

Llansantffraed in Elwel

SO 099548
16172

Introduction

Seven kilometres north-east of Builth Wells, Llansantffraed-in-Elwel has the craggy upland tract of Perthi Common immediately behind it providing shelter from the west, and lower undulating ground bisected by minor tributaries of the River Edw to the east. The church lies close to a small stream, the modern houses a short distance away beneath the hill.

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).



Llansantffraed in Elwel church, photo 95-C-0330, © CPAT, 2011

History of development

The origin and early history of Llansantffraed are obscure, although the church dedication if not the shape of the churchyard point to its establishment in the early medieval era.

Reputedly a Cistercian nunnery was established here prior to 1174, but it may have been dissolved by 1186. Nothing is known of its precise location, and the evidence even for its existence here is hardly conclusive.

About the year 1200 the church was known as *Lansanfret in Elevain*.

If the settlement expanded in the Middle Ages there is now relatively little trace of it. By the mid-19th century Llansantffraed consisted only of the church and a few farms and houses including Llandre. Then as now there was a large area of common land to the north-west, and the picture that currently emerges is of a dispersed settlement around the common.

The heritage to 1750

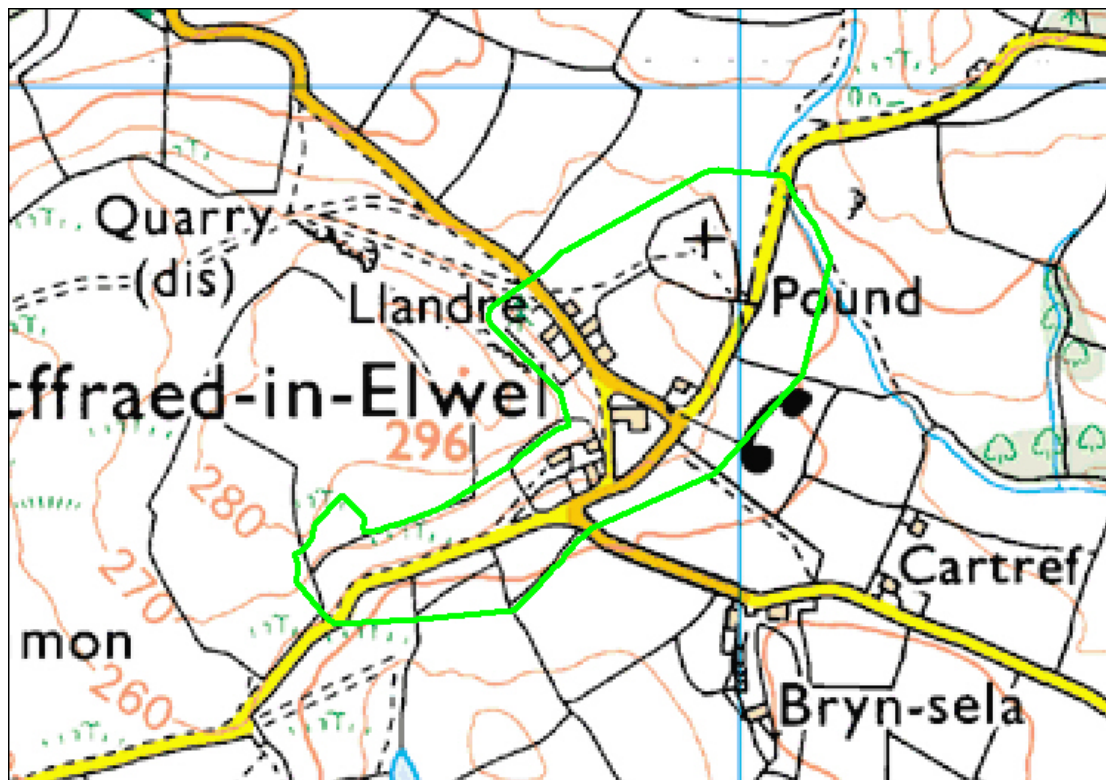
St Bridget's Church (16035) consists of a single chamber which was largely rebuilt in 1895, though much of the north wall and some of the east and south walls could have been retained from the earlier structure. The font is perhaps 15th century, and the piscine too though this appears to have been re-tooled. Fragments of earlier window tracery, the altar rails and oak for the pews were re-used in the Victorian rebuilding.

The churchyard (16236) is a curiously irregular shape in view of the absence of topographical constraints. However, there is an indication, in the form of a low scarp on the north-west, south-west and perhaps the east side, of an earlier 'llan' or enclosure, ovate in shape. A mound in the churchyard (1632) was previously thought to be a round barrow but is now considered to be a more recent dump of material.

The northern corner of the field opposite the church and east of the lane (OS plot 0078) contains earthworks (16237) that appear to include platforms. A farm known as Upper Llandre was shown here on the mid-19th-century Tithe map. There are other less intelligible features further south.

Elsewhere in the settlement there are signs of other former buildings though their function and age remains in doubt: immediately to the west of the enclosure around Church House is a possible, but unconvincing, house platform (16239) and a building, perhaps a barn (16238; OS plot 7658) occupied the corner of a field a few metres to the south-west. Another dwelling or farm now represented only by earthworks (36966) lay some 200m to the south-west of Church House.

Llandre (16036) is cruck-built, though no date has been assigned to it. Of medieval origin, it was reconstructed in the years 1766-1769. The 19th-century cowhouse with a cart-shed and stable incorporates reused cruck blades in the trusses. There are no listed buildings in the settlement.



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