

The former "Parish of Llanblethian" and the Evan Jenkins Charity

Civil parishes are a relatively recent innovation. In the British Isles the only definition of 'parish' is the ecclesiastical one, namely, an area which can be traced on a map, in which there is a parish church (there may be other churches, but just one *parish* church) and *one* incumbent (rector, vicar or perpetual curate). Any other area of civil or ecclesiastical administration (borough, conventional district, etc.) and any other church office (assistant curate, priest-in-charge, chaplain, etc.) indicate a sub-division of the parish.

A "benefice" in the broader sense is an ecclesiastical living - ie. a parish or group of parishes which provide(s) the "living" (enough to live on - just!) of an incumbent. The title given to a parish is the name of the district - the name of the parish church is not used unless there is some doubt as to which parish may be referred to, as in "Cardiff St John". When **two or more parishes** are combined into one benefice, their names are joined by the conjunction "and" (as in the former united benefice of "Llandough and St Mary Church"). When there is just **one parish serving more than one community**, the names of the secondary communities are given following the word "with". Thus the title of the pre-1994 Cowbridge benefice was: "Llanblethian *with* Cowbridge, *and* Llandough *and* St Mary Church". That is, the benefice of Llanblethian included the Church at Cowbridge and had also been combined with the already-combined benefice of Llandough and St Mary Church (a late eighteenth century united benefice). There were three parishes and three parish churches: Llanblethian, Llandough and St Mary Church.

A "Rectorial Benefice" (as in Cowbridge, Llantwit Major, etc. - called a "Team Ministry" in England) is a single ecclesiastical parish with one Parochial Church Council and one incumbent, its Rector. It has one parish church, and normally a number of other churches and clerics. The new "Parish of Cowbridge" created in 1994 and 1995 is a rectorial benefice but it is not relevant to the historical question because all the former ecclesiastical parishes ceased to exist from that time.

The Town of Cowbridge was an ancient civil borough (first charter 1254), not an ecclesiastical parish. The recent report of the national archive on Holy Cross Church begins: "The Church of the Holy Cross at Cowbridge was a chapel of ease to the mediaeval parish of Llanblethian and did not achieve parochial status until the 19th century." The archivist is correct in the first statement, as is shown by the first reference to the church in 1443, when the church was about 200 years old, and by the charter (27 February 1484) in which the Vicar of Llanblethian (the incumbent) is required to give his permission for the appointment by the Bishop of Llandaff, John Marshall, of a "chaplain" [the title is significant] for the church. The archivist has assumed (without any evidence) a nineteenth century change of status where none occurred, making this assumption because Vicars of Llanblethian appear to have adopted for themselves the additional title "Rector of Cowbridge" during the nineteenth century - a title which had no basis in church law, merely a kind of falling into step with the enlarging of the civil borough in the middle years of the century. [The name of Holy Cross Church also changed to St Mary's for a while.] There is ample evidence of a late eighteenth century assistant curate and Grammar School headmaster attempting to persuade his friends on Cowbridge Corporation to obtain funds for a separate Parish of Cowbridge to be created from within the Parish of Llanblethian and for him to be made its incumbent, but this failed. In any event, even if the eighteenth century had ushered in a new parish for the old borough of Cowbridge, it would have no bearing whatsoever on the Evan Jenkins Charity which is a century older.

Holy Cross became the Parish Church of Cowbridge in April 1994 for the first time, and the other four churches of that rectorial benefice lost their status as parish churches by decree - a similar process took place in April 1995 when the rectorial benefice was enlarged. Technically I am the first "Rector of Cowbridge", though I acknowledge this as mere pedantry!

It is my firm contention that, since Evan Jenkins and all involved with the original bequest and trustees for at least two centuries would have known that the ancient civil Borough of Cowbridge was fully part of the Parish of Llanblethian, we are incorrect in making a distinction in the apportionment of trust income. We have also been basing our decisions on the wrong map of the Borough of Cowbridge, that which shows the boundaries as enlarged after the 1831 census. The only Borough known to Evan Jenkins would have been the 33 acres more-or-less within the bounds of the old walled town.

I have run these ideas briefly before Mr Geoff Alden, Mr Vic Eveleigh, Mr Graham Phillips and Mr Hubert Thomas, all of whose comments are attached. These point to the attempt to create a separate Parish of Cowbridge (itself proof of the point that it was a single parish), that the attempt failed (proof that it remained one parish), that the Evan Jenkins Charity pre-dates that plot significantly, and that the boundary of the civil borough was enlarged in the mid nineteenth century.

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Note

AT THE DISCUSSION by Trustees of my original draft of page i (30 April 1998), I realised for the first time that some trustees might be thinking (perhaps because of past discussions before my time) that I was seeking to bring Holy Cross Church into the same funding relationship to the Charity as Llanblethian and Ystradowen Churches. Nothing could be further from my intention: it would be impossible and indefensible to include Holy Cross as a named church into the trust deed. [Historic benefactions to Holy Cross Church have been amalgamated into the Cowbridge and Llanblethian United Charities.]

A careful examination of the document I tabled at the meeting ought to have made this clear. References to Holy Cross Church are made in the paper simply to illustrate the fact that Llanblethian was a parish with two (at one time three, including the Llanquian Chapel) churches. The issue throughout is whether Evan Jenkins intended to exclude the Ancient Borough (ie. the 33 acres of the old town) of Cowbridge from the Parish of Llanblethian. In the absence of such an exclusion (the need for which specific exclusion Jenkins would undoubtedly have been aware), the term "Parish of Llanblethian" must be taken to mean the whole of it. There can be no doubt that "The Ancient Parish of Llanblethian" always included the Borough and there can also be no doubt that the "Ancient Borough" was much smaller than the Borough as defined in the map the trustees have been using - and I may add, understandably if incorrectly.

The consequence is simply that students, elderly persons in need and others who live in the ancient Borough and who submit requests for help, and such excellent causes as the proposed Drop-In Centre for the Elderly cannot be treated in a different way from any other applicants and worthy causes within the ancient Parish of Llanblethian.

Robert Paterson:

14.10.1998

It is perhaps worth noting that the term 'Vicarage' and 'Rectory' in some of the quotations which follow don't refer to parsonage houses but are used in the sense of 'the post of Vicar/Rector', as in 'Bishopric' for a bishop.

Response from Mr Vic. Eveleigh

A most interesting paper on the subject which to my mind is a clear statement of fact.

I have for a long time thought it a bit of an anomaly that Cowbridge was held to be a Parish in its own right despite being totally enclosed within the Parish of Llanblethian.

My own rather limited research has led me to conclude that our forefathers' sense of civic pride in comparing 'bustling' Cowbridge with 'sleepy' Llanblethian has been the cause of the problem. This, so far as I can make out, has never been proven or recorded until recent times.

Dr L. Hopkin James' "Old Cowbridge" has a chapter relating to the churches which I find rather hard going. In appendix K he states

"... that from 1762 to 1781 there was a strong desire on the part of the Corporation to bring about a separation ... which began with a resolution in a Court of Common Council in 1762 ... in case a separation be procured of the Rectory of the said Town from the mother Church of Llanblethian. ... however, it failed to fructify and in 1781 was dropped."

In addition, the list of Ecclesiastical Parishes c. 1850 does not mention Cowbridge, although it does Llanblethian. Similarly, the map shows Llanblethian as a nice big chunk with no indication of Cowbridge.

I am sure you are well aware of the foregoing and I only mention it as being the origin of my basic thinking.

Therefore, I support your contention that Cowbridge and Llanblethian are, and always have been, two parts of a whole. Evan Jenkins would have, in my opinion, considered them as such.

A nice little mental exercise.

Vic Eveleigh,

May 1998.

Response from Mr Jeff Alden

I feel your argument is correct (though the paragraph - "It is my firm contention ..." - needs some clarification).

Some relevant historical details:

- 1 The Evan Jenkins bell is dated 1702, so I presume the Charity dates from about that time. What is crucial is whether a separate parish of Cowbridge existed at the time of the bequest.
- 2 The Court of Common Council held at the Guildhall, Cowbridge, on 11 August 1772, agreed:
"... in case a separation be procured of the Rectory of the said town from the mother church at Llanblethian, a stipend of £6 yearly be chargeable on the revenues of the town ..." (in other words, in 1772, *after* the date of the Evan Jenkins Charity, Cowbridge and Llanblethian were not separated). In any event, this agreement was rescinded on 26 February 1781.
- 3 The Terrier [inventory of land belonging to the parish] of June 1771:
"... of the parish of Cowbridge, heretofore considered a chapel to Llanblethian, but of late there is a question made whether it be or not a Rectory independent of it in the gift of the Crown:
 1. no Parsonage House
 2. no Glebe
 3. there is no pension or augmentation ..."
- 4 Revd J Evans, absentee Vicar of Llanblethian, in a letter to the Bishop of Llandaff in 1790:
"... Cowbridge is not a perpetual curacy as your lordship seems to have apprehended, but a rectory united to Llanblethian. A clergyman who served it a few years since, taking advantage of my non-residence, took much pains about 8 years since to separate it from the other, and to invest it in the patronage of the Corporation of Cowbridge ..."
- 5 The first record I can find dealing with a separate Parish of Cowbridge dates from the Tithe apportionment of 1841, and I think this can be considered a civil matter, but I quote it for completeness:
"... Apportionment of the rent charge in lieu of tithes in the parish of Cowbridge, 5/2/1841;
An agreement between the Revd Thomas Edmondes, rector of the said parish, and as such owner of all the tithes thereof ..."

Jeff Alden,

May 1998.

Response from Mr Graham Phillips

Re: the "Evan Jenkins" question, the source to which I referred ... was your illustrious predecessor, Ewart Lewis (Vicar of Llanblethian 1949-63).

He contributed a short chapter to a local history volume entitled "History on my Doorstep" which was published in 1959. In that he wrote:

".... Llanblethian Church, therefore, is the ancient parish church of the benefice of Llanblethian with Cowbridge. Cowbridge Church is quite as old a building; it has its own churchyard and churchwardens, and is much larger than its mother church. But though treated as a parish church for all practical purposes, it is not a parish church in the full canonical sense. Whoever has been Vicar of Llanblethian has also been incumbent of Cowbridge, and only once, towards the end of the 18th. century, has an attempt been made to disturb this order of things.

Thomas Williams, Headmaster of the Grammar School, was also Curate of Cowbridge. His friends and kinsfolk on the Town Council persuaded that body to promise a contribution towards a stipend, and Williams himself made a determined attempt to persuade Queen Anne's Bounty to provide funds which would make Cowbridge an independent cure, with Williams as first incumbent. The Bounty administrators were sympathetic, but insisted on the Vicar's consent. From the Gloucestershire living which he held in plurality with Llanblethian, the Vicar, John Evans, made it very plain that he did not agree. The Town Council, when brought to the point, would not guarantee to continue its contribution towards the stipend beyond the lifetime of Thomas Williams.

The whole intrigue collapsed, its one echo today is a bundle of papers preserved in the Church in Wales archives, and we remain 'Llanblethian with Cowbridge' in official terminology."

Graham Phillips,

June 1998.

Information provided by Mr Hubert Thomas

SUMMARY of all the INFORMATION relative to the Borough of Cowbridge, laid before Parliament since March 1831

Limits

Cowbridge is defined as "part of the Parish of Llanblethian".

Population and Number of Houses

Two sets of figures are given "Of the Borough" and "Of the Parish exclusive of the Borough".

In the detailed paper by T.F. Ellis, jun. accompanying the 1831 census statistics is the following:

Cowbridge is in the parish of Llanblethian, by which it is entirely encompassed, except at one point on the North-west, where the Boundaries of the two coincide. The Chapel at Cowbridge [Holy Cross Church] was originally a Chapel of Ease to Llanblethian Church, and the same Minister performs the duty at each, taking Morning Service at one and Evening Service at the other the same Sunday, and changing the distribution each successive Sunday. ... Llanblethian Church is at the farther end of the Village, which gives name to the Parish. ... The Parish contains 1,944 acres without the Borough; the Borough contains rather more than 33 acres.

... I should propose that the new Borough should comprehend Cowbridge and Llanblethian Villages, with a moderate space round, but not Aberthin. For this purpose, I should recommend a Boundary which is laid down by a dotted line. ...

If it should be determined not to include Llanblethian Village, I think it would be advisable to adhere to the old Borough Boundary, except towards the East and North, where it seems to me to cut the Town too closely, being in fact almost coincident with the backs of the houses. An enlarged Boundary might be described here, by means of the Stream on the North.

August 1998.

It is clear from the above that whole of the civil Borough of Cowbridge was within the Parish of Llanblethian in 1831 and beyond. The only change to boundaries was the proposal by T.F. Ellis to alter the civil boundary of the Borough. This took place more-or-less in accord with the recommendation of the final paragraph above, enlarging the Borough from its original 33 acres [roughly the area within the old walled town]. Those who amended the constitution of the Evan Jenkins Charity a decade or so ago followed a false move of the trustees in the final decade of the nineteenth century (when Llanblethian's civil Parish Council was invited to nominate trustees but not Cowbridge Town Council), and used as their guide the map showing a clear definition of the civil Borough of Cowbridge *after enlargement*. This compounded two understandable mistakes:

- 1 it appeared to confirm the false assumption that the civil Borough was a parish; and
- 2 it did not represent the correct boundary of the ancient Borough (a civil boundary which Evan Jenkins would have known though does not mention), thus excluding such areas as Druid's Green and the Broadshoard.

It is my firm conviction that the trustees would be acting contrary to the intention of the donor in refusing assistance to residents of the ancient Borough of Cowbridge (those few who live within the area once occupied by the walled town), because that was entirely within the Parish of Llanblethian. In addition, trustees have been basing their exclusion of applicants from the Borough by reference to a map which post-dates the 1831 census (probably the Town Hall map surveyed in 1876) and which now includes housing areas which, prior to the mid-nineteenth century, were not part of the Borough.

Robert Paterson.