



ST CYNON'S CHURCH TREGYNON

A description and brief
history of this beautiful
church

Written by former rector,
Rev. Dr. John Guy

Welcome to the parish church of Tregynon in the county of Powys.

There is good reason to believe there has been a place of Christian worship on this site for nearly fifteen hundred years. We hope that you will enjoy your visit to this historic place and that these brief notes will be helpful.

The First Church

Nothing now survives of the first church erected here, other than its dedication and the raised and circular churchyard. Both indicate its foundation during the great era of the Celtic saints in the Dark Ages. The church is named in honour of St Cynon, a Christian missionary from Brittany to Wales early in the sixth century. Cynon was one of a group of believers, the peregrini, who accompanied St Cadfan from Finistère to settle in mid and north Wales. Travelling by one of the well-established sea routes, they first settled on the coast, then moved inland to teach, preach and establish churches. Cadfan landed at Towyn, South Gwynedd and later built a church at Llangadfan, only a few miles from Tregynon. Cynon, who may have been related to him, came with him and built his own church nearby. Both later lived on the Holy Island of Wales – Bardsey – and may be buried there.

Cynon's church, which would have been of timber, thatch, wattle and daub, was later replaced by a more

durable stone one but his name lives on. Cynon was once a common name in Wales. It is, for example, borne by the mischievous tutelary sprite of one of the streams which fed Lake Vyrnwy, about twenty miles away, but Tregynon's saint was an altogether sterner and more austere character.

An ancient Welsh verse says this of Cynon:

A glywaist ti a gant Cynon

Ynddiogel rhag meddwon

Cwrw yw allwedd Calon

(Hast thou heard what Cynon sang?

Beware of drunkards –

Ale unlocks the human heart.)

The Medieval Church

Sometime towards the end of the twelfth or early in the thirteenth century, Tregynon was given by local Welsh lords to the Knights of St John of Jerusalem, the Knights Hospitallers. It was certainly a possession of their north Wales Commandery at Halston, near Oswestry by 1254. The Knights had extensive property in this part of Wales, including the churches at Kinnerly, Llanwddyn, Ysbyty Ifan and Carno, as well as here at Tregynon. It was the practice of the Knights to provide a church and a priest

for their tenants. Of their Halston churches, only Kinnerly and Tregynon are not dedicated to their patron, St John the Baptist. In addition, they built 'hospitals' for travellers. (The word is used in its original sense, deriving from the Latin 'hospes' meaning guests.) These were perhaps the first Travelodges, near lonely roads and on the edge of wild moorland or a wilderness. With its banked enclosure, Carno's bears some resemblance to the earthwork in Moat Meadow close to the main road and site of their Tythe Barn here in Tregynon. Was this the Knights' hospital?

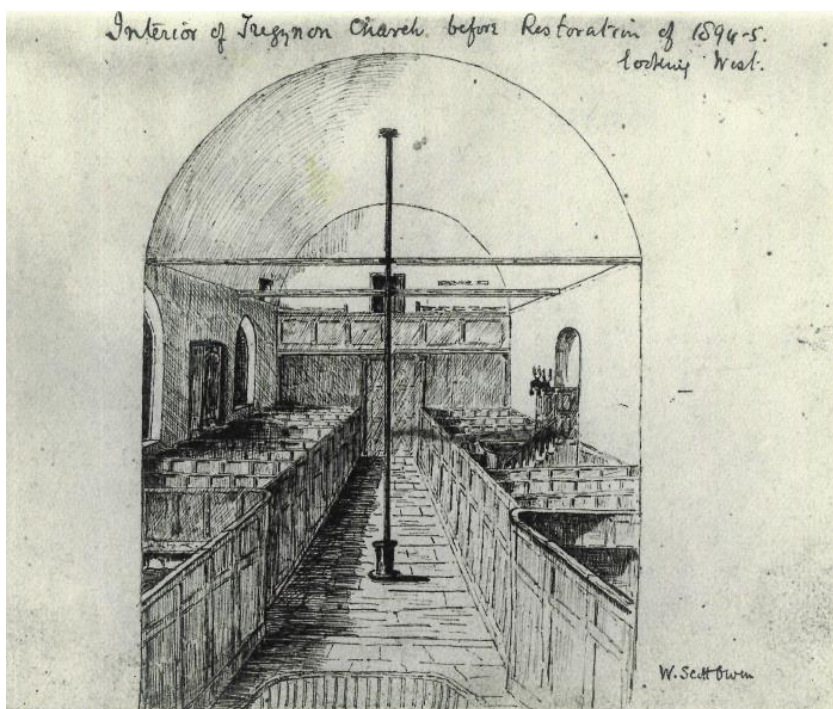
We know little of Tregynon church during the Middle Ages. Like all Hospitaller property, it was exempt from Papal Taxation and from the jurisdiction of the bishop of the diocese, so the usual administrative records do not survive.

It is generally accepted that the body of the church – a simple rectangular structure – dates from the 13th century, soon after the Knights first acquired the property. Only the porch and the tower, perhaps built in the 17th century to replace an earlier bell turret, have been added

The Reformation and Beyond

After the Reformation in the 16th century, the right of appointing the clergy to serve the church passed to the local lords of the manor at Gregynog – for more than three hundred years the Blayney family. The last of the

Blayney squire, the bachelor Arthur who died in 1795, was an improving landlord, who not only rebuilt cottages on his estate, but re-modelled the parish church as well. A 19th century drawing, now on the west wall of the nave, and reproduced here shows the interior as he left it with the high box pews and the three-decker pulpit so characteristic of the 18th century. The drawing also shows the coved plaster ceiling which for more than a century hid the 15th century timber roof.



Blayney's successors, the Lords Sudely, were also improving landlords, in particular Charles, the 4th Baron,

who inherited the title and estate in 1877. He was a pioneer in the use of concrete, re-building farmhouses, cottages and the façade of Gregynog in that material. It is not surprising, therefore, that he should have supported moves to restore the parish church in a style more in keeping with the tastes of his time. Initial plans for a major re-building were abandoned in favour of a more conservative restoration, carried out by the agent of the estate, William Scott Owen, who had known the building for nearly half a century. The church as it stands is very little changed from the time of Scott Owen's restoration in 1893-4.

Description of the Church

The east window was assembled by the notable firm of Clayton and Bell, the glass being brought here from the famous collection at Toddington between 1891 and 1893. Among the saints depicted are the twelve apostles with their emblems, Cecilia, Ambrose, Jerome and rather more unusually Lambert of Utrecht.

The reredos. This was not part of the original design but was given by the wife of the squire, Lady Joicey, in 1901. The statuettes, under their pink canopies, are of white alabaster. The stencilling on the east wall, which complements the reredos, is of the same date.

The south chancel window. An example of the work of the artist Leonard Walker, the glass here was put in place in 1922 as a memorial to William Scott Owen. The figure

of St Benedict, St Dorothea and an angel, each with swirling drapery and their own colour theme, are very striking, and the whole is a distinguished work of Expressionist art.



The organ. This replaced a small chamber organ which had stood originally against the south wall of the nave, and later in a shallow recess in the north chancel wall. The present organ chamber was constructed in 1898-99 for the instrument which it now houses, built for the church by Peter Conacher of Sheffield. The pipework is beautifully made, in particular that of the Flauto Traverso 8' on the Swell.

The nave. The square-headed windows date from Scott Owen's restoration, replacing narrower, pointed openings with wooden frames and the simple Y-tracery

characteristic of the 18th century. The pews and wainscoting are also of 1893 date, but incorporate some of the earlier woodwork of the old box-pews. The font, too, is of 1893 but its much eroded and battered medieval predecessor lies in the tower room after being rescued from the garden of the former Rectory opposite the church. The west wall which looks structural but is not, is part of Arthur Blayney's 18 century work, originally serving as a backdrop to the gallery which stood against it until Scott Owen's restoration.

The monuments are of some interest. That on the west wall is charmingly and skilfully painted wood. Arthur Blayney's monument on the north wall is by J. Bacon R.A. and is an exquisite example of a neo-classical relief.

The tower – thrust through the fifteenth century roof – houses one bell of 18th century date. The belfry is supported by roughly hewn, massive cross-braced oaken uprights of impressive solidity. The sundial on the exterior south face should be noted.

The porch is Scott Owen's, replacing a smaller, more enclosed structure built of brick and probably part of Blayney's 18th century work.

*Rev Prebendary Norman Morris, incumbent, adds,
"Thank you for visiting our ancient and much-loved church, which is still the spiritual home of an active Christian congregation. May God bless you and keep you in His grace."*