

# Great Archaeological Sites in Blaenau Gwent



## 4. LLANHILLETH CHURCH



The modern village of Llanhilleth or Llanhilledd lies at the bottom of the valley of the Ebbw Fach. It is a typical miners' village with long rows of terraced houses dating back to the 19th century. But climb the very steep hill above the village and you will come to the heart of the medieval Llanhilleth with a scatter of houses and a pub, a motte and the remains of a later stone castle, and between them the church of St Illtyd. This is no longer used for worship – a new church was built in the valley at the end of the 19th century, where most of the people now lived within easy distance of Llanhilleth colliery.

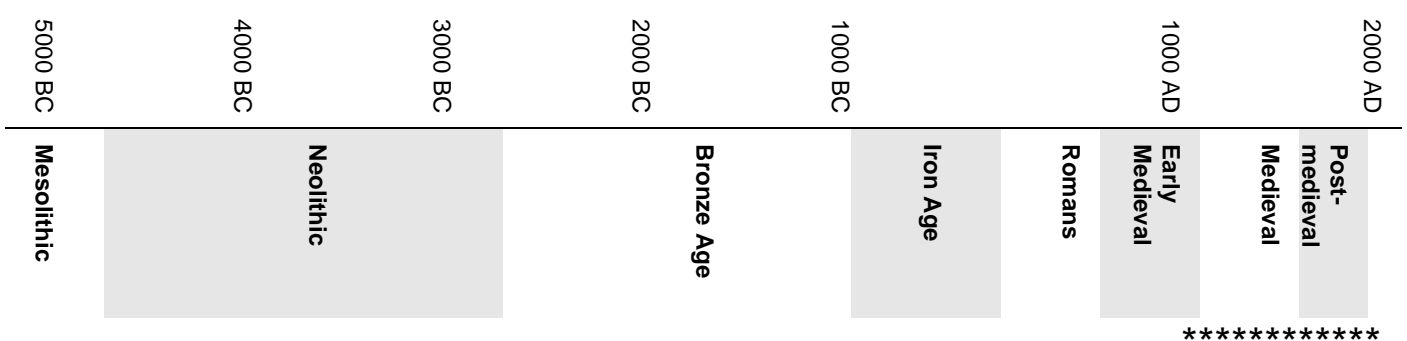
The church itself probably dates to before the coming of the Normans since the name is a Celtic one. None of the present building will have gone back that far, though the nave must be relatively early because its side walls have been built with a batter – they slope inwards at the bottom. The windows don't help us with the date, as they are part of a Victorian makeover and don't necessarily copy what was there before. An earlier makeover, in the 15th or 16th century, is revealed by the aumbrey

in the chancel, where the bread and wine for the mass were kept, and the door between the tower and the nave. These both have Tudor arches. The tower is the big surprise. This looks just like dozens of medieval towers in South Wales, but it must be later, because when Archdeacon Coxe visited the church during a tour of Monmouthshire in 1799, he recorded that there was no tower and the bells hung at the end of the nave.



Llanhilleth church (NP132AY) stands on the top of the hill above Brynithel. The churchyard is always open, enabling the visitors to see the outside of the church, but there is usually no access to the interior unless a special open day has been arranged. Maps: OS Landranger Series sheet 171, Explorer Series 152.

**Timeline** (the asterisk indicate the time-span)



You can learn more about this site, and other similar archaeological sites in Wales, by going to <https://www.archwilio.org.uk/arch/>. Please read and observe the Conditions of Use. Llanhilleth church has the PRN (Primary Record Number) 02511g, and you can search for other similar sites here too. You can contact us via social media or through the methods given at the bottom of the page. See more about sites in South Wales connected to Christianity at [http://www.ggat.org.uk/cadw/historic\\_christian/pages/index.html](http://www.ggat.org.uk/cadw/historic_christian/pages/index.html)