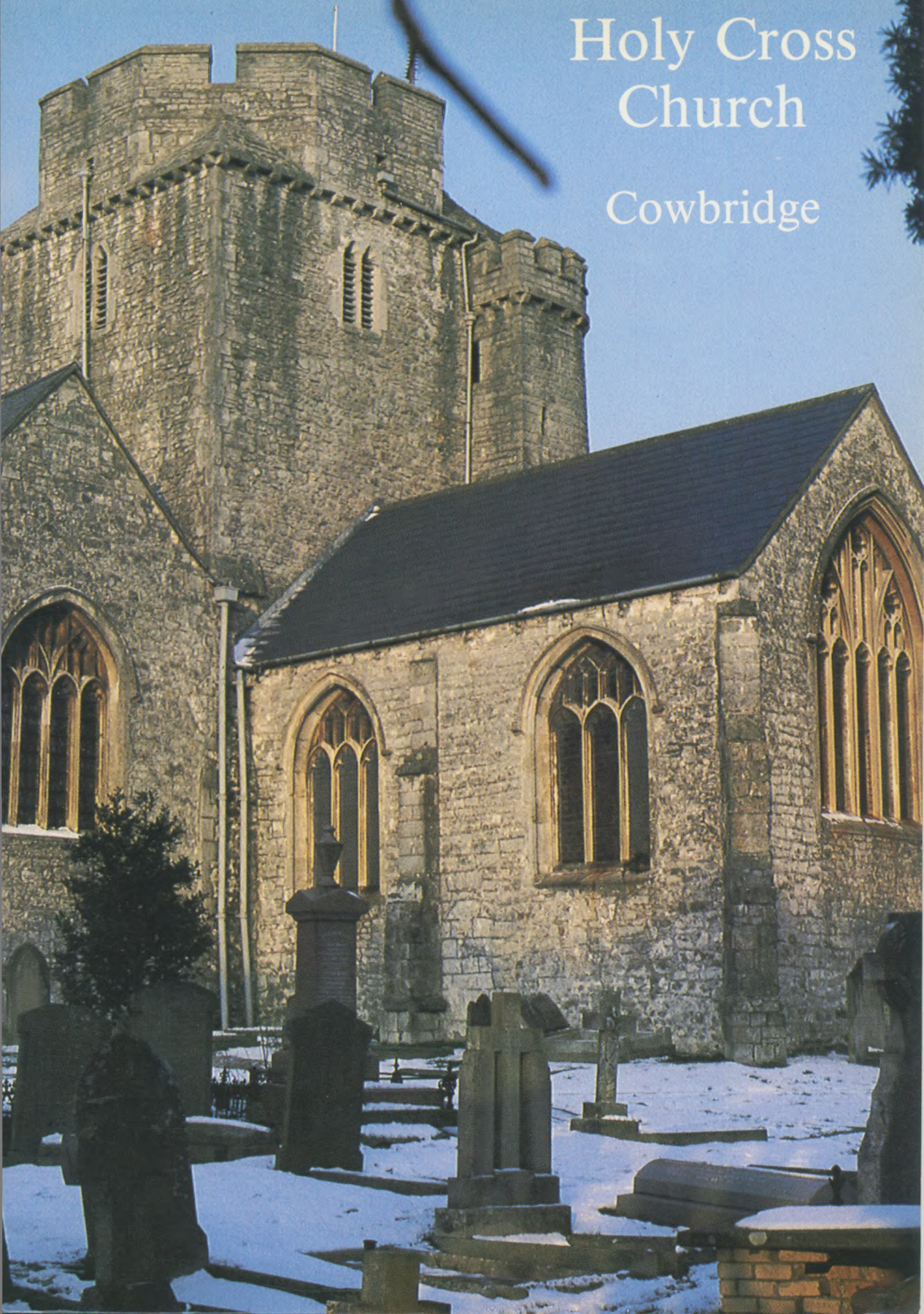


Holy Cross Church

Cowbridge



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Holy Cross Church Cowbridge

South Glamorgan Wales



Holy Cross Church from the south, with the former Grammar School *left*
and Town Hall *right*

Detail from a mid-Victorian lithograph of Cowbridge published by David Davis



Foreword

We welcome you to this ancient Norman church, in the name of Christ. Here for well over 700 years, this church has stood, and generations of Christians have worshipped within its walls. We are their inheritors, inheritors not only of a beautiful building that breathes the very stuff of history, but of a place hallowed by centuries of prayer and praise, and of a living faith. The story of the church is the story of Cowbridge and the people of Cowbridge, to whom in this place the Word is preached and the Sacraments administered.

We have just celebrated 500 years of the Charter of King Richard III: it is noteworthy how few changes there have been in the shape or structure of the building since those days. However, by contrast, many alterations have been made in the forms of worship and the mode of furnishing: the Reformation, the introduction of the Book of Common Prayer, the Commonwealth period, the Oxford movement, nineteenth century restoration and the Liturgical and Renewal Movement of our own day have all brought their changes. Now we are faced with a major task of Restoration and Re-ordering, a responsibility we gladly undertake, in order to pass on this treasure to posterity.

We hope that this booklet will prove an attractive record of the story of Holy Cross church, and that it will stimulate further interest: our thanks to Mr Jeff Alden for his hard work.

Gwilym E. Williams (*Rector*)

July 1985.

John B. Russell, Steve P. Dickens (*Churchwardens*)



View from the nave of the fifteenth century arcading and the Llanquian aisle

The story of the Church

At the time of the Norman Conquest of South Wales, Cowbridge did not exist. The Thaw valley, where the town stands today, showed perhaps a few grassy mounds covering the remains of Roman buildings, but it was mainly an area of meadow and pasture for the cattle of the manor of Llanblethian—for at Llanblethian there was a village, and a church which had been established there before the Conquest.

Towards the middle of the thirteenth century, Richard de Clare—Lord of Glamorgan, and lord of the manor of Llanblethian—decided to build his new town of Cowbridge on this 'greenfield site' in the Thaw valley. The town grew so rapidly that a church was soon needed and soon constructed. It was built of stone, and was much larger than the mother church at Llanblethian—but it was officially a chapel under the control of Llanblethian, with the vicar of Llanblethian taking responsibility for Cowbridge church affairs. Cowbridge received its first charter as a borough in 1254, and so it is reasonable to assume that the church dates from about that time: work by the Royal Commission for Ancient and Historic Monuments states that much of the nave, tower and chancel dates from the late thirteenth century. The size and shape of the tower suggests that it was to serve as a watch tower or stronghold in case of attack on the town, but whether an attack ever occurred, we do not know.

The church was certainly enlarged in the fifteenth century. The South Aisle was built in 1473, reputedly as a gift of Lady Anne Nevill, wife of Richard, Duke of Gloucester and Lord of Glamorgan (later to be Richard III). The construction of the aisle, also known as the Llanquian aisle, involved the removal of the massive south wall of the church, and replacing it with the light pillars and arcading which are there today.* Also in the fifteenth century, a chantry chapel was built on the north side of the chancel, for a chantry priest whose duty was to say daily prayers and mass for the soul of the founder, and to teach; the priest probably lived on the premises. The chantry was terminated in 1548, and the chapel is today used as the choir vestry.

*A chapel at Llanquian which had come under the jurisdiction of Llanblethian had fallen into disrepair by this time, and so the parishioners moved to Cowbridge; today a dilapidated outbuilding of Hollybush farm on Stalling Down is thought to be the original Llanquian chapel.

In 1484, Richard III as Lord of Glamorgan and Morgan granted a chaplaincy to Holy Cross Church: the document, requiring Bishop John Marshall of Llandaff to provide a chaplain ‘for the purpose of celebrating divine worship and the holy sacrament in the church or chapel of Holy Cross’ with the king’s seal in red wax, is preserved in the Glamorgan Record Office. This charter put the previously more haphazard provision of ministers on an official and more regular basis.



Seal of Richard III affixed to the king’s Letters under his Sign Manual for the Endowment of Cowbridge Church

We know that soon after this an altar in the church was used as a place of solemn and binding agreement—there is a record that in 1516, William Bassett of Treguff conveyed to David Seys of Cowbridge and William ap John of St Hilary, property in Eglwys Brewis—the money to be repaid on the feast of St Andrew in 1526 ‘in the parish church of Cowbridge on the altar of St Nicholas’, between sunrise and sunset. This altar may have been at the east end of the Llanquian aisle.

It is interesting to see how the national changes in the church of the sixteenth century—the Reformation following Henry VIII’s break with Rome—were reflected in church life in Cowbridge. The rood loft was removed from its position over the entrance to the chancel, and in 1553 Sir Edward Carne, William Bassett and Robert Gamage were sent as royal commissioners to remove vestments and ornaments which were then regarded as being no longer appropriate: these included red, purple and green velvet chasubles, blue silk and white satin chasubles, and copes: if these were regularly used, the pre-Reformation church services must have been colourful indeed!



The seventeenth-century Carne memorial in the Llanquian aisle



DAVID JENKINS of Heolaf Esq:
One of the Justices of Wales.
Died in the Year 1664.
CECIL his wife died 12 Feb: 1671.
DAVID JENKINS Esq: his Son died 18 Mar: 1696.
MARY his wife died in Sep: 1667.
RICHARD JENKINS Esq: Grandson of the Judge
Died 16 July 1721.
KATHERINE his wife died 19 June 1719.
And he buried in this Church.



One shilling worth of Bread to be supplied to the Poor every Sunday after Divine Service from Charity funds named on a Tablet in the South aisle.

For I was an hungred and ye gave me meat
Matthew 25 Ch. 35 V.

Memorial to Judge David Jenkins, imprisoned in the Tower of London in the Civil War

Modifications to the church continued in the sixteenth century: the small vestry was built on to the chantry chapel, and windows were replaced—our only surviving Tudor window is at the rear of the nave, between the porch and the back of the church.

Memorials exist from the seventeenth century onwards. The earliest dated gravestone still visible in the church is of the early 1600s: the earth floor of the church would have made the digging of graves within the building fairly straightforward, although not every memorial slab denotes a grave; some stones could have been brought in from outside when re-flooring proved necessary.

The memorials, however, remind us of the church's continuing role as a place of worship for the townspeople of Cowbridge—and among them the names of many headmasters of the former Grammar School tell of the close connection between the school and the church. Headmasters of the school were, from its foundation in 1608 until 1918, in holy orders, and frequently acted as the ministers of Cowbridge church. They had an important role to play as the rectors of Llanblethian were frequently absentees—but many of the masters also held church livings elsewhere. David Lloyd, 1662-9, was rector of Newton Nottage; David Watkins 1669-1703 was rector of Llanmihangel, and Thomas Williams, 1764-83, who attempted to become rector of Cowbridge in place of the absentee Revd. John Evans (who lived at Hatherley in Gloucestershire), held several livings—St Donat's, Colwinston, and Bishopston in Gower.

From 1709, the church also housed the library of the SPCK. This fine collection of books, which was intended primarily for the use of clergymen and schoolmasters of the diocese of Llandaff, was kept in what had been the chantry chapel, and in 1834 it was recorded that 'the library was to be converted into a vestry-room'.

Major alterations to the appearance of the church also came in the nineteenth century, with the construction of the present porch, much Victorian 'restoration', and the removal of the gallery at the west end of the church. In 1925 and 1926 the nave and Llanquian aisle were re-roofed, and the arcade pillars between the nave and the aisle were reconstructed—which is why most of the delicate fifteenth century columns have concrete bases! The roof of the nave, which had been plastered, had weighed eighty tons, and over the centuries had caused the pillars to lean more and more from the vertical, and so when repairs started, rebuilding the pillars proved essential.

Details of the church continue to change—the screen between nave and chancel has been removed and resited, and a screen in memory of Mr Richard Williams, headmaster of the Grammar School from 1918 to 1938,

has closed off the vestry from the chancel; a new internal door for the porch has been built, and stained glass windows installed after their removal from the Grammar School. The plan of the church is however little different from the sixteenth century plan, and it is thought-provoking to realise that this building has provided continuity of worship in Cowbridge for well over seven hundred years.



The nave before the removal of the screen



The nave and the chancel today

Overleaf: the church from the south-east



Visitors' Guide

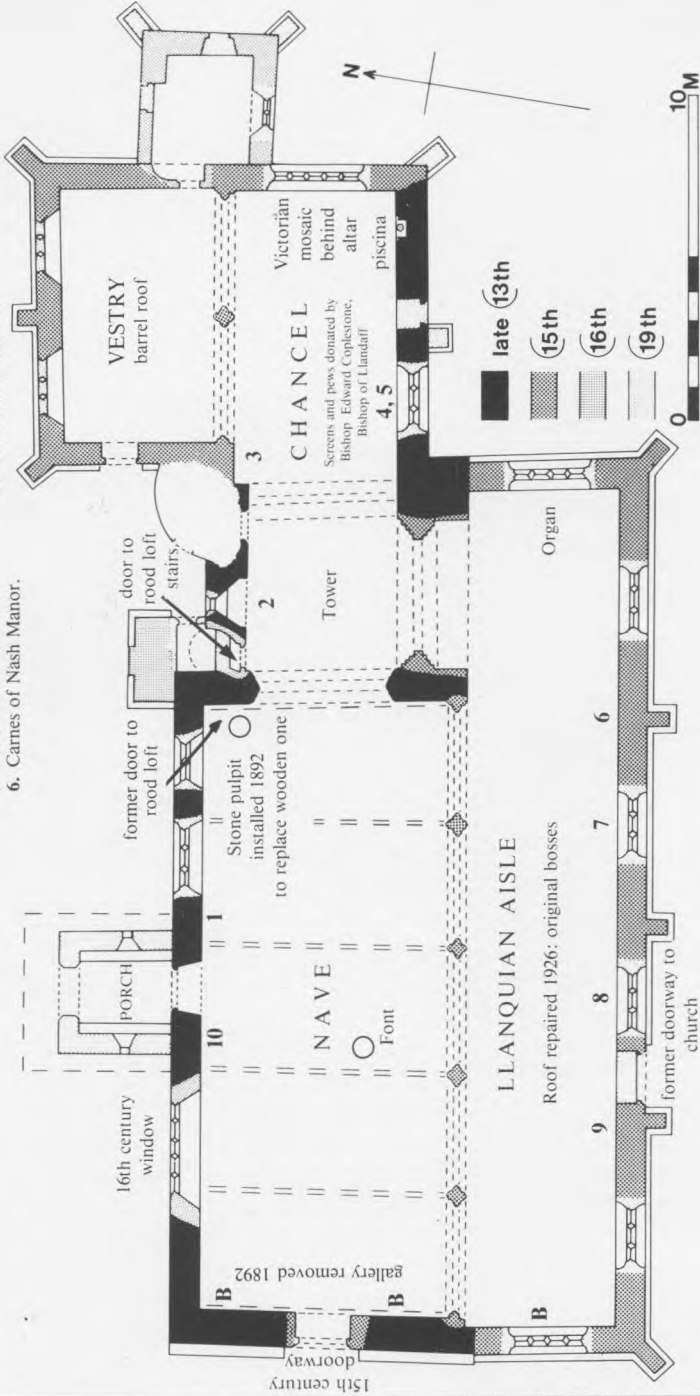
KEY

Memorials

1. Bevan.
2. Edmondson.
3. Daniel and Wm. Walters.
4. Benjamin Heath Malkin.
5. Revd. Thos. Williams.
6. Carnes of Nash Manor.

7. Grammar School Coats of Arms.
8. and 9. Grammar School War Memorial window and plaques.
10. David Jenkins of Hensol.

B. Benefactions boards.



[After R.C.A.H.M.]

A tour of the building

The numbers in brackets in the text refer to the plan opposite.

On entering the church, perhaps the most noticeable features are the delicate pillars and arches which separate the nave from the Llanquian aisle. They were built in 1473 and rebuilt with care in 1925-6. The roof of the Llanquian aisle was also repaired in 1926, but it displays most of the original arch-braced trusses, and also the original gilded carved bosses. Also worth seeing in this part of the church are the memorials and windows. The Carne memorial (6) depicts William Carne, of Nash Manor and Great House, Cowbridge, with his wife, while the weepers underneath show the six of their children who survived beyond infancy. The eldest son—who had the memorial built—was Sir Edward Carne, Receiver-General for South Wales in the early seventeenth century. The monument is now rather sombre, but was originally brightly coloured—the paint has faded under the effect of years of rain leaking through the roof.

The adjacent window (7) contains coats of arms of various benefactors of the Grammar School, brought in from Founders Room and Seys Room in the school with the help of the County Council and the Old Boys'



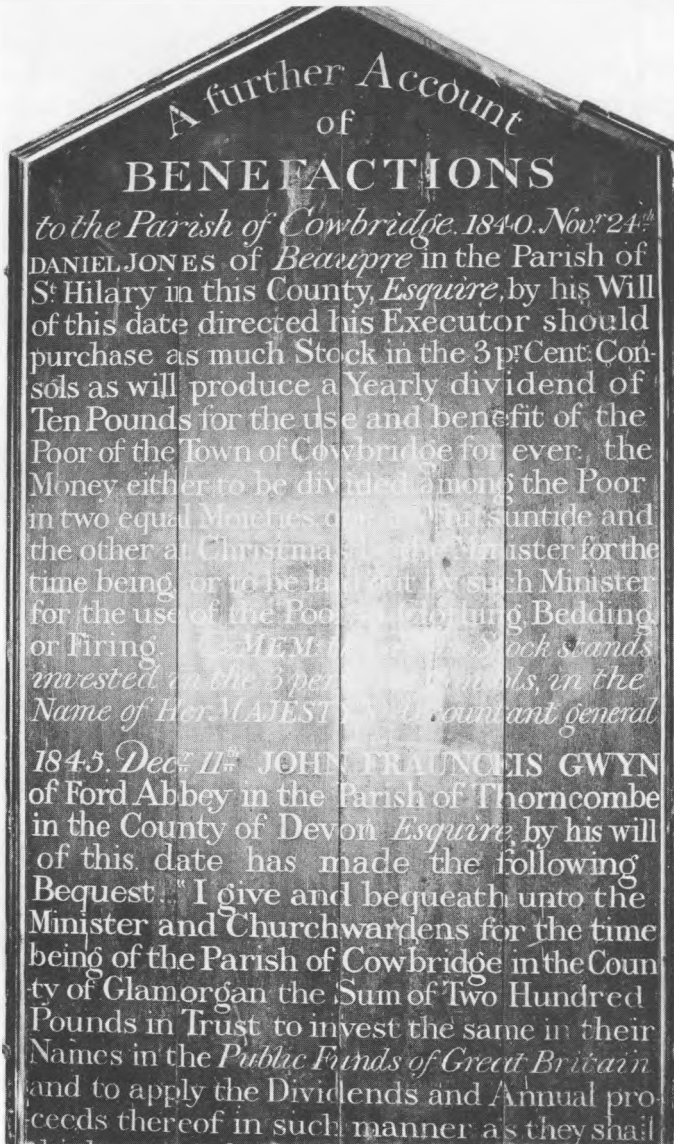
Coats of arms of Sir Edward Stradling, Sir Leoline Jenkins and Jesus College Oxford (from the Llanquian aisle)



Details of the 1626 memorial to William and Elizabeth Carne, in the Llanquian aisle

Association when the Grammar School was closed in 1974. Then comes the Old Boys' Memorial window (8), and the wall plaques (9) commemorating those Old Boys of the school who died in the two world wars.

The nave is large and fairly plain, and at first glance, perhaps, not very interesting. The fine oak barrel roof is modern, dating from 1926, and the pulpit is a Victorian stone one which replaced a wooden one in 1892. The wall memorial to the west of the door (10) commemorates Judge David



One of the benefactions boards at the west end of the church

Jenkins of Hensol, an ardent Royalist who was imprisoned in the Tower of London for his opposition to Cromwell; to the east of the door the Bevan memorial (1) refers among others to John Bevan of Cowbridge, who has been described as 'a busybody and a benefactor'. He was a solicitor who provided the building for the Girls High School hostel, established endowments for Elementary and Grammar School education, and helped to pay for the Institute in the town. Then, at the back of the church, in addition to the boards with lists of benefactions (B) from members of the church, are a number of corbels which mark the position of the gallery which stood above the west door. This was taken down in 1892, and the organ put at the east end of the Llanquian aisle. It is not known how long the church has had an organ—certainly we know that in 1798 the organist was paid six guineas a year, and in September 1820, Mr Thomas Williams of Brecon was appointed organist at a yearly salary of £21 payable every quarter—a good salary for those days! However, he only lasted six weeks, becoming organist of Brecon in October.

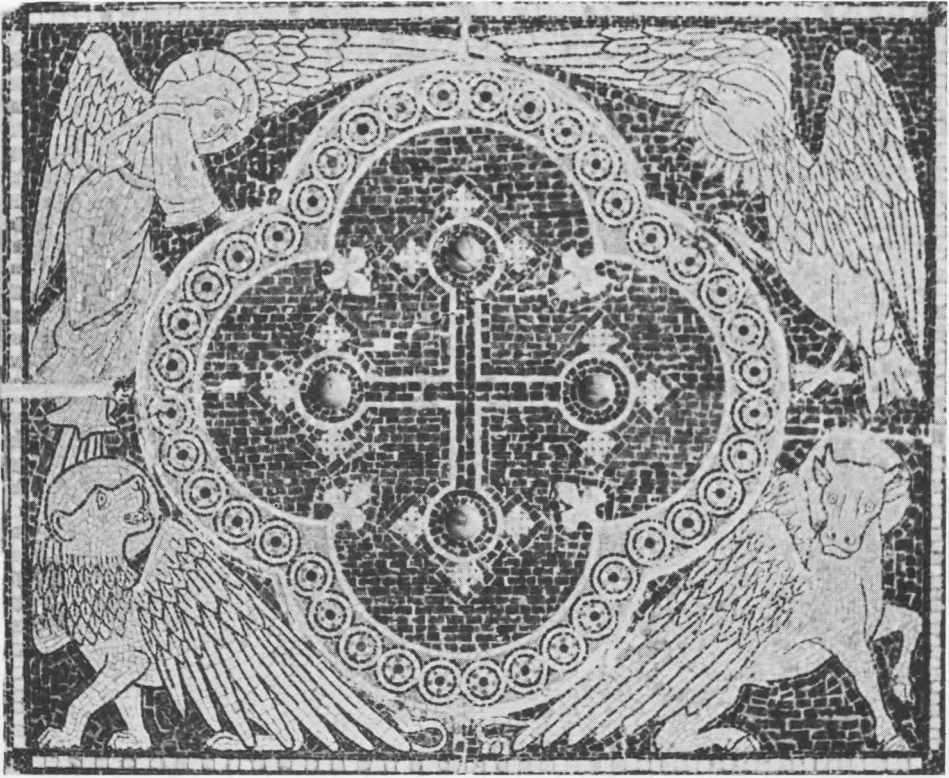
Between the nave and the chancel is a fine solid pointed arch, under one wall of the tower—and there is another between the choir stalls and the Llanquian aisle. There was a rood loft—a great beam surmounted with a crucifix—on the wall of the nave above the point of the arch. This was removed during the Reformation changes, and now no obvious sign remains on that wall, though marks in the plaster above the pulpit suggest the position of a door opening onto the loft. From the chancel, however, the doorway to the rood loft stairs still exists, although the steps are now bricked up. The other doorway from that side of the chancel leads to the bell tower.

The pews and most of the screens in the chancel were donated by Bishop Edward Coplestone, who lived at Llandough Castle in the 1830s: the modern screen between the chancel and the vestry was erected in 1974 by the Grammar School Old Boys' Association in memory of Mr Richard Williams, the first non-clerical headmaster of the school. Behind the altar the green and gold mosaic work is Victorian and has its admirers as well as its detractors; as a former incumbent, the Revd. Ewart Lewis, wrote: 'the emblems of the four Evangelists have a grace and vigour which lead one to hope that they at least may long survive'. The stained glass windows glow with colour.

One of the most renowned poets in Wales in the sixteenth century, Lewis Morgannwg, is reputed to be buried near the chancel door. Another famous person buried here is the topographer Dr. Benjamin Heath Malkin (1769-1842), author of *The Scenery, Antiquities and Biography of South Wales* (London 1804), which is still much admired. He retired as professor



Looking west in the nave, with the Llanquian aisle to the left



Emblems of the four evangelists: mosaic behind the altar

of history at London University and came to live at Old Hall, and is buried with his wife, Charlotte, in the graveyard behind the church. His (4) is one of a multitude of memorials in the chancel—others are to the Edmondes family of Old Hall (2), and a number to headmasters of the school (3,5). The close relationship between church and school is also revealed by the carvings on the pews made by the boarders at the Grammar School—graffiti made respectable by age!

The present vestry dates from the fifteenth century and was originally built as a chantry chapel, although it has had a variety of uses over the years. From the inside there is little sign of the windows on the north wall, but their filled-in outlines are clearly visible on the exterior. The plastered barrel-vaulted roof shows what the nave would have looked like before the repairs of 1926; the east window contains more stained-glass coats of arms which were transferred from the old Grammar School.

The tower and the bells

One of the most striking features of the church is its massive tower, which is square in plan, but with an octagonal top. On the north-east there is a large staircase turret which gives access to the bells and to the roof of the tower; the narrow windows are thought to have been arrow-slits for defence. There is no obvious reason for the very large buttress in the north-west corner.



Tenor bell, removed for repairs in 1935

The idea that at one time a spire graced the top of the tower comes from a report made in 1819 by Edward Williams the stonemason, better known as Iolo Morganwg the antiquary. He claimed that in 1480 the tower was struck by lightning, which destroyed the lead-covered wooden steeple—but this tradition like many others, may well have been the product of Iolo's fertile imagination!

Until the early eighteenth century the tower contained four bells, but according to a report of that time, they were 'broke, crack'd, and very much out of Repair, as also the walls of the said steeple, timber and frames being decayed'. In 1722 these four bells were recast, and four new bells added 'so as to have a ring peal or sett of eight bells'. The cost of £246 was met by the borough, by mortgaging for nine years 'the whole profitts accrewing from all the toll in general, the profitts or Toll of the weighhouse, the rents of the Town Shop, Church House and Council Tutt'—just about the total revenue of the town.

The bells were cast by Evan and William Evans of Chepstow in 1722, and are now the only complete set of Evans bells surviving. They all bear the impression of the coat of arms of Cowbridge Borough, and, apart from the treble bell, are all inscribed with the names of benefactors and borough officials:

- Treble. In E. 'Evan Evans, Wm Evans, Bellfounders. 1722'
2. In D sharp. 'Benefactor, Richard Gregory—Rector. Benefactr, Danl Durell, Schoolemaster. 1722'
 3. In C sharp. 'Benefactresse[s] Mrs Magt Mathews, Mrs Hester Wilkins. E.E. W.E. 1722'
 4. In B. 'Wm Davis, John Styder Aldn. Benes. E.E. W.E. 1722'
 5. In A. 'Rich. Bates, Tho. Bates, Aldermen. E.E. W.E. 1722'
 6. In G. sharp. 'Tho. Wilkins, Ie[va]n Williams, Gent, Aldern. Benefacts. E.E. W.E. 1722'
 7. In F sharp. 'Edwd. Carne, Rog[er] Wilkins, Esqr, Bayliffs, Benefacts. E.E. W.E. 1722'
 8. In E. Benefactors. 'Francis Gwyn Esqr, Mayor. Edw Stradling, Esqr, Dep Mayor. E.E. W.E. 1722.'

The bells were tuned and rehung in a steel frame by Taylors of Loughborough in 1935. Despite the mention of a ring peal in 1722 there is no record of peal ringing before 1935. However, in 1877, the Churchwardens received from the Chimers a letter in which they complained of the difficulties under which they laboured, and the small remuneration which they received for chiming: this certainly suggests some organised bell-ringing.

The Sanctus bell, used as a fire bell and curfew until 1896, is of ancient shape and without inscription. It was formerly known as Mary Rose, and used to be rung at 8 pm from Michaelmas to Lady Day, and the rest of the year at 6 am.

Church plate

Of the church plate, there is a silver Elizabethan chalice dated 1576, a silver gilt cup with cover from the seventeenth century, two patens or plates—one of which came from the family of Judge Jenkins—and a large silver flagon given by the Seys family in 1680. There are also some beautiful modern silver pieces.



Elizabethan chalice and the Seys flagon

The full inscription on the flagon reads 'The Gifte of Margarette ye widow of Mathew Seys Bachelor of Divinity & Sole Daughter & Heier of Lewis Basset Alderman and often Bailiffe of the Towne Cowbridge unto theyr Church & inhabitants for theyr life only at the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper and to remayne in the custody of theyr churchwardens succesively for Ever; Anno Domine 1680'

Church records

The registers and records of Cowbridge church go back to 1718, but there are gaps in the early years—which is not surprising when one considers that in the eighteenth century many of the rectors were absentees. At first sight rather arid documents, they do provide some interesting insights into the organisation of the church. On 27th November 1822, for example, it was decreed that ‘the present parish clerk John Rosser, having by repeated acts of drunkenness and other crimes so disgraced himself and the office he holds in the church, be deprived of the same.’ Similarly, James John the parish clerk in 1883-4 was discharged because of drunkenness, ‘on one occasion convicted by the magistrates for such offence on a Sunday.’ Putting the church officials in a better light, however, is the note of 1766. ‘The roof of the North Isle in the church being this year thoroughly repaired . . . and the trees growing in the churchyard having been cut down . . . for that purpose, there were planted in the churchyard two dozen young ash trees for the future uses of the Church by

Thomas Williams gent } Church
Nicholas Morgan } Wardens.”



Cowbridge Church Sunday School Outing to Llandough Castle about 1910



Nantgarw plate made circa 1820 for Revd. William Williams, headmaster of Cowbridge Grammar School 1787-1847. Painted by William Weston Young

Outside back cover:
Glowing Victorian stained glass window, from the south side of the chancel

