

Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant

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Introduction

The large village of Llanrhaeadr straddles the River Rhaeadr about 7km north of Llanfyllin and 17km roughly south-west of Oswestry, at the place where several minor roads converge on the B4580 which terminates here. In its lower reaches, the Rhaeadr, a tributary of the River Tanat less than 2km away, occupies a shallow valley, but at the place where Llanrhaeadr has developed, the valley sides are steeper, particularly the southern slopes. The church and market place lie on the valley floor north and east of the river, and from this focus the settlement has expanded along the gentle slopes of the valley and less densely on the opposite bank of the river where there is steeper terrain. The settlement form has thus been dictated by the natural topography.

The river passing through the village acted as the county boundary until recent years. Thus in say the 18th century the settlement will have been split between Denbighshire and Montgomeryshire (though this may not have been the case at the time of the Act of Union in 1536, assuming John Speed's county map is correct). The two parts were only reunited with the creation of unitary authorities in 1996.

This brief report examines Llanrhaeadr'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 here 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

A mother church, probably with a clas community, was established here in the early medieval period, with its precinct slotted in to a bend on the north side of the river. The ecclesiastical centre of the commote of Mochnant, it may have been founded as early as the 6th century and it has been claimed that it continued until at least 1291, for later medieval records refer to a community of clergy here during Edward I's reign.

Llanracarder the name first appears in 1254 and as Thlanrather in Meuhenhand in 1284. A more intelligible form, Lanraiaeder en Mochnant is documented between 1344 and 1357. In English the meaning would be 'the church of the waterfall in Mochnant'.

During the medieval period if not earlier, settlement must have developed around it, with what appears to be a market place created just to the north of the church. It has been suggested that this was one of the churches with its village, recorded by Giraldus Cambrensis, that was burnt by an English expedition in 1165, but this can only be speculation. The extent

of that medieval settlement cannot be gauged from current knowledge though it is not likely to have been large. Its development in Tudor and Jacobean times is similarly unrecorded.

A small-scale manuscript map of around 1780 depicts a compact settlement on the north-west side of the churchyard. The 'market triangle' is shown but the network of lanes to the south-west has changed slightly. In particular Church Street is shown as a broader thoroughfare than today, leading to the church gate, and a modern map appears to confirm there has been infilling there.

The spread of houses on to the west and south bank of the river cannot be dated but we may suspect that it was a feature of the post-medieval era. The bridge which is dated to around 1775 (apparently replacing a timber one) and the road south-westwards to Penybontfawr (which though it has the appearance of 18th century turnpike trust work cannot be corroborated as such, and may indeed be much older) may have encouraged the construction of dwellings on this side of the river. There is also some evidence that an attempt may have been made to introduce a separate market on this side of the river somewhat earlier, in the reign of William III at the end of the 17th century, but this came to nothing.

The heritage to 1750

The church (101047) is dedicated to St Dogfan (or St Doewen) and was perhaps built in the 11th or 12th century within the precinct of the mother church. Extended in the 14th or 15th century, it was restored in 1882. It has an aisleless nave but curiously a chancel with aisles, and a west tower. Internally there is a fragment of a 9th or early 10th century cylindrical shaft of Mercian type, an 11th century (or earlier) rectangular cross-slab commemorating Gwgan, son of Elstan (101048), and fragments of a Romanesque shrine. There is also a 17th century font, an 18th century chest and altar table, and re-used pew panels, as well as a good range of 18th century memorials. It is set on a level platform rising above the churchyard on the south and east.



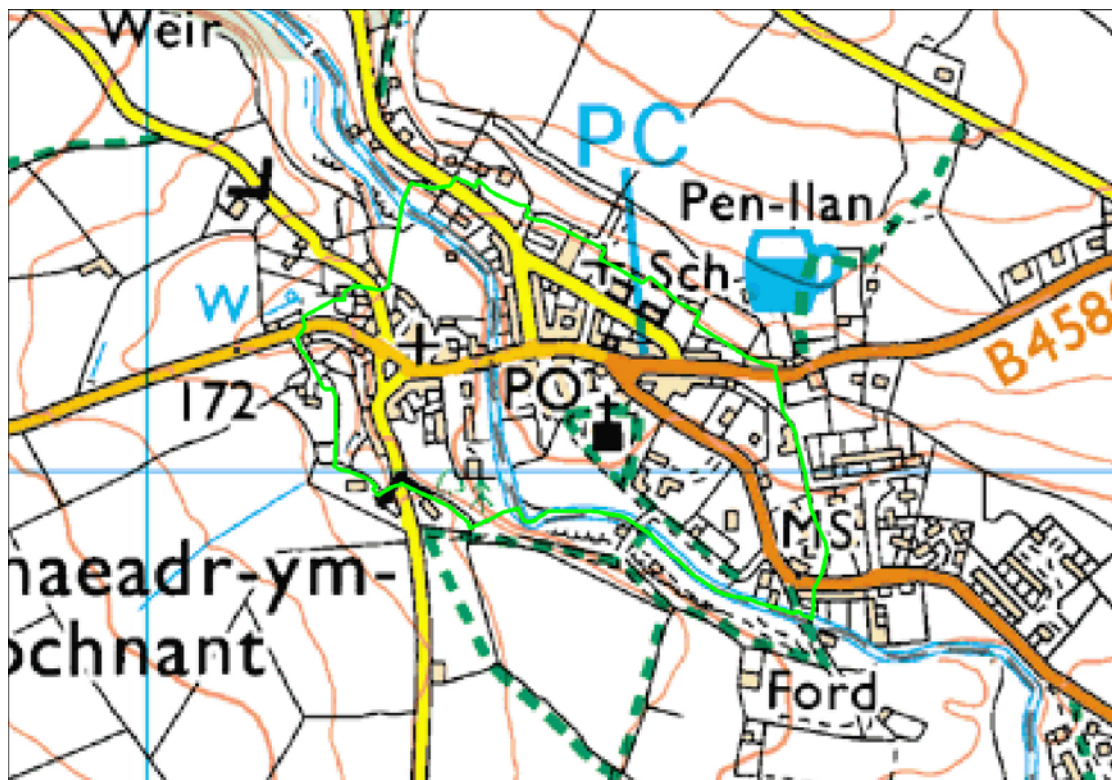
The church at Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant, photo 0614-0019, © CPAT, 2012

The churchyard (19793) is large and slopes down to the river, but the original enclosure of the mother church is reflected in the even larger elongated enclosure lying between the road and the river, with the churchyard at its western end and the lane to Vicarage-fach on the east.

The open triangle immediately to the north of the churchyard formed the market place. Inside it at the end of the 19th century lay a town hall (demolished in 1901), but this was termed the market hall in the middle of the century. Markets were held here as late as the 19th century and there were also five annual fairs. However, the market itself goes back into the Middle Ages for Edward I granted Roger Mortimer of Chirk the right to hold a weekly market and two annual fairs in Llanrhaeadr in 1284. It can be assumed that the market as a weekly event continued largely uninterrupted into the 19th century, though as a revenue raiser for the lord of the manor there were times when it was not very successful.

West and north of the market place houses are packed in to a reasonably regular gridded layout of small streets. There could be some element of planning here, and though it would be stretching the evidence too far to argue that this was of medieval design, it is not impossible.

No particularly early vernacular buildings have survived in the village. However, Llys Morgan (59462), formerly known as the Old Vicarage though broadly 18th and 19th century in build contains a re-used collar and tie-beam truss of 16th or 17th century date, presumably salvaged from a hall-house which might have been on or close to the site. Timber-farmed Minafon (42555) on Church Street is probably early 17th century in date. Y Bwthyn (42566) on Park Street, is of stone construction, probably from the 18th century, while the timber-framing of its neighbour, Trigfan (42564), could indicate 17th century work.



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