

The Parish Church of St. Hilary in the Vale of Glamorgan

This ancient church is dedicated to St. Hilary, a C4th bishop of Poitiers. The dedication is found in few other churches in the British Isles but the saint enjoys a much wider cult in France.



The existence of the church of St. Hilary (ecclesia Sancti Ylarii) in Glamorgan is first documented in 1116 but scholars now suggest that the church is of pre-Norman foundation.

The present building dates from the late C12th or early C13th and comprises nave, chancel, south aisle, south porch and west tower, the porch and aisle having been added in the C14th. In 1862 the church was restored under the direction of the eminent Victorian architect Sir George Gilbert Scott and at the expense of Mrs Charlotte Louisa Traherne of Coedriglan as a memorial to her husband, the Reverend John Montgomery Traherne F.R.S., F.S.A., who died at St. Hilary in 1860.

The church is entered through the **south porch** which was designed by Sir George Gilbert Scott to replace the original C14th structure. The decorative carving on the **bracket** above the doorway includes the arms of the Basset family of Beaupre *three bugle horns*.

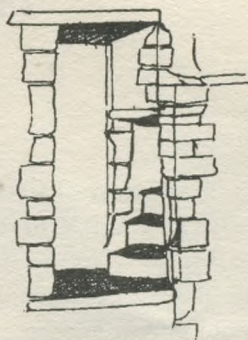


Inside the church, set into a recess in the south wall of the nave close to the door, is a medieval holy water **stoup**, hexagonal in shape.

Opposite the south door, near the north wall of the nave, is a **font** of early Norman design. It is formed from a block of local Sutton stone and has a cylindrical bowl with bulging sides and a rim with roll moulding.



A Transitional Norman arch leads from the nave into the chancel. All that remains of the **rood loft**, which in Pre-Reformation times spanned the chancel arch, are the five stone steps built into the thickness of the nave wall at its north-east corner, and the two windows which illuminated the rood and its stairs. The smaller of the two windows is square and is set low into the wall of the nave.



Within the chancel the lancet windows in north and south walls and the square-headed priest's door in the south wall are all medieval survivals.



Most of the windows in the church date from the Victorian restoration. The East Window was designed by Sir George Gilbert Scott as was the West Window in the south aisle. The stained glass in the East Window, depicting scenes from the Passion, Crucifixion, Resurrection and Ascension of Christ, was presented to the church in 1873 by George Montgomery Traherne in memory of his sister. Figures represented in the glass of the West Window in the south aisle include **St. Hilary**.

The marble and stone reredos beneath the East Window depicts the Lord's Supper (after Leonardo da Vinci) and was erected in memory of S. H. Penrose (d.1872). The church possesses an Elizabethan chalice dated 1577.

On the north wall of the nave are memorials to members of the Basset, Traherne and Ackland-Allen families. On the east wall of the nave, adjoining the chancel arch, is a **memorial to Daniel Jones** of Beaupre (d.1841) wealthy lawyer and a founder of Cardiff (Royal) Infirmary. The tablet shows Jones' head encircled by a serpent devouring its own tail, an ancient symbol of eternity also associated with the Greek god of medicine.

On the west wall of the south aisle is a brass memorial tablet to Charlotte Edmondson (d.1770).



Two medieval monuments are of particular interest:

EFFIGY OF A LAYMAN, lying in a sepulchral recess in the north wall of the nave. The figure is that of a young man believed to be a member of the De Cardiff family, lords of the manor of St. Hilary in the C12th and C13th. The youth wears a long, plain tunic, holds a pair of gauntlets in his right hand and has round-toed, slightly peaked shoes covering his feet and ankles. His long hair curls around his ears and is kept back from his face by a band or garland around his brow. Costume and hair-style are typical of those worn in the early part of the C13th.



EFFIGY OF THOMAS BASSET (d.1423) of Beaupre, on a chest tomb in the south aisle. Thomas Basset, his body encased in a suit of plate armour, lies in an attitude of prayer. His head, protected by a bascinet, rests on tassellated cushions; his feet, supported by a lion couchant, are covered by 'lobster plate' shoes with sharply pointed toes. A surcoat worn over the armour is decorated with the arms of Basset. Thomas Basset wears a handsome sword belt around his waist from which is suspended a small dagger. The inscription on the monument reads: Hic iacet Thomas Basset qui obiit XIII^o die me'sis dec'bris a^o d'ni M^o 1111^o XX111^o cu' a'ie pro(pici)etur Deus amen. (Here lies Thomas Basset who died 14th December 1423 on whose soul may God have mercy. Amen.).

The effigy has been much defaced over the centuries. It is possible that some of that mutilation was the work of Cromwellian soldiers after the defeat of the Royalists (Bassets of Beaupre among them) at the Battle of St. Fagans in 1648.



The Basset family is first recorded in St. Hilary in 1262 and by 1376 was identified with Beaupre. Members of the family continued to live at Beaupre (2km S.W. of St. Hilary village) until the end of the C17th, and the ruins of the old mansion, mostly of C16th date, still stand. In the mid-C18th the Edmondes family of Cowbridge acquired lands in St. Hilary and the marriage of Charlotte Edmondes with Llewellyn Traherne of Coedriglan in 1787 established the Traherne connection with St. Hilary. Richard Basset 'last male heir of the ancient family of Basset of Beaupre' who died in 1849 is buried in the churchyard, his gravestone surrounded by iron railings.

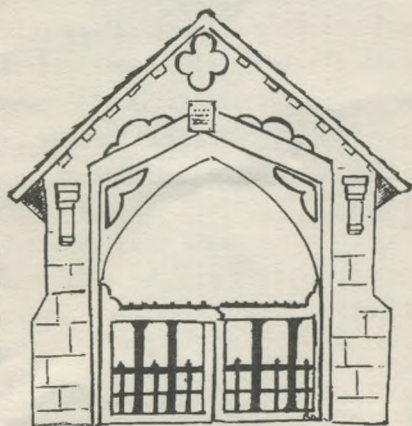
A simple headstone marks the grave of J. C. Clay, Glamorgan county cricketer and churchwarden of St. Hilary, who died in 1973.

The embattled tower at the west end of the church contains a ring of five bells, four of which were cast originally by Abraham Rudhall of Gloucester in 1734. Each corner of the tower's parapet is decorated with a gargoyle. Within the church, a narrow doorway at the west end of the nave gives access to the belfry.



The base of an ancient churchyard cross with its four high steps stands near the south porch. The cross itself dates from the C19th.

The lychgate, on the east side of the churchyard, was erected in 1900 as a memorial to George Montgomery Traherne of St. Hilary and Coedriglan. A marble tablet affixed to the wall of the lychgate records the safe return of local men who fought in the Great War (1914-18). A memorial in the church commemorates their comrade George Rees who sacrificed his life in the conflict.



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