

More treasures come to light at Llancarfan



CELEBRATED for its extraordinary wall paintings, St Cadoc's Church, Llancarfan found new fame last Thursday, when it revealed another remarkable treasure.

A beautiful intricately carved, gilded and mysterious reredos screen has been returned to its original beauty, over the last six months, thanks to work by three specialist conservators.

On Thursday, December 5, over 160 people gathered in the church to celebrate the end of the first major phase of conservation work in St Cadoc's Church, which was the subject of a £542K Heritage Lottery Grant in 2011, and viewed the newly conserved screen for the first time.

The mystery remains as to why this early 16th century screen turned up in a village church at all. Its splendour would be more fitted to a cathedral or abbey, and research suggests it started its life elsewhere.

Was it a refugee from the dissolution of the monasteries? A discarded glory from a grand cathedral? The whim of a rich local benefactor? Detective work continues.

The certainty is that - having been delicately cleaned and returned to glory by timber conservator Hugh Harrison,



along with conservation joiner Cameron Stewart and paint conservator Liz Cheadle, this elaborate carving has been transformed.

Formerly a rather mournful and dusty backdrop, it has emerged as a magnificent treasure, resplendent in its original mediaeval colours and gilding.

Hugh Harrison commented: "This work is most innovative in design, using colouring to create the effect of a myriad candles - the work is magnificent and it is the clever design which is the notable feature."

The screen now shares pride of place with the dramatic tableaux of St George and the Dragon, and the Seven Deadly Sins, which are still being painstakingly uncovered from under their 27 layers of lime-wash, on the walls of the church.

In an evening of hos-

pitality and illumination, there were fascinating talks by the reredos screen conservators, and also by historian Madeleine Gray, and wall painting conservator Jane Rutherford. These remarkable treasures have transformed St Cadoc's into one of the most intriguing churches in Wales.

Madeleine Havard, from Heritage Lottery Fund Wales, said how encouraged HLF had been by the success of the St Cadoc's project, not only for its extraordinary achievements, but as a great example of community involvement.

Pictures of the wall paintings were posted on the BBC news world wide website last wee, leading to a storm of response on Twitter - from Japan, North America, Canada, Brazil, Mexico, and Europe, expressing awe at the findings.

PENNY FELL



Another historical find uncovered at Llanccarfan church

Part of the restored reredos.



A RARE treasure in the small Vale church of St Cadoc's, Llanccarfan, will be unveiled for the first time next week.

The intricate, gilded early 16th Century reredos screen has been painstakingly returned to former glory by a team of three specialists, over the last six months.

It will be revealed at celebration evening to mark more than four years of major conservation work in the church.

This work included the discovery and restoration of medieval wall paintings of the St George and the Dragon and the Seven Deadly Sins and further dramatic detail of these paintings will also be unveiled during the evening.

A spokeswoman told *The GEM*: "The mystery remains as to why a work of the magnificence of the reredos is tucked away in a village church such as St Cadoc's. One theory is that this screen possibly began life elsewhere and only moved to Llanccarfan when it was 150-years-old, in the mid 1600s.

"Was it a refugee from the Dissolution of the Monasteries? A discarded glory from a grand abbey? The whim of a rich local benefactor? Detective work goes on..."

It is certain, though, that this historic screen can now take its place alongside St Cadoc's famous emerging wall paintings, making the church one of the most intriguing in Wales.

Conservation by the specialist team of Hugh Harrison (timber conservator), Cameron Stewart (conservation joiner) and Liz Cheadle (paint conservator), has transformed a neglected

treasure into an intricate thing of beauty, splendid in its original subtle colours.

Conservator Hugh Harrison said: "Canopy work like the reredos at Llanccarfan can be found in the choir in almost every cathedral and major church in England and Wales, but none of these grand arrays of woodwork are coloured and gilded as at Llanccarfan.

"This lively polychromatic scheme lifts this work to quite another level of sophistication. It is also unique in using simple metal brackets to display the ornate pinnacles in front of the general canopy spires as though they float by magic... a daring concept not found anywhere else."

The Archdeacon of Llandaff and Priest-in-Charge of Llanccarfan, Peggy Jackson, said: "Since work began in 2010, this conservation project has prompted visits by people from all over the world. We have been gratified by the support and funding help we have received, but we have also been touched by the enthusiasm and joy which the church has generated amongst its supporters and the wider public."

The presentation evening tonight (December 5) marks a turning point in the first major phase of conservation at St Cadoc's, a project generously supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund Wales, among other benefactors.

Visitors will have a chance to see how much these thrilling major tableaux have developed during recent conservation; and will hear how much more might be hidden behind layers of limewash and history.

Experts will unlock the secrets of St Cadoc's

25/11/99

EXPERTS from Cardiff University will visit St Cadoc's Church in Llancafán on December 9 to reveal what is believed to be a 14th century wall painting.

A large chunk of plaster will be removed from the church wall to uncover the church's secret.

Studies have shown that the painting has been covered by 43 layers of plaster and paint, which have been added over the centuries.

Sandwiched in between these 43 layers are believed to be two later paintings, and it will take painstaking work before the mystery can be solved and the jigsaw is complete.

EXCITED

The vicar of Llancafán, Reverend Malcolm Davies, said he was "very excited" by the latest discovery, which is only part of a Millennium project to restore the church to its former glory.

The church, a grade one listed building, dates back to the 12th century, but the village has strong ties to the roots of Christianity in this country. Llancafán was the site of a sixth century monastery, founded by St Cadoc, possibly on the site of church.

Another interesting feature is a new set of church bells. On December 14, the sound of church bells will be heard in the village for the first time in 15 years. A parish confirmation service will be given by the Bishop of Llandaff, the Right Reverend Barry Morgan, on that date to dedicate the new bells.

The four original bells were re-cast at the Whitechapel Bell Foundry in London in September. A total of six bells arrived at St Cadoc's at the begin-

ning of November, and they have now been re-hung in the church.

The company which cast the bells is believed to be the oldest company in continuous existence in the UK. The moulds used to make the bells consisted of a curious mixture of Chinese goat's hair, horse manure, Mansfield red sand and London clay.

The restoration of the bells cost more than £50,000, with half the money coming from donations and half from the Millennium Commission.

Reverend Davies said: "The response to the appeal has been outstanding, with donations coming not only from people in the parish, but from many parts of the country and abroad."

He paid tribute to the village's "community spirit" and described the church as "the heart of the village".

The refitting of the bells is the culmination of five years of restoration of the church, which has also included work on the roof and the church tower.

ONGOING

The work has been supported by CADW and Heritage lottery money, but villagers have raised more than £100,000 for the project.

Reverend Davies has made it his mission to restore the church to its former glory and hopes the work will be an ongoing process. "I want to get this church back to the way it was," he told THE GEM.

The church's newest feature is a weather vane - not a cockerel, but a stag, to signify St Cadoc's use of the animal in moving timbers to construct the building.

St Cadoc's Church will be involved in the village's Millennium celebrations, with a special service taking place from 11.30pm on December 31.

St. Cadoc's, Llancafán
November 1999