

Cannon Mogford

SOME NOTES ON COWBRIDGE CHURCH

Q. How old would you say the Parish Church of Cowbridge is?

A. That's a question we often get asked and it is really very difficult to answer. A church is a living thing and grows or dies with each succeeding generation. It will contain remains of the very old Church, and the long distant past, and contributions from almost every generation afterwards.

Holy Cross Church is certainly part of a very ancient grouping of Churches under the Mother Church of Llanblethian. Somewhere between the years 1153-1183 the then Bishop of Llandaff, Nicholas ap Gwrgant, executed a Deed of Gift to the Monks of Tewkesbury Abbey, making over to them certain Benefices in this area. He named Llanblethian in this Gift, also Welsh St. Donat's, but although Llanblethian and Cowbridge are within sight of each other and have never, as far as all our information goes, done other than share one and the same Incumbent, Cowbridge^{was} was not named among the others. But there was mention of a Parish called St. James, Llanquian, also conferred on Tewkesbury. This Church of St. James, Llanquian, remains a bit of a mystery. It may well once have had a separate existence in Aberthin, where the name Llanquian is still found and certain church ruins. It may even by this early date have ceased to exist as a separate Parish Church (if it ever was one) and have become somehow absorbed into the larger Church at Cowbridge. One of the aisles of Cowbridge Church is known as the Llanquian Aisle. True, it was not built until 1473, some three hundred years after this Deed of Gift, but there could well have been a separate Chapel by then with a St. James Altar as part of Cowbridge Parish Church. It is at least reasonable to assume that Cowbridge, with its long association with Llanblethian and Welsh St. Donat's, was serving its community as long ago as the others, and was therefore involved in the transfer to Tewkesbury Abbey. Some part or parts of the Church, if this is so, must therefore have come to us from as early as the 12th century.

Q. Do you have the names of Clergy who served the Church from all those years ago and, if so, who appointed them at that time? Was it the Bishop?

A. Yes. We are indebted to researchers for the names of a long list of Clergy who have served this Church, always remembering that the Parishes of Llanblethian and Cowbridge go together. The name of

the Vicar of Llanblethian for 1208 is known: a certain Thomas. He was followed in 1217 by Magister Radulph Maelog, and in 1226 by a second Thomas. No doubt these men were all monks, appointed by Tewkesbury Abbey. Indeed, we know that one of them, Eustace by name, was sent down from Tewkesbury in 1231 to dominate the local inhabitants of Llanblethian who bitterly resented paying their revenues to the Abbey. He was kidnapped, tied up, refused the keys of the Church, and was saved from the anger of the locals only through the threat of their being excommunicated. So we do know by name some of our very old Parish Priests, and that they were nominated by Tewkesbury Abbey - up to the dissolution of the monasteries in 1537. After that date the privilege of appointing to the Benefices of Llanblethian and Cowbridge, etc., passed to the Dean and Chapter of Gloucester who continued to exercise that privilege until the Disestablishment and Disendowment of the Church in Wales. What surprises me a little is that the Parish bears no evidence of the influence either of the Abbey at Tewkesbury or the Cathedral at Gloucester, unlike Aberdare, for example, also in the Gift of the Dean and Chapter of Gloucester, where near the Church are such streets as Canon Street, Dean Street, and so on.

- Q. Were there any really outstanding men among these Vicars?
- A. We have no one very famous as far as I know. There was a Knight, Sir John Grant, here as Rector in 1552, and he is on record as having been sued for debt. Perhaps he's not the only one. The Rev. Edward Davies was here as Rector when the Puritans took power, and he was dismissed from the Benefice as being loyal to King, Bishop and Prayer Book. Where he went and what he did we don't know, but he survived those years and was reappointed Rector in 1662 when the Monarchy returned, and was also made a Canon of Llandaff. An interesting Rector was the Rev. John Evans, 1773-1808. As well as being Vicar of Llanblethian with Cowbridge he was also Vicar of Hatherley in Gloucester, and there he lived, seldom coming to his other Parishes. He left the entire care of the Parish of Cowbridge in the hands of the then Headmaster of the Grammar School, The Rev. Thomas Williams, who thought he ought really to be made Rector of Cowbridge as distinct from Llanblethian. The Borough Council agreed to make available a sum of money towards a stipend and the Headmaster sought a grant of stipend from Queen Anne's Bounty who agreed to make it available if it had the approval of the Vicar of Llanblethian, none other than the Rev. John Evans of Hatherley. ^{He} ~~He~~ did not. The Vicar did not agree and stood firm.

The correspondence is available and interesting, and after this small foray towards independence Llanblethian and Cowbridge have continued to have the same Incumbent.

Q. How close has been the relationship between the School and the old Grammar School next door?

A. Since its foundation in 1608 Headmasters of the Grammar School were almost invariably Curates or Chaplains to Holy Cross. We have already looked at the evidence of the Rev. Thomas Williams. We have evidence also of another Headmaster, ^{who,} disappointed at the lack of provision made for his School, asked for a special Service to be allotted to the School on a Sunday afternoon, conducted it himself and paid all expenses. Over long periods it seems all the assistant masters were also in Holy Orders, and there are records of them taking Services and officiating at Baptisms, Burials and Marriages in the absence of the very often non-resident Vicars of Llanblethian. There are tablets to the memory of three Headmasters in the Chancel, and other types of memorials to several others. We are told that the Boarders, if they only knew it when they took their seats in the Chancel, were walking over the graves of three Headmasters - Daniel Walters, Thomas Williams and William Williams.

Q. You spoke about the Records of the Church. Do they go back a long way? Are they complete?

A. The Records of Cowbridge Church start at 1718, those in Llanblethian start in the previous century, 1661, and those of Llandough and St. Mary Church a good deal earlier than that. There are some gaps in the early period in Cowbridge and one wonders why, but the miracle is, with so many absentee Vicars all over the country and others standing in for them, that the registers are as complete as they are.

Q. Tell us something about the building itself.

A. The Church was built just inside the walls of the old City and near to its present South Gate. It bears all the signs of being part of the defences of the area. Its tower is massive, rather squat, and is unusual in being octagonal. It has a huge buttress on the North side, the reason for its enormous thickness not being easily apparent. Inside the tower there are some recesses in the ringing chamber believed to have been built to house the arrows of the defenders. The tower is said to have once borne a steeple, a framework of wood covered by lead, which was des-

troyed by lightning and never replaced.

There are those who believe that the tower was an addition to the original Church and was built about 1300. Until then, if what they say is true, the Church would have been a simple building of the nave and part of the present Chancel. The next stage in the building of the Church, following the addition of the tower, is thought to have been the extension of the Chancel Eastwards, and the building of the Chapel we now use as a Choir Vestry. This Chapel, it seems, was used for many years as a Chantry Chapel, founded by William the Prior in the 14th century for the perpetual support of one priest. It was the duty of ^{such} ~~later~~ priests to say daily Mass for the dead, and among other duties, no doubt, to teach the children of the neighbourhood. He probably lived on the premises, and there is a smaller room attached to the rear of the Chantry Chapel with its own outer doorway (now blocked up) and its own fireplace. This room we now use as the Rector's Vestry. The last stage in the building of the Church came in 1473 with the building of the so-called Llanquian Aisle on the South side of the building. The Church wall of the nave on that side had to be taken down, ^{and} a colonnade of pillars erected to form the link between the nave and the new aisle. The work was completed in 1473 and was the gift of Anne, daughter of the Earl of Warwick, and married to Richard, Duke of Gloucester and later King of England. The present porch of the Church is a late Victorian addition built in 1859, but no doubt succeeded an earlier one.

There was once a doorway which lead into the Church through this new Llanquian Aisle, and from one of the older maps I saw somewhere, it looks as if at one time this was the main ^a entrance into the Church, across the churchyard from the South side. The door can now be seen from the outside but not from the inside. ~~It is a feature of Cowbridge Church as with many such old churches.~~ There are several doors no longer in use. There are doors still visible from the outside which now cannot be seen from the inside; there are doors within the Church which now lead nowhere. There are two such doors in the Chancel. One, if it were in use, would lead from the Church to the bell tower. It is very small and we would have to stoop low to use it. The other is bricked up totally at the back and we cannot even open it, but when in use it would have led to a flight of steps and out onto one of the rood screens which were once so much a feature of Church life, from which hung

a crucifix, and from which musicians often used to lead the singing. Few of these rood lofts now exist, sad to say, but nearly all the doors remain, and often times the flight of steps. There is nothing distinctive of the Norman age now inside the Church. The moulded capitals and pointed arches of the interior show it to be early English in style.

The font in Llanblethian Church is a Norman font, and one of the windows still remains from Norman times, but we are not so fortunate in Cowbridge. However, it is possible from outside the Church to see where new windows have been inserted in place of the old, and traces of the much older ones are still there. So the architecture of different generations have succeeded each other.

- Q. The floor of the Church, I notice, is dotted with burial slabs inscribed with the names of local families. Were people actually buried there?
- A. The floor of the whole Church, we are told, is full of graves, but it doesn't follow that people have been buried under these slabs, for there was a tendency when reflooring needed to be done for materials to be brought in from outside. However, we have no reason to doubt that the Carne family of the 17th century are buried, as it says, beneath the Carne family pew, that Matthew and Margaret Seys are buried between the font and the West door, the oldest gravestone I can find in the Church, and that certain Headmasters of the Grammar School rest within the Chancel walls. Somewhere in the Church also, it is believed, are buried the poet, Lewis Morgannwg, and the genealogist, Rice Meyricke^{of} Cotterell.
- Q. What monuments does the Church possess, and are they of any value?
- A. There are many monuments in the Church, not, on the whole, among the most notable in the land, but several are of interest. The best is the Carne Memorial in the Llanquian Aisle, 1626 by date. It shows the deceased Father and Mother and the weepers, presumably their six children. The monument was once, no doubt, brilliantly coloured, but years of rain and dirt, particularly rain due to a long defective roof in the aisle, have much spoilt it. It would be great to restore it one day.
- Incidentally, the roof of the Llanquian Aisle is almost certainly the original roof, and has of recent years been restored. It contained some nicely carved roof bosses which were taken down years ago and for a long period were hanging about at the foot of the

belfry stairs - apparently getting fewer in numbers. In our recent work on the roof these were regilded and replaced as best we could decide.

Many who come to Cowbridge Church now can still remember the way the slender pillars of the colonnade supporting the arches used to lean where the two roofs met. The weight of the new Llanquian Aisle roof was too heavy for their foundations. When the roof of the nave was renewed totally in 1926, and in oak, it was realised the weight of that would be too much for these pillars as they were and were taken down piece by piece and rebuilt on stronger foundations. We owe a great deal to the courage of the men of those years, for it was a costly and difficult operation.

To the right of the North door as you enter there is the Jenkins Memorial. Judge David Jenkins lived in Hensol Castle. He spent some years in the Tower for his opposition to the Cromwell regime, where he continued to work for the King and Bishop, was lucky enough to survive his imprisonment and to be returned to his home and position. His family motto, *Fe Dal Am Daro* (It Pays To Strike), and his emblem (Three Cocks) are on the monument.

There is a monument to Benjamin Heath Malkin, Topographer and Historian, who is said to be buried in the Church, and who lived at Old Hall, and, of course, many plain monuments to the Edmondes family who also lived in Old Hall, one of whom, Thomas Edmondes, was Rector from 1835 to 1884, almost a full fifty years.

At the back of the Church there are boards setting out a long list of benefactions from members of the Church, almost all of which continue to be administered. The exception is the gift of bread after Service every Sunday, and that was discontinued only in comparatively recent years.

Q. Are there any gifts of silver the Church looks after?

A. In its silver Cowbridge Church has treasure indeed. There is an Elizabethan Chalice dated 1576. There is an attractive silver gilt cup with cover from the 17th 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 modern silver gifts of considerable beauty.

Q. We notice over the years the quality of the Church bells.

A. Yes, there is a fine peal of eight bells in this tower, the only complete peal of bells surviving ~~and~~ all cast by William Evans of Chepstow in 1722. All the bells bear a medallion of the arms of

Cowbridge with motto surround; not to be wondered at when it is known that the Borough Council of 1721 mortgaged the revenue of the town to find the money to pay for the bells and the rehousing of them in the tower. The bells themselves are inscribed with the names of certain benefactors, and the old and famous of Cowbridge are immortalised by them.

DANIEL DURRELL, Headmaster of the Grammar School.

THOMAS WILKINS, MRS. HESTHER WILKINS, EDWARD CARNE,

FRANCIS GWYN, EDWARD STRADLING.

Rectors, Headmasters, Mayors, Bailiffs - as long as these fine bells continue to ring these names will never be forgotten.

There is also a Sanctus Bell - unlike the others, without inscription. In days long ago it was known to everyone as Mary Rose. It used to be rung at 8.00 p.m. from Michaelmas to Lady Day, and for the rest of the year at 6.00 p.m. It was a Curfew Bell to bring children home to their beds. It was also used as a Fire Bell.

Q. What is meant by referring to Cowbridge Church as a Royal Foundation?

A. It was founded long before it had Royal approval. But in a sense Cowbridge Church had a Charter from the Crown just as the Borough did. In the year 1484, i.e., not long after the addition of the new aisle, Richard made provision for a Chaplain to serve the Church of the Holy Cross for ever. He asked the then Bishop of Llandaff to see to it with the co-operation of the Vicar of Llanblethian and the Burgesses of Cowbridge. The Chaplain was to receive, it seems, 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ d from each communicant at Easter and 4d from each family with a garden.

Q. What traces can a keen observer see of parts of the Church having disappeared?

A. There was certainly once a gallery at the West end of the Church, some of the supports of which are clearly to be seen. It probably housed the organ and perhaps the choir.

Where the organ now is there may well have been room for an Altar of St. Nicholas. There is no trace of it now but there is a record of such an Altar existing somewhere which was used as a place of solemn and binding agreement. William Bassett of Treguff, 21st November, 1516, conveyed to David Seys of Cowbridge and William ap John of St. Hilary, half the Manor of Eglwys Brewis and half the Rectory for 100 marks. The agreement was that the money should be repaid on the Feast of St. Andrew, 1526, in the Parish Church of Cowbridge on the Altar of St. Nicholas between the sunrise and

sunset - one half of the sum to Seys, one half to ap John. There must have been also a flight of steps from the Chancel to the rood screen. The doorway is still there but not the steps, nor the screen.

- Q. Why is it that in maps of 100 years ago or later the Church of the Holy Cross, as it seems to have been called for centuries, then begins to appear as St. Mary's?
- A. For perhaps the same reason that Rood Street now appears also under its new name of Church Street. Perhaps it was thought that the Church of the Holy Cross or Holy Rood was a little too "Catholic" for that period. Anyway, the same was happening also in Llanblethian where St. Bleddian's Church became the Church of St. John the Baptist, but neither of these two new Dedication names caught on and the Church of the Holy Cross reasserted itself under that name.