

THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

St David's Church, Newtown

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT
IN ADVANCE OF REDUNDANCY**



CPAT Report No 815

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Report for Diocese of St Asaph

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St David's Church, Newtown: an Architectural and Historical Assessment

Diocese of St Asaph

Location

The church lies beside New Road in Newtown, a 19th-century thoroughfare to the south of the historic core of the town.

Archaeological and Historical Importance

The church of St David's is a Grade II listed building built of rather stark buff-yellow brick, though Haslam was perhaps kinder in calling it 'a large, light and powerfully vertical church'. The church is wholly Victorian built between 1843 and 1847, and as its architect was Thomas Penson, the county surveyor, it has a certain regional significance. Its listing, however, demonstrates that it is not an exceptional building, and more significant, historically, are its contents.

Architectural History

The church is built in what has been termed the 'lancet style' and has dog-tooth ornament to the mouldings. To Haslam its appearance suggested a Romanesque monastery.

It has a tall aisled nave with clerestory, a taller west tower, a north porch which is now blocked off, a smaller chancel and, incongruously, a corrugated tin meeting room, appended to the old vestry on the south side. Renovation occurred in 1874 when the Liverpool architect, David Walker, removed the internal galleries on three sides and redesigned the chancel.

A fuller description can be found in the listing description which is appended to this report.

Furnishings and Fittings

A significant group of medieval and later furnishings and fittings were brought from St Mary's, the old parish beside the Severn which was abandoned in the 1840s because of flooding. It can be assumed but not proved that most but perhaps not all of the pre-1843 objects in St David's originated in St Mary's.

Wooden furnishings

Rood screen. Various parts of the screen from St Mary's have been utilised in St David's. Haslam thought it 'the highest in quality of any of the so-called Newtown School, except perhaps for Llananno' while a recent volume on the screens in the Welsh Marches claims that 'the woodwork is startling in its variety and includes several carved pieces of almost unparalleled finesse'. Some parts retain their original colours, green, red and gold. Part used as a parclose screen – sections approximately 3.5m and 2.5m long – to surround a small chapel at the east end of the north aisle. The hood over the altar in the Lady Chapel also uses parts, and the dado around the sanctuary is fashioned from the screen.

Three gilded and painted *angels*, perhaps terminals from a medieval hammerbeam roof (*cf* *Llanidloes*). Two in the north aisle, one high on the wall at the east end, and the third in the south aisle.

Chairs. A pair, elaborately carved and with highly decorated panels, inscribed with the name Edward Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury and carrying the date 8 May 1616, assumed to be the date of his succession to the earldom. In the sanctuary.

Plaque inscribed: The Lord is our Refuge 1687 E.M. E.I.C. North aisle wall.

Wooden box. Of uncertain date but perhaps 17th or 18th century. In the old vestry.

Victorians furnishings include the pulpit, the lectern, the choir stalls and two priest's chairs in the sanctuary. Also, but of stone, the font that is in current use. The altar table is of uncertain date, but I am inclined to think it is pre-Victorian.

Stone furnishings

Font. Perpendicular, both the bowl and stem survive. Inverted. In the anteroom to the old vestry.

Font. Bowl only, perhaps pre-Perpendicular. Against east wall of the south aisle.

Chandeliers

Brass, no obvious inscription but probably 18th-century. In entrance lobby beneath tower.

A second chandelier, also without obvious date but perhaps 18th-century if not earlier. In the Lady Chapel.

Benefaction Boards.

One recording the gift of Littleton Lloyd, gent in 1734.

A second records the gifts of Catherine Edwards and William Jones, 1734 & 1738. Both in entrance lobby beneath tower.

Memorials

Grandiose marble memorial to successive wives of Sir John Pryce (died 1731 and 1739). North aisle.

The remaining memorials, seemingly all of marble, are plain: to William Newtown (d.1912) and Joseph Wigley (d.1865), both in north aisle; to Anne Pryce (d.1736) and to John Jones (d.1848) at the west end of the nave; and to John Williams (d.1826) and to Oliver Jones (d.1826) in the south aisle.

Marble panel

Small panel set in wall and bearing statement about false witness. Incised by Thomas Lloyd, 1740. In entrance lobby beneath tower.

Bells

According to a 1986 article on church bells in Montgomeryshire there are six bells in the tower, all dating to 1727.

Paintings

Portrait of Mr Bennett Rowland; early 20th century. North aisle meeting area.

Pair of paintings – 19th-century? - of the Severn, one showing the old church of St Mary's in ruins, the other perhaps looking along the valley in the opposite direction. North aisle meeting area.

Madonna and Child in the Lady Chapel. No date.

The Last Supper. By John Dyer, reputedly from 1730 and supposedly the only one of ten signed by him. Restored at the National Museum in 1963.

Stained glass

East window is the most noticeable and has glass of 1902.

Church Plate

Some plate, assumed to be 19th-century is in new Vestry. According to the standard work on church plate in St Asaph there are other pieces in silver gilt – two communion cups, a stand paten and a flagon and an alms dish, all of which date to c.1727 except for the last which dates from 1734.

The Churchyard

The churchyard is near square, with New Road running along the north-east side and warehousing and a builders' yard to the south-east and south-west respectively.

Most of the churchyard has grave memorials, not particularly dense anywhere, though there are more on the east side of the church, and noticeably sparse on the north-west. It hardly needs stating that there are no graves that pre-date the 1840s but burials have continued into the 1990s. South-west of the church, gravestones have been laid flat to provide a paved area.

Recommendations

- 1. While the redundancy of the church is a sad fact which no one will welcome, the building has a historical importance which should not be overlooked by the church authorities and needs to be recorded for posterity if the church passes out of ecclesiastical control. A full photographic record of the interior of the church should be made by a competent specialist before any more of the furnishings and fittings are removed. The exterior of the building and the churchyard should also be included in the record. On completion this should be housed in an appropriate public repository such as the National Monument Record maintained by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales in Aberystwyth and a copy retained by the diocese in an appropriate archive in St Asaph.*
- 2. It is imperative that the most important wooden furnishings and fittings be re-located to appropriate repositories. These would include the various sections of the medieval rood screen, the three medieval angels and the two early 17th-century chairs.*
- 3. The future of the fonts should be given careful consideration. Should there be a decision to transfer the church building to secular use, the two medieval fonts should be properly recorded and moved to a more appropriate repository. Given that every church redundancy in Wales is likely to result in an unwanted font, it is assumed that the Representative Body has a policy on the disposal of such furnishings.*
- 4. Likewise the future of the post-medieval furnishings and fittings - the benefaction board, the wooden plaque and the box – must be considered.*
- 5. Regrettably there is no obvious solution to the problem of the wall memorials and particularly to that to Sir John Pryce's wives. It should be properly recorded before the church changes hands.*
- 6. Advice should be taken on the importance of the Dyer painting and depending on that advice, a decision should be taken as to where it should be re-housed. The painting of the old church may have some local interest. Again advice should be taken. The other paintings do not appear to have great merit, but the writer would claim no expertise in this field.*

7. *Any written records that may remain in the possession of the church – registers, churchwarden's accounts, the terrier, etc – should be lodged in an appropriate repository such as the regional record office or the National Library of Wales.*
8. *A suitable home should be found for the six early 18th-century bells in the tower.*
9. *The early 18th-century church plate should be passed to another church in the locality or failing that to the Treasury in St Asaph.*

Appendix 1

Listed Building 8143 (II)

NGR:- SO1094991357 (SO19SW)

Unitary authority :- Powys

Community :- Newtown and Llanllwchaiarn

In a spacious churchyard in a prominent position facing New Church Street.

History. 1843-47 Thomas Penson, County Surveyor at a cost of £4,600. Renovation of 1874 by David Walker of Liverpool at £3,000; galleries removed, chancel with organ chamber and vestry built of stock brick.

Exterior. Lancet style with dog-tooth ornament to arches. Tall aisled nave with W tower, porch on N and small apse to E end. Buff brick fabric. Galleried interior. Aisles of 6 bays. 3rd from W on N occupied by 2 storey gabled porch with clasping buttresses; square pinnacles. Hoodmould to pointed arch below twin lancets. Gables to stepped buttress, paired tall lancet windows, corbelled eaves, slate roofs. Plain pinnacles on clasping buttresses to corners. Single lancets to W aisle windows, blocked to E. Clearstorey similar with tripartite lancets. 5 stage saddleback tower, pinnacles rising from clasping buttresses. Vents to apices over paired lancets on bell stage. Unused clock openings below. Single lancets to 3rd stage, paired to 2nd stage with 2 storey polygonal vice to S. Door on N, shallow twin lancets to W. Peal of 6 bells from old church. Steeper roof to chancel, gable parapets; polygonal pinnacles on stepped angle buttresses. Corbelled eaves; pointed shouldered arches to flank windows, continuous hoods, sill bands. 5 light Geometric traceried E window. Organ chamber at right angles to N, angle buttresses, twin lancets. Single storey vestry to S; porch, lancets.

Interior. Polygonal arcade piers rise to pointed, decoratively moulded arches. Moulded capitals, masks to springing points and tops. String course to clerestorey hoodmoulds to windows. Inner doors of N porch blocked by re-sited Baroque wall monument of 1739 to wives of Sir John Pryce of Newtown Hall. Columns, heraldic crest, flying putti. Cusping to King post and tie beam trusses. N aisle chapel by H L North of Bangor 1938. Parclose screen and altar canopy made up of very fine C15 vine scroll screen from St Mary's. Cusped sedilia to chancel, priest's door; nookshafts. Pointed arch to organ chamber, nookshafts. Pulpit with trefoil arcade by Walker? C13 font, C18 candelabra, some cartouches and painting by John Dyer C1730; all from St Mary's. Good glass to E window, 1902, depicting Victoria.

Churchyard wall to New Road contemporary with 1847 building. Gate and corner piers match pinnacles. Iron gates later?



Plate 1: one of three angels from a former hammerbeam roof



Plate 2: detail from the late medieval screen, formerly in St Mary's church, Newtown



Plate 3: parts of the former screen used around the sanctuary, together with an early 17th-century chair



Plate 4: painting of old St Mary's church, Newtown