

Llangwyfan

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Introduction

Llangwyfan has emerged on the eastern edge of the Vale of Clwyd where the ground starts to ascend gradually before rising steeply to the crest of the Clwydian Range. A minor stream running down to the River Clwyd passes immediately to the north of the churchyard, but its shallow course has left virtually no imprint on the gently sloping landscape. The church itself is virtually lost on the periphery of the sprawling remains of the former Llangwyfan Hospital.

Llangwyfan is served only by minor lanes one of which winds over the Clwydians to Nannerch. The larger settlement at Llandyrnog is less than 2km to the south-west and the town of Denbigh is about 7km to the west.

This brief report examines the emergence and development of Llangwyfan 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

Llangwyfan was listed as *Langrifin* in the taxation record of 1254, but nearly three hundred years passed before another reference can be identified, this one to *Llan Goyffen* (1535). After this the place-name occurs rather more frequently, evolving into its present form by 1795. The saint whose dedication has given rise to the place-name is thought to have been Cwyfen who may have been of Irish extraction.

The origins and history of both church and settlement are obscure. The church dedication and perhaps the location beneath the Clwydians – it is in much the same topographical situation as Llangynhafal and Llanbedr – might suggest an early medieval beginning, though there is no substantive evidence to collaborate this view.

If there was a medieval settlement around the church, it had probably long gone by the time that John Ogilby in his *Britannia* published in 1675 depicted only the church close to the road linking the pilgrimage centres of St Davids and Holywell. Similarly a late 18th-century estate map shows only the church and Plas Llangwyfan a little over 100m to the south-east, a pattern confirmed by the mid 19th-century tithe map when there were no other buildings in the vicinity. Yet this is not altogether certain. When John Ingleby drew the church with Vron Yw (to the north) in the background in 1793, he included a small cottage on the track that led from the church. Was this simply artistic licence? It seems not for the Ordnance Survey surveyors' drawing of 1821 shows two small buildings here, one of which seems to have survived into the last quarter of the century when it was mapped by the Ordnance Survey

again for the 25” to the mile map of 1875. That the 18th-century estate map does not show the cottage is of no relevance for the boundary of the estate that was being mapped stopped short of it, but what is of interest is that the lane running beside it north-westwards and now gone was then termed ‘the old road to Caerwys’. The lane going north-east and still a track today was termed ‘the new road to Caerwys’.



Llangwyfan, photo 95-C-0160, CPAT 2014

The heritage to 1750

St Cwyfan's church is a small single-chambered edifice with a west bellcote, its rendered external surfaces obscuring any signs of surviving medieval masonry. One window is 15th-century and the south door could be 14th-century, while others windows are post-medieval, one carrying a date of 1684. The porch is from the early 18th century. Box pews survive in the interior but there are no medieval fittings.

The churchyard is rectangular, raised above the surrounding ground. There is nothing to suggest an earlier curvilinear *llan*.

The parish stocks are set outside the churchyard gate, though it is not clear whether this was their original position. They are believed to be a modern replica of the original stocks, now stored inside the church.

Llangwy(n)fan Hospital was constructed as a sanatorium in 1918-1920, and closed in 1981. Parts of it are now a care home. It replaced Plas Llangwyfan, a small late 16th-century house.

An earthwork platform lies in wood pasture a few metres to the north-east of the churchyard gate. It is not well-defined and its purpose is unclear.



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