

Llangar

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Introduction

Set in a remote spot where the confluence of the River Dee and its tributary the Alwen creates unusually extensive low-lying levels, Llangar church is set into a steep west-facing hillside just above the main river with the Berwyn massif providing a back drop. The B4401, a former turnpike road linking Bala and Llangollen, runs along the valley edge above the site, while a now dismantled railway between the same two centres has left its terraced course immediately below the churchyard. Corwen is less than 2km to the north-east. Llangar was in Merionnydd until 1974 when it was transferred to Clwyd and in turn to Denbighshire in 1996.

This brief report examines the emergence and development of Llangar 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 reference in the Norwich Taxation of 1254 is to *Langar* with a similar spelling in the later taxation of 1291, and *Llangar* in a document of 1292/3, revealing little change to the place-name over eight centuries. There were, however, minor variations over the centuries, as in 1370 when we read of *Thlangair* in Edeyrnyon. Archdeacon Thomas claimed that there was another old name for the parish, *Llan-garw-gwyn*, but Melville Richards' place-name archive indicates that this term was current only in the 18th century.

According to Samuel Lewis in the earlier part of the 19th century, the name was derived from 'an ancient fortification which formerly occupied the summit of a hill called *Caer Wern*, in the immediate vicinity of the church, and of which there are still some vestiges...'. This interpretation has found little favour in more recent times and the late Derek Pratt argued for a personal name 'Car', related to modern Welsh 'car' meaning kinsman or friend.

There is no record of a settlement here, excepting the nearby farm of Stamp and the loosely nucleated settlement of Bryn Saint, 300m higher up the slope. The latter was certainly in existence in the mid-19th century, but how much earlier is impossible to ascertain. Edward Lhuyd's correspondent at the very end of the 17th century made a point of noting the absence of any house by the church.



Llangar Church, photo CS03-045-0006, CPAT 2014

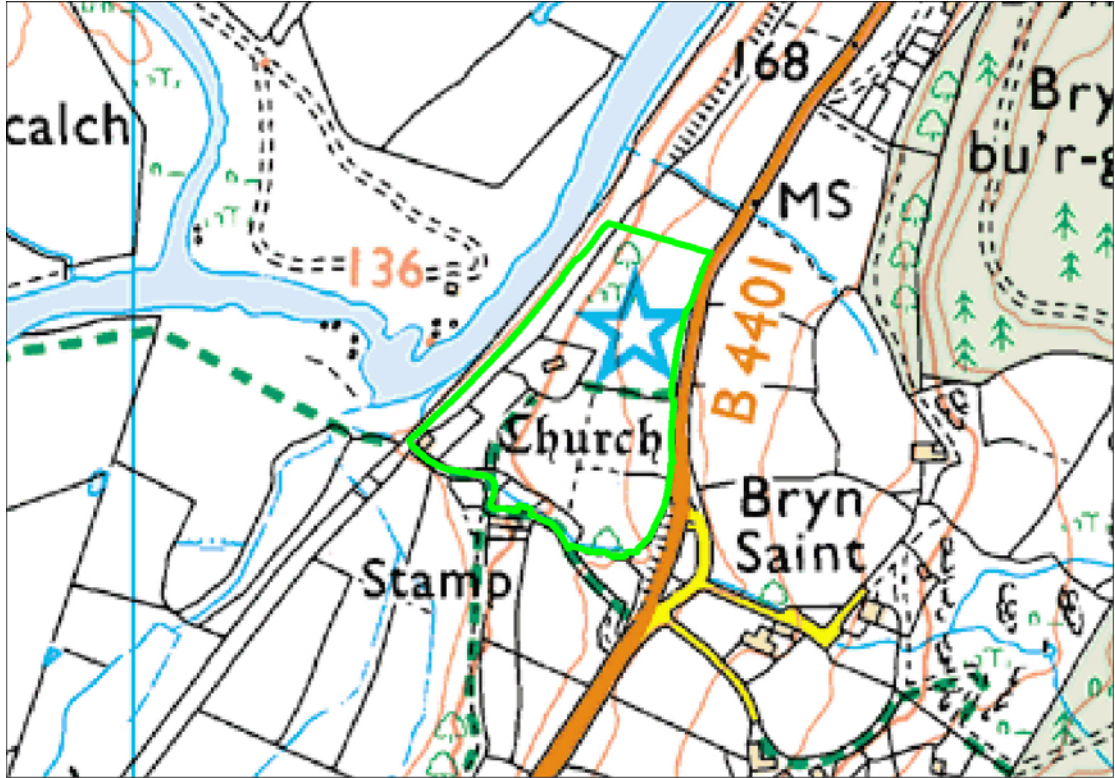
The heritage to 1750

The church of All Saints (100815), from 1967 a guardianship site in the care of Cadw, is at least as old as the 13th century, but it is probable that there has been a church or chapel on the site since before the Conquest. Much of the structure is post-medieval, and date stones in the walls indicate rebuilding between 1615 and 1620 and the erection of the porch in 1617. The west wall was rebuilt sometime after 1656 and again in the early 17th century. Excavations in the 1970s found nothing pre-dating the 14th century. The church however escaped Victorianisation, largely because it was superseded, in 1856, by a new church in Cynwyd. The windows are largely of 17th- and 18th-century date. A simple exterior is matched internally by stone-flagged floors, box pews, a three-deck pulpit and a west gallery. From the medieval era there are roof trusses and fragmentary wall paintings (with others of the 18th century), and a font that is 12th or 13th-century.

The churchyard (19761) is of irregular shape, as a result of extensions, and set on a relatively steep slope. An original curvilinear form is suggested on the south side and on both the west and east there are traces of an earlier boundary within the present enclosure, the former merging with the platform supporting the church itself. The lychgate on the south side carries a date of 1731.

Earthworks (100829) have been recorded in the past in the bracken-covered field to the north of the church and in pasture just to the east of the main road. The former may be no more than a medieval or later lynchet and perhaps a quarry, while the significance of the others is uncertain. The track leading to the church from the south is certainly of some antiquity and is edged by flattish ground suitable for occupation.

Hafod-yr-afr (104521), some 300m to the east of the church is recorded as a cusped cruck-framed house of post-medieval date. Its inclusion here underlines the dispersed nature of local settlement and the absence of any nucleated community.



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