

Llanerfyl

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Introduction

Llanerfyl lies in the valley of the Banwy where the main A458 trunk road to Dolgellau and Machynlleth crosses the river. It is 8km north-west of Llanfair Caereinion. The church and the settlement that has grown up around it occupy the edge of flattish ground above the Banwy valley, a small dingle to the east effectively creating a spur to the north of the village. Modern housing is gradually spreading over the eastern slope of the valley within the triangle of roads south-west of the church.

This brief report examines Llanerfyl's emergence and development up to 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 provides 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 may need to be modified 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. Numbers in brackets are primary record numbers used in the HER to provide information that is specific to individual sites and features. These can be accessed on-line through the Archwilio website (www.archwilio.org.uk).

History of development

The dedication of the church and the sub-circularity of the churchyard point to an early medieval foundation, and these characteristics are reinforced by the very early grave marker that is now in the church.

The name appears first as *Llanurvyll* in 1254 and refers to the church of St Erfyl. Reputedly a daughter of the better known St Padarn, this is apparently the only dedication to her in Wales although another has been claimed in Brittany.

The subsequent development of the settlement is unrecorded. It must have benefited to some extent from the creation of the Welshpool to Machynlleth turnpike road which passed through it in the second half of the 18th century. But subsequently, it appears that before the tithe survey map was compiled in 1850, a new road leading directly from by the churchyard gate down to the bridge across the river was built, together with another from the main road at Caer Ffynnon. It joined to the old road to Talerddig which is now the back lane on which the Methodist chapel sits and this was also the original road to the bridge with a T-junction probably beneath the chapel. This earlier lane has disappeared as has another lane which ran below the churchyard and for an unknown distance along the eastern bank of the river. All this is evident from an estate map in the Powis Castle collection from 1734. What this map also indicates is that there were apparently very few tenements in the vicinity of the church in the mid-18th century, suggesting that this was little more than a church settlement.

The heritage to 1750

St Erfyl's church (7573), a small building with a nave, chancel and bellcote, was rebuilt in 1870, retaining some of the medieval roof trusses but virtually nothing else of the medieval stone and timberwork. This is more than compensated for, however, by the inscribed grave marker, mentioned above, a shrine and a reliquary both of the 15th century, a font of slightly later date, a 17th century communion table and decorated wooden panels of 1727 from the front of a former gallery.

In the church is a 5th century gravestone (1741), inscribed in Latin, and one of the earliest examples from Wales. It was previously in the churchyard and although it is reasonable to assume that it was directly associated with an early church at Llanerfyl, there is nothing definite that supports this contention.

The churchyard (7574), raised above the adjacent road, has been extended eastwards in recent times, but the former bank of the oval enclosure can still be detected just beyond the eastern side of the church. Its original shape is easily distinguished on the large-scale late 19th century Ordnance Survey maps. Downslope from the churchyard was Fynnon Erfyl (4289), a holy well now difficult to detect on the ground.

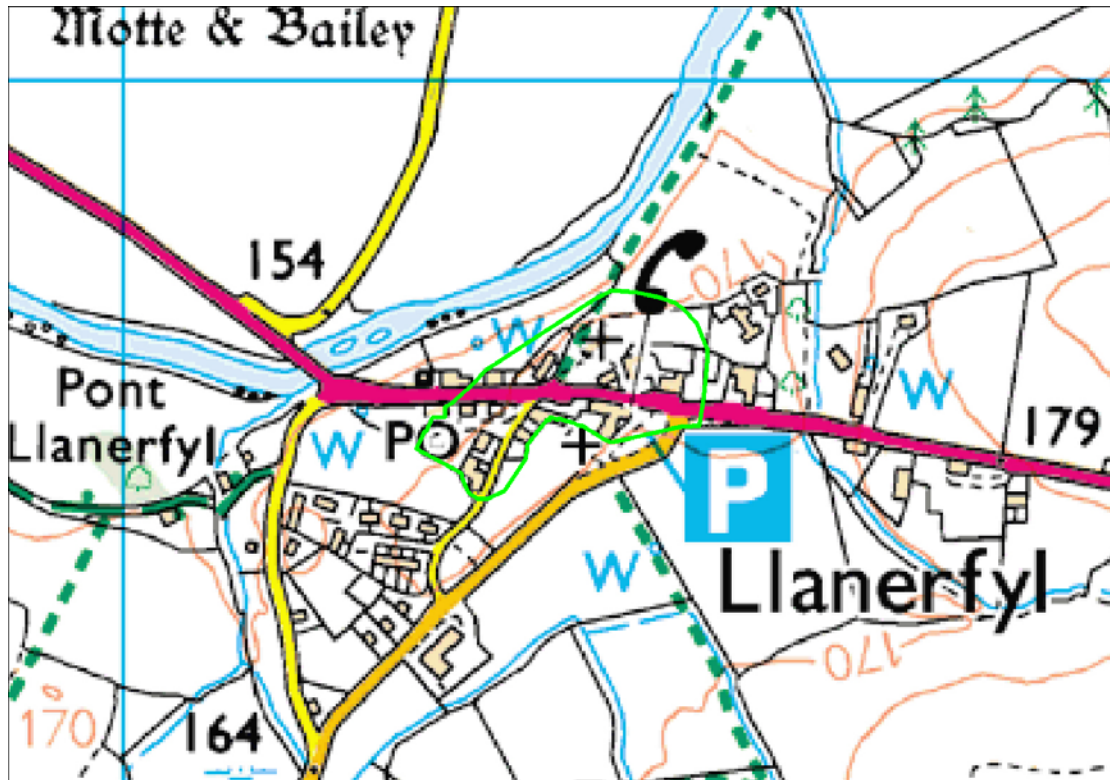
The listed buildings in the village all post-date 1800, the earliest, Caer Fynnon (7642), being of about that date.

A small motte and bailey castle (756) surmounts a natural knoll on the valley floor at Llyssun, just over the river from Llanerfyl, and if Samuel Lewis (1833) is to be believed, there was also a gentry home, probably of medieval date, called Llŷs Wgan near the present farm of Llyssun. The former existence of a large deer park behind Llyssun suggests that there may be some truth to Lewis' story.

In 1966, excavations were undertaken on earthworks (1328) in a field (OS 2266) on the south side of the village, above the river, in the belief that these were of Roman military construction. They proved to be of natural origin.

Other nebulous earthworks (7575) whose significance is uncertain survive in a field opposite the Bethel Chapel.

A cockpit (1744), presumably of post-medieval date, formerly existed close to the modern house called 'Noddfa'.



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