

Llanllugan

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Introduction

Llanllugan lies on a back road in the heart of Montgomeryshire. It is just over 6m south-west of Llanfair Caereinion, and around 12km north-west of Newtown in the Severn valley. The settlement is set on a slight spur overlooking the southern branch of the River Rhiw, a tributary of the Severn, and comprises the church and the adjacent farm of Tynllan, and one hundred metres and more to the south-west and at a slightly lower altitude, a small number of houses which front onto lanes that converge to cross the flood plain of the river.

This brief report examines the emergence and development of Llanllugan 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 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).

History of development

The shape of the early churchyard, its location above the river and general remoteness, arguably the place-name itself suggest an early medieval foundation, though this remains unproven.

The place-name is recorded as *Llanlugan* in 1239 and in its present form as late as 1562. The standard *llan* prefix to so many place-names that incorporates a saint's name, here accompanies a name that is otherwise unattested. No 'Llugan' is referenced in the Calendar of Welsh Saints, nor is it recognised as a personal name. A link with the name Llorcan Wyddell, alias Gwyddelan, who appears as a dedicatee only a few miles away at Llanwyddelan, has been proposed in the past. Modern experts have yet to be wholly convinced.

The medieval history of Llanllugan is equally obscure, and is complicated by the putative presence of a Cistercian nunnery (1334) which was certainly in existence by about 1217 when a charter granting land both around Llanllugan itself and beyond was drawn up for the local lord of Cydwain. The charter however could be a confirmatory copy of an earlier grant from the period 1170 to 1190. In all probability, Llanllugan was ever a small community: in 1377 there were only an abbess and four nuns, and a chaplain. John Leland on his travels as the king's antiquary, termed it 'a very poor little nunnery' and within a couple of years, in 1536, it was dissolved.

In the middle of the 18th century the village was mapped by a surveyor called Isaac Messeeder as part of a large estate survey. Taken at face value his map would suggest that to the north-west of the church was an expanse of open common, but sadly Messeeder's surveying skills

are far from impressive and it would be unwise to place too much emphasis on his record. In the middle of the 19th century, the village looked much as it does today. Only the new house behind Lower Mill has been added in the last 150 years.

The heritage to 1750

St Mary's church (20107) is a simple, single-chamber building, probably of 15th-century date, though the walls could be older. The fine roof is of similar date, as is an assemblage of stained glass including pieces showing an abbess, recently claimed as one of the most important collections of Cistercian stained glass now available to us. The plain font is attributed to the 13th century.

The present churchyard boundary encapsulates a smaller, near circular enclosure showing as a scarp bank up to one metre high (7621). This should be the early medieval *llan*.

A holy well (1335), supposedly positioned close to the church, can no longer be recognised.

The church is the only listed building here. Tynllan (20229) formerly had a listing in the now obsolete grade III category. However, the Royal Commission's records state that the house is half-timbered and was probably built in the 17th century, and its timber-framed barn has a similar period of origin.

Nothing of the Cistercian nunnery remains, although a carved beam over the fireplace at Gwernfyda, just over 1km to the south-west, is believed to have come from it. Several suggestions as to its location have been made over the years. That the conventual buildings were closer to the Rhiw seems unlikely. A case has been made recently for cloisters and a single range of buildings lying immediately to the north of the church, on the basis of an early blocked doorway in the latter. Attractive an idea though this is, the supporting evidence is flimsy. A third possibility is that Tynllan overlies the site. Thus there has been considerable speculation about the location of the nunnery and virtually nothing in the way of concrete evidence. The field to the east is recorded as *Maes y cwrt ucha* (1759).

Earthworks probably signify that the village was once larger. Just below the west churchyard wall is a platform (7623) on the natural spur, a sunken track (or dry stream bed) runs across the field opposite the church, while the field east of Ebrandy has tracks and perhaps platforms (7622).



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