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## THE CHURCH AND THE COMMUNITY

The ancient church offers glimpses into the history of the parish by the memorials that have been left behind. The site of the church is likely to have been a focal point for religious ceremonies since pre-Christian times. 'Llan' translates as an enclosed, protected area, and Christian churches were often built on such sites of pre-existing age. There is evidence of Bronze Age and Iron Age settlement in Llansannor, and people from the Iron Age hill settlement on Mynydd y Fforest (Crofta

Mountain) may have brought their dead down to the low ground on which the church now stands to be buried – perhaps along the 'Way of the Corpse' (Ffordd Cyrph) shown on a 1811 Plan of the New Forest enclosure.

Worship was carried out by early Christians in the open at nearby St Mary Hill under three crosses slotted into large boulders. These crosses are said to have been moved in the 13th century to Coychurch, Llangan and Llansannor



*Painting of Llansannor Church by M Bruno Thibault, 1998.*

churchyards. Further evidence of early Christian worship was discovered recently on Gelli Goll farmland. The old holding of Llwyn Crwn has long been held to have a religious connotation, possibly being on the site of an earlier priory. In the dry summer of 1997 the outline of the old building became visible. It was in the shape of a cross. Possible further evidence of a religious connection is found on the 1843 Tithe Map, which shows a small field near Llwyn Crwn with the name Cae Llan (church field).

Llansannor Church was first mentioned as the Capella St Senwarae de la Thawe, belonging to Tewkesbury, a Benedictine Abbey founded in 1108. In 1254, the church was valued at £3. During the same decade, Stephen Bauzan had impressed Edward I with his valour in, first, Gascony and, later, Carmarthen. The effigy in the chancel, thought to represent Bauzan, is a reminder of the days of knights, crusades and service to the lordship, the Crown and to God.

For the next few centuries, Christian worship was based on Rome. Local evidence of this influence is shown in wall paintings uncovered in 1968, when restoration work was being carried out following damage by death watch beetle. Work was delayed until specialist advice could be obtained about their origins and the best form of preservation and display. The paintings, near the south door, are thought to depict St. Christopher and other saints and may have been painted in the 14th century. They were probably covered over sometime between the death of Henry VIII and the time of Oliver Cromwell. Small sections of the paintings have been left exposed. Pilgrims visiting Rome during the 14th and 15th centuries brought back souvenirs from the various shrines. In 1998 a lead ampulla was discovered in a field at Church Farm. This tiny shell shaped, scalloped flask was in perfect condition. It would have contained holy water, and its origin has been traced to the shrine of St James Compostela in Rome. It was probably used

as a talisman for hanging in the church. It could have been buried in the soil as a means of blessing the crops or it might have been hidden at the time of the dissolution of the monasteries.



*14th or 15th century lead ampulla (about 5 cm in size) found on Church Farm in the late 1990s.*

Two families have played a major role in the history of the church and the local community. The Gwyns were resident in Llansannor

Court from the mid 16th century. It is not known what compromises Francis Gwyn made during the Civil War: he was born in the house of John Fraunceis, a colonel in Cromwell's army, but was later in the service of Charles II. The Gwyns exerted authority over the parish for three hundred years but, surprisingly, there are no memorials or gravestones within the church: only a silver chalice and plate remain as a gift from John Fraunceis Gwyn in 1795. Some Gwyn family members are buried in a crypt at Forde Abbey.

The other family that had considerable power over the church and community was the Trumans of Pantylliwydd but, unlike the Gwyns, they left several memorials. Thomas Truman combined influence from his great grandfather, Trooper Thomas Truman, a Cromwellian soldier of fortune, and his wife's family. On her death at the early age of 23, he had licence to bury her under the chancel of the church because her ancestors, the Eustances, had been lessees of the great tithes of the parish and one of the family had married the incumbent clergyman. Thomas Truman gave a detailed account in the parish records of alterations to the church involving the move of the

pulpit across the nave to where it now stands. As a monumental stonemason, Truman designed and made a sundial which was placed over the front porch in 1741. The inscription reads: "Sic transit gloria mundi" (the glory of the world departs). A replica was installed in 1986 by Miss G F Truman; the original sundial, having become badly weathered, was relocated inside the church on the west wall. Other memorial tablets can be found on the north wall, probably designed by Truman himself and commemorating other members of the family. He married a second time and produced three sons. A grandson provided some intrigue within the parish when he was found dead, either thrown from his horse or, possibly, murdered. His second wife, then still living at Pantylliwydd, eventually married Edward Mathews the famous Methodist preacher.

Nonconformism took a strong hold in the area from the mid 18th century, and Llansannor was affected by this from both within and beyond the parish. A Calvinist chapel had been established in nearby

Aberthin as early as 1749, and about 50 years later an independent chapel opened in Maendy, followed by one in Llanharry in 1820. There are accounts in the Mountain School records of children being absent to attend 'Big Meetings' at Maendy, followed by church outings designed to lure the people back to the church. Nonconformist groups met at Ton Brigam from the 1720s and Isycoed Fach from 1829. These groups were influential in establishing separate chapels in Pencoed and Penllyn, but none was built in Llansannor even though local people, and farmers in particular, were becoming dissatisfied with absentee landlords and clergymen alike. Many of the parish still attended church as well as going to hear visiting nonconformist speakers, most of whom preached in Welsh. The presence of an incumbent in the Rectory from the 1860s helped to draw people back to the church.

A memorial dedicated to the parents of one of Llansannor's rectors, Rev F R Williams, was erected in 1926. The reredos, designed by a London architect, is one of the most striking features of the Church and



Reredos erected in 1926.



Church porch with replica of Truman sundial.

is decorated with gold leaf on a blue painted background depicting the Good Friday story. Other memorials are of a completely different nature. When the Rev George Rees died after serving for only five years, his wife arranged for a number of trees and shrubs to be planted in his memory. These come into flower at different times of the year, bringing the fragrance of witch hazel in January, the brilliance of the orange azalea in May and the lovely lilacs to lighten up the sombre yew trees. Many of the yew trees date back hundreds of years, and one near the lych gate served in earlier times as a special burial ground for stillborn babies of the parish.

### Social Responsibility of the Church

The 18th century church records give insights into the social and agricultural history of Llansannor. Overseers to the Poor were elected from the local community to handle the financial affairs on an annual basis. They

had to be honest, upstanding members of the parish and preferably well educated in order to be able to write in legible copperplate. Since the Poor Laws were first passed during the time of Elizabeth I, each parish was responsible for the wellbeing of its poorer residents, particularly those unable to work and the homeless. Monies were paid for rent, food, items of clothing, flannel for making shirts, and also for dealing with the burial of paupers. This included the expense of laying out, making the coffin, digging the grave and disposing of the goods and chattels of the deceased.

In 1751 poor Ann John cost the parish:

52 weeks @ 2 shillings/week = £5 - 4 - 0

Then in 1752

48 weeks @ 2 shillings/week = £4 - 16 - 0

Then, as she becomes more frail:

6 weeks @ 3 shillings/week = £0 - 18 - 0

Until in 1753

House Rent £0 - 5 - 0

Stockings £0 - 0 - 8

Blanket £0 - 4 - 0

Until she dies that year and the costs are:

Coffin £0 - 10 - 0

Digging of Grave £0 - 1 - 0

Ale & Bread at Funeral £0 - 3 - 6

Cheese and Butter £0 - 1 - 0

1 <sup>st</sup> John Suffrance begins to pay to poor of 10 <sup>th</sup> Ann			
of June 1753 paid in Cash	31	5	
A True account of John Suffrance Overseer	12	9	
of 1 <sup>st</sup> Door for 4 <sup>th</sup> year 1753 ad follows			
Impn 3 <sup>rd</sup> Ann John 37 weeks 2 3 weeks 4	3	3	
Impn 1 <sup>st</sup> House rent to Ann John	0	5	
Impn for Stockings to Ann John	0	0	8
Impn for a Blanket to Ann John	0	4	0
Impn for a Proceat to Ann John	0	1	0
Impn for a Coffin to Ann John	0	10	0
Impn for Ale & Bread then	0	3	6
Impn for Cheese & Butter then	0	1	0
Impn for Coal & Candle 3 then	0	0	11

Extract from parish record regarding Ann John.

The money paid towards food for a poor person gives insight into their diet:

David Hord for David Hornel viz			
To Cheese & Butter	5-1-0		
To a Quart of Butter	0-0-3	}	0 5 6
To a Peck of Wheat	0-1-3		
To a Peck of Peas	0-0-6		
To a Peck of Wheat	0-2-6		

Extract from parish record regarding David Hornel.

These amounts were paid to a poor man in 1780 and give an idea of what was plentiful in the parish. Other records show clearly the collective responsibility of local farmers to a poor man, Thomas William, who was moved around from farm to farm in order to share the burden of his keep. The acceptance of shared social responsibilities was greater than that normally seen today. Even the arrangement for ale in the vestry meetings was fairly dealt with: "6d for each man... and whoever do like to drink more he is to pay for it himself".

Throughout the 18th century the Church was continually having to replace broken window panes and in one instance a carpenter was instructed to build wooden shutters for the windows. The damage was not done by delinquent children, but by the playing of jacks, and ball games, including a type of fives, against the church wall – often after important functions such as weddings. To these activities would be added a barrel of ale and refreshments laid out on the stone benches in the church porch. As churchgoers, all members of the community would have been involved in these functions.

There was a strict order of precedence in the seating arrangement according to amount of tithe paid. During the 18th and 19th centuries the most important person was the landlord of the Court but, in his absence, he would have been represented by his tenant farmers. As recently as the 1930s Major Watson and his family from the Court would sit on the first pew on the right, with his staff towards the back on the

81	Brought over	26-4-0
	Towards Thomas William	
July 21 <sup>st</sup> up of stockings 1 pair & 1 pair of shoes	5-10	
28 <sup>th</sup> 11 <sup>th</sup> 1/2 of cloth for James the 2 <sup>nd</sup> Buttons C	2-0	
Paid for mending a breeches for him	2-0	
October 21 <sup>st</sup> 1/2 of and half of of shannel at 1	3-12	
Soules Bread, B. Mass & mending his shirt	4-2	
Jan <sup>ry</sup> 20 <sup>th</sup> 1/2 of stockings 1-3	1-5	
Do a new Leather Breeches	5-6	
Apr <sup>il</sup> 18 a pair of stockings li. May & June 2 <sup>nd</sup>	2-0	
Do 1/2 of cloth for a waistcoat at 1/4	4-4	
Do 1/2 of shannel at 1/4	1-4	
Do 1/2 of shannel & Canvas	1-0	
Paid a Taylor	1-6	
Paid for mending Bots's stockings	2-6	
Paid Morgan Richard for keeping him 6 Weeks & three Days	6-6	} 16 8 4
Paid David Dean for 2d for 6 Weeks	6-0	
Paid Paul Adam for 2d for 7 Days	1-6	
Paid William Morgan for 2d for 7 Days	1-6	
Paid John Morgan for 2d for 2 Weeks	2-0	
Paid Thomas Truman for 2d for 10 & 3 Days	6-6	
Paid David Hugh for 3 Weeks keeping	3-0	
Paid Tho <sup>s</sup> Thomas for 3 Weeks on the 1 <sup>st</sup> Oct.	3-0	
Paid John William for 6 Weeks	6-0	
Paid Anne Proff <sup>r</sup> for 1 Week	1-0	
Paid Mr Ed Thomas for 2 Weeks	2-0	
Paid Elizabeth Neave for 6 Weeks	6-0	

Extract from parish record regarding Thomas William.

right, and the Leighs from Llansannor House would sit on the front row on the left, with their staff behind them.



Llansannor churchyard cross, restored in memory of Major Watson.

## Windmill

In 1690 Windmill was a small holding known under its Welsh name 'Melin Wynt'. There was then a windmill close to the dwelling and its location is still marked by a low circular bank. In 1811 there was an Enclosure Award of the New Forest area. After the enclosure, the land gradually reverted to its original state and in 1851 a tenant named John Thomas was farming only 30 acres on Windmill. In 1863 a further Enclosure Award was made to bring the land back into production. In 1871 Windmill was being farmed by Llansannor Court Estate. The old thatched cottage was extended and the stone farm buildings were constructed in about 1860. The farm had no natural water supply and two catchment ponds were installed.

In 1881 the tenant was John Davies and in 1895 Evan Lewis of Talyfan. Some of Evan Lewis's large family were sent to farm Windmill. They constructed a new windmill of timber, utilising the former mill machinery. Sir Joseph Spearman gave seven acres of the Bullen to the Glamorgan Hunt who dug several holes, covered them with timber and earth, and

imported foxes from Ireland. In 1901, following the sale of the Llansannor Court Estate, the James family occupied Windmill under its new owner, Mrs Babbage of Groesfaen. From 1919 to 1936, George Watkins, grandfather of John & Keith Watkins of Lsyoed Farm, was the farmer. The farm was sold to Jack Evans who was the first farmer in Llansannor to use a tractor. He brought the Graig and the Bullen back into cultivation. In 1945 Tal and Joan Thomas, niece of Jack Evans, moved to Windmill as tenants, and in a few years purchased it, excluding the Bullen. Jack Evans sold the Bullen to Bill Buckland in the mid 1950s. He built a new house and set of buildings, creating a holding called Hillside.

In 1996 Windmill passed over to the Thomas's daughter Claire, and her husband, Jon Rosser. In 1999 some of the old stone buildings were becoming obsolete because of modern farming methods and they were converted into holiday accommodation units that preserve the craftsmanship of the past for future generations to enjoy – a local example of diversification in the modern farming industry.



*Self-catering apartments at Windmill Farm.*

In 1690 there were 25 farms apart from the demesne lands of the Llansannor Court Estate. In 2000 there were just seven farms and three smallholdings. Glan y Mynydd, established on land near Mountain School in the 1970s, was the only relatively new holding. There is still a smallholding at Gwaen Llyn where, from the 1950s to the 1980s, there was a poultry unit. The houses of several farms mentioned in the 1690 Valuation no

longer exist, including Gilfach, Gwaen yr Annel, Pantylliwydd Fach, Isaf and Ganol, Llwyn Crwn and Graig Lwyd. However, a new house built on Gelli Goll, called Llwyn Crwn, is near to the site of the old holding. Other old farmhouses have been converted into private residences. In spite of all these changes, Llansannor remains a well farmed parish with stock grazing the fields, crops growing and an abundance of trees.

