

Llanynys

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Introduction

Llanynys lies on a minor road in the Vale of Clwyd, 5km north-west of Ruthin and just over 6km south-east of Denbigh. The core of the settlement occupies a discrete area of well-drained sandy loam soils raised slightly above the valley floor. The churchyard straddles the south-eastern lip of this island which overall is about 650m long.

This brief report examines the emergence and development of Llanynys 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 first record that we have of it, the Norwich Taxation of 1254, Llanynys appears as *Ecc'a de Lanenys*, and in Pope Nicholas' taxation of 1291 as *Llanynnys*. It first appears in its present form in 1386. The second element of the name can mean either 'island' or 'river meadow', but in this instance the location favours its rendering as 'church on an island'. It has been the subject of a particularly thorough study by Glanville Jones in 1964.

Llanynys may have been founded as a monastic site (100606) as early as the 6th century AD, and there is an early 15th-century reference (in 1402) to it housing a *claswyr* or *clas* community at some previous time. As a 'mother church' it served an area, (as reported by Edward Lhuyd) extending at least as far as Cyffylliog, four miles away, a subservient association that can be traced back to at least the 13th century. An early holy man, St Saeran, is supposedly buried here; and the place was recorded in 9th-century verse as 'Lanfawr beyond Bannawg, where the Clwyd joins the Clywedog'.

In the 13th century the church was one of the richest in North Wales, with a value of £16 estimated in 1291. By then the *clas* had become what Glanville Jones called 'an hereditary ecclesiastical corporation'. But none of this means that a settlement had grown up around the church during the medieval centuries, though this is certainly possible.

At the end of the 17th century, Edward Lhuyd's correspondent noted that in time of heavy flooding, Llanynys became an island but there were only two houses near the church, Plas Llanynys and Ty'r Clochydd. By the mid-19th century the settlement had grown only slightly: the church, the rectory, a few cottages and Plas Llanynys, a short distance to the south. Since then there has been only limited development around the village core.



Llanynys, photo 96-C-0151, © CPAT 2014

The heritage to 1750

The island on which Llanynys sits has a long history of land use. Enclosures, probably of late prehistoric or Roman date have been photographed on both sides of the settlement and a double ring ditch (19788), probably of Bronze Age date, underlies one of the former open-field quillets to the north-west of the settlement.

The church is dedicated to St Saeran (100605). It is typical of the Vale of Clwyd with a double-nave, a south porch and a bellcote at the western end. It appears to have started as a small church in the 13th century which was enlarged in the 15th century with an extension at the east end and the addition of a long southern nave, a substantial part of which was rebuilt in 1768. The present porch was added in 1544. Inside it has one of the best collections of furnishings and fittings in the diocese of St Asaph: a Perpendicular font, a superb wall painting of St Christopher thought to be earlier 15th century, a tomb chest with the effigy of a priest on top, the head of a 14th-century churchyard cross, fragments of 16th-century stained glass, a royal arms on canvas from 1661, 17th-century wooden furnishings, and wooden dog tongs.

The present churchyard, now irregularly pear-shaped, lies within what appears to be a larger, oval enclosure defined at least in part by existing property boundaries. Work on the Cerriglwydion Arms to the west of the church in 2012 uncovered human remains, demonstrating that the public house had been built across the edge of the former churchyard.

Glanville Jones suggested in the 1960s that a radial pattern of fields converging on the *llan* were the back gardens or quillets of undertenants of the *clas* community in the pre-Conquest era, though his arguments do not perhaps convince everybody. He argued that there were other radial plots in Bryn Castell to the north, and that beyond were the hereditary lands of the *clas*.

More certainty attaches to the two open fields, Maes Isa and Maes Ucha, 300m north-west of the church, and still sub-divided into quilllets at the beginning of the 20th century. The subdivisions were ploughed up in 1971. An important open-field relic (105912), it has been discussed in detail by Jones. The balks between the quilllets in Maes Isa are still faintly visible in the right lighting conditions. Other quilllets to the south of the village are recorded on the Tithe Map but have now disappeared.

The name Bryn Castell (now translated into the housing estate Glyn Castell) appears in the Tithe survey but has not been explained.

The church apart there are no buildings of any age within the core of Llanynys. Plas Llanynys and a nearby barn have both been attributed to the 18th century but no full descriptions of them have been circulated.



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