

The Parish Church
of
Llandough
(near Cowbridge)





Medieval window

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This small grey stone church, which stands on a hillside above the river Thaw, two miles south of Cowbridge is, in its size and architectural style, typical of the many Vale of Glamorgan churches built in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. A church can be identified with the present site from the mid-thirteenth century onwards, and the medieval structure of nave, chancel and south porch, with exterior bell turret, survived with only minor alterations and repairs until the nineteenth century, when the hand of the restorer fell heavily upon it.

But tradition ascribes a Celtic origin to the church at Llandough, and it is likely that a small church or cell was established here in pre-Norman times. Documentary sources from the seventh to the eleventh centuries point to the existence of three major Celtic monasteries in south-east Wales associated with Cadog (Llancarfan), Illtud (Llantwit Major) and Dogwin (Llandough). The location of the latter foundation has been the subject of much historical speculation, with both the Glamorgan Llandoughs (Cowbridge and Penarth) being claimed as the site, but recent archaeological and historical investigations indicate that by the late tenth or early eleventh century it was Llandough Penarth (where an early Christian monument in the form of a pillar cross still survives) that was a centre of the Celtic church. Any religious settlement on the banks of the Thaw at that date was small and insignificant, any connection between it and the Penarth foundation, other than that of like dedication, impossible to prove.

Nevertheless, the proximity of those proven centres of Celtic christianity, Llantwit Major and Llancarfan, and the accessibility of an important harbour at Aberthaw tempt the hypothesis that the wooded valley of



Church Exterior before restoration, 1865



Church Exterior, 1984

the Thaw, with its wells and streams, may have provided the site of an early Dogwin foundation in the fifth or sixth century. Is it possible that the 'remains of a small British encampment' to the south-east of the church and 'the great number of human bones' discovered nearby, as described by the antiquary Samuel Lewis in his *Topographical Dictionary* (publ. 1840), were in fact the remains of an early Christian settlement? The questions remain unanswered.

The dedication of the church is yet another enigma. While the place-name Llandough in various forms (Landoche, Landozne, Landogh, Llandoghe etc.) was applied to the medieval knight's fee, the church and the manor from the thirteenth century onwards, and while the name is taken to imply a continuity of worship and dedication from Celtic to Norman church, the first dedication reference, to a St. Tocho, does not occur until the late sixteenth century. Even the name of this elusive Celtic saint, rendered in such variant forms as Docco, Dochau, Dochwy, Dochdwy and Dogwin, remains obscure, its form and derivation still a matter of scholarly debate.

Only in the fabric of the church does surmise recede before historical fact. The present building is a medieval structure, its Early English style suggesting a late thirteenth to early fourteenth century date. But it is the work of the nineteenth-century restorer that is most immediately apparent and which obscures the surviving details of medieval architecture. By the mid-nineteenth century, restoration was essential to rescue the fabric of the church from dilapidation and decay, but as part of that restoration many of the original features were destroyed.

The original chancel arch was a small, narrow opening in the great thickness of wall separating nave from sanctuary. In 1869 this ancient arch was opened-up and replaced by the pointed arch on marble shafts that stands today, together with the low stone screen. One Glamorgan historian, T. C. Evans (Cadrawd), writing in the 1880s complained: "The chancel arch, which the original builders had not required to give more than convenient access to the chancel and was not calculated to display with effect the 'restored' ritual of the English church, has been replaced by one of requisite height and span, and is now an irreproachable example of what such an arch ought to have been in a thirteenth century church".

Within the chancel the roof timbers, the east window and south lancet windows, the stone seats and piscina all date from the nineteenth-century



Hic iacet Wenllian Walshe quondam de ...
morsu qui obiit xxv die mensis ...
milleccccc xxxviii annis de ...

Monumental Brass. Wenllian Walshe, died 1427

restoration, and it was at this date that the vestry with its connecting arches was added. During the late-eighteenth century a large wooden-framed window had been inserted in the south wall of the chancel to provide more light, but this was another feature obliterated during restoration.

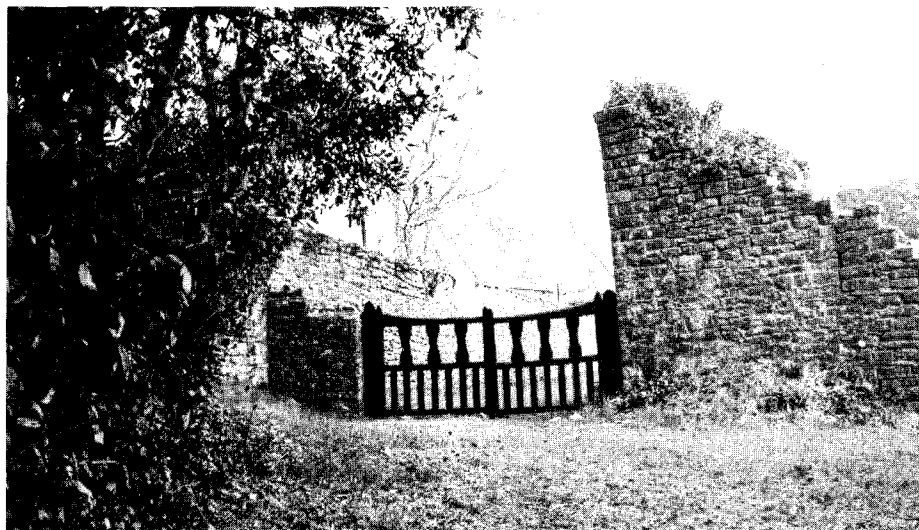
West of the chancel arch the fabric of the church is less heavily restored. The nave retains its ancient cradle roof with massive oak timbers, and in the north wall of the nave is a doorway concealing a flight of stone steps which, in pre-Reformation times, led to the rood loft. The projection for the rood stair is clearly seen in the external north wall of the church.

Two small square-headed windows that gave light to the rood and to the chancel approach survive in the walls abutting the chancel arch. Below the north loft light is a single trefoil-headed lancet, while below the south light is an oblong recess and a small round aperture or squint, formed by a hole cut into a solid stone. Placed in the wall about one metre above the ground, the latter opening is now obscured by the organ, as is the recess.

Traces of the medieval church can also be seen in the small trefoil-headed lancet in the south-west wall of the nave, and in the two lights in the west gable. The latter are set within a large, slightly pointed arch the profile of which is visible in the exterior stonework. Prior to the nineteenth-century restoration the nave was lit by a large square-headed window that appears to have been a sixteenth-century insertion or enlargement. The restored window, with its neatly rounded arch, now provides a memorial to Francis Edmund Stacey of Llandough Castle (died 1883) and his wife Theodosia.

The plain octagonal font, and the holy water stoup set in a wall niche near the south doorway are further survivals from the medieval church.

The most unspoilt part of the church is the south entrance porch. The original woodwork in the roof incorporates decorative flower bosses and a central rib carved with a head of Christ. The external obtuse stone arch is surmounted by a grotesque carving and has a carved head, much weathered, at each extremity of the moulding. Although heavily restored, the arch above the south door of the church has a more rounded profile than that on the porch entrance, indicating that the porch was a later addition to the body of the church. Stone slabs form bench seats inside the porch.



Churchyard approach



Churchyard monuments

Few monuments survive within the church, but one that does is of particular interest, both for its form of monumental craftsmanship and for its links with the medieval lordship of Llandough. This is the monumental brass on the floor on the north side of the altar. Set into a slab of local limestone the brass, measuring 87 cm. × 41 cm., comprises a female figure and a latin inscription. The woman wears a horned head-dress and veil, and a long, high-waisted gown with full sleeves that are edged at the wrists with fur. The gown, laced below the neck, has a large collar and is worn over a kirtle, the close-fitting sleeves of which can be seen at the wrists. Lightly engraved 'graffiti' in the form of figure of eight and knot patterns are discernible on the left sleeve and on the skirt.

The stone into which the brass is set is incised for a canopy, and has an indent for a shield, but both these details have been lost over the centuries.

The inscription in latin reads:

Hic iacet Wenllan Walsche quonda uxor Walteri Moreton . que obiit xxv^o die Decembris Anno dni Millmo . cccc^o . xxvii^o . cuius aie ppiciet deus. Amen.

Here lies Wenllian Walsche, formerly the wife of Walter Moreton, who died December 25th A.D. 1427, on whose soul may God have mercy. Amen.

The Walsche *alias* Walsh family can be traced in Glamorgan from c.1200 and was closely associated with Llandough and St. Mary Church from the mid-thirteenth century onwards. An Extent of Glamorgan, dated 1262, describes Llandough as a knight's fee, held by Adam le Walsche, the lordship or fee comprising Llandough and St. Mary Church. A labyrinthine family tree reveals a succession of Adams, Simons and Roberts le Walsche, one Adam le Walsche being the reputed builder of a castle at Llandough in the thirteenth century. While some features of a late medieval castle or strong-house can be seen in the walls and towers of the present-day 'Llandough Castle' adjoining the church, no trace can be found of an early medieval fortification and it is in that other symbol of the Norman presence in Llandough, the church, that the Walsh family is commemorated.

The first member of the family to emerge clearly is Robert Walsh whose Will, dated 6 May 1427, included a bequest of £10 for masses to be said for one whole year in Llandough church for the repose of his soul, a gift of 40 shillings to the same church and a payment of 20 shillings to the

rector of the parish for 'forgotten tithes'. Robert and his wife are buried at Langridge in Somerset where the family had acquired extensive estates before their arrival in Glamorgan. Robert's sister Wenllian, wife of Walter Moreton the Constable of Cardiff Castle, is the only member of the Walsh family known to have been buried at Llandough, but in the churchyard lies what is now little more than a pile of broken stones, all that remains of a 'mutilated effigy' relegated to the vestry when the church was restored. Undoubtedly a medieval effigy, apparently representing a knightly figure, it must be supposed that this marked the grave of an early Adam, Robert or Simon le Walsche.

Llandough, its castle, church and manor, together with St. Mary Church, remained in the hands of the Walsh family until 1444 when it was sold to Sir William Thomas and became part of the vast estates of the Herbert family, later Earls of Worcester. In 1536 the manor, lands and advowson of Llandough (and St. Mary Church) were sold to Sir Edward Carne of Ewenny, and in 1677 passed by marriage to the Mansel family of Margam in whose possession they remained for over two centuries.

Carnes and Mansels lie buried at Ewenny, Margam and elsewhere and have no memorials in Llandough. The Walsche brass is an exceptional survival from the fifteenth century and the few other monuments in the church are of eighteenth and nineteenth century date.

Prior to the Victorian restoration the aisles of the church were floored with tombstones, but in 1869 most of these were removed to the eastern end of the churchyard where some still lie under the ancient yew, their inscriptions recalling generations of Bassetts, Morgans and Jenkins' who lived in the parish in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. One tombstone that escaped relegation to the churchyard lies beneath the altar and records the burial of the Reverend Edward Williams, rector of Llandough (1708-23) and his children.

On the south wall of the nave are two more eighteenth-century monuments. One is a memorial to three members of the Bassett family, John aged 23, William aged 18 and Friswith aged 26, who died within a few weeks of each other in the spring of 1713. The inscription is followed by a rhyming couplet: "William dyed first & lies outward of all, John lies in ye middle & Friswith next ye wall".

The other, a marble tablet decorated with a winged death's head, commemorates the Reverend William Lewis who served for thirty years as

chaplain to the Mansels of Margam and who died in July 1715 aged 59. The monument was erected by his sister Mrs. Catharine Powell, probably the wife of Edward Powell of Llandough mill, the local bailiff for the Margam estate.

On the west wall of the church are monuments to two families who lived at Llandough Castle in the first half of the nineteenth century, the Lynche Blosses and the Morgans. Only a plain marble slab now survives from the elaborately carved mural monument to Sir Robert Lynche Bloss, member of an ancient Irish family, and his first wife Eliza Gorman whom he married in Llandough church in 1801, but its terse inscription records the deaths of two infant children and their mother within a few years of the marriage and of Sir Robert himself, aged only 34, in 1818. Sir Robert's second wife Charlotte, daughter of John Richards of Cardiff and mother of Henry Lynch Bloss a future dean of Llandaff, died in 1834 and is commemorated on a separate black and white marble tablet. Both memorials are classical in inspiration and were the work of a Bristol monumental sculptor, Henry Wood. The classical urn and decorative swags that originally embellished Sir Robert's monument having crumbled and fallen from the wall, the remaining inscription was re-set in 1984. The two tablets recording the names of Colonel Richard Morgan, his wife Susanna Maria and their daughter Emma Matilda were formerly in the chancel. A lieutenant-colonel in the Glamorgan militia, a magistrate, deputy lieutenant of the county and eisteddfod bard, Richard Morgan leased the Castle from 1819 until his death in 1834. He and his wife died within a few months of each other and lie buried within a railed enclosure at the east end of the churchyard. Their daughter, wife of John Oliver of Berkshire, a military officer, died in Italy at the age of 25 and is buried in the Protestant cemetery at Leghorn. Both monuments, the one a simple tablet, the other in the form of a sarcophagus surmounted by a draped urn, were the work of another Bristol statuary, W. Hancock.

All the stained glass in the church dates from the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. The east window depicts Christ in majesty, the chancel lancets portray St. Francis, St. Christopher and St. Stephen, the nave lancet shows the Good Shepherd. The two lights of the Stacey window depict the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. John.

The church plate has undergone a 'refurbishment' even more drastic than that imposed on the fabric of the church. The silver chalice set with

amethysts and pearls and the silver paten, both used regularly at the Eucharist, were the gift of Theodore Mansel Talbot of Margam (1839-76) to the restored church and replaced vessels given to Llandough in 1552 by 'W' of Llanblethian. Sadly, the old plate was melted down in order to make these 'new' vessels.

* * The two bells hanging in the western turret bear no inscription. They appear to have been cast early in the eighteenth century.

Llandough is one of the few Glamorgan parishes, St. Mary Church among them, to possess an Elizabethan parish register. Here are recorded baptisms and burials from 1583 and marriages from 1585, the earliest entries relating to such families as Cnappe, Wilkin, William and Nichol. Also named in the pages of the register are some of the earliest known rectors of the parish—Laurence Nicholl 'parson of Landoghe' in 1560, Richard Hughes (buried 15 April 1592), Hoel Evans (buried 8 December 1635), William Hughes (buried 12 January 1648) and Thomas Morgan (buried 7 June 1666).

The small churchyard, overshadowed by an ancient yew, is encircled by high stone walls that formerly enclosed the Castle gardens. Churchyard monuments are varied if undistinguished. A table tomb that now stands near the Morgan grave at the east end of the churchyard was originally erected in the chancel. Adorned with sculpted coats of arms, the tomb records the death of Catherine Annabella Cerjat of Llandough Castle and her infant son in 1803. Her husband, Colonel Henry Andrew Cerjat of the 16th Light Dragoons, was one of a succession of military men to reside at the Castle as tenant of the Margam estate. After the death of his wife and son he took his young daughter to live at Lausanne in his native Switzerland, his rare visits to the family grave at Llandough renewing his brief connection with the parish.

In the north part of the churchyard is the grave of the Reverend Stephen Henry Fox Nicholl, rector of the parish when the restoration of the church was undertaken. The Nicholls of Merthyr Mawr were related by marriage to the Mansel Talbots of Margam, in whose gift lay the presentation to the living, and three members of that family served as rector of Llandough and St. Mary Church—Edward Powell Nicholl (1858-64), his brother Stephen Henry Fox Nicholl (1867-99) and the latter's son Henry Stephen Nicholl (1899-1917).

In 1797, during the incumbency of the Reverend John Walters and at the instigation of Thomas Mansel Talbot of Margam the then patron of

* * **** When taken down during church restoration in the 1990's the bells were discovered to be medieval (14th century) and the work of William Revel of London, an itinerant bell founder**

the livings of Llandough and St. Mary Church, the two parishes were united by episcopal decree into one combined benefice. One noteworthy cleric presented to that benefice was the Reverend William Bruce Knight (inducted 1817) whose subsequent career as chancellor, archdeacon and dean of Llandaff established him as one of the most influential diocesan figures of his day. The last incumbent of the united parishes before their grouping with Llanblethian and Cowbridge was the Reverend John Evans (1955-66) whose churchyard grave is marked by a plain headstone.

Close to the Castle wall, in the north part of the churchyard, is the grave of Sir Sidney Hutchinson Byass, the South Wales businessman and industrialist, who purchased Llandough Castle and lands from the Margam estate in 1914 and lived at the Castle until his death in 1929. The grave of a former tenant of the Castle, the barrister F. E. Stacey who is commemorated in the stained glass of the church, is marked by a marble cross bearing a relief carving of the head of the deceased.

It is ironic that among the church and churchyard monuments there is no memorial to the eighteenth-century Welsh scholar and lexicographer, the Reverend John Walters, rector of Llandough from 1759 to 1797. For most of his incumbency John Walters lived at the Cottage, the rectory being in a dilapidated condition, and it was there that he worked to produce his famous English-Welsh dictionary. His burial at Llandough is recorded in the parish register but his grave is unmarked and unknown.

In this small parish, where faith and worship have evolved from the remote past, the church continues to serve the spiritual needs of the community. Both church and churchyard contain reminders of the many generations who have lived, worked and worshipped God in this beautiful corner of the Vale, and bear continuing witness to the Christian faith.

HILARY M. THOMAS
Llandough

May 1985



West gable



Head of Christ