

Llanbister

SO109733
16159

Introduction

Llanbister church occupies a sloping rocky spur edged by valleys to north and south whose streams run westwards to the River Ithon. The older part of the village accompanying the church lies in the more shallow southerly valley. Llanbister is one of several settlements on the east side of this particular stretch of the Ithon, and is 13km north-east of Llandrindod Wells.

This brief report examines Llanbister'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 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

Dedicated to the pre-eminent saint in Radnorshire, the church supposedly originated as the cell of St Cynllo in the 6th century AD. It is considered to have been the mother church of North Radnorshire, an early 'clas' foundation, and was thus one of the most important churches in the region in the pre-Conquest period.

Its name first appears as *Lambister* in 1252 and *Lanbyster* in 1334. If there was a saint with the name of Pister or something similar he is otherwise unrecorded.

Its subsequent development as a settlement is not recorded. Common land or waste lay immediately to the north of the church, and another small patch looks to have lain immediately beyond the south-western edge of the churchyard. Dwellings or other buildings were erected around and then within this, and other buildings emerged beside the lane leading southwards into the valley. By the mid-19th century a small group of dwellings clustered to the south of the church. While it might be tempting to see a longer history with Llanbister as a small nucleated settlement in the late medieval era, there is no substantive evidence to support such a view.

The heritage to 1750

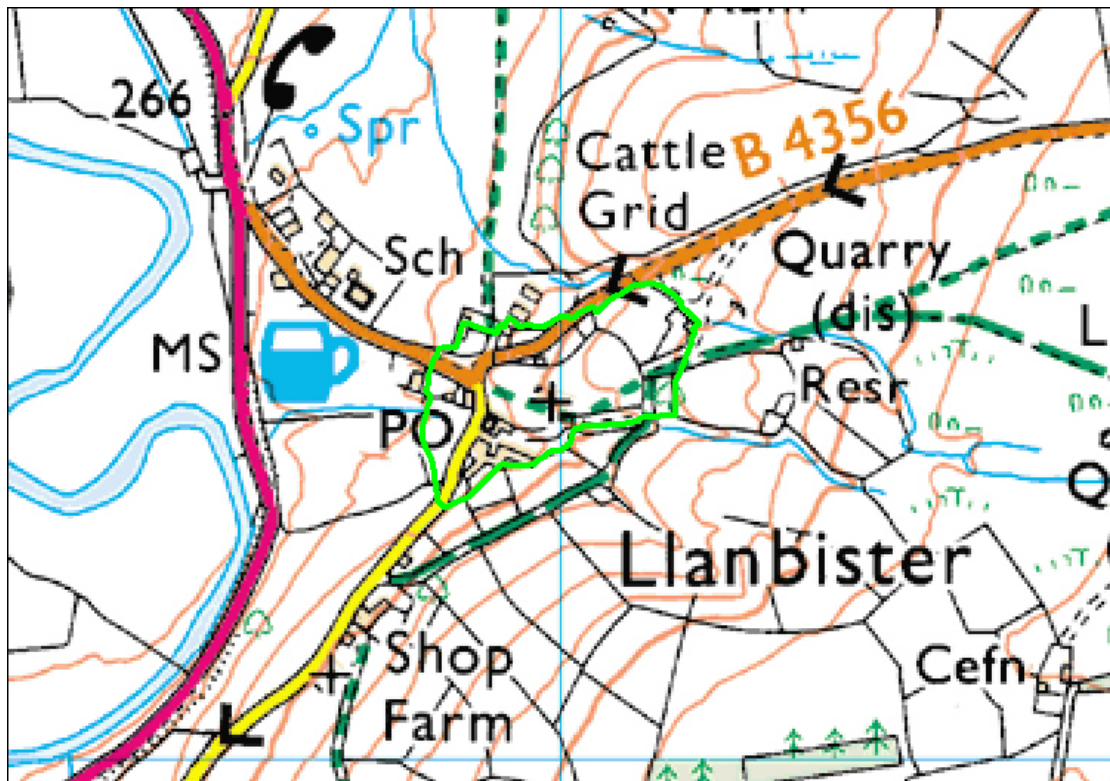
St Cynllo's Church (16024) consists of a nave, perhaps of c.1300, and a massive 16th-century east tower, its upper stages dated to 1732. The font is 14th-century, the screen late medieval,

and there is a 17th-century wall painting and an early 18th-century west gallery. Re-used carved fragments in the porch and tower have been recycled from Cwmhir Abbey.

The churchyard (16086) is of irregular shape, best described as double-lobed, reflecting the natural topography, but the church occupies a flat platform deliberately fashioned in the otherwise sloping ground. On the north side of the church is a sub-rectangular terrace and two or even three scarped platforms. These would be unusual features in any churchyard, and it can probably be assumed that buildings once occupied the platforms, and might indeed relate to the early 'clas' foundation. A holy well – Pistyll Cynllo (81708) – lies just outside the south-eastern corner of the churchyard.

Slight earthworks (16088) survive in the field (OS 9027) to the south-west of the church. Their function remains uncertain.

While there are a considerable number of farms in the parish which go back to the 16th or even the 15th century, there is no evidence for any buildings of a similar date in the settlement around the church.



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