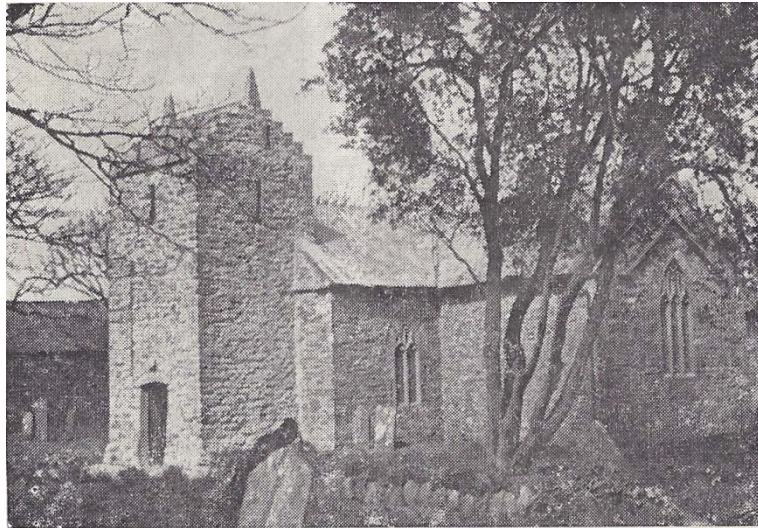


In the Steps of St Rhian

A History of the Church and Parish of LLANRHIAN

By Kathleen Lewis, M.A.



TOWER AND WEST END OF LLANRHIAN CHURCH.

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K. L.,

Llanrhian Vicarage, Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire.

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IN THE STEPS OF ST RHIAN

The rugged coast of Pembrokeshire, St. David's Cathedral hidden in the hollow, and no less the ancient church of Llanrhian with its sturdy tower, all evoke memories of that golden age known to Church historians as "The Age of the Saints." By 325 A.D. the British Church was already sufficiently well established to send representatives to the Council of Nicea, but it was in the 5th and 6th centuries, after the withdrawal of the Roman forces, that she blossomed into all her glory and ways were trodden through the length and breadth of the land by saints afire with the love of their Lord.

The Celtic world was wide; it included not only Wales, Ireland and Scotland, but Cornwall and Cumberland and Brittany. Throughout all these parts, the family of the Celtic Church was to be found, and there was fellowship and constant traveling to and fro. These hardy Christians of the early days thought nothing of braving the perils of the deep in small, frail crafts, or of tramping hundreds of miles through dark, trackless woods infested with wild boar, across rushing mountain torrents, past the strongholds of hostile chieftains, all to meet with like-minded Celts and to spread the Gospel in their native land. Their equipment as they travelled consisted of three items : a stout staff to help them on their way, a leather satchel in which they carried their precious hand-written books, and a square, tongueless bell which they struck with their staff to call people to worship. The services to which people were summoned were mostly in the open air, as had been the druids' rituals which they replaced. Baptism was commonly administered in lakes and streams, and the tail trunks and branches of forest trees were the arches of their churches.

The gateway to Southern Ireland and to the western sea routes was St. Davids, for at Porthmawr, or Whitesands, several trade-routes converged and travellers could embark for Ireland, for Cornwall, and even for further afield. Here saints, both known and unknown, would meet to worship and study. Learning and the arts were centred in the monastic settlements and the Vale of Roses was already famous for culture and Christianity before the time of Dewi.

We can glean some idea of the journeys of the saints by the existence of ancient inscribed stones marking sacred spots or early Christian burials; Pembrokeshire is particularly rich in Ogham stones, stones with early Irish characters, and these prove the close link which existed between Wales and Ireland. The extent of the journeys is also suggested by the place-names of Wales. When a saint of the Celtic Church prevailed upon a local chieftain to grant him land on which to erect an oratory, or prayer cell, he would first construct an earthen rampart and the area thus enclosed was the "llan." Inside the llan would be erected a hut of wattle and daub, simple outside but richly decorated within, and this would be the church where Mass was offered for the people; other smaller huts served as cells for the saint and his companions, and the llan was referred to thereafter by the name of the saint who had founded it, or of the saint whose disciple he was.

Thus a glance at the map of Wales gives an idea of the widely distant places visited by any particular saint; Llanddewi indicates a foundation of St. David or his pupils, Llangadoc or Llangattock foundations of Cadoc and his pupils, and so on. Only later, with the Normans, came the custom of choosing Biblical dedications and many ancient shrines were rededicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary (Llanfair) or to St. Peter (Llanbedr).

RHIAN?

Who was the saint who travelled northwards along the coast from St. Davids and founded his llan, a shrine of prayer and devotion, in the spot where Llanrhian Parish Church stands today ? Was he an unknown saint by the name of Rian, or Ryan, as the earliest documents spell the name ? Was he Rein, or Rhun, 'son of Brychan Brycheiniog whose children are recalled in various Pembrokeshire dedications at Llangledwin, Clydey, Llanfyrnach, Dinas, Nevern and others, and whose dedications are said to be among the earliest in Wales? Was he indeed Reanus, Abbot of the 7th century, as has been commonly assumed? Or is the name

perhaps descriptive rather than personal? Rian was an old Irish word for a trackway and Llanrian might refer to the church on the trackway, were it not that every Celtic church could have been so described. Could it be the Church of the Little King (rhi = king, an = little), recalling some local chieftain who had embraced the Christian faith? Another suggested derivation is the Welsh word "rhiain" for a maiden, in which case the dedication might be to the Blessed Virgin; this, however, would indicate a later dedication, nor is it considered etymologically possible.

Of the above suggestions Rein, son of Brychan, is perhaps one of the most attractive for although the stories concerning the family of Brychan are largely legendary and based on the apocryphal Iolo MSS, nevertheless they provide a vivid sketch of a warrior chieftain, Rhain Dremrudd, the red-eyed second son of Brychan, who lived in the fifth century and through whom later kings of Bryncheiniog traced their descent from Brychan Rhain, Rein (Regin) or Rhun is said to have been killed with his sister Tydfil when defending the bridge at Pont Run, outside Merthyr Tydfil. His death is commemorated on August 23rd. The connection of the family of Brychan with Pembrokeshire has been disputed, but a number of church dedications in the county would appear to establish a link. It is certainly probable that members of his family travelled to and from his native Ireland and in so doing they would necessarily pass through Pembrokeshire. Sir John Rhys, in an article published in the *Archaeologia Cambrensis* of 1898, produced further evidence from ancient stones found in neighbouring parishes to Llanrhian; one is inscribed with the name DOBAGNI which he identifies with Dubhan or Dogvan, supposed son of Brychan; another reads NEFI which could represent the name of Neffei who is also found in some of the lists of Brychan's sons; the inscription on the third stone has been deciphered as PAANI or RAANI and this is believed by Mr. J. J. Evans of St. Davids to be Raganus or Regin, son of Brychan, and the Rhian of Llanrhian Church.

Modern scholarship, however, questions the validity of this evidence. Philologists declare that neither the "ai" of Rhain, nor the "ei" of Regin could develop into the "ia" or "ya" which appear consistently in all the early spellings of the place-name. The most one can say, therefore, with any certainty is that the founder of the Llan of Rhian was some Celtic saint of the Age of the Saints, the 5th or 6th century, who is probably unknown and unrecorded. The early dating of the Christian site is deduced partly from its position and the rich historical tradition of the district, partly from the obscurity of its founder, Rhian. In his obscurity Rhian may be compared with the apostles Nathaniel and Matthias, of whom nothing is definitely known other than their name; and as the Unknown warrior buried in Westminster Abbey represents all his fellow warriors, so does Rhian stand for the countless numbers of Celtic saints who fought a good fight, who witnessed to the light of the Gospel in the darkness of pagan Britain, and who built up for us that rich heritage which is ours today in Wales. The Patronal Festival is observed on November 12th, the day which the Welsh Calendar allots to All Saints of Wales.

The parish of Llanrhian contains other links with the early Celtic saints. The hamlet of Llanon bears the name of the mother of Dewi, but her exact connection with the spot is unknown; her associations in north west Pembrokeshire, however, are well known, for she is said to be the daughter of a chieftain, Gynyr of Caerfawch, and her well and chapel are still to be seen on the cliffs outside St. Davids. Ynys Barri, or Barry Island, is a reminder of the Irish bishop Finbar, or Barry, who is said to have sailed from there to Ireland in Dewi's boat; the boat bore the figure-head of a horse and the legend thereby arose that Finbar rode David's favourite horse across the sea. Finbar died on September 25th about the year 560.

It is said that in Roman times the promontory of Dewisland was one of the most thickly populated areas of the country, and a glance at the Ordnance Survey map reveals a wealth of ancient associations. A tumulus is indicated in the Bickney field, and a scone c_rcie in a field (O.S. 453) marked as "Llain y Sibedau." Local tradition has it that Christians were taken to Llain y Sibedau to be slain at some unspecified period, though the location of the spot is said to be a different field (O.S. 413) from the one so named on the map. The cross roads at Croesgoch (Red Cross) are believed to have received their name from a battle fought there, which caused the roads to "run red with blood." This alleged battle may explain the

ancient burial ground which was discovered in 1800 when some stone coffins were turned up by the plough. One contained the skeleton of an exceptionally tall man and a sword of corresponding dimensions, "of such a length as not to admit of being sheathed by the tallest man of those parts," says Fenton. The site is known as "Parc y Fynwent " (Burial Ground) (O.S. 383), and is now occupied by a new housing estate. Other old tombstones have been found in the vicinity.

Not far from Croesgoch, at Mesur-y-dorth (the Measure of the Loaf), a rough pillar stone is built into the wall at the roadside. It is incised with a Latin ring cross which scholars attribute to the 7th to 9th centuries. Chancellor J. W. James of Bangor says that it may possibly have been an old pagan stone, the object of superstitious veneration, which was later "baptised" into Christianity by the addition of the cross within the circle. Its Christian use could have been that of a preaching cross, or it may simply have been one of many marking the Pilgrims' Way to St. Davids. The very name of Mesur-y-dorth suggests a centre of distribution of bread for the pilgrims as they approached their journey's end at Dewi's shrine.

FABRIC OF THE CHURCH

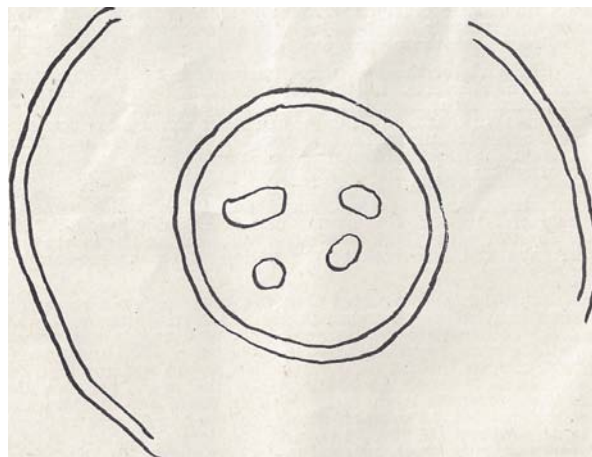
The actual church of Llanrhian must have seen many changes through the centuries. Of its earlier forms we can only speculate. The original beehive shaped cell of wattle and daub was probably followed by a somewhat larger wooden structure. The first part to be built of stone was undoubtedly the tower which is stated in the Inventory of Ancient Monuments to date from the 13th century. It is one of a line of old church towers stretching along the north coast of Pembrokeshire and around Cardigan Bay, and including St. Davids, Newport, Nevern and Cilgerran. Professor Tyrrell Green describes them as "strongholds for coast defence" and as "defensible places of refuge in case of raids by rovers from the sea." The upper storey of Llanrhian tower commands a view of Porthgain harbour where pirates and raiders might have been expected to approach. The low, solid form of the tower has all the appearance of a stronghold with the narrow, slit-like windows, the stepped gables of the saddleback roof and the spread of the walls at the base. It seems almost certain that the tower once stood alone; this is suggested by a study of the masonry which reveals slit-like apertures on the north, west and south sides, but on the east, an opening large enough to give access to the belfry, or upper storey of the tower. This opening had been partially filled up since it was on a level with the ceiling of the present nave and completely inaccessible, and the slit in the north wall had been replaced by a door to provide a new means of entrance to the belfry. When access was originally gained through the opening in the east wall, there must either have been no nave adjoining, or else an extremely low building of which the apex of the roof was lower than the present eaves.

The walls of the tower are nearly three foot in thickness, and the apertures which are mere slits on the exterior broaden to about a yard on the inside. The floor of the belfry is unusual in that both its upper and lower surfaces are concave, presumably to strengthen the structure. Two holes had been bored in the floor and thick wooden hubs of cartwheels inserted to allow the bell rope to pass through. Massive ancient oak beams, which must have survived the passage of many centuries, bear the weight of the bell on which can be deciphered the following inscription : JOHN PERKINS, R.P.T.M , BELL 1697. John Perk.ns was probably the bell founder, and R.P. and T.M. may well be the initials of the churchwardens of the time.

In 1903 it was reported that the tower required re-roofing and repairs were undertaken in 1904. A crack in the west wall of the church gave rise to anxiety in 1960 and it was feared that the whole tower might have to be taken down and rebuilt. This, however, proved quite impossible as the structure was so solid that it defied demolition. Only the upper part, as far as the roof of the nave, could be taken down, and all the walls were repointed. The aperture in the north wall was restored to its original slit-like form, and the larger doorway in the east wall once more opened up to give access to the belfry from above the ceiling of the nave in which a trap-door was placed over the centre of the nave. The masons engaged in the work were able to recover from among the stone work all the original shaped quoin stones

for the northern slit and to replace them in their original position. Removal of plaster during renovation revealed an interesting feature in the lower part of the tower which now forms the porch, for a double arch was uncovered over the inner door. The upper arch is probably a retaining arch, intended to strengthen the structure.

When the upper part of the walls was taken down, a number of stones were found bearing roughly incised markings, some of which were thought to be Ogham inscriptions. Unfortunately, none were clear enough to be satisfactorily deciphered. The stone is of local origin, from Tremynydd and Abereiddy. An interesting piece of Abereiddy stone was discovered, built into the wall, bearing very distinct fossilisation of the Ordovician system. Although such stones are not uncommon at Abereiddy, such a fine specimen is rare. Most remarkable of all the stones discovered was one built into the base of a wall on the north side of the church, near the tower. It is clearly incised with a double circle containing four pits in the centre. This has been identified by Dr. Savory of the National Museum of Wales, Cardiff, as a cross-incised slab of the 7th to 9th centuries, probably roughly wrought by a local mason. He believes it to be part of a monument which had been broken up, perhaps by the Anglo-Normans who despised such slabs, and its incorporation in the wall of the church proves the existence of a Christian Church on the site at a much earlier date. Archaeological evidence of this nature is particularly valuable relating to periods for which no documentary evidence can possibly exist.



CROSS-INCISED SLAB. 7th to 9th CENTURY.

According to the Inventory of Ancient Monuments (1920), the church was entirely rebuilt, except for the tower, in 1836 and extensively restored in 1891. Whether the main part of the building was erected in 1836 or earlier, care was taken to imitate the original masonry, for the gables of the transepts are stepped and surmounted by built-up pinnacles in the same distinctive style as the top of the tower. No evidence exists of the form of the church prior to 1836 apart from a few scanty references. Fenton, writing in 1811, says, "The church bears a sort of stunted tower and has the nave divided by a row of low pillars near one of which I formerly recollect to have seen a mutilated effigy of a priest." According to this description, the earlier building must have been considerably lower, and therefore presumably smaller, than the present one, and the row of pillars may well have occupied the centre of the nave.

Documents known as "Bishop's Transcripts" or "Visitation Returns" give interesting information about the condition of the fabric during the 19th century. Every three years the Incumbent and the Churchwardens were required to answer questions concerning the state of affairs, both spiritual and temporal, in the parish. The churchwardens were mainly questioned on the maintenance of the building and its furnishings; some of their replies make interesting reading. In the record for 1810 we find that "repairs are now in progress. No part of the church hath been taken down." In 1813: "The roof of our church is ancient but does not leak. The windows are glazed, the walls plaistered and whitewashed." in 1816: "The walls appear sound but the roofs not so. The walls are plaistered and will soon be whitewashed, the pews excepting one are decent and the bell in good order." In 1845 the communion rails were reported not to be in good order, but were soon to be repaired.

The records give little indication of the size of the church. John Banks, writing in 1828, says:

"I cannot state the precise number the church will contain. I never saw it filled"; but in 1842 the churchwardens declared that there were free sittings for 209. The plans of the seating placed in the church in 1891 allow for 158.

Viewed from the road, the chancel gives the impression of being a later addition to the ancient church; it has apparently been more recently roofed and its length is disproportionate to the nave, transepts and tower. Inside, however, its unhampered spaciousness, and the natural reredos of trees to be seen through the clear east window, add beauty and dignity and contribute to the sense of worship in the church. Whereas the mouldings of the east window match those of the nave and transepts, it is noticeable that the window in the south wall of the chancel is of a different design; as this window is not shown in the plans of 1891, one may conclude that it was added later. A clue to the date of the present chancel may be found in the existence of three tombstones built into its outer walls. They can hardly be in their original position and it seems reasonable to suppose that the three graves were in that part of the churchyard on which the chancel was to be built. The reconstruction must, therefore, have taken place after the first date on each of the three stones; these dates are 1796, 1810 and 1828. This suggests that it formed part of the major rebuilding said to have been undertaken in 1836, but of which no detailed record has been found.

One of the three tombstones is a memorial to one "Thomas Propert of Llan-ryan who died 7th of July, 1810, in the 51st year of his age." This is interesting because an old piece of woodwork which has been preserved and superimposed on the more recent panelling in the vestry bears the following inscription:

W.H. 1687/Thos. Propert 1788/T.I. 1789.

One wonders who Thos. Propert was and why his name is linked with W.H. who lived a century earlier. Were these two, together with T.I., craftsmen whose art adorned their parish church? A stone in the wall of the Manor House adjoining the churchyard informs us that Thomas Propert rebuilt the house in 1769. Can it be the death of this same Thomas Propert which is recorded in the vestry, while the tombstone on the chancel wall is that of his son? Perhaps the R.P. whose initials were graven on the bell in 1697 was a forbear of theirs.

There must have been a chancel of some sort before the present one was built, for throughout the years we find references to its dilapidated condition. Chancel repairs were the liability of the rector of a parish, and in the case of Llanrhian the rector was the Archdeacon of Carmarthen, whose privilege it was to appoint a vicar. On April 1st, 1418 William Neupert, Archdeacon of Carmarthen, complained "of ye dilapidations of ye chancel in ye time of my predecessors." This tale finds an echo in the Visitation Returns in the 18th and 19th centuries. The report for 1820 tells us, "The church is in decent repair; materials are ready for repairing the chancel, which is not." In 1824: "About two years ago the chancel was partly rebuilt and a new roof." In 1842. "The floor of the church is paved, but the floor of the chancel is made of earth and is uneven. The church is handsomely ceiled but the chancel is not. The chancel is not in that repair in which it ought to be." It seems strange that the chancel was already in such poor condition in 1842 if it had in fact been renovated as recently as 1836, or even 1822, unless the rector had sadly skimmed his repairs. One wonders how much it can have been used, for to the inquiry as to whether the church was kept clean and in decent order, without dust, cobwebs or anything offensive or unseemly, the wardens replied, "It is, with the exception of the chancel." In all these complaints the churchwardens were politely calling the attention of the Bishop to the Archdeacon's neglect of his duties and responsibility. When the Ecclesiastical Commission was established in 1841, it took over all episcopal and cathedral estates and became liable for rectorial repairs. Attention is drawn in the Terrier of 1901 to the fact that the Ecclesiastical Commissioners were responsible for repairs to the chancel, and the parishioners for other parts. In accordance with the Tithe Act of 1936, the Representative Body took over from the Welsh Church Commissioners liability for maintenance of the chancel.

Repairs to other parts of the fabric depended on the levying of church rates from all parishioners, whether church members or not. They were, in fact, a parish rate and entitled all

parishioners, whatever their denomination, to attend and vote at the Easter Vestry meeting. Reference is frequently made to these rates in the Churchwardens' Returns We read that in 1810 "none refused to pay them "; in 1813 "all pay rates towards the repairs of the church and provide things necessary for the service of Almighty God"; in 1851 "church rates are regularly made," and in 1854 "church rates are made as often as is needful for the repairs of the church." These rates provided the main source of income for the church and no collections were taken at services. In 1860, however, the situation was less rosy and we find the rather mournful entry : "No benefactions have been left to the church. No church rate is made."

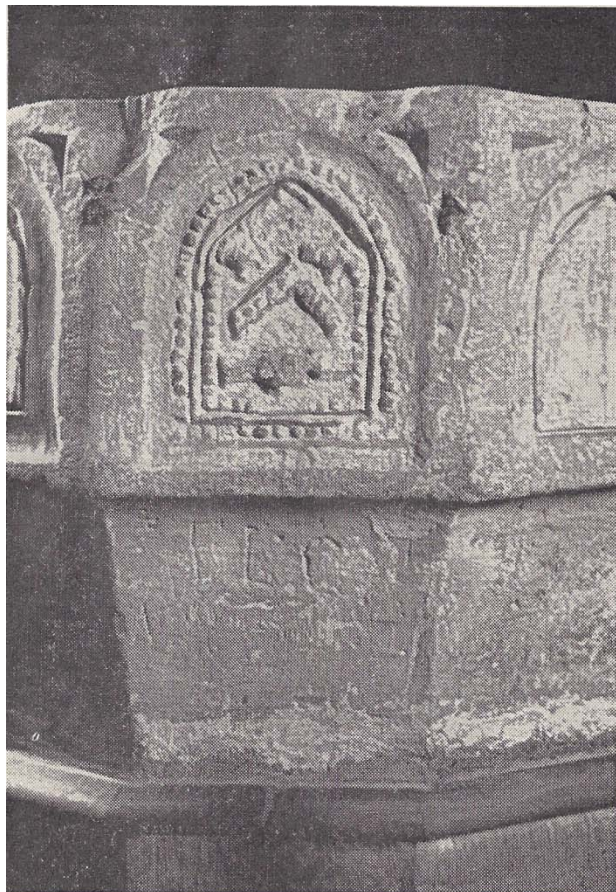
The restoration undertaken in 1891 consisted of the replacement of the old irregular, high backed pews by the present remarkably fine oak ones, the panelling of the walls, the erecting of the oak chancel screen and the screening off of the vestry, the installation of heating apparatus, and what were described as "general repairs." To this list it seems probable that we must add the present ceilings both on account of their similarity to the panelling and also because the nave alone was reported to be "handsomely ceiled" in 1842. The fact that a firm of architects from Cardiff (Messrs. Seddon and Carter) were employed, and that the quality of the woodwork was described by Tyrrell Green in 1921 as being "of better finish than any other in the north of the county except St. David's Cathedral," leads one to suppose that funds were readily available. The heating apparatus installed at that time was not replaced, except by oil stoves, until seventy years later when electrical tubular heating was fitted in 1961. A contemporary press account ("Pembrokeshire Herald," 3rd June, 1892) of the reopening of the church after restoration on Friday, 27th May, 1892, informs of the previous bare condition of the interior and the "high pews of all shapes"; this had so dismayed the vicar (the Reverend James Lewis) when he came to the parish that "he went to consult the bishop as to what he could do to it, but His Lordship could only advise him to wait till someone gave him £1,000 to build a new church." The exterior was "clad with ivy" and described as "quaint and picturesque and well worthy of preservation," but "internal restoration was deemed impossible." A newcomer to the district, however, a Mr. Herbert Birch, offered to assist in raising funds for the purpose. Dean Allen of St. Davids encouraged the venture by himself providing the stonework and glass of all the windows, "a gift which could not fall far short of £100," adds the reporter. This was a very generous contribution since the total cost of the restoration was only about £500. The woodwork of the old pews was used to panel the walls.



15th CENTURY DECAGONAL FONT.

THE FONT

An unusual feature of the church is the decagonal font. It is thought to date from the 15th century when the perpendicular style of architecture prevailed, a style which is reflected also in the mullions of the windows. Each of the ten pane's of the font contains an inverted shield and on one shield there is a coat of arms consisting of a chevron between three birds; if the birds are choughs or ravens, the arms are those of Sir Rhys ap Thomas, whose arms are technically described as "Argent a Chevron, Sables, between three Ravens proper." He is reputed, probably wrongly, to be descended from Urien Rheged, Prince of Cumberland or Cymryland in the 5th or 6th century. Sir Rhys, who lived in the time of Henry VII, had no known personal connection with the parish of Llanrhian, a though he had descendants living in Rickeston in Pembrokeshire. He was buried in the Grey Friars' Church, Carmarthen, and at the dissolution of the Monastery in 1538 his remains were re-interred in St. Peter's Church, Carmarthen. The question therefore arises as to why the font in Llanrhian Church should bear his coat of arms. The stone of which the font is made raises another problem, for geologists have declared that it is not to be found in the British Isles but bears resemblance to the stone of Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem. If this is so, a possible explanation is that Sir Rhys brought it to Carmarthen from the Holy Land; it may have been presented to Llanrhian at a later date by the Archdeacon of Carmarthen who was patron and rector of the parish of Llanrhian.



ARMS OF SIR RHYS AP THOMAS.

The base of the font is comparatively modern and of local stone. A cylindrical stone, pierced with a hole and standing in the chancel, was described in the Inventory of Ancient Monuments as the original shaft of the font. As it is also of local stone, the explanation seems unlikely; more probably it is the other part of the old grindstone found outside the church.

The present pulpit, lectern and altar have all been added during the present century. The pulpit was presented in 1906 as a memorial to the Reverend Prebendary James Lewis who was vicar of the parish from 1877 to 1901 and Rural Dean of Dewisland. His successor, the Reverend John W. Rees, is commemorated by the lectern, the gift of his widow. In 1942 the carved oak altar was prevented by the then vicar, Canon R. Keble Williams and his family, in memory of his son, John, who died on active service in India during World War II.

THE COMMUNION PLATE

The communion plate includes a delicate silver chalice dated 1680, and described by J. T. Evans in his *Church Plate of Pembrokeshire*. The stem and base are finely ornamented, but the deep, narrow bowl is plain and appears to have been melted down at some time and re-made. Probably the original purpose of the chalice was secular; it may have been a stirrup cup and the ornamentation on the bowl would be considered unsuitable for a communion vessel. The two silver patens are of less interest; one bears the inscription "Llanrhian Church 1884" and the other is undated. Year after year, the churchwardens reported that they had a silver chalice and pewter paten, but no alms dish. It therefore seems likely that an ancient pewter plate in the church was the original paten to which they referred.

Later Additions

- The communion plate has been recently added to by the donation of a magnificent silver abonum, the gift of Mrs Olivia Sambrook and family, Hafan, Trefin, in memory of her husband, the late Mathias Sambrook.
- Another valuable addition to the church treasures is the gift of a silver-plated processional cross, donated by Mrs Olive Bermingham and family of Bryn Coed, Trefin, in memory of her late husband, Kenneth Bermingham, M.C.
- In March 1974, an architect's report revealed substantial weaknesses in the roof of the nave and in the general woodwork. Accordingly, with the full backing of the Parochial Church Council, a public appeal with a target of £10,000 for major restoration work on the church was launched. It is hoped that, over a ten year period, this vital and urgent restoration of the fabric will be successfully achieved.

PARISH LIFE

When Rhian originally founded his llan it was an independent unit with no parochial boundaries. Parishes and episcopal jurisdiction in the sense in which we know them today were introduced by the Normans in the 11th and 12th centuries. The Normans were responsible also for the manorial system. At one time, the whole of Dewisland belonged to the Church, and the Bishop of St. Davids was overlord; even to-day the Bishop continues to be temporal as well as spiritual lord of Pebidiog, or Dewisland, a position to which he owed his seat in the House of Lords before Disestablishment. We read in the works of Giraldus Cambrensis that Wilfred, who was Bishop of St. Davids from 1085 to 1115, disposed of many of his lands, including Llanrhian, through fear of the Norman invaders. Giraldus also records that David Fitzgerald, who was Bishop from 1148 to 1176, granted much of his Church land to members of his own family, bestowing Llanrhian upon his brother Maurice.

Trefin was an episcopal manor consisting of the greater part of the parish of Llanrhian and adjoining lands in the parish of Mathry. Longhouse and Henllys were granges belonging to Trefin Manor and the mill was situated at Aberfelin, where its ruins can still be seen to-day. Traces remain of the old episcopal residence in Trefin "whither the bishops frequently retired to disengage themselves from their most immured situation and ceremonious life within the cathedral precinct and breathe a purer air, or when the temporalities were withheld and their establishment was obliged to be contracted to the spiritualities alone, as many of their instruments are dated from this place. Bishop Tully (consecrated Bishop in 1460) lived here altogether" (Fenton).

By the 16th century Llanrhian Manor was held "of the Bishop of St. Davids" by the Wogan family of Wiston, some of whom are buried in St. David's Cathedral. In recent years the manor has been held by George Le Hunte, Henry Prosser and Richard Jenkins whose son, Elliot Jenkins of Manor House, is the present Lord of the Manor.

From the time that the Archdeaconry of Carmarthen was founded soon after the Norman Conquest, part of the stipend of the Archdeacon consisted of a fee from the Church of Llanrhian. In an old MS included by Yardley in his *Menevia Sacra*, we read that besides synodals and procurations from his clergy, the Archdeacon had "for his corpse the impropriation of Lanryan in Co. Pembroke." The annual value appears to have been the lordly sum of £13 6s. 8d., together with the annual rent of £3 13s. 4d. for Cruglas. Some of the

Archdeacons of Carmarthen were also vicars of Llanrhian. Others presented, or nominated, an incumbent to the bishop. As the Archdeacon had a house in the Cathedral Close in the field below the Deanery, he was able to take an active interest in the parish if he wished. When for any reason the Archdeacon was unable to appoint to the benefice, the privilege was exercised by the Archbishop of Canterbury. Such was the case in 1556 when the Archdeacon Constantine had been suspended as a Protestant and Philip Adam was presented to the living by Cardinal Reginald Pole, Archbishop of Canterbury and ex-officio Papal legate. The unity of the Church in this country and in Rome is further illustrated by the fact that on 11th January 1426, Roger Somer, "perpetual vicar of Llanrhian," obtained an indult from the Pope to rent the fruits of his benefice for seven years while he studied letters at a university (Papal Registers). This is a typical instance of the bad Papal administration which was so clearly in evidence as early as the 14th century; dispensation could be obtained from the obligation to keep any Church law or rule, merely by payment in advance of a fine to the Papal court. By the middle of the 16th century, patronage of the living appears to have been entirely in the hands of the Bishop of the diocese.

As early as 1799 grouping of parishes had begun. During the period between 1799 and 1813, and possibly longer, Llanrhian and Whitchurch were joined; from 1842 until 1906 Llanreithan was grouped with Llanrhian; regrouping occurred again in 1959 when Llanreithan became part of the parish of Mathry, and Llanhowel and Carnhedryn were joined to Llanrhian. During the latter part of the 19th century, there was an assistant curate in the parish, receiving a stipend of £120. The Reverend John Watts, who served the parish in 1877, was assistant curate also of Brawdy-cum-Hayscastle; he was followed by the Reverend David Parry who was curate in 1880, by the Reverend Lewis Richards, curate in 1889, and by the Reverend D. Sinnett Jones, curate in 1892.

Throughout the period covered by the Bishop's Transcripts (1755 to 1903), Holy Communion was only celebrated once monthly and at Easter and Christmas. The number of communicants fluctuated. Writing in 1804 the vicar lamented, "The communicants are generally but few, at some of the great festivals there are about twenty communicants." Sometimes the picture was slightly happier, reaching its peak in 1854 when forty to fifty communicants were reported. A later vicar was more precise in his estimates, declaring that in 1883, 17.6 out of 32 possible communicants attended, and in 1889, 18.25 out of 29. The preparation of the parishioners for their monthly Communion was a problem. At one time, the whole of one exhortation to the Sacrament was read on the previous Sunday. One question on the Visitation Form asked whether a service of preparation was held on a week-night during the week preceding "Sacrament Sunday." The vicar of 1807 replied, "I never saw it done in this neighbourhood," and this seems to have been the usual experience. In 1877 however, such a service was held on a Wednesday night, though we are not told of the response with which it met. 1877 appears to represent the beginning of a more lively period of public worship, for in that year the newly inducted vicar stated that he held two services a Sunday instead of the usual one alternating between morning and evening. It was in 1877 also that the taking of a collection during the service was introduced. In answer to the inquiry as to how many parishioners attended the Established Church, the vicar of 1813 replied, "Sometimes a pretty full congregation, at others a thin one. I cannot tell the number." In 1810, however, it had been reported that "none absent themselves from church nor follow world'y employment on the Sabbath." We also read of their "reverent and decent behaviour in church."

Interesting social history can be deduced from the Bishop's Transcripts and light is thrown on moral conditions of the day. In 1810 the vicar was able to state categorically that there was no immorality in the parish, "no common Swearers, Blasphemers or Drunkards, nor any who lie under publick Suspicion of Adultery, Fornication or Incest." By 1900, a slightly different picture is painted. With regard to honest dealing and Christian charity the vicar declared his parishioners to be "fair "; where truthfulness was

concerned, "fair on the whole," temperance, " good with few exceptions "; but purity, " bad." Family Prayer was observed "in a very few instances " and there was a "deterioration in observance of Sunday both among nonconformists and Church people." The churchwardens also had to testify that the incumbent was "sober, studious and pious" and that "his conduct was suitable to his sacred function." Happily the answer was always in the affirmative, even on one occasion with the added emphasis of "Yes, none more so." That the question was not entirely irrelevant is proved by the fact that one vicar of Llanrhian in the 17th century had been sequestered by the Commissioners for Propagation on a charge of drunkenness; the charge, however, may not have been important in itself for it was commonly brought against those who remained loyal to the Church of England when no other charge against them could be found.

There was no singing in the church in 1807, but by the middle of the century Welsh hymns had been introduced. Services in Llanrhian Church were usually bilingual, with a greater emphasis on Welsh. At times, however - in 1848, for instance, and from 1880 to 1889 - they were entirely Welsh. In 1800 it was said that only one per cent. of the population habitually used the English Language. A similar ignorance of English existed among the children in the school in 1804: "I believe that some of them can read, but that they are not generally capable of doing it," wrote the vicar. "The general mode of teaching is in English which they understand but little. After having learnt to read English they in general come of themselves to read Welsh."

In the days when illiteracy was not uncommon, and when we find the marriage registers signed by the mark of a cross in place of a signature, the Parish Clerk was a man of great importance for the smooth running of the services. One of his main duties was to lead the responses and the singing. Both the vicar and the churchwardens were therefore required to answer questions as to his suitability; a typical reply was . "He can read and write but not sing. He performs his duties regularly and decently." More often than not, he had to be sexton as well. His salary throughout the first half of the 19th century was £3 a year, which came from the church rates. In 1860 he had no salary but was entitled to fees, and in 1869 he was granted £2 12s. "by subscription and collection." At one time the office was held by the village schoolmaster; this was no doubt a satisfactory arrangement since he drew no additional salary.

A matter which vexed the minds of the Church authorities throughout the 19th century, and possibly earlier, was the growth of nonconformity. In 1807 the vicar declared that he told his parishioners "in sermons of the sin of schism " and that tracts were needed on Infant Baptism. Over and over again, questions were asked concerning the number of "dissenting ministers," and the impact of such places of worship on the parishioners. In 1799 we learn that there were "Presbyterians and Anabaptists" in the parish "but no Papists." Anabaptists were generally considered the strongest numerically. A Methodist meeting house was opened in Trefin at the beginning of the 19th century and a Sunday School was started there; one can only hope that it met with more response than the catechising of the children in the Parish Church, for the vicar frequently reported that although notice was given to bring the children to be catechnised, they were not brought.

CHURCH SCHOOL

Lack of a Church school was a constant hindrance to religious instruction in the parish. During the first half of the 19th century there was a "publick school" but it was not endowed, the schoolmaster was not licensed, nor did he attend church or instruct children in the catechism. In 1828 it was reported that the school was "kept of a woman" and that the parents had to pay for the education of their children. It was not until 1852 that a National School was opened in the parish. In 1851 a site opposite the church was presented to the vicar and churchwardens by George Le Hunte of Artramont in Co. Wexford, who owned considerable land in the parish of Llanrhian and to whom the manorial rights had passed. Funds for building were raised by private subscriptions augmented by grants from the Committee of the Council on Education, the National Society and the

Church Union Society of the diocese. Most of the stone required for the building was quarried locally; limestone and other materials, which had to be brought from further afield, came by sea to Porthgain from where they were carted up to Llanrhian. A labourer's pay at that time was 2/- a day.

The schoolmaster of the new school was required to be a member of the Established Church, and he began to play an active part in Church life. In the returns of 1854, we read that he taught the catechism on Sunday. In 1857 he was described as "a person of sober life and conversation and he teaches the children the catechism." In 1836 he was voluntarily performing the office of Parish Clerk. All this was for the meagre salary of £25 a year, plus the school pence, making a total in cash of about £40, together with the school house and garden. His close link with the Church caused a certain amount of opposition, and we read in the entry of 1860 that "dissenters' children will not attend." Six years later, however, a different situation prevailed for we learn that "many of the children are dissenters' children."

Although the existence of such a school must have been an asset to Church life in the parish, it proved an added burden to the vicar who, with the School Managers, was responsible for its maintenance. Records show that donations and subscriptions were received from friends in other parts of the country and even as far afield as Canada. One of the main qualifications for nomination as Manager of the school was the ability to contribute to its maintenance. In the deeds for the conveyance of the site we read that the managers had "to be members of the said Church of England and contributors to the funds of the said School to the amount of one pound per year each at the least, and to be possessed of beneficial interest to the extent of a life estate at least in real property situated in the said Parish of Llanrhian..." Another source of income was an annual grant from Madame Bevan's Trust. This was dependent on an annual inspection; when the inspection failed to take place the grant was not forthcoming. A letter exists, written by the vicar to the Trustees of the Fund in 1875 :

"The Madame Bevan's Trust was refused for the last two years towards the support of Llanrhian National School," he wrote, "although the school has been carried on as usual since the year 1852.

"In the year 1873 the Diocesan Inspector was prevented coming by a very heavy fall of snow. The school was prepared for an examination. I examined the school myself and sent the Report to the Inspector but received no grant.

" In 1874 the Inspector appointed a day for examination but that very day was selected for the election of a Member of Parliament for the County of Cardigan. My schoolmaster, Jenkin Dafydd Jones, being a shareholder under Jordan Price, Esq., desired to give his vote in favour of Mr. Lloyd and he went up to Aberayron for the purpose. In consequence the school was closed when the Inspector came and no examination took place. The grant was refused this year again. It was no fault of mine, and can I hardly blame the schoolmaster that it was not examined then.

"However the school gets deeper into debt. It is now about £40 in debt. As I receive only £85 net a year from the Parish I cannot properly carry on the school without little more assistance. I guarantee £25 a year to the schoolmaster beside the school pence and Government Grant. When there is a deficiency I am obliged to make it up myself."

The Education Act of 1944 made provision for Church Schools to become either Voluntary Aided Schools or Voluntary Controlled Schools. Schools in the former category were to receive a grant of half of their expenses from the Local Education Authority, but in the case of Controlled Schools the entire financial responsibility would be assumed by the Education Authority. At the same time, certain privileges were to be retained by the Church : two of the managers were still to be appointed according to the original conditions laid down in the deeds of the school, the managers were to be consulted about the appointment of the head teacher; arrangements could be made for denominational teaching to be given, and if he wished the vicar could go into the school to give this teaching; the building would still be vested in the trustees and could be used for Church purposes out of school hours.

In 1951, serious consideration was being given to the question whether Llanrhian School should become Voluntary Controlled. Both the Director of Education and the Chairman of the Diocesan Board of Education, Canon T. Halliwell, advised the managers

to make application and on January 23rd, 1952, Voluntary Controlled status was granted. In 1925 the building had already been scheduled as a "defective premises" and the school is due to be closed when a new one is built at Tregynon, Croesgoch, to replace the three existing schools of the parish, namely Llanrhian, Trefin and Croesgoch. The building and land will then remain property of the church according to the original conveyance

OTHER CHANGES

Other changes which took place in the parish towards the end of the 19th century were the closing of the churchyard and the building of the vicarage. The churchyard was closed by Order in Council in July of 1881 and a new burial ground of one acre was opened about a hundred and fifty yards from the church. According to old records, now missing, between thirteen and fifteen thousand people had been buried in the churchyard down the ages. It must at one time have been the only place of burial for a wide area. Interments within the church were not allowed. The condition of the churchyard was a matter on which the churchwardens had been required to report at the Bishop's Visitations, and from their replies, we learn that the paths were kept clear, no earth was allowed to accumulate near the walls of the church, the boundary walls were kept in repair, and no markets or fairs were held in the churchyard. As late as 1813 it was reported that there were no trees in the churchyard; the ilex trees which flank the path today must have been planted shortly after. At one time the road lay on the opposite side of the church, between the churchyard and the Manor House, and there was a sawpit where the present road runs.

Throughout the years, the parish suffered through lack of a Parsonage House. More often than not the vicar resided outside the parish. He traveled to and around the parish on horseback and various references to this means of transport are to be found in the Bishop's Transcripts. In 1813 the vicar wrote, "Having lost my horse by an unfortunate accident, and not having received the Queries in time, I have not been able to make the necessary inquiry." At times the living was held by the Archdeacon of Carmarthen himself; such was the case with the Venerable John Barlow in the 15th century, and the Venerable Rice Williams who was instituted and inducted on 14th May, 1742. More often, a Vicar Choral of the Cathedral was also Vicar of Llanrhian; this was true of the Reverend William Roberts, Vicar from 1802 to 1832. His successor, the Reverend John Jones, lived at Cruglas, which lies some four miles from Llanrhian on the road to St. Davids. The Reverend Jacob Hughes (1844 to 1877) was the first incumbent to reside in the parish, dwelling first at Parkcourt in Trefin and later at Porthiddy. The next vicar, the Reverend James Lewis, who was also Rural Dean, was a Prebendary of the Cathedral and lived in the Close at St. Davids. It was he who was responsible for the building of the Vicarage.

The land for the Vicarage and the Vicarage Farm was bought for £600 by the Governors of Queen Anne's Bounty from Lady Marianna Augusta Hamilton. In 1876, the Ecclesiastical Commissioners made a grant of £1,500 to provide a parsonage with stables, wash-house and other outhouses, and a small garden. Plans were prepared by K. W. Ladd, Architect of Pembroke Dock, and work was begun in 1880, the year in which the Reverend James Lewis was instituted and inducted. The vicar himself kept detailed accounts for all disbursements and appears to have been responsible for ordering materials and seeing that the work was carried out satisfactorily. Prices had risen but little in the thirty years since the school was built and a labourer's wage varied between 2/- and 3/- a day. Stone was quarried locally at Tremynydd and Caerbwdy; bricks, slabs and timber came by boat. One William Griffiths of Mesur-y-dorth was paid 11/3d. for discharging a vessel of timber, which task occupied him for four- and-a-half tides. The carriage on twelve loads of sand from Porthgain was only 1/6d. a load; from Abereiddy it cost a penny a load and the carriage 2/-. The welfare of the workmen was not forgotten and, dated January, 1882, we find the entry, "Beer allowance—£3 12s. 6d." Final payments were made in July of 1883 and at last Llanrhian Parish had a Parsonage House ready for occupation by the incumbent. Electricity was installed in 1956.

In 1959, the St. Davids Diocesan Board of Dilapidations decided that the Vicarage was too large, too costly to maintain, and too far from the church; they therefore agreed that it should be sold and a new one built. Difficulty was experienced in obtaining a site for building, but in 1961 J. W. Morris, Esq., of Trenifed Fawr agreed to sell a plot of land less than five minutes'

walk from the church. It is hoped that building will begin in 1962.

Such is the story of Llanrhian Parish. Behind us lie some fifteen hundred years or more of unbroken witness and worship from the time of Rhian and his Celtic brethren. As we walk these lanes to-day, we may pause a moment, dimly hearing the tread of sandalled feet, and in our mind's eye seeing the white-cowled figure of a Celtic saint in his homespun robe; or it may be the chanting of the pilgrims which echoes in our ears, or the thud of hooves as some solemn priest rides round his parish, admonishing his flock. All these are one. They are the Church which Rhian brought. Wattle and daub and wooden structures give way to stone as man uses his new skills and knowledge to the glory of God. But the living stones are the people who have worshipped through the ages, by their prayers adding to the sacredness of our ancient shrine. We too would do our part by prayer and worship to enrich this heritage, as we pass it on to those who follow after.

VICARS OF LLANRHIAN

List compiled from

- (a) Records in the Registry Office, Carmarthen.
- (b) MS list of Welsh Incumbents in National Library of Wales.
- (c) Wet Wales Historical Records, Vol. II.

1380	William Canton.	1695	Lewis Goze.
1406	Walter Somer.	1718	Thomas Jordan.
1426	Roger Somer.	1719	Henry Goffe.
1486	John David.	1721	John Edwards.
1487	William ap Jenkyn.	1733	William Garnons.
1491	David ap Llewelin.	1742	Rice Williams.
1535	John Adam.	1756	John Roberts.
1542	John Barlow.	1802	William Roberts.
1550	Owen Johns.	1832	John Jones.
1554	David Kelley.	1844	Jacob Hughes.
1556	Phillip Adam.	1877	James Lewis.
1559	Reddiz Prowlinge.	1901	Henry Evans.
1560	John Jones.	1904	John William Rees.
1562	John Bartholomew.	1927	Robert Keble Williams.
1564	Morgan Jones.	1960	Edward Lewis.
1569	William Vaughan.	1962	Martin Kaye Likeman
1570	Edward Powell.	1973	Richard Morvan Jenkins
1581	Henry Jno. Kynrick.	1981	David Jonathan Lean
1610	Henry Johnes.	1989	Christopher Probert
1621	Howel Williams.	1991	David Richard Rees
1661	Philip Goch.	1999	William Jones
1687	Rice Howell.	2000	John Seccombe Bennett
1688	Peter Lewis.	2013	Donald Alexander Thomson MacGregor

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