

Llanfihangel Nant Melan

SO 180581
16168

Introduction

Llanfihangel Nant Melan occupies the valley of the Summergill Brook as it curves round the prominent hill known as Mynd, one of the most prominent heights at the southern edge of Radnor Forest. The church and village lie on the south side of the stream. New Radnor lies four kilometres to the north-east, Llandrindod Wells about twelve kilometres to the west. A turnpike road, now the A44, passes through the village on its way to Kington 12km to the east.

This brief report examines Llanfihangel Nant Melan'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

Nothing has been discovered about the origin and development of this settlement.

Sancti Michaelis de Nantmelan is recorded in the period between 1176 and 1198, with the only significant variation, *Mychelchurche*, appearing about 1545. The last element necessarily refers to the adjacent stream.

The tithe map of the mid-19th century shows the church and a few cottages between the turnpike road and the stream, with Great House and Lower House on the opposite, south, side of the road. Insufficient remains to suggest that this was a nucleated settlement in the medieval era, but the various platforms that survive do seem to indicate an interesting past history.

The heritage to 1750

The 20th-century Radnorshire historian, W. H. Howse claimed a round barrow (1495) in the churchyard and commented on the tradition that a stone circle surrounded the latter (6095). If correct this would be a remarkable and exciting coincidence. These identifications have, however, not been confirmed by later writers, and some consider them to be no more than mis-sitings! Nevertheless, the church surmounts a prominent platform (see below) which may have coloured Howse's view, while the stone circle tradition has been confirmed by a

householder in New Radnor who mentioned two stones in the churchyard and a third in the adjacent inn carpark. The tradition remains to be verified.

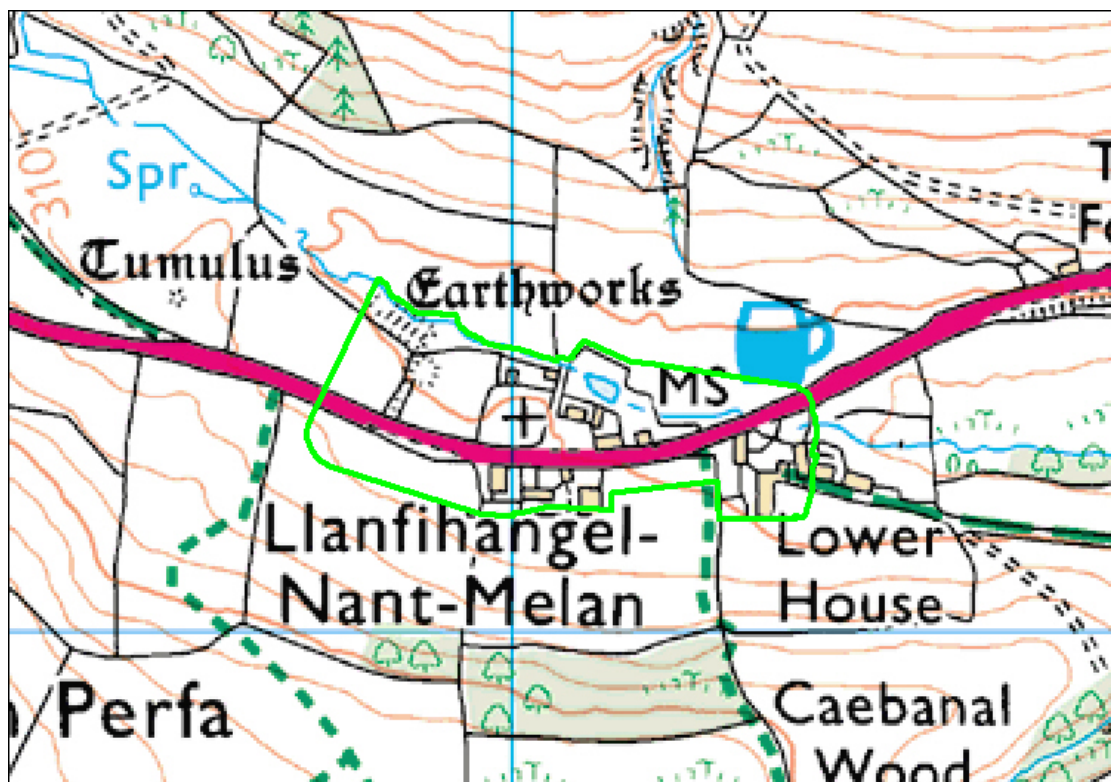
St Michael's Church (16031) with its small nave and semi-circular apse, was rebuilt in its entirety in the Romanesque style in 1846.

The churchyard as it currently exists (16282) is sub-rectangular, but there is a distinctive raised platform within it on which the church has been erected. This is most apparent on the north and west where it is nearly two metres high. It could perhaps represent either the levelled remains of an earlier church or even an earlier churchyard enclosure.

Just to the west of the churchyard and now covered by a small plantation is a linear bank (5229) lying across the valley floor. Past speculation that this is an early medieval feature remains to be confirmed, though it has been suggested that it pre-dates the earthworks of a mill which itself could be medieval (6109). The latter consist of an embanked pond, a building platform and, leading to it, a leat. There are also other earthworks (16280) in the same field including at least one further platform.

Platforms, perhaps for dwellings have also been claimed behind the Red Lion Inn, but the creation of ponds and other landscaping activities on both sides of the stream in the modern era may have obliterated these features. However, one platform (16281; old OS plot 543) may survive on the north side of the stream, north-east of the house that is adjacent to the inn.

Great House (16032; Grade II listing), opposite the church, shelters the remains of a 15th-century open hall-house, with a complex, later history. The cowhouse under the same roof is later in date. This appears to be the only old house in the settlement.



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