

Llansantffraed Cwmdeuddwr

SN 966677
16171

Introduction

Llansantffraed occupies the west bank of the River Wye immediately opposite Rhayader, and close to the Breconshire border. The Wye in its upper reaches follows a pronounced if not always deep valley, but in the vicinity of Llansantffraed church the valley flattens out, and the ground is level and probably covered by riverine deposits, hence the name Y Gro between the church and the river. In past times this natural crossing-place was utilised by a ford across the river. The motte and the dwellings surrounding it are set on the edge of higher ground, almost certainly a river terrace, at the point where it swings away from the Wye. The church, on the same terrace but further south, thus lies further back from the river.

This brief report examines Llansantffraed'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).



Llansantffraedd Cwmdeuddwr church, photo 3247-0006 © CPAT, 2011

History of development

The early history of the settlement has not been established, though it is generally assumed that it emerged at an earlier date than Rhayader, its larger neighbour to the east. An early medieval origin can only be conjectured, but some authorities have claimed Llansantffraed as a mother church with ecclesiastical control over the commote of Deuddwr. One of many Welsh churches dedicated to St Ffraid, otherwise St Bridget, the church is first referenced as *Launsanfret by Raeyrdr* in 1368, but the site is likely to be much older.

It has been argued that a motte was thrown up in the earlier 12th century to command the ford across the Wye. This is reputedly still visible at the bottom of Water Lane between the churchyard and the river. However, the landscape here has undergone some modification. The present course of the river opposite the church is unusually straight for over three hundred metres with a pronounced right-angled bend at its southern end. An earlier course for the river can be posited, following a more sinuous curve that took it directly below the churchyard and the motte. The idea is supported by the enlarged plan of the village in the mid-19th-century Tithe survey shows a pond on this putative course that looks suspiciously like an oxbow lake. It follows from this that the church and its churchyard and any associated settlement would have been on the river bank.

No doubt as a result of its proximity to Rhayader the settlement had developed into a small village by the middle of the 19th century.

The heritage to 1750

Tomen Llansantffraed (259) is a mutilated motte overlooking the river. Its sides have been cut back during housing construction and its original shape is no longer recognisable. Whether it had a bailey has never been ascertained. Excavations in 1982 and 1990 yielded information about how the mound was raised.



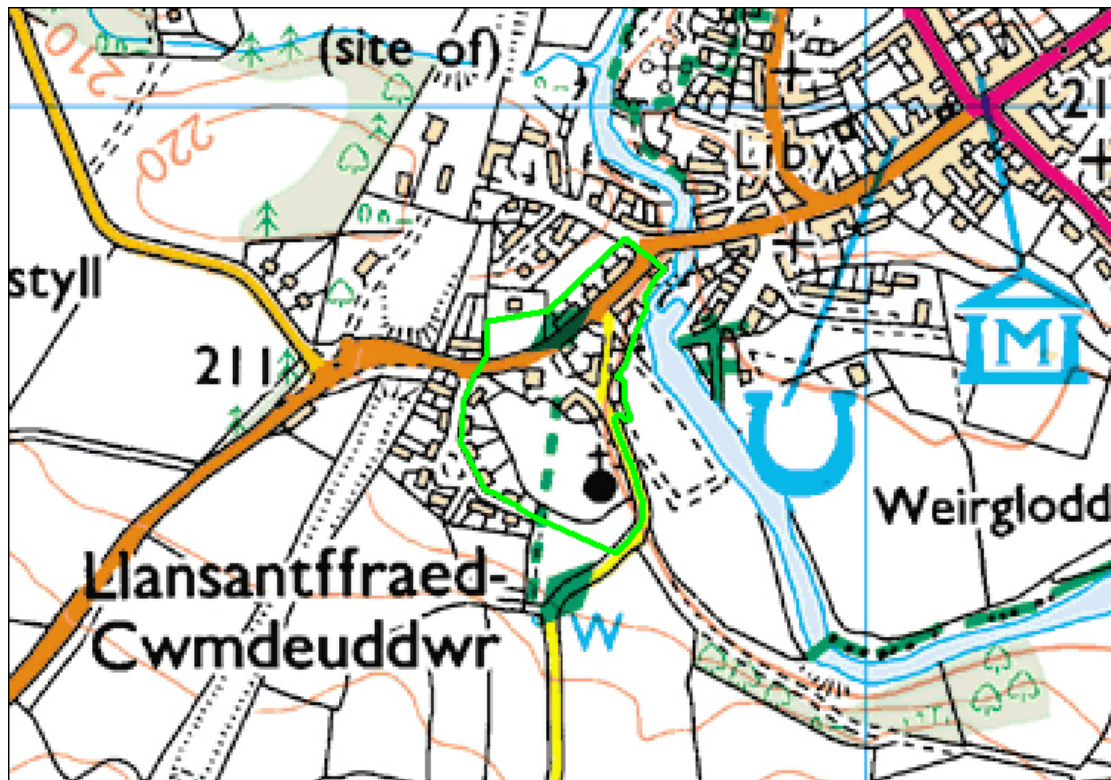
Section through Llansantffraed Cwmdeuddwr motte, photo CS82-005-0010, © CPAT, 2011

St Bridget's church (267) was rebuilt in 1778 and again in 1866, on a new site, its medieval predecessor being slightly to the north. The only feature surviving from the medieval church is a stoup carved with three heads, probably Romanesque though it was overlooked by Thurlby in his detailed study. It is housed in the south porch.

No unequivocal traces of a circular churchyard remain. But immediately north of the church an irregularly shaped area of slightly higher ground unrelated to the present perimeter of the churchyard (16081), may have some significance in this context, and the near-semi-circular yard shown on the late 19th-century Ordnance Survey maps bears locational similarities to site such as Meifod and Llanfair Caereinion in Montgomeryshire. The north-west portion of the modern churchyard is a recent extension as the Tithe map makes clear. Perhaps, too, the south-east corner which could lie over the original bed of the river, and this might account for slight irregularities in the line of the churchyard boundary on the south.

The Triangle Inn is an 18th-century but unlisted timber-framed building. On present evidence it appears to be the only pre-19th-century building in the settlement.

No evidence of early settlement growth or shrinkage has been detected. Modern expansion resulting from its proximity to the market town of Rhayader has probably obliterated any traces that existed.



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