

Llanmerewig

SO 1571 9312
15726

Introduction

Llanmerewig is set in the hills east of the Severn valley, some 5km east-north-east of Newtown. The isolated church and adjacent farm, Church House, occupy a saddle separating two slightly higher crests on a ridge between the Severn and its tributary, the Miwl (Mule). To the south the ground drops away suddenly towards the modern hamlet of Llanmerewig which is developing around a crossroads, 400m away.

This brief report examines the emergence and development of Llanmerewig 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 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 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

Traditionally, the church was founded by a local holy man, St Llŵchaiarn, about 575, who was subsequently buried here. Its circular churchyard is consistent with an early medieval foundation, its position on a ridge is not. It is believed formerly to have been a chapelry within the parish of Llanllŵchaiarn, a subservient role that it may have held for several centuries.

The name is an interesting one for in its earliest form – *Lamerewic* appears in the Norwich Taxation of 1254 – it suggests that uncommonly in Wales, the *llan* prefix was eschewed in favour of Welsh *lamm*. One such form might be seen as a scribal error, but the *llam* forms continued to be written down to the end of the 16th century and beyond. The name is thus taken to mean the 'leap of the hind', referring to a legend associated with St Llŵchearn. *Llam* eventually gave way to *llan* in the 17th century, although the earliest occurrence as *Lanmierenwyk* was in 1338.

The subsequent history of the settlement, if one ever existed here, has yet to be recorded (but see below). It is noticeable that modern maps attach the name Llanmerewig to the small settlement, three hundred metres to the south, where modern houses group beside the Old Rectory, itself a timber-framed building of the 17th century. One is inclined to think that perhaps the rector of the time selected a somewhat less exposed location for his home than the one where his church was situated.

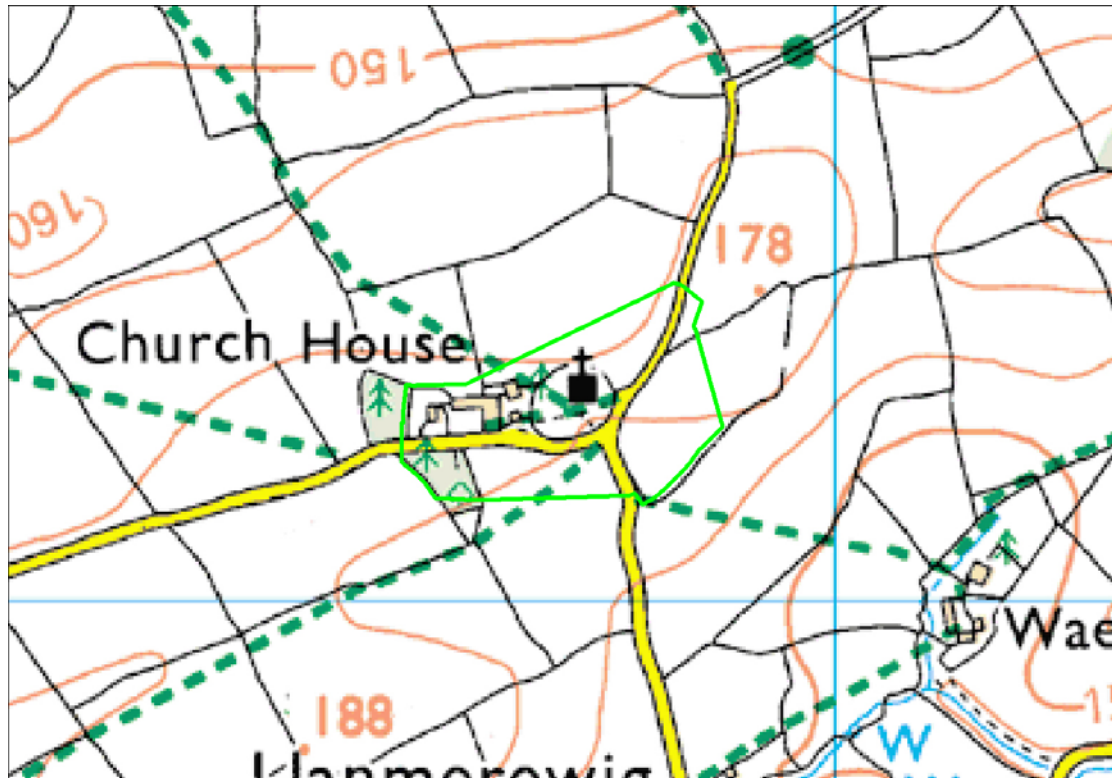
The heritage to 1750

St Llwlchaiarn's church (7560) was rebuilt almost in its entirety in the second quarter of the 19th century. Surviving from earlier periods are the arch-braced roof of the 15th century, some reused fragments of the contemporary screen and the damaged medieval font which may be 13th century. But it is questionable whether any medieval fabric remains, perhaps only in the extreme north-east angle. The early 14th century east window of the former structure has been set up against the eastern wall of the churchyard. The 'rich Gothic style' has led to it being listed as Grade II*.

The church sits slightly eccentrically in a sub-circular churchyard (1818). The presence of a distinctive bank around much of the perimeter - now faced in part by a stone wall - has led to the feasible suggestion that this was originally a prehistoric enclosure, reused in the early medieval period. Excavation would be required to prove this theory.

There are no early buildings in the settlement, other than the church. Church House beside the church dates to the earlier 19th century.

Much of the land is down to improved pasture, and there is no surface evidence of earlier settlement activity around the church. However, archaeological evaluation in the polygonally shaped field immediately to the east of the churchyard recently uncovered a significant number of postholes and gullies, and the absence of pottery led the excavators to speculate that the activity represented by the features might be early medieval. Important in terms of the development and perhaps the abandonment of settlement is the proximity of the lane running off to the north which continues as a footpath down into the Severn Valley.



Reproduced by permission of Ordnance Survey® on behalf of HMSO. © Crown copyright and database right 2009. All rights reserved. Welsh Assembly Government. Licence number 100017916.