

Llansilin

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Introduction

Llansilin lies close to the county border with Shropshire in the north-eastern corner of Glyndwr District. Oswestry is little more than 8km to the east and Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant a similar distance to the south-west. Formerly the village was in the historic county of Denbighshire but it was transferred to modern Powys in 1996, along with several other parishes.

Llansilin occupies fairly gently rolling countryside, the grain of the land running from west to east on a broad interfluvium between tributaries of the River Tanat. Hills rise to the north and west and the aspect is primarily southwards, with the road in this direction following the shallow valley of a stream that rises just to the north of the village and is then apparently culverted through the settlement itself.

This brief report examines the emergence and development of Llansilin up to the year 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 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 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

A *clas* or early medieval monastic community (101083), with its church becoming the mother church for the area, existed at Llansilin. This may not have been the primary mother church of the region – that distinction seems to belong to Llanrhaeadr – but may have been carved out as the lord of the *llys* at Sycharth established himself. Llansilin was the ecclesiastical centre of the small commote of Cynllaith, and was served by several priests in the early 13th century. By this time the church may have been dedicated to St Giles (though this is open to question), a saint often associated with afforested areas after the Conquest, but there has now been a reversion to the much older, legitimate dedication of Silin.

The church and any associated settlement may have been one of the settlements in the region which was burnt by an English army in 1165, according to Giraldus Cambrensis. This unproven historical incident apart, Llansilin does not feature much in medieval records and its development during the Middle Ages can only be surmised.

The first written reference to the place seems to be from 1191 when it was referred to as *eccleie silin*. The Norwich Taxation of 1254 has it as *Llansilyn*, Pope Nicholas' taxation of 1291 as *Lansylyn*. The 1296 *Ecclesia Si Egidii de Kynlleith* introduces Giles for which Egidius is a latinised variation.

A manuscript map of the lordship of Chirk from the second half of the 18th century shows the village spreading from the crossroads adjacent to the churchyard, northwards as far as the location of the modern house known as Beech Grove and westwards to Ty'n-Ilan. The Wynnstay Arms apart, nothing lay to the south. This pattern had changed very little by the time of the Tithe survey nearly a century later.



St Silin's church, photo 03-c-0538, © CPAT, 2012

The heritage to 1750

St Silin's church (101080) reveals a complex development with two naves, mainly 15th century, and some 13th century features including a lancet window and perhaps two doors, survive from a proposed cruciform-shaped church, though the evidence for this design is not convincing. The west tower was erected in 1832, replacing a timber-framed spire. There was a major restoration in 1890. Internally there appear to be no fittings that have survived from before the 17th century, other than a cross-incised altar stone (*mensa*), but there is a good range of 17th and 18th century wooden furnishings, including a west gallery, and an early 18th century Royal Arms of plaster.

A fragmentary churchyard cross shaft (101081) of medieval origin is now surmounted by a sundial of 1717.

The churchyard (19795) is large and sub-oval except on the north where the perimeter has every appearance of having been truncated when the National School was built in 1823. Within the present enclosure a curvilinear scarp is apparent on the south, east and north-east hinting at an earlier and smaller 'llan'.

A well – Fynnon Silin (101085) – lay a little to the west of Ty'n-Ilan, but the well chamber has been infilled and the site is now lost. It should perhaps be classed as a holy well.

Bronwylfa on the north side of the village is a box-framed timber building encased in stone of 17th century and later date (19712). The church apart, this seems to be the oldest building in

the village. There are no other recognisably early buildings, although attention should be drawn to the Old Malt House, dated 1822, lying opposite the churchyard (19796).

In 2004-5, the foundation trenches of a 17th century barn, generally considered to have been a tithe barn, were excavated to the west of the church. The building was certainly standing in the 1630s, and was demolished only in 1910.

The plan of the village is interesting. An estate map of 1772-4 shows a triangle of open land between the churchyard and Ty'n-Ilan. North from the churchyard is a lane with terraced cottages occupying narrow plots running off at right-angles, those on the east being particularly pronounced. The date at which this pattern emerged is not known, but it is evident from later 18th century maps that this represents the historic core of Llansilin.



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