

Llantwit Major - Notes

Town Hall

This building is similar in many ways to those of the ancient boroughs of Cowbridge and Cardiff. Its construction is usually attributed to Gilbert de Clare, Lord of Glamorgan, who died in 1295, but manorial records suggest that it was built in the fifteenth century as the administrative centre of the manor. This was where the court leet met to organise duties and collect rents. Weekly markets and the fairs were also controlled from here and it is possible that the ground floor was used as an area of stalls.

During the reign of Henry VIII it was referred to as a guildhall but that was unlikely as the only industry in the area which would have merited a guild was glove making. The building was renovated in the late sixteenth century and then rented out for various purposes. Its lower floor was used variously as a school, a slaughterhouse and a lock-up for the local constable, whilst the upper floor was used as a church house and for vestry meetings etc.

In the 1830's the church leased the upper rooms to the Oddfellows who carried out repairs and kept it in good order. Such was their control that on occasions the Church sought permission from the Oddfellows to use the hall. When it was taken over by the newly created parish council, it became the centre for entertainment in the town. Plays, meetings, concerts and dances were regularly held and it was even used as a cinema.

The Town Hall is listed at 15th century, but is best described as "medieval", it could have been between the 13th and 14th centuries.

Untruth: The building led to the derivation of the expression *Des-ig-ne Fl-aw* or as it is known today Design Flaw. When the architects' drawings were submitted to the builders they omitted the interior stairs, hence the need to the exterior stairs to be added at a later date. It took five years for the m to discover the error.

St Illtud's Church

Old Church

The university of the Saints of the early Celtic Church.

Britain's oldest Centre of learning (Guinness Book of Records).

St Illtud arrived in ~500. Achieved his fame as a teacher, sending his students out all over Celtic Britain, Ireland and Brittany. Was described at the time as 'the most learned of all the Britons'.

Early Christians believed man could only approach God in isolated places and not in towns hence monasteries and alike grew up in the countryside.

The community here would have been a church, a school, guest rooms, hospice, monastery, workshop - masons were trained here.

Monks divided into 24 groups, each responsible for an hour's worship each day so there was worship around the clock. The only other places this is thought to have happened in UK are Glastonbury and Salisbury.

Wooden buildings - hence nothing remains.

St Illtud's was said to be possibly a student of St Germanus of Auxerre - though unlikely they ever met in person. (Mention St German's in Adamsdown Cardiff and St Illtud's on Crwys Road).

The legacy of the school however has led to both myths and legends of the area to surface.

"There's a legend about St Patrick being here," said Philip. "But Patrick couldn't have been here because he's too early, much earlier in fact, and there's no evidence whatsoever."

However, Wales' patron saint, St David, is mentioned in documents studied by historians.

"St David is mentioned in some of the later documents which are from pupils at Llanilltud Fawr but it's difficult to say for certain however because the Lives of David don't actually mention him being here at Llantwit but it's lives of others which mentioned David.

"So we can't prove it but we can't disprove it. It's nice to say St David was here though."

Untruth: One story passed down through the generations tells of St David and St Patrick being here at the same time and during one of the study breaks, holding an arm-wrestling duel to decide which of them went to Ireland and who stayed in Wales. St Patrick lost.

The Stones

Date from the 9th to the 11th centuries.

Largely commissioned by and for the region's kings, noblemen and abbots, the Stones were effectively 'expensive and conspicuous gifts to the monastery

Houelt Cross

Probably dates from mid-late 9th century and is one of the most beautiful examples of a 'wheel cross' in Wales. 'Artistically, this is the finest of all the Celtic Christian carved stones in the country' states the book - Penguin Buildings of Wales

'In the name of God the Father, (and of the Son - missing) and of the Holy Ghost'. 'This cross Houelt prepared for the soul of Res his father'.

Samson Cross or Illtud Cross

Found in the churchyard but when they lifted it up there were two skeletons underneath.

Inscriptions are like pages of a book.

Front left: Samson placed this cross Front Right: For his sole. Samson the King, Samuel

Rear left (for the sole of) Illtud

Samson Pillar

Discovered in 1789 by Edward Williams (Iolo Morganwg) poet, antiquarian and mason, who was working as a stonemason in the churchyard. He had been told how the stone had previously collapsed and buried local youth known as Will the Giant.

Might be the earliest inscribed standing stone in Britain.

Erected by Abbot Samson for his king Iuthahelo, who is thought to be Ither, King of Gwent died 848.

Cross Shaft

Regarded as one of Wales' finest monuments - because of the quality of the carving.

Cylindrical Pillar

10th or 11th century. Has a groove down one side - therefore may have been one of a pair, possibly to hold a screen.

Untruth: The cylindrical pillar was found at the top of the churchyard. In order to get it into the Galilee chapel they rolled it down the slope. When they got it in they noticed it didn't have any moss on it and hence was derived the expression 'a rolling stone gathers no moss'.

In ~1093 Robert Fitzhamon (of Cardiff Castle fame) became Lord of Glamorgan and overran the Vale of Glamorgan from his base at Cardiff Castle. He rewarded his '12 knights' with estates but kept Llantwit Major for himself as he liked it so much and to supply his castle with grain.

He founded Tewkesbury Abbey and from then on St Illtud's came under Tewkesbury Abbey. After the dissolution of the monasteries it came under Gloucester Cathedral. It did not return to being under Welsh management until dissolution of the Church in Wales in 1920.

The only remnants of the Norman church are the font and the arch above the inner porch of the West Chapel.

The church has undergone many changes. The original Norman West church was larger than the present building and cruciform in shape. This was levelled in the 13th century and the east chapel added.

West chapel had an earthen floor. Parishioners worshiped in the West chapel and the clergy, etc in the East.

After the reformation the church paintings were whitewashed over and other decorations removed.

John Wesley visited in 1777: I have not seen either so large or so handsome a church since I left England..... abundantly the most beautiful and most spacious church in Wales. It was sixty yards long but one end is now in ruins.

With the growth in nonconformity, the worshipers at St Illtud's fell and the West Chapel ceased to be used. It was described by a visitor in 1882 as a gruesome place indeed with graves present and "..... an indescribable faint odour oppresses us."

1888 : West chapel paved, Celtic stones bought inside. wall paintings exposed, buttresses built on the East Chapel to make it safe.

1950s: Present pews introduced. Most recent change is the rebuilding of the Galilee Chapel.

Wooden roof supports in the West Chapel - with heads and family emblems.

Medieval statuette of a virgin and child, rediscovered in 1899, now on display in one of the South windows.

The Jesse Niche

A rare treasure from the 13th century - representing the ancestry of Christ. it would at one time have been painted and possibly an altar piece.

The wall painting: St Christopher.

Untruth: When removing the old whitewash from the walls one inscription they came across read 'Patrick was here - and I actually beat David at arm wrestling' They quickly covered it up.

The Gatehouse and Columbarium (dovecot)

These are the only surviving buildings from the Grange belonging to Tewkesbury Abbey. The abbey had been given the land, shortly before he died, by Robert Fitzhamon, Earl of Gloucester and first Norman Lord of Glamorgan. The grange was run by lay brethren and the revenues remitted to Tewkesbury. The Gatehouse, which dates from the fourteenth century, was the main entrance into the farm complex and may have served as the Bailiff's dwelling or guest house. The archway, though blocked up, is clearly visible and the height of the gable walls suggest that the building was once thatched.

The dovecot dates from the same period. Doves and pigeons were not only a source of food during winter time, their feathers were also used in pillows etc, and their droppings were spread on the land as manure. The circular form of the building enabled the maximum number of nesting places to be constructed in the walls and internal wooden platforms were usually included to give easy access to collect eggs.

Untruth: The problem with dovecot of course is that you can't stop other birds coming in. In early days a ship's parrot escaped and made their home here. This caused embarrassment when Robert Fitzhamon one day visited from Cardiff Castle, went into the dovecote to be greeted by a squawk of 'Who's a pretty boy then'.

Old Police Station

When the Glamorgan Constabulary was established in 1841, a constable was allocated to Llantwit Major, reporting to the sergeant in Cowbridge. The police station was built a few years later and originally comprised a single storey with a living room and kitchen in the front with cells at the rear. In 1876 a second floor with four bedrooms was added with zinc foul air flues in the walls of the back bedrooms from the cells. The building remained in use until 1928 when the new station was built in Wesley Street, closer to the centre of the town.

White Heart Inn

This is described as an end-entry house built in the late sixteenth century. As with The Old Swan it is unclear when exactly it became an inn, though again tokens were issued under its name in the eighteenth century. There are claims that it was once a court house with a room reserved for the judge, but these cannot be substantiated.

Old Swan Inn

This was probably a substantial local dwelling built in the sixteenth century. When it became an inn however is open to speculation.

In the mid seventeenth century it belonged to Edward Maddock, who was permitted to mint his own tokens as there was a shortage of coin at this time. This implies that he was operating either a shop or inn. Various celebrities have availed themselves of its hospitality, including Randolph Hearst and Marion Davies and their Hollywood friends who stayed with them at St Donats Castle.