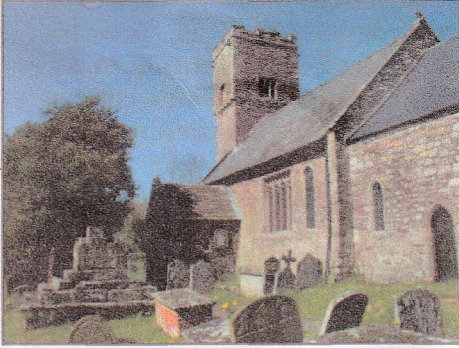


## Llanvetherine

### The Parish Church of Saint James the Elder



In about 1150 there was written the Book of Llandaff which gives many very interesting details of the Churches and parishes existing at that time, for until the Diocese of Monmouth was formed in the year 1921, this little Church was included in the Diocese of Llandaff. The

name means the Church of Saint Gwytherine, and it is said in the book that...

*'Cors and Morwyd gave the Church of Saint Gueithirin with three modii of land around it. After a time Cors on his own account gave another three modii above the road next to the other land already mentioned.'*

Land belonging to the Church in this way is commonly called Glebe. Three modii is equal to 27 acres, and it should be noted that the name of the Celtic Saint has been spelt another way. This gift of land is said to have been made when Nud was the Bishop of Llandaff, and he is indeed named among the Clerical Witnesses of the Gift. Bishop Nud is thought to have lived somewhere between 850 and 916, and if this is so, it can be said with a fair degree of certainty that a Church has existed on this site since about 150 years before the Norman Conquest. The present building does not date from that time of course, but there is very real proof that it is pre-Reformation. ⇨

Near the SE corner of the south wall is the little Priest's Door through which, in pre-Reformation days - that is, pre 16<sup>th</sup> Century, the priest of the parish entered the Church to say Mass. A little further along the same wall a tall semi-circular headed window bears the date 1703 which is presumably when it was put in. Opposite this are the remains of a very fine old Churchyard Cross of which the top is unfortunately missing.

In the Porch is a Holy Water Stoop. The bowl has been broken off, but here is another pre-Reformation feature.

In the Church itself there is a Piscina in the SE corner of the Nave near the Pulpit, and there is another in the south wall of the Sanctuary. Inside the Chancel Arch (restored in 1872 by a former Rector) is a door on the left behind the seats. At present this leads into a recess, but it was originally the door to the steps leading up to the Rood Loft. In the Chancel are two full length effigies of a former Rector and his wife. The Rev. David Powell, who died in 1621 after an incumbancy [sic] lasting 45 years, achieved considerable scholastic distinction, being an M.A. and Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford. His inscription refers also to his son Valentine, another M.A. and Rector of Llanvetherine. Mary Powell, wife of David, is depicted wearing a Welsh hat and her hands clasped as if in deep prayer. Her feet are curiously placed at right angles to her ankles. Mr Fred Hando, a local historian, records in his book on the County of Monmouthshire, the pleasure his visit to Llanvetherine gave him, and in his description of Mrs Powell draws attention to the position of her ring:

*'The ring on the second finger of her right hand reminds us that until 1549 the wedding ring was worn on the fourth finger of the right hand.'*

Another flat stone in the Chancel shows the figure of a priest with one arm upraised in blessing. The carving is rather crude,

suggesting great age and the work of a not very skilled mason. It was found buried deep under the Chancel during excavations carried out in 1750 and is said to be a carving of Saint Gwytherin himself.

Very little is known of this old Celtic Saint – some authorities say that he was the son of Dingat ap Nud Heal, who lived in the 6<sup>th</sup> Century, and there is another Church dedicated to him in North Wales in the old County of Denbigh.

The most ancient feature of the Church appears to be the Tower, the upper part of which projects over the lower. The cradle is made to hold three bells, but there are actually only two, dated 1582 and 1653 respectively.

The Churchyard slopes gently to the South where it is bounded by a small brook, a tributary of the River Trothy. Like most rural Churchyards it contains much of historical interest on its old tombstones. Some of these are so ancient that the inscription is barely readable, while others are of more recent times. For all who are buried there the Churchyard makes a tranquil and quiet resting place.

*'Beneath those rugged elms, that yew tree's shade,  
Where heaves the turf in many a mouldering heap,  
Each in his narrow cell forever laid,  
The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep.'*

Thomas Gray, 1716 –1771



*This description transcribed directly July 2003 from a leaflet written by the late Mrs Margaret Francis (d. 2005), whose Remains now lie in the Churchyard.*

Welcome to the Church of St James the Elder, Llanwetherine. Please enjoy the Peaceful surroundings. If you wish, a small contribution will help to maintain the Building.