

Cilcain

SJ 1766 6515
19932

Introduction

The village of Cilcain is situated on the gentle, lower, eastern slopes of Moel Famau in the Clwydian Hills. To the east about one kilometre away is the valley of the River Alyn, and immediately to the south of the built-up area the ground slopes away to a tributary valley carrying Nant Gain towards the Alyn. The main axis of the settlement resulting from modern development is now from north to south and is on level terrain.

Cilcain is served by back lanes which link with the A541 to the north and the A494 trunk road to the south. Both run to the town of Mold which lies 6km to the east.

This brief report examines the emergence and development of Cilcain up to the year 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 only 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 will 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).



Relict strip fields to the north of the village , photo 08-c-0235, © CPAT, 2012

History of development

There is virtually no information about the origins of Cilcain, or indeed its development during the Middle Ages. The church is probably an early medieval foundation – this at least is what the churchyard shape implies - but the earliest references are from the 13th century, and whether the church became the focus of a nucleated settlement in these centuries has yet to be determined. There is also a tradition, and it is no more than that, that St Eurgain who is the dedicatee at Northop, found refuge here in the 6th century and that the church was established on or close to her cell.

The village name appears as *Kilkennin* in the year 1210 (though the source of this information is a later document of around 1400). *Kilkeyn* appears as the name of the church in the Norwich Taxation of 1254 and as *Kylleyn* in Pope Nicholas' Taxation of 1291. *Kilkayn* is recorded in 1465. The elements in the name are *cil* [nook or corner] and *cain* [fair or pleasant], so 'fair corner' would be a reasonable interpretation. It has long been suggested that the name of the settlement was taken from Nant Gain, though this is no more than speculation, and modern place-name authorities point out that Cain could be a personal name, or might refer to the ridge of Moel Famau above the village.

At the end of the 17th century Edward Lhuyd recorded seven houses in the village based on information from one of his correspondents, and an estate map prepared in 1738 depicts a similar number of buildings together with the church around the crossroads.

The heritage to 1750

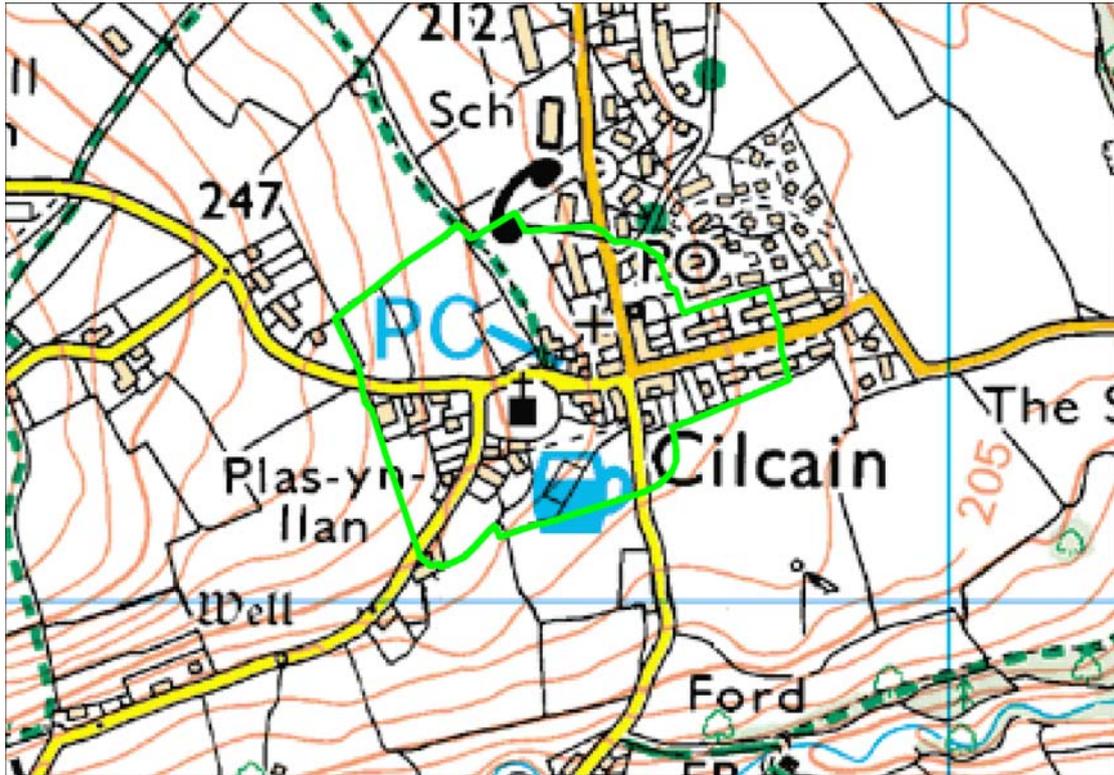
St Mary's church (19905) is a double-naved structure to which is appended a western tower. Part of the northern nave has been attributed to the 13th century, but most of the building including the tower is of the 15th century. The north nave was partially rebuilt in 1746 and the whole building was restored in 1889. Internally there is a spectacular hammerbeam roof, some fragmentary 16th century stained glass, a fragmentary font that may be Romanesque, a good collection of 14th century sepulchral slabs and other worked stone.

The churchyard (19906) is oval in shape and raised above the surrounding ground level, except at the north-west corner where the parsonage once stood. A carpark has been fashioned from the western part of the original churchyard. The stone base and part of the shaft of a church cross (100241) is set in the churchyard, but has been moved to a new location since the Ordnance Survey map was published. A sundial (100242) remains in the graveyard; two pieces remained in 1960, a shaft one metre high which is still in evidence, and the socket stone now gone. There is also a listed hearse house built in 1810.

Plâs-yn-Ilan (19102), immediately west of the church, has a Tudor-arched doorway and a staircase of late 17th century date; the building is a complex one but is thought to be 17th century, remodelled around 1700. One of its stone barns is considered to be early 18th century in date (36185). There are no other listed buildings in the village, although Smithy House at the cross-roads has been claimed to date from 1572, though on what basis remains to be established.

The layout of the village is interesting, with housing in the 19th century concentrated around the crossroads, 80m to the east of the church and two larger properties, Plâs-yn-Ilan and Ty-mawr beside the churchyard. It may be that both the east/west routeway and that from north to south were important in the Middle Ages, and that their crossing place grew in importance as a result.

There are no obvious village earthworks at Cilcain. Minor irregularities in the field immediately to the north-west of the church are not intelligible, though it should be noted that the tithe map in the mid-19th century termed this 'Fynwent (Cemetery) Field'. The field patterns in the vicinity of the village hint at the former layout presence of strip fields.



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