

Llanfihangel Helygen

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Introduction

This isolated church at Llanfihangel Helygen occupies an unimposing ridge crest in gently undulating land to the west of the River Ithon. Llandrindod Wells is situated just over 3km to the south-east.

This brief report examines Llanfihangel Helygen's emergence and development up to 1750. For its more recent history of the settlement, it will be necessary to look at other sources of information.

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).



Llanfihangel Helygen church, photo 95-C-0317 © CPAT, 2011

History of development

Nothing is known of the church's origin or early history. From the church dedication, ridge-top location and the irregular shape of the churchyard, a late date for its emergence might be postulated.

Translated as 'the church of St Michael at the willow tree', Llanfihangel has a late documentation, appearing as *Llanvehangell* in 1544 and as *Llanihangell Yelegen* in 1556. It was known to the Radnorshire historian Jonathan Williams in the early 19th century as *Llanfihangel-fach*, the diminutive suffix first putting in an appearance in 1566.

There is no evidence of any form that suggests that settlement ever developed around the church, and it appears to be an outstanding example of the isolated church phenomenon. As far as can be judged nothing has occurred here in recent years to warrant archaeological assessment.

The heritage to 1750

St Michael's Church (16030) consists of a simple rectangular chamber with a west bellcote. The walls were largely rebuilt in c.1812 and a new east window put in place, although the roof is probably late medieval in origin. The building was restored in 1956. Internally there is little of any age, although the font is perhaps of the 13th century, and there are box pews which reputedly were imported from another church.

The churchyard (16098), neither raised nor distinctively curvilinear, is hardly redolent of an early medieval foundation.

The nearest dwelling, Little House just over 100m to the north, has an early 19th-century cowhouse with re-used crucks indicative of an earlier building. There is though no evidence yet encountered to indicate that this was ever anything other than an isolated church with well-dispersed farmsteads in the neighbourhood and a large area of upland common to the east.



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