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## St Tysilio and St Mary's Church

The present church is a magnificent building, standing on the site of three earlier churches, and claims a link with the Princes of Powys. After the arrival of Gwyddfarch around 550, a 'clas' or Celtic monastery was established in Meifod, which developed as a mother church, making Meifod a centre of Celtic culture for over a thousand years.

The first church on this site was dedicated to Gwyddfarch, and tiles from his church were uncovered in the 1870's when foundations for a Congregational Chapel were being dug in the churchyard. These are now in the Powysland Museum in Welshpool.



from the site of the present church at Meifod. Around 621, a second church was built in Meifod, near to Gwyddfarch's Church and dedicated to Tysilio. Cynddelw, the twelfth century poet, describes it as having "cloisters with towering azure spires". During Tysilio's lifetime, Meifod became a place of pilgrimage after a miracle was performed by St Crediael.

### St Tysilio

Tysilio was the second son of Brochwel Ysgythrog (the father of Cynog and Dogfan). The palace of Brochwel Ysgythrog (Brochwel of the tusks because of his protruding teeth) was on the site of the old church of St Chad's in Shrewsbury, and his summer residence was at Mathrafal, three kilometres

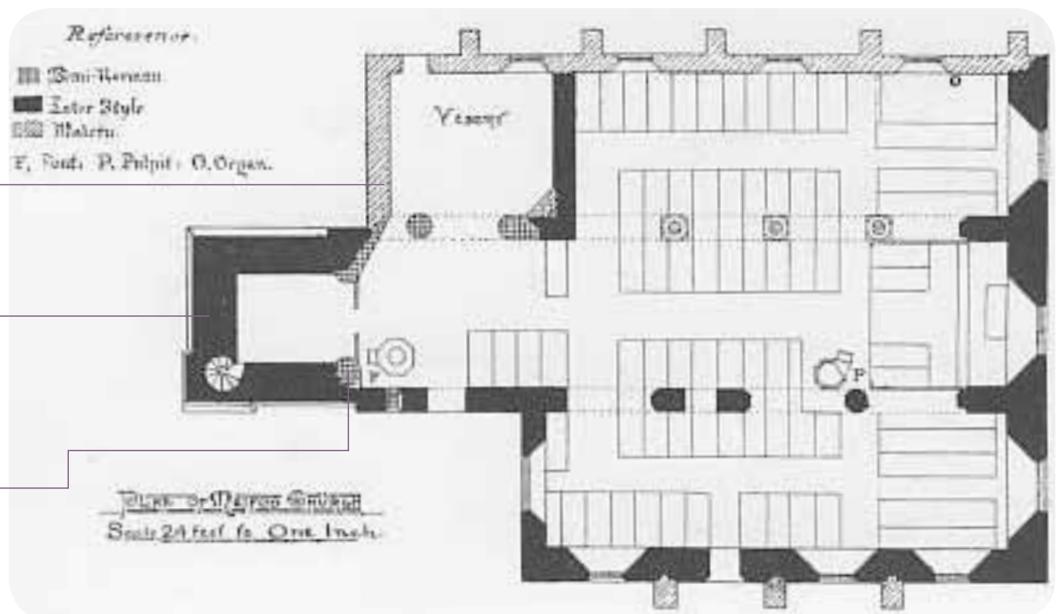
### The building

The church that survives today is impressive, both in its size, and for the fascinating 'layers' of historic fabric that can be found throughout the stone walls and the interior fittings. The plan below dates from 1877, after the final additions were made to the building by the Victorians.

The diagonal lines show the Victorian additions

The solid black areas date from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries

The vertical and horizontal lines show the few remains of the earlier Norman church



Plan of the church by Thomas Hancock in 1877. Montgomeryshire Collections Volume 10.



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### Early church

The visitor enters the church through the south door. This is one of the earliest parts of the building and dates from the twelfth century. The two external arches above the main entrance and the internal arches facing the entrance, once formed an arcade in the twelfth century church, but were filled in during the fourteenth century when the present doorway was created.



The red stone of the internal arches is not local to the area, suggesting the church may have been built as a showpiece of wealth and power by the Princes of Powys.



### Fourteenth and fifteenth centuries

The main body of the present church was built during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The square tower with battlements, small belfry windows and gargoyles is typical of an architectural style popular at the time. The main doorway and large perpendicular tracery windows at the east end of the nave (the main body of the church) and south aisle are also typical of this period.



### Nineteenth century

The north aisle of the church was originally a 'lean-to' with a wooden arcade. Around 1849, the timber lean-to was removed and rebuilt in stone, prompting a visitor in 1855 to call it "a modern addition".



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### Victorian restoration



The woodwork around the door of the vestry (facing you as you enter the church) is thought to have originally formed part of a medieval rood screen, recorded as being in the church in the nineteenth century and being moved during the extensive restoration of 1871/72. Other remains of the rood screen can be seen behind the altar.

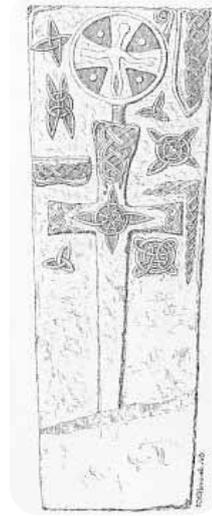


Thomas Hancock's sketch of the church in 1877, after the Victorian restoration, from the Montgomeryshire Collections Volume 10



### Items of interest

#### Carved Celtic stone



This church is said to be the burial place of princes. A carved tapering stone slab was found beneath the floor near the chancel in 1871. The carvings are interesting

as they do not follow one clear pattern of design. At the top is a Maltese cross, showing Christ crucified, above a Latin cross encircled with knot work. The foliage around the border is thought to be an Irish design with Celtic plaits. Viking knots of animals from Norse tradition are incorporated into the cross. The Viking features suggest the stone may be as old as the ninth or tenth century, but there are also suggestions that it was the coffin lid of Madog ap Meredith who died in 1159.

#### Stained glass



The majority of the stained glass dates from the 1871 restoration. However, the unusual heraldic panels of glass inserted into windows on the north and south aisles, are earlier and relate to the families who donated money to the church. They were made by in 1838 by David Evans.

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### Font



The font dates from the fifteenth century rebuilding of the church. There are initials carved on to one side.

### Organ



The gothic cased pipe organ was built in Chelsea in 1840 and was installed in this church in 1877.

### Churchyard

The churchyard is thought to be the largest in Wales. It is semi-circular and is bordered by the stream on the south side and the boundary wall and road on the north side. 'Church Walk' runs along the western edge of the churchyard. The name is thought to relate to its role as a causeway between the early church and the vicarage during frequent flooding of the valley.

Until the mid 1950s, the churchyard was fenced into two areas and sheep grazed on the northern half.

The large open space created by the churchyard is a distinctive feature of Meifod village today, providing a beautiful setting for the church, and a place for wildlife and for people to enjoy. As well as the yew trees that one would expect to find in a churchyard, a number of other trees planted by a previous vicar with an enthusiasm for arboretums have reached maturity. The most striking is the wellingtonia, in the north of the churchyard.

**Further information about the church can be found in the church guidebook.** The CPAT Montgomeryshire Churches Survey: Historic Environment Record 75 gives details of the fascinating archaeology of the churchyard.