

Llanlleonfel

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Introduction

Llanlleonfel is a very small settlement, comprising no more than an isolated church accompanied by a pair of cottages. It lies on the western slopes of the Dulas valley some 10km to the west of Builth Wells.

This brief report examines its 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).



Llanlleonfel village, photo 95-C-0634 © CPAT 2011

History of development

Today, Llanlleonfel comprises a church and a single pair of modern cottages though a series of earthworks lying to the east show that the settlement could have been larger at one time.

The curvilinearity of the churchyard and the presence of an important inscribed stone in the church should indicate an early medieval establishment for the church and thus the settlement. This is reinforced by the earliest form of the name – *Lanloeluyal* (in 1280) and later *Llanllewenvoyl* from between 1360 and 1367. These forms incorporate the personal name *Llywenfel*, presumably an otherwise unattested saint.

Llanlleonfel has never been an important historical focus, though it might be argued that it was less remote in former times than today, for less than one kilometre to the north, the Roman road approaching the fort at Caerau could have been accessible long after Roman military abandoned their stronghold. In the 18th century the church came under the patronage of the Gwynne family who reputedly purchased the neighbouring manor of Garth at the end of the previous century. They became associated with the Wesleys, Sally Gwynne marrying Charles Wesley in Llanlleonfel church in 1749.

The heritage to 1750

While it can be speculated that there was a church on the spot in the early medieval as well as the medieval centuries, the present structure (20135) was a complete rebuild in 1876, replacing the previous church, which may have been of the 16th century. Progressively restored by the Gwynne family from about 1712 and used by them until the end of the 18th century, the church was recorded by Francis Kilvert in 1873 as ruinous, ‘..the only occupants being several white owls’.

The church contains a massive, early medieval stone (3048), carrying a Latin inscription. It stood in the churchyard until about 1938/39. Whether it was originally associated with this church cannot be determined, but it seems highly likely. A second stone (3415) was mentioned in 1699 by Edward Lhuyd, standing eight feet from the first, and this may be one of the two stones still visible outside the east end of the church, a detailed case being made by Charles Thomas in 1999.

The church stands within a roughly polygonal churchyard enclosure which hints at former curvilinearity (2976) and is some 75m across. The circuit of the enclosure is defined by a bank and shallow ditch. Its perimeter is virtually intact although it appears to have been flattened out on the north-west to accommodate a trackway.

The western end of a univallate, rectangular enclosure, c.30m by 55m to the west of the church was photographed from the air in 2006. On present evidence it is not possible to determine whether this represents a later prehistoric defended enclosure or is part of an early medieval graveyard.

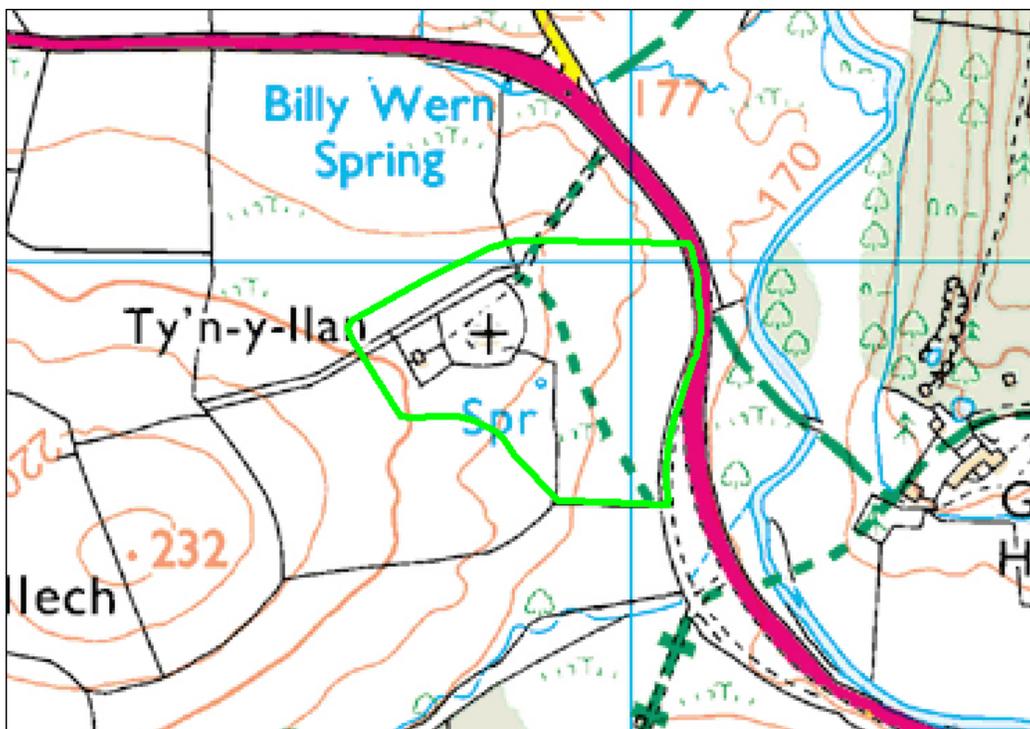
A spring or well, now capped in brick and concrete (3418) lies to the south-east of the church, and was approached by a track in the 19th century. This is reputedly a holy well, noted by the Breconshire historian, Theophilus Jones at the beginning of the 19th century, though not mentioned by Francis Jones in his standard work on the holy wells of Wales.

A series of earthworks (2977) occupy the field east of the church. These comprise linear banks and possible platforms and may represent the remains of a now deserted part of the former medieval settlement. To the south-east of the church there is a sunken trackway and further settlement may have once existed in this area. The tithe survey of 1844 shows that this sunken trackway was the main approach to the settlement from the valley. It is possible therefore that the track could have acted a focus for settlement.

An adjacent area of ridge and furrow (2978) presumably represents part of the settlement's field system.

In summary, this is a church settlement, comprising the church itself and a pair of cottages whose date of origin remains uncertain. While it is possible that Llanlleonfel has never been any larger than this, the sunken trackway ascending the hill may have been a focus for other

dwelling and there are earthworks on the east side of the church and its enclosure which have yet to be properly assessed.



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