

Llandrillo-yn-Edeirnion

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Introduction

Llandrillo has grown up where Afon Ceidiog breaks out from the constriction imposed by the Berwyn Mountains into the broad valley of the upper Dee. The village is then set on level ground, although a river terrace, utilised by both the church and other buildings, is clearly discernible on the west side of the Ceidiog. The Berwyns loom to the east, while the Dee is little more than a kilometre to the north-west. The B4401 linking Bala and Corwen passes through the village, with the former 11km to the west, and the latter 8km to the north-east.

Llandrillo was, until the 1974 local government reorganisation, in Meirionnydd, as was the rest of the commote and later the hundred of Edeirnion. The affix, though adopted here, is now used only intermittently when referencing the village.

This brief report examines the emergence and development of Llandrillo 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).

History of development

The earliest form of the name comes with the listing of the church in the Norwich Taxation of 1254 when it was called *Lantruello* and in the subsequent taxation of 1291 as *Landerillo*. Its commotal label was appended in 1370-1 with *Thlandrethon in Edyrnyon* and in 1691 there was a reference to *Llandrillo in Idernion*.

There is virtually no information about the origin of Llandrillo. A local tradition has it that St Trillo in his wanderings founded a church near where the Ceidiog and the Dee meet, sometime in the late sixth century. This somewhat romantic view is not supported by modern research which tends to the belief that 'the distribution of particular dedications is unlikely to reflect the actual activity of the named individual'. Nevertheless the morphology in the form of the strongly curvilinear shape of the churchyard, combined with its location on the lip of the river terrace argues persuasively for an early medieval date.

At what point a settlement started to emerge around the church cannot be determined. It could have been in the pre-Conquest period, but perhaps a later date is more likely. However, it is significant that Llandrillo was granted a weekly market and two annual fairs in 1334, indicating that it must have been a settlement of some substance in the Middle Ages. By the post-medieval era it had developed into a sizeable village. Edward Lhuyd's correspondent at the end of the seventeenth century recorded thirty houses by the church, and the tithe survey in the middle of the nineteenth century confirmed the High Street as the main focus of

development, though this is not perhaps surprising as from the 1760s, the village lay on the turnpike road from Corwen to Bala and beyond.



Llandrillo, photo 1766-0462, © CPAT 2014

The heritage to 1750

The present church of St Trillo with its west tower surmounted by a low spire was erected between 1875 and 1877, incorporating the lower walls of its predecessor from 1776. Of the medieval church nothing remains. It contains a font which is believed to be 15th-century, a little late 17th and 18th-century woodwork, and some late 18th-century memorials, but by and large little survived the successive rebuildings of the 18th and 19th centuries.

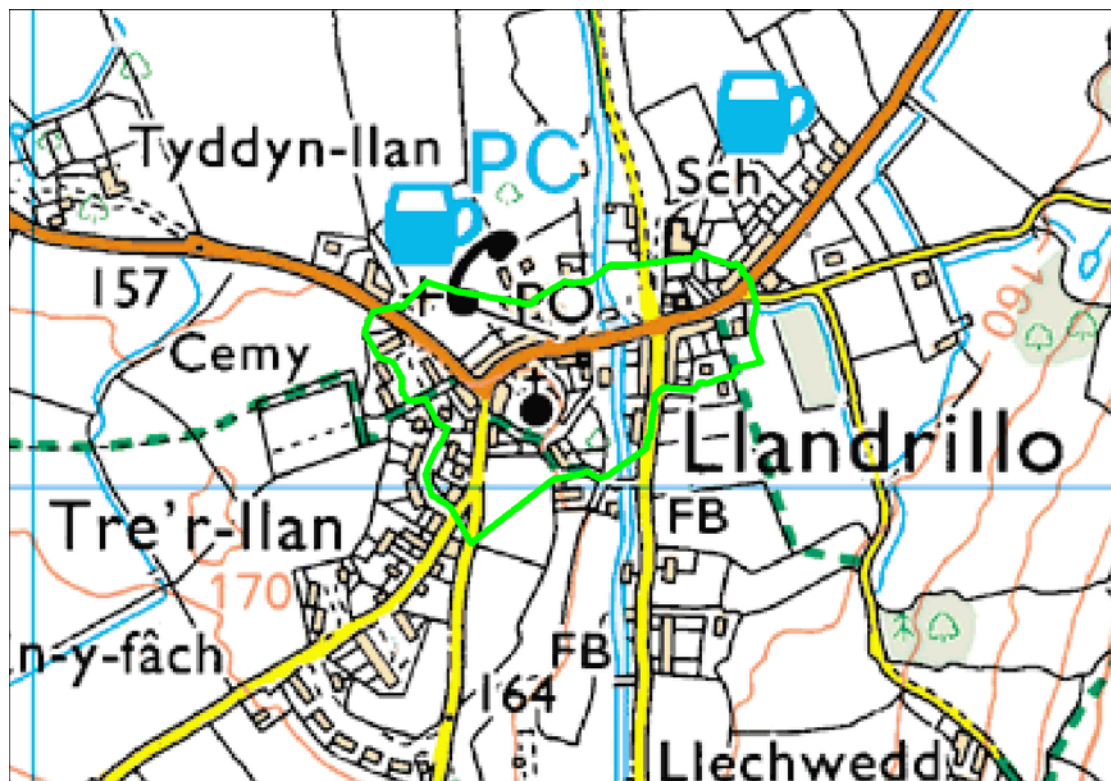
The churchyard is distinctively curvilinear, its perimeter encroached upon by houses on the west and north; and it is raised, particularly on the east where the utilisation of the river terrace projects the ground level nearly 4m above the valley floor. A sundial plinth on the south side may originally have been a cross shaft. Sadly the stone benches which in 1749 were 'along the inside of the churchyard wall .. in very regular order for the parishioners to sit upon before prayers' were removed in 1877.

The site of St Trillo's well lies about 450m north-north-west of the church. It appears to have been deliberately filled in, and no meaningful traces can now be seen. Its former presence reinforces the pre-Conquest religious significance of the immediate area, but is of little importance in understanding the settlement at Llandrillo. Likewise an inscribed (though largely unintelligible) stone now in the church but formerly at Blaen-y-cwm at the head of Cwm Pennant (the valley that runs southwards from the village) could be early medieval in origin. A second stone with a possible inscription was also recorded at Blaen-y-cwm by the Royal Commission, but its present whereabouts are not known.

The houses and cottages in the High Street, some of which are listed, are generally attributable to the mid or late 18th century; the Bell Inn carrying a date of 1748. Curiously, given Lhuyd's statement recorded above, nothing earlier has been recognised. The stone bridge spanning the Ceidiog also has an 18th-century date but cannot be attributed more specifically. However Cross Foxes, once an inn is said by the Royal Commission to be 17th-century in origin, though this does not appear to have been verified. To find anything earlier it is necessary to go 400m to the west of the village where Tyddyn Llan is recorded in the listing description as a fine regional house of the 17th century if not earlier.

Moving to a more speculative stance, we might wonder if High Street on the north side of the churchyard is a result of road widening, or perhaps even a new construction at the time of the turnpike being driven through the area. The right-angled change in direction of the turnpike road as it enters the village is extreme, giving the impression that this layout has been dictated by what was already in place. Could this have been a small market-place, perhaps? The line of the pre-turnpike lane suggests that originally this curved around the south side of the churchyard before crossing the Ceidiog (by the bridge referred to by Lhuyd). However, this would have been too narrow for turnpike traffic so a new course north of the church was necessary, and probably a new bridge as well. This would explain why the houses along the High Street are uniformly later 18th century, although the former Bell Inn with its date of 1748 might argue for an existing lane, as perhaps would the relatively large number of dwellings recorded by Lhuyd. Probably the northern side of the churchyard was shaved off to give extra space.

Quillets visible on late 19th-century Ordnance Survey maps and still recognisable in the modern field pattern lie to the north-east of the village. These strip fields might be the best evidence yet for a small nucleated settlement here in the Middle Ages.



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