

Llanstephan

SO1188042141
16173

Introduction

The isolated church at Llanstephan is sited on the east side of the River Wye, where the slope rising from the valley floor flattens out before continuing to climb to The Begwms several kilometres away to the north-east. The A470(T) road from Brecon to Builth Wells runs in the valley below. Llanstephan is 12km to the south-east of Builth Wells.

This brief report examines Llanstephan'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).

History of development

Nothing is known of the origin and early history of Llanstephan. The earliest cartography which admittedly goes back no further than the last century suggests the church could always have been an isolated building serving the dispersed farms in the neighbourhood. However, the identification of relict traces of past settlement around other churches in the Wye and Usk valleys in Breconshire warns against assuming this too readily.

As place-names go, Llanstephan is evidenced quite late. *Llanytyfffaen wen* is mentioned in the 15th century, but no earlier versions have been identified. The 'white' element that has been affixed is taken to mean that the church had been coated in limewash. It can be no more than an assumption that the church had a dedication to an obscure Welsh saint which later became anglicised as Stephen.

This is an area where the landscape is undergoing visible modification. Relict field boundaries showing as lynchet banks are to be seen in the large field (OS old plot 250) to the north-east of the church while the adjacent embanked trackway has fallen out of use and is overgrown. Other field boundaries shown on the accompanying early 20th-century Ordnance Survey map have also been removed since its preparation.

The heritage to 1750

St Stephen's Church (16037) consists of nave, chancel, south porch and west tower, and in date terms is a mix of periods. The nave is 13th-century, the chancel 14th-century, as perhaps is

the tower, which seems then to have been partially rebuilt in the 16th century. Some windows were replaced in the 15th century and the chancel was re-roofed in the 17th century. Restoration occurred around 1867.

The lych-gate (16213) with its stable, an unusual feature, is of 18th-century date and has a Grade II listing.

The churchyard (16214) is irregularly oval. It may have been extended in the past for a low scarp is discernible around the south side of the church but this does not describe a complete circuit. The well in the southern sector is not known as a holy well, but this seems to be a distinct possibility.

There are no dwellings or farms in the immediate vicinity. A building platform (16215; OS old plot 284) has been identified, lying adjacent to the track leading westwards from the church at the point where it bifurcates. However, it has not been possible to authenticate this earthwork.



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