

Rhulen

SO 137499
16194

Introduction

Rhulen lies 10km to the east of Builth Wells. Hills rise to the north, east and south, and only the valley leading westwards to the River Edw offers easy access to this small remote settlement. The church is constructed on the valley side above the stream on its west side. The rest of the houses that make up the settlement lie beside the stream.

This brief report examines Rhulen'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).



Rhulen church, photo CS03-032-0008, © CPAT, 2011

History of development

Nothing is known about the origin and subsequent development of this small settlement. Its Welsh form, Rhiwlen, is reflected in the earliest versions of the name which are *Ruylwynnan* in 1232 and *Ryulan* in c.1291 though it is not until the mid-16th century that forms such as *Rulen* and *Riwlén* appear. Richard Morgan in his booklet on the place-names of Radnorshire felt that the combination of *rhiw* meaning hill or slope and *glan* meaning bank described the position of Rhulen very well.

The isolated waterside location of the church together with the curvilinear element of the churchyard points to an early medieval foundation. But there is nothing to suggest that this ever became the focus for a nucleated community. When the area was mapped for tithe commutation purposes in the mid-19th century, the church was accompanied by only three houses, and this pattern is very little different from today. Rhulen can be seen as a typical mid-Wales church settlement.

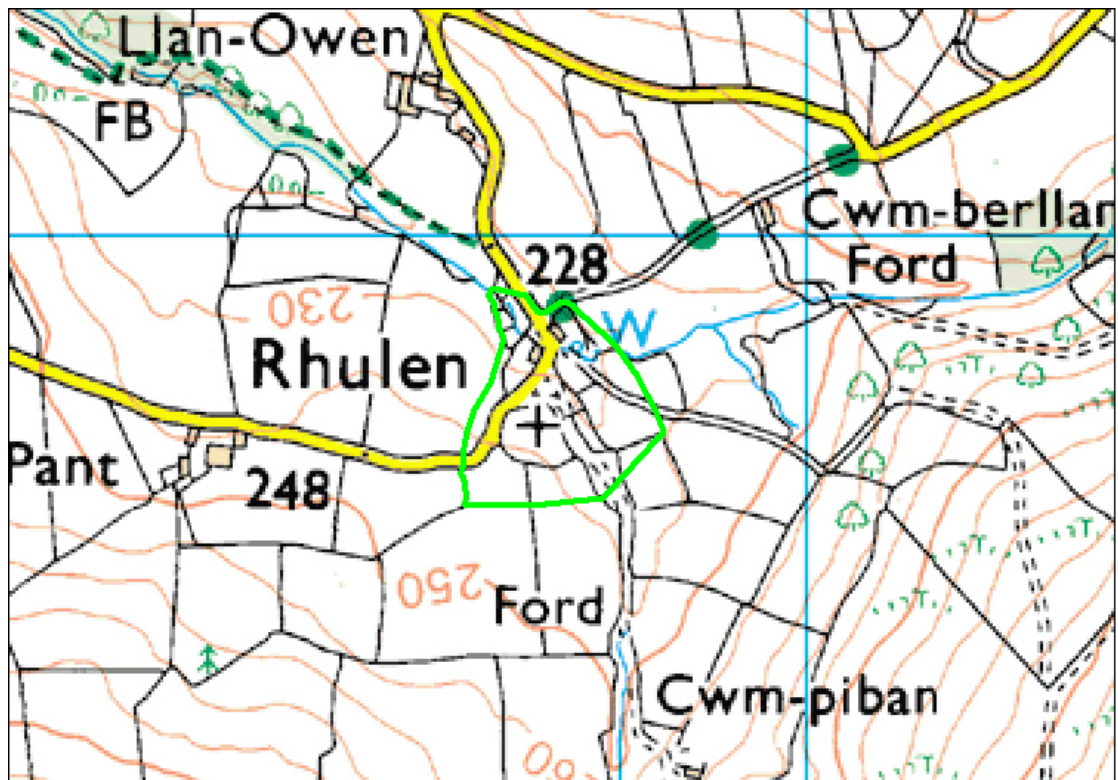
The heritage to 1750

St David's Church (16052) 'is the most unassuming of Radnorshire's rural churches' according to Richard Haslam. This is a church that lacks diagnostic features. The nave and chancel are in one and may date to around 1300, extended westwards at a later date; the porch was reputedly added in the 17th century. There is a belfry on the west, and internally a font of c.1400, an 18th-century wall monument and a couple of bells that are said to be medieval in origin.

The churchyard (16283) appears very irregular in outline, but it is evident that there have been modifications to its form in the past, perhaps when its stone boundary wall was built. Outside the wall on the north and east is a scarp bank presenting a more curved perimeter that can be traced inside the present south-east corner of the churchyard.

The church apart there are no buildings of any age in the settlement. Cwm Bellan is a late medieval hall-house (97370) of around 1500, set on a platform and a few hundred metres to the north-east of the church.

Faint ridge and furrow (16284; OS old plot no 134) survives on rising ground on the opposite side of the valley and to the east of Llan-Owen farm. This area on the east side of the stream exhibits other signs of medieval cultivation in the form of surviving strip fields.



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