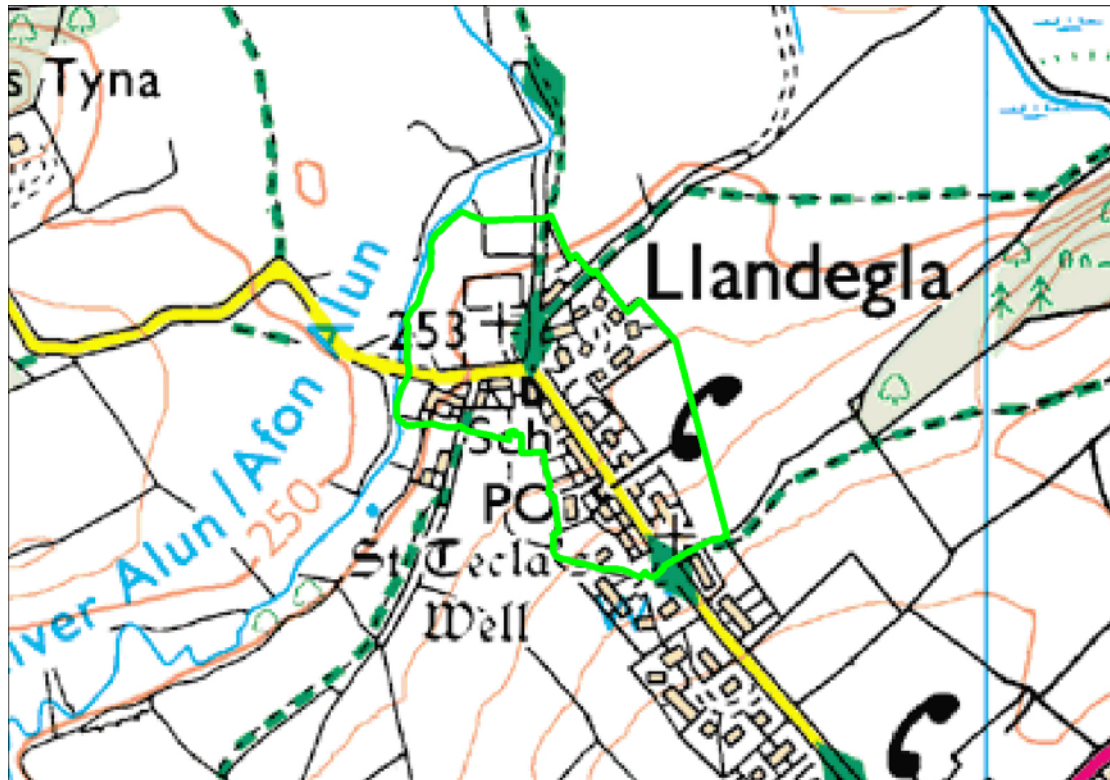
St Tegla's church is a Victorian structure, rebuilt on an older site in 1866. There is a fine, late medieval brass chandelier (traditionally but almost certainly incorrectly reported to have been recovered from Valley Crucis Abbey), a Perpendicular font and the parish chest, the only furnishings to survive the Victorian rebuilding which may have removed some items. However, that inveterate church visitor, Sir Steven Glynne coming to the church sometime in the 1840s or 1850s reported that the 'small, mean church without distinction' had 'scarcely any original feature remains either within or without', other than a west door with some 'tolerable mouldings' and a pulpit with some 'tolerably good carving'.

The churchyard is now a solidly rectangular plot, though its east side retains a slight concave curve. The church is set in its north-east quadrant. However, within the western boundary of the graveyard is a low scarp bank, suggesting an earlier straight-sided enclosure with curving corners. This is likely to be the outline of an earlier more curvilinear *llan*.

St Tecla's Well (Fynnon Degla), with three sides encased in stone, was believed to have medicinal properties, apparently frequented for a cure for what was known as 'Tegla's malady', or epilepsy as it is now known. People were still visiting it in anticipation of a cure

in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The well lies about 200m to the south-west of the church and was excavated in 1935 and produced quantities of finds, most of the coins dating to the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Thomas relates an unsubstantiated report of 1710 that there was a monumental inscription associated with it. The presence of a holy well tends to reinforce, without proving, the early medieval origin of Llandegla.

The older, stone-built cottages of the village are set on lower ground to the south of the church. One has a datestone of 1736, but none is listed. The bridge across the river Alun is of mid-19<sup>th</sup>-century date.



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