



3

St Dogfan's Church

St Dogfan's Church is sited on the southern edge of the village where it was founded as a "clas" or Celtic monastery. Llanrhaeadr was the administrative centre of Powys Fadog Province and the church would have played an important role in the province. A carved Celtic wheel cross (Cwgan stone), on a carved stone probably used as a coffin lid dating from the ninth or tenth century, was found in the wall during the late Victorian restoration. The church is famous as the place where Bishop William Morgan translated the Bible into Welsh in 1588.

St Dogfan

Dogfan (or Doefan) was the son of Brychan Brycheiniog, a prince of Powys in the fifth century who became a missionary to the area around Llanrhaeadr where he led a simple life of self-denial. His name is associated with a plant called Mwyar Doewan (Dogfan's berries) that thrives on the Berwyn mountains. According to a tradition passed down by Berwyn shepherds, the annual wage to St Dogfan was a quart of Berwyn berries. It became a custom to present the vicar of the parish with a quart of the berries on the morning of St Dogfan's festival day (July 13th). Whoever got there first was let off paying their tithe for a year!

The building

Originally the church was a long single chamber. The two side bays were probably added in the fourteenth century. The arcade arches were remodelled during the 1880's restoration. The date of the rough base of the tower is unknown; the current tower dates from the early eighteenth century and survived later alterations.



The south elevation and tower in 1872, before restoration, and today. The tower is all that survives of the rustic charm of the earlier south bay, porch and vestry. The dormer window has gone and the windows throughout have been enlarged in the style of Victorian decorated.



Victorian restoration

By 1872, all the windows, apart from the east window of the north bay had been removed in a restoration, and the pulpit was moved to its current position. The south bay was extended and a porch was added to the north elevation. Internal alterations included raising the floor of the chancel, removal of the box pews, west gallery and hearse house, and the construction of a partition between the tower base and nave. A new lectern, desk and pulpit were installed. The west porch is panelled with sections of the box pews, some of which bear coats of arms.



3 St Dogfan's Church

Interior features

The rear pew on the north elevation is 30 feet long and thought to be the longest in Montgomeryshire!

According to local tradition, the north aisle roof was thatched. When the roof was repaired, the timber beam supporting the roof was reused to construct a gallery at the west end of the nave (the main body of the church). This gallery was removed around 1880.

The Cwgan stone

was found in the church during the 1850's restoration. It is thought to date from the ninth century and was then decorated at a later date as a covering for a tomb in the church, possibly for Cwgan, son of Ethelstan (a prince of Powys) who died in the eleventh century.



Font: the most striking feature of the octagonal font is the date 1663, surrounded by three sets of initials. 'RIV' below the date are most likely to be those of Richard Jervis, vicar from 1661-1675. The initials either side are probably the churchwardens. The stone is a local grey stone. The base on which it stands is likely to be the base of an earlier font destroyed during the Commonwealth, a decade earlier.



Pulpit: The timber pulpit was originally fixed to the nearby pillar and was moved and lowered to its current position before 1872. It incorporates two small panels from an earlier pulpit. The tradition is that these panels date from a pulpit used by William Morgan, but they are in the style of eighteenth century inlaid panels, and so may not be Tudor after all!



Organ: the fine three manual and pedal pipe organ by Walter James Bird & Son of Birmingham was installed in 1906 and dedicated to the memory of William Morgan.



The Wagon roof ceiling above the chancel is thought to date from the fifteenth century.



Welsh Bible: A hand printed copy of the Bible as translated by William Morgan in 1558 is on loan to St Dogfan's Church from the University Library of Wales, Aberystwyth.



3 St Dogfan's Church

The people:

William Morgan



William Morgan was born at Ty Mawr Wybrnant, near Betws-y-Coed and educated at St John's College, Cambridge. He was vicar of Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant and Llanarmon Mynydd Mawr between 1578 and 1595, and during this period he was

also rector of Llanfyllin and Pennant Melangell. He became Bishop of Llandaff in 1601, and Bishop of St Asaph until his death in 1604.

Translating the Bible into Welsh at this critical time is credited as saving the language. Welsh was being fostered by others, such as the Bards, but it was considered a hindrance by some Welsh gentry, who saw the language as culturally inferior and a political disadvantage.

In 1585 Gruffydd Robert published 'Y Drych Cristnogol' (The Christian Mirror), and blamed the Welsh gentry for not valuing their language, pretending they had forgotten it, allowing it to be "contaminated by the English language". The translation of such an authoritative book as the Bible into Welsh, restored the dignity and status of the language. In his foreword to Silas Evans' History of the Parish Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant, W.T. Havard, Bishop of St Asaph describes Morgan's translation as "a means of rescuing the soul of Wales".

William Morgan's parishioners were less impressed during the process, and complained that the translation work was causing him to neglect them. As a result, Morgan had to appear before the Archbishop of Canterbury who, after questioning him, was so impressed that he made him his own chaplain and gave him the money and support he needed to finish the translation!

The title page of William Morgan's Welsh translation of the Bible in 1588 is shown below. Verses from 2 Timothy 3, 14 & 15 are quoted:



Remind them of this, and warn them before God, that they are to avoid wrangling over words, which does no good but only ruins those who are listening. Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth.

Beneath this it reads: 'Imprinted at London by the Deputies of Christopher Barker, printer to the Queen's most excellent Majesty, 1588'

William Worthington

William Worthington was vicar of St Dogfan's from 1747 to 1778 and a Canon of St Asaph and York. He was a popular and generous vicar and is responsible for the road from the village to the waterfall. He is buried under the chancel of this church.

Walter Davies (Gwallter Mechain)

Walter Davies was born in Llanfechain and left school at the age of 12 to be an apprentice cooper. His interest in Welsh poetry and language gained him the support of some prominent Welshmen and in 1790 he published his Treatise on Freedom. The publication of this provided him with the means to study at Oxford. He became a famous poet and historian of Welsh industry, and an Eisteddfod adjudicator. He was vicar of St Dogfan's from 1837 until his death in 1849. He is buried in the south side of the churchyard.

3 St Dogfan's Church

Churchyard

The churchyard covers 2½ acres and is an irregular shape, suggesting it has been added to over the years. It contains the graves of five previous vicars of the parish, the most famous being Gwallter Mechain (Rev'd Walter Davies).

At one time there were two lychgates, at the eastern and western entrances to the churchyard. The main entrance to the church is now by a more recent lychgate on the north side, dating from 1954, on which memorials to William Morgan are fixed, dating from 1988 and 2004.



The churchyard supports a wide variety of wild flowers from spring to autumn. The grass is not mown in some areas until after the flowers set seed.

There are many other items of significance in St Dogfan's Church, and information about these is readily available on the guide sheets fixed to various parts of the church. Further information about the above characters, and others associated with the church and the village can be found in Silas Evans' History of the Parish of Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochant.

Images from St Dogfan's Church



Reredos



Bishop's Chair