

Llanfair Dyffryn Clwyd

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Introduction

Llanfair Dyffryn Clwyd as its topographical affix indicates lies in the Vale of Clwyd, some 3km south of Ruthin, with the road from that town to Wrexham and Llangollen, the A525, bisecting the village. The settlement lies towards the head of the Vale as this narrows and the River Clwyd emerges from the hills to the south-west which are really a western extension of the Clwydian Range. The church occupies gently sloping ground in the lee of a low hillock rising just to the south. A small stream, Dwr Ial, runs northwards some 300m to the east, while the Clwyd itself is about 500m to the west.

This brief report examines the emergence and development of Llanfair Dyffryn Clwyd up to the year 1750. For the more recent history of the settlement, it might be necessary to look at other sources of information and in particular 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 require modification 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. The HER can be accessed on-line through the Archwilio website (www.archwilio.org.uk).

History of development

In the taxation records of 1254 and 1291 it is *Lanweyr and Lanveyr* respectively. Its siting in the vale is alluded to in 1386 when we read of *Llanvair in Diffrencloyt*. Later references clung to the full name to differentiate it from the other Llanfair settlements in north Wales and the present form of the name was first recorded in 1838.

There is no element of the ecclesiastical foundation, whether in physical form or name, that points to an early medieval origin for Llanfair. This though cannot be taken as confirmation that there wasn't a church here in early medieval times, and the twin dedication incorporating the British saint St Cynfarch might reveal an early origin (with tradition supposedly signalling that St Mary was only added after a medieval rebuilding, though this would have had to have been before 1254). The great Welsh historical geographer William Rees distinguished Llanfair as the *maerdref* (or settlement of bondsmen who served the lord's court) in the commote of Llanerch in existence before the Norman Conquest, though the evidential base for this view is not given.

Little or no information has become available on the medieval history and development of Llanfair. By the end of the 17th century, Edward Lhuyd could refer to six houses by the church, but there are no maps that would help in understanding the layout of the village at that time. In the middle of the 19th century when the first larger-scale maps were prepared, Llanfair had emerged as a compact village at the centre of a web of five roads and lanes converging on it, but what is not clear is whether the turnpike road running north to south through the village was a new creation of the later 18th century or followed the course of an

earlier thoroughfare. Its straight alignments either side of the village could indicate the former.



Llanfair Dyffryn Clwyd, photo 95-C-0140, © CPAT 2014

The heritage to 1750

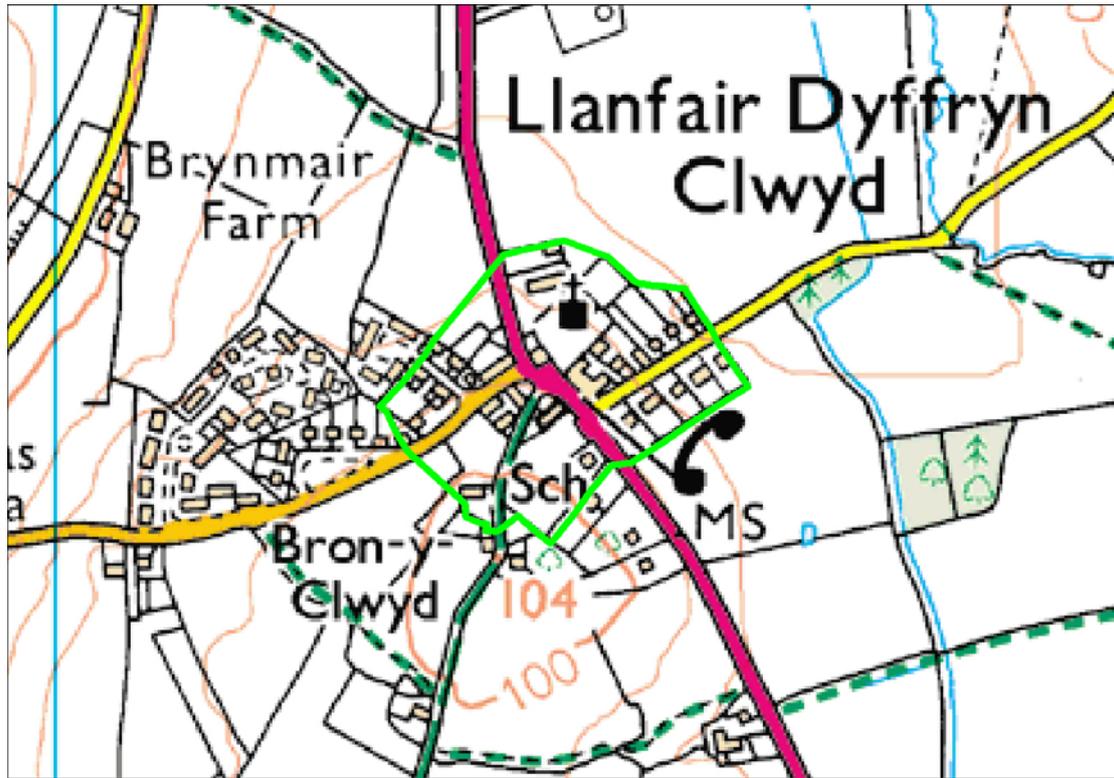
The church dedicated to St Cynfarch and St Mary is a double-naved structure, a typical form in the Vale of Clwyd, with a west tower, all of Perpendicular (15th-century) build. The windows too are in the Perpendicular style though one carries a date of 1626. It was restored in 1871-2. There are two early 14th-century sepulchral slabs, fragments of the medieval rood screen (and timbers from the medieval roofs have been recycled), fragments of stained glass with one perhaps carrying the date 1503, a large iron-bound chest thought to be earlier 17th-century, and several wall memorials, the earliest being from 1582.

The churchyard is wholly rectilinear with no sign of any ancient modifications and no obvious curvilinearity. Cleared almost entirely of gravemarkers, it presents a manicured artificiality. A fragment of the medieval churchyard cross, reused as a sundial, is set close to the south door of the church.

There are no listed buildings of any age in the village other than the church. However, the settlement is surrounded by landholdings, the farmhouses of which date to the 16th and 17th centuries. Possibly some may go further back into the medieval period and have had some bearing on the development of the village, for Samuel Lewis in 1833 pointed to the ‘great number of ancient family mansions, occupied by opulent and highly respectable families’.

Traces of ridge and furrow cultivation survived in fields on the south-western edge of the village until after the war. That in the field south-west of Bron-y-Clwyd is still in evidence. There are hints too from the 1st edition of the large-scale Ordnance Survey map that a

medieval open-field system existed in the same area and was subsequently enclosed into individual strip fields.



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