

## **Llansanffraid-ym-Mechain**

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### ***Introduction***

Llansanffraid lies at the intersection of two roads, the A495 and B4393, in north-eastern Montgomeryshire, approximately 13km north of Welshpool. The settlement has grown up at an important river confluence, the River Cain flowing into the Vyrnwy just to the east of the village and south of Llansanffraid Bridge, and in addition Afon Tanat debouches into the main river 2km further on. Llansanffraid straggles along the north edge of the Cain valley with steep hills to the north and west, and the flood plain of the river to the south. At the eastern end of the village, houses have spread to the lip of a steep scarp above the Vyrnwy.

This brief report examines the emergence and development of Llansanffraid 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](http://www.archwilio.org.uk)).



*Llansanffraid-ym-Mechain, photo 95-c-0039, © CPAT, 2012*

### ***History of development***

The original sub-circular churchyard (below) and its location, as well as the dedication to St Ffraid all point to the establishment of a church or chapel here well before the Norman Conquest in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. However, precise information on this early phase and the settlement's development in the subsequent medieval centuries is absent.

The meaning of the place-name in English is a straightforward one, ‘the church of St Ffraid in Mechain’, the last element being the local cantref (district). As *Llansanfret* it first appears in the Norwich Taxation of 1254 and as *Llannsanffrayd in Mechayn* in 1390. *Ffraid* is the Welsh version of Brigid (Bridget), and indeed this is encountered in 1425 in the name, *St Bride in Mechein*. Debate continues as to whether the more correct name is Llansanffraid or Llansantffraid, the latter being favoured by the Ordnance Survey. The former is preferred by Welsh place-name specialists and in a recent authoritative publication it was pointed out that the loss of the ‘*t*’ was common when Welsh *sant* was prefixed to a personal name as is the case here.

A late 18<sup>th</sup> century manuscript map reveals that Llansanffraid was very much smaller than today with a group of houses scattered around the church and this picture is confirmed by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century tithe map. Some buildings were beginning to emerge below the church beside the main road running eastwards and others, well spread out, developed along the same road in the vicinity of Llansanffraid Bridge. Most of these were probably of relatively recent construction. A superficial study which needs to be corroborated by more detailed work also suggests that the road pattern was modified, perhaps in the 18<sup>th</sup> century or a little earlier, with an earlier network of lanes converging close to the churchyard and superseded by the straighter roads that form the modern transport routes through the village. The main road was formerly the 18<sup>th</sup> century turnpike road from Shrewsbury to Bala, but at present it is uncertain whether it followed an earlier thoroughfare.

### ***The heritage to 1750***

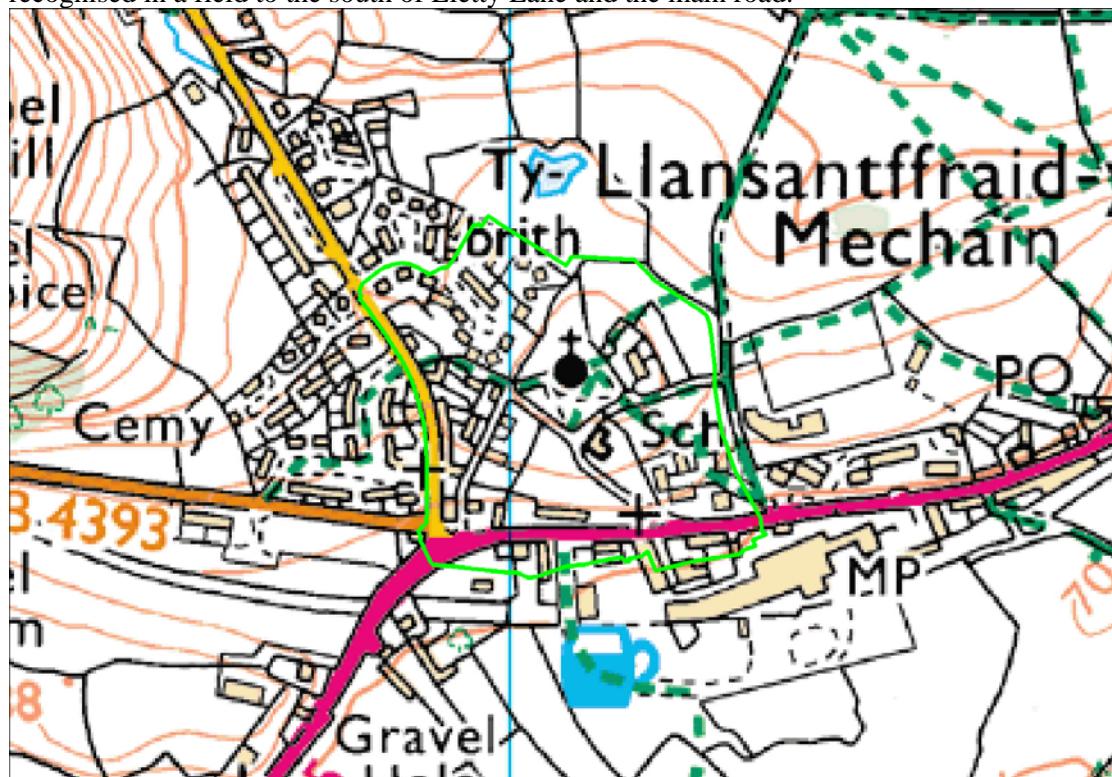
St Ffraid's church (31154) has a complicated structural history which is revealed in its fabric. A small Norman window perhaps signals a 12<sup>th</sup> century date for part of the nave, then extended in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. A south porch and a western bell-turret were added in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and a north transept in the 18<sup>th</sup>. It is interesting too for its series of dated windows in the south wall. Inside is a medieval font and piscine, wooden furnishings of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries and a few pre-19<sup>th</sup> century memorials.

The raised churchyard (7605) was apparently rectilinear in outline before it was extended at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, although earlier maps hint at a more curvilinear form.

That the west end of the village around the church was the original focus of settlement is suggested from circumstantial evidence: the primacy of the church in the landscape, the narrow lane leading past the Lion Hotel to the church, alterations to other parts of the layout in that the original track from Bronhyddon to the east cut through what is now the vicarage garden, and the ribbon development along the main road giving every appearance of being late in origin.

There are several listed buildings in Llansantffraid, including the Lion Hotel (7720), Bridge House (7719)), yet they are all either late 18<sup>th</sup> or early 19<sup>th</sup> century in date. The exception is Bodwen (7717) on the main road which is considered to be a small, timber-framed farmhouse of around 1600. Together with the unlisted 17<sup>th</sup> century origin Ty-brith cottage, 250m to the north of the church, and the church itself, these are the only buildings of any great age in the village. Llansantffraid Bridge at the east end of the village is late 18<sup>th</sup> century in date, replacing one of stone and timber that was swept away by floods in 1778.

Minor earthworks (7718) survive in the field adjacent to the north side of the churchyard. Their significance is uncertain. Some ridge and furrow (74218) of uncertain date has been recognised in a field to the south of Lletty Lane and the main road.



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