

Llanfarchell

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Introduction

The modern settlement of Llanfarchell consists of little more than the church and a farm occupying the edge of a river terrace of the Clwyd on the west side of the Vale. Westwards the ground rises around Denbigh, eastwards the valley floor is almost completely level and beyond the river, the Clwydians rise steeply. The impression is of an early foundation positioned deliberately to overlook the flood plain of a major river. The suburbs of Denbigh have encroached to within two hundred metres of Llanfarchell church (and Denbigh's sewage works are even closer) while the centre of the town is little more than a kilometre away.

This brief report examines the emergence and development of Llanfarchell 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

Llanfarchell, a name derived from the saint to whom the church was dedicated, was known as *L(l)annvarcell* in 1254. Other forms are no doubt to be found in medieval and later documents, but unlike most small Welsh settlements Llanfarchell was overlooked in the authoritative *Dictionary of the Place-Names of Wales* (2007). An alternative name is Whitchurch, apparently a post-Reformation appellation, which in Welsh is *Eglwys Wen*, and supposedly recalls the church's white-washed exterior, as well as giving a name to the farm on the opposite side of the road.

The dedication is to a 7th-century saint, whose latinised name was Marcella, and who reputedly established her hermitage by a holy well here in the 7th century. This then is a strong candidate, though based on circumstantial evidence, for an early medieval origin beginning.

Llanfarchell was originally the parish church for Denbigh, but its history and the development of any settlement in its vicinity are obscure. It is one of those curious places where the parental role has been usurped by the offspring, the former disappearing into obscurity while the latter has thrived. Denbigh emerged as a manor in the late 13th century after the Edwardian Conquest of north Wales, and perhaps significantly so did Kilford on the opposite side of Llanfarchell.

A manuscript map depicting the liberty and borough of Denbigh from c.1809 depicts only the church and the adjacent farm, together with a lane leading up from the south which is now reduced to a footpath. This absence of settlement is confirmed by the Ordnance Surveyors' survey drawing of 1819 which similarly shows only the church and farm.

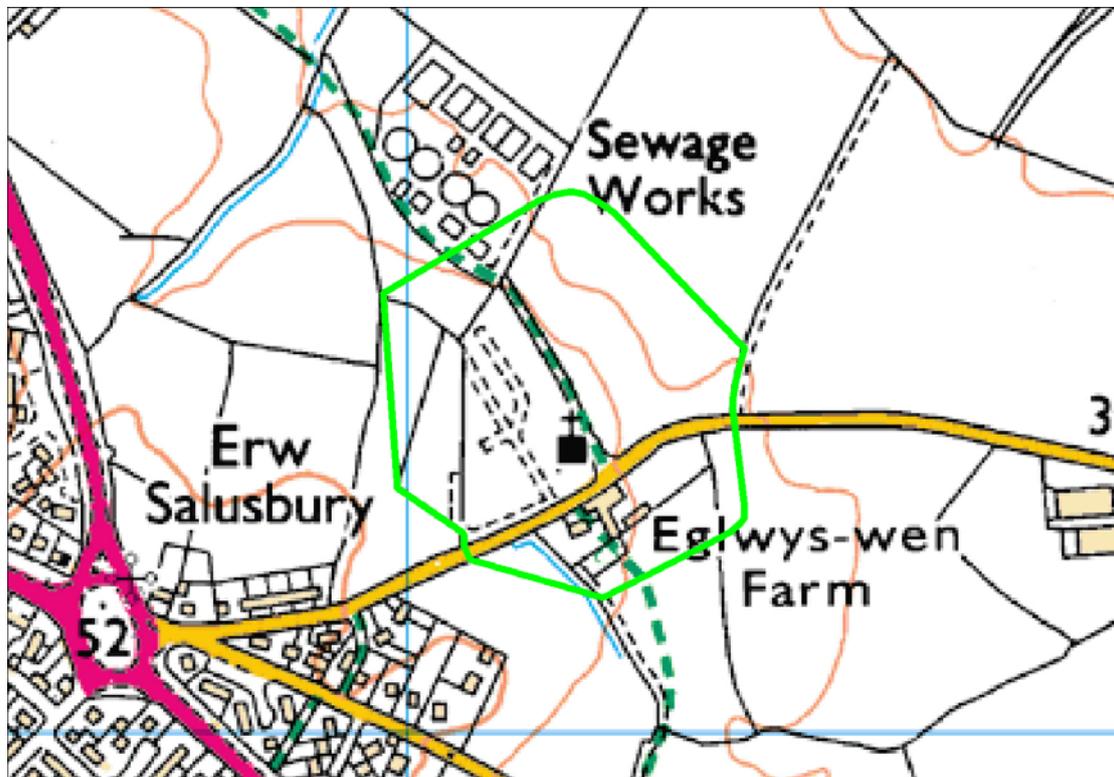
The heritage to 1750

Claimed as the grandest of all medieval Denbighshire parish churches, St Marcella's is a 15th-century double-naved structure of a type prevalent in the Vale of Clwyd. While largely Perpendicular, there is a blocked doorway of earlier, 14th-century date. Internally the arcade and roofs are of late medieval origin. The near total absence of medieval furnishings and fittings could be a result of the building falling out of use in the early 19th century, other than for burial, when it was supplanted by St Hilary's in Denbigh (though it was subsequently restored in the first decade of the 20th century). A little medieval stained glass remains, and parts of the medieval rood screen were incorporated in the early 20th-century screens. But most of the internal features are 17th- and 18th-century in origin, including a font of 1640, an altar table of 1623, the pulpit of 1683, a chandelier of 1753 and a benefaction board of 1720. There are interesting memorials starting with that to the antiquary, Humphrey Llwyd (d.1568) and a brass to the governor of Denbigh Castle, Richard Myddelton (d.1575).

The rectilinear churchyard has been extended on several occasions over the last one hundred and fifty years. A manuscript map of c.1811 appears to show a smaller churchyard with the church placed eccentrically within it, but it is difficult to determine how much credence to attach to its accuracy.

There are no earthworks characteristic of earlier settlement in the vicinity of the churchyard. However, the fields to the south-west (OS plot 9844) and north-west (OS plot 9758) of the sewage works both have irregular surfaces. While some of the irregularities are clearly modern and others perhaps of natural origin, it is possible that one or two may be archaeologically significant.

Slight ridge and furrow is discernible in pasture below the river terrace (OS plot 3700).



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