

*The Parish Church of St. Donat,
Welsh St. Donats*

A Guide for Visitors



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50p

Welcome to Welsh St Donats Parish Church

Christians have worshipped here for centuries and throughout that time, this church has stood as a focal point of the local community. Yet a church can never be just a building. Over those same Christian centuries, the flame of faith has been kept alive in the heart of this community. Now, in the opening years of the 21st century, the congregation of this church has the particular privilege of being the living stones that form the church in Welsh St. Donats today.

We are indebted to Lyn Evans who compiled the text of this guide, to Margaret Maynard for compiling the list of incumbents and to Jonathan Grimes for the illustration of the church on the cover.

Enjoy your visit to our parish church. But as you admire its architecture, remember that it has been a place of prayer and worship for perhaps a thousand years, and today serves as the home of a vibrant worshipping community of faith.

The Holy Eucharist is at the heart of our worship, with the main celebration at 9.30am every Sunday morning. Only when you come to join with us in worship will you really experience the full glory of this building.

With every blessing.

Edwin Counsell

Parish Priest

The parish church of Welsh St Donats is dedicated to St Donat and is built in the Early English style of architecture. As one of the chapels attached to Llanblethian church under the name 'Capella Sancti Donati', Welsh St Donats was specifically confirmed to Tewkesbury Abbey in 1180. The earliest recorded instance of the name 'Welsh St Donats' was documented in 1482. The church at nearby St Donats on the coast was called the English St Donats. Welsh St Donats remained attached to Llanblethian until the Disestablishment of the Church in Wales in 1920, when it grouped with Ystradowen. In 1973 Welsh St Donats was grouped with the parish of Pendoylan to form one benefice.

The building was listed as Grade B in January 1963. The consecrated churchyard is enclosed by a stone wall and has an open burial ground, with an area set aside for cremated remains. The church itself is a two cell building with chancel, nave, porch and embattled western tower containing a large bell bearing the date 1863, which was probably cast by Thomas Mears and Son of London. Much of the early fabric of the church survived and on the whole, the building seems to have withstood the close attention of the Victorian restorers. A substantial part of the nave and chancel is possibly of the middle 15th century. The church is built in local lias (blue limestone rock) rubble stone with calcereous sandstone dressings of the Cowbridge beds, with some scattered Bath stone where the Victorians inserted new windows and mullions. The roof is covered with Bangor slates on the nave and porch, with Ffestiniog slates on the chancel. The roof of the church is arch-braced with foliage bosses at the intersections of the principal rafters and collar purlins. A feature of the nave is the 15th century oak roof which is of the open arch-braced collar truss type, with two

tiers of curved windbraces between the purlins and the wallplate. The principal rafters are cut out of large oak scantlings which rest on wallposts supported on stone corbels.

The south porch is large with glazed double iron doors. The inner doorway has a pointed arch and the outer doorway had a depressed arch. The porch is of later date than the nave and its lower part is earlier than the upper which is possibly of the 17th or 18th century. The tower is a massive square structure with a small corbel table beneath the embattlement. It opens to the nave by a slightly rounded modern arch. The tower houses a commandery chapel of the Military and Hospitaller Order of St Lazarus of Jerusalem, where the Blessed Sacrament is reserved. The chapel was dedicated by Archbishop Rowan Williams in June 2001.

The belfry has on its north and south faces a two-light square-headed window, and a small stringcourse halfway up the tower divides it into two portions. The lower stage is of late 13th century date and the west doorway has a horseshoe arch, which is quite a rare feature. In the south wall is a trefoil lancet which was opened out during the restoration of 1891.

The lectern is of wood and also dates back to 1891. The massive font dates perhaps from the 13th century and has a circular bowl with scalloped underside. The short stem is separated at either end from the base and stem by a single roll moulding. The base has two heavy rolls, one upon the other. The font is of stone construction and has a wooden cover. There is also one ancient floor standing font now not in use.

Windows

The perpendicular east window, which is not in the centre of the east wall, is of two cinquefoiled lights surmounted by a square label. The chancel is lit on the south side by a two-light cinquefoiled window with square label. A trefoil headed window of three lights can be found in the south east corner of the nave, with a similar window of two lights in the south west corner. In the north wall are a pair of two light windows, one with trefoil heads and the other with rounded heads.

Monuments

Around the walls there are 15 monuments. The earliest death recorded on these is that of Helen Richards "interred January 14th 1729 aged 22". The most recent is one dedicated to four young men of the parish who died during the Second World War. This plaque was presented to the church in November 1994 by the Cowbridge Branch of the Royal British Legion, upon the closure of the local Maendy Primary School where it was originally housed. There are 15 floor slabs and the earliest legible recorded death is that of the Bassett daughters on the 8th and 10th October 1669. However, one slab does record the death of an unknown 44 year old in 1625. One of the floor slabs, dated 1673, bears the inscription:

"Undeneath this stone i ly in dust, until the resurection of the just" (actual spelling).

Outside the church, affixed to the south wall of the nave, is a memorial tablet, now badly weathered, with an inscription which once read:

"Short was the notice Death me gave when I was summoned to my grave".

Sculpture and Statuary

There is one Holy Water stoop situated in the south wall of the nave just to the left of the main door. Displayed at Christmas time only is a delightful Nativity Scene with the Holy Family and others gathered at the crib with Mexican facial features and decorated with Mexican gold.

In addition to the bell tower mentioned earlier a pre-Reformation Sanctus bell hangs in its original position suspended from a yew beam on the altar side of the chancel arch. Cast in bronze it is devoid of any inscription, it has a hemispherical haunch and has three parallel lines on its shoulder and four near the rim. It is one of the very few pre-Reformation bells still in existence in the Vale of Glamorgan. It was rung at certain times, principally at the Sanctus and at the elevation of the consecrated host during Mass. It is still used during worship today.

According to the scholar and antiquarian, Iolo Morgannwg, who is buried in the churchyard at Flemingston, the great Welsh hero, Owain Glyndwr spent his last years in the Welsh St Donats area. This tradition tells of him living the life of a hermit under the name of 'Sion Goodfellow', the miner, and he is reportedly buried beneath the Sanctus bell in Welsh St Donats church.

Architectural Features

To the left of the east window is a niche with an ogee headed trefoil which formerly held a statue, or possibly a painting, given the shallowness of the niche. Cut into the sill of the window in the south wall of the chancel is a square drain piscina.

In the north east corner of the chancel at floor level is an effigy niche but the effigy is missing. In the same wall is an opening with steps leading up to a rood loft. On the nave side the recess is still in evidence, although long since filled in. On the south wall of the chancel is a priests door, now blocked off, although the original door still exists in the outside wall.

A very ancient custom practised in the churchyard of Welsh St Donats and some neighbouring parishes, was that of 'raising the summer birch'. A birch bough was bedecked with ribbons by the ladies of the parish, and on Easter Day their menfolk assisted them by lifting it up upon a cross in the churchyard. The birch was guarded for four days and nights for it was regarded as a disgrace for a parish to lose its birch, while a parish that succeeded in stealing a bedecked birch bough from another parish while retaining its own, was held in great esteem.

Until the end of the 19th century Welsh St Donats church was particularly noteworthy as being the only church in the Vale of Glamorgan to hold regular services in the Welsh language.

The church plate includes a silver chalice and cover. The paten is inscribed 'W.S.D. 1610'. The registers of baptisms, marriages and burials date from 1726.

A list of known Incumbents and other clergy who have served at Welsh St. Donats Parish Church.

August 27th 1703:

"I, David Davies, being to be licence'd to serve the cure of Welsh St. Donates, do willingly (etc) David Davies"

November 17th 1704:

I, Sam: Richards, being licenced to serve the cure of Welsh St Donetts, do willingly (etc) ... Sam: Richards"

The following is a list of clergy officiating there from 1762. The term 'curate' refers properly to the parish priest – the person having the cure (or the care) of the souls of the parish. It is also used colloquially to refer to the assistant clergy.

1762 George Williams, Curate

David Griffiths, Curate

1768 Thomas Rimbron, Curate

1770 Morgan Morgan, Curate

1773 Thomas Beare, Curate

1776 Thomas Jones, Clerk

1778 Thomas Hopkins, Curate

1813 Thomas Thomas, Vicar of St Hilary

1814 William James, Curate

1815 Evan Jones, Curate

1819 J B Williams, Curate

1820 Thomas Stacey, Curate

Afterwards, Rector of Gelligaer and Vicar of St Johns Cardiff

1822-49 John Powell, Curate

1850-68 T H Jones, Curate

1867-1922 (incomplete)

John Evans
E Jenkins, Curate
O B Price
Daniel Jones
W R Jenkins
Thomas Read
W J Williams
T Cynon Davies
John H C Morson
F A Binch
G M W T Jenkins
R J B Lucas
Gilbert Thomas
J Du Heaume
D N Davies
M C Gower-Williams

Mrs N Jenkins mentioned in her "Childhood Memories" that The Rev. Gilbert Williams was the Vicar in 1924. He succeeded The Rev Lemuel Hapkin James

Other clergy who have served Welsh St Donats church include:

Rev Collier
Rev Payne

From 1973 Welsh St Donats was grouped with Pendoylan and Canon A. John Lewis became the first Vicar of the current parish of Pendoylan with Welsh St. Donats

1969-81 A. John Lewis
1982-87 Brian Evans
1988-93 David Williams
1994- Edwin Counsell