

## Llanfyllin

SJ 1431 1934  
15718

### *Introduction*

Set in the hills of northern Montgomeryshire, Llanfyllin is the terminus of the A490 from Welshpool which lies some 15km to the south-east. This large village has expanded along the southern edge of the valley through which Afon Cain flows towards its confluence with the Vyrnwy. The shallow valley carved by its tributary, the little Nant Abel, which runs down from the west, proved attractive to the earliest colonisers: the church was founded on a slight rise above it and the settlement developed along the valley and beyond it, the Abel flowing down Brook Street and High Street until it was culverted in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The 20<sup>th</sup> century expansion of Llanfyllin has focused on the road from Welshpool, with housing estates, a large school complex and some industry all set close to it.

This brief report examines Llanfyllin'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](http://www.archwilio.org.uk)).

### *History of development*

The church's early foundation seems assured, the unusual dedication coupled with the curvature of some parts of the churchyard boundary and the location overlooking a small river combining to suggest a pre-Conquest origin. As it was termed a *capella* in the mid-13<sup>th</sup> century it appears to have been originally dependant on the mother church at Meifod.

The place-name *Llanvelig* first appears in 1254 and as *Llanvyllyn* in the 1291 Taxatio of Pope Nicholas. The name means the 'church of St Mylling', a Welsh version of an obscure Irish saint, Moling, a 7<sup>th</sup> century Irish monk who, tradition has it, was buried under the altar of the early church. The reason for Moling's appearance here is unknown and there is no corroborative evidence to suggest that the holy man ever visited Wales.

To what extent the church acted as a focus for settlement prior to the late 13<sup>th</sup> century is not known. But at that time Llanfyllin became a Welsh borough. It was founded in the years between 1293, when a weekly market and annual fair were granted to the Lord of Mechain, and 1295 when he died. Of no great size, it had only 30 burgages, supposedly laid out along Bridge Street, which has been claimed as the main axial road in the town. The town's charter which still survives states that it was to follow the laws and liberties of the Norman town of Breteuil, a standard formula at that date.

How many of Llanfyllin's lanes had medieval dwellings beside them is unknown, but we can be reasonably certain that it remained no more than a small town throughout its history.

Nevertheless, John Speed, writing at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, listed it as one of the principal market towns in Montgomeryshire and this is borne out by the revenues from the market and fairs as documented in 1650 for these were greater than at Llanidloes, Machynlleth and Newtown. The market town specialised in the sale of wool and yarns throughout the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, and received a new charter in 1673.

The earliest map that we have – a copy of an unprovenanced original – dates from around 1725. Taken at face value this suggests that dwellings had spread along the road to Bala at least as far as where Rhiwlas Terrace now is; that on Bridge Street there were unbroken lines of houses down to the Cain, with a few on the other side of that river; that towards Welshpool houses stretched almost as far as the location of the modern council offices; and that Market Street also had continuous housing as far as the Vine Square area. As to whether Narrow Street existed in anything like its present form is unclear, but as noted above, the Abel flowed in an open channel at this time.

The 18<sup>th</sup> century appears to have been a period of expansion and maps from the end of the century indicate an expanding settlement. Brickworks produced the materials for many of the buildings in the town centre including the church. Maltings and tanneries were located here and in the later 19<sup>th</sup> century the railway arrived, though this falls outside the scope of this report.

### ***The heritage to 1750***

Nothing survives of the medieval church dedicated to St Myllin. It was demolished and a new structure (7614) was built largely in brick soon after 1706. This itself was restored around 1863. Virtually all the fixtures and fittings post-date the construction of this new church.

The present churchyard embraces the unmistakable traces of a small, circular enclosure, undoubtedly the earlier 'llan' (7615).

The street pattern in Llanfyllin merits attention. Soulsby claimed Bridge Street as the main thoroughfare while Haslam believed Narrow Street fulfilled this function, though earlier maps of the town suggest that is very unlikely. The main development in the borough was without doubt along the Shrewsbury to Bala road, with a widening of the road to accommodate the market place to the south-east of the church. Running off the main street at right angles were subsidiary lanes, one (now Bridge Street, but Street Issa/Lower Street in 1817) running off north-eastwards towards a crossing of Afon Cain, 150m below the church, and on towards Llangedwyn and Oswestry; and another, initially very narrow lane or passage, edging the churchyard and turning through a right angle (as Church Street) to meet Bridge Street. On the opposite side, two or perhaps three lead off the market place: Narrow Street, Market Street which before the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century seems to have been Pig Street, and Brook Street which followed the looping Nant Abel. All are incorporated in a rectangular network, the very regular layout indicating an advanced degree of planning at the time that the borough was founded. Interestingly, the Market Place is off centre from both Bridge Street and Narrow Lane.

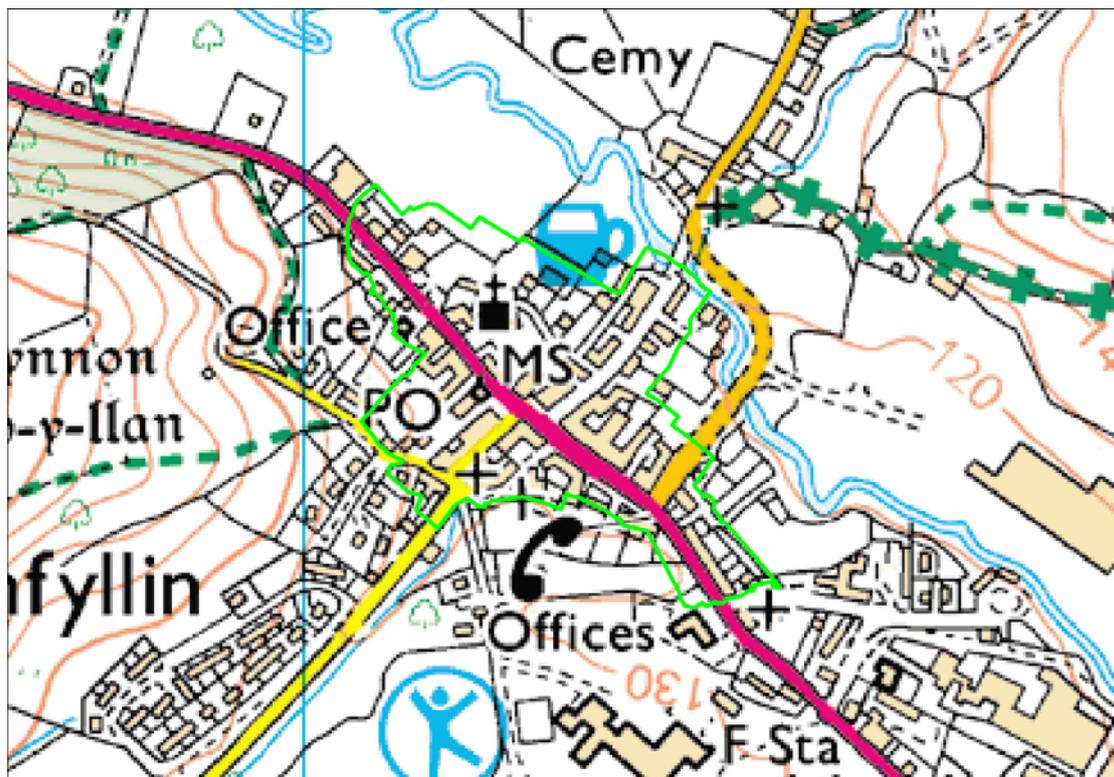
A town hall or market hall had occupied the same spot at the bottom of Market Street from at least 1590 when it was first documented (the last structure, of brick, was erected in 1791 and demolished in 1960). The location is now an open space.

There are few grade II\* listed buildings in Llanfyllin. The Manor House (31534) between Narrow Street and Market Street of 1737 is one such. But there are a significant number of grade II buildings, their lower status probably a recognition that many have been remodelled or re-fronted subsequent to their original construction. And their range of dates is perhaps one of the clearest indications of the town's thriving history during the 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

No.38 High Street (31512) is 17<sup>th</sup> century but was extensively rebuilt in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and neighbouring Waterloo House, and also Denbigh House (40438) both have 17<sup>th</sup> century origins, as does the Cain Valley Hotel (20260). The Bakery on the High Street (40433) is considered to be mid-18<sup>th</sup> century as is the Post Office (31503), Rhiwlas Terrace (41076-40181) has a core which could be 17<sup>th</sup> century, while adjacent Rhiwlas House (31495) has its origins in a 17<sup>th</sup> century timber-framed house. Lower down the High Street, 4 and 5 Penybryn (40435) opposite the Cross Keys incorporate parts of a 16<sup>th</sup> century hall-house which was rebuilt in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the Cross Keys itself (31517) was also originally a 16<sup>th</sup> century hall-house, with a gabled front added in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Globe House (31516) on the High Street was also an Inn, the Cross Foxes, and was built in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, while its neighbour, no.48 High Street (the Eagle Café; 31515) also had 17<sup>th</sup> century origins. On Bridge Street, no. 16 (31489) is a modernised 17<sup>th</sup> century jettied house, and no.19 (31490), opposite, is from the same century.

Away from the High Street Church View (31493) on Church Street is early 17<sup>th</sup> century if not earlier. And The Hall (57) on Vine Square is of 16<sup>th</sup> century date, its open hall re-modelled in about 1599.

The only archaeological work in Llanfyllin in recent years was an evaluation north-east of Church Street and close to the churchyard boundary in 2008. A number of features denoting medieval settlement were revealed by the excavations, including post-holes, a possible floor layer and further uncharacterised layers. Small fragments of daub were found throughout some of the early layers, suggesting that timber-framed structures with wattle infill are likely to have been located nearby in the past.



Reproduced by permission of Ordnance Survey® on behalf of HMSO. © Crown copyright and database right 2009. All rights reserved. Welsh Assembly Government. Licence number 100017916.