



A History of St. Jerome's Church

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Part One

Because of their resourceful negotiation of so many changeful centuries, parish churches are commonly regarded as unique repositories of the history of the communities of which, for so long, they have been an integral part. However, discreetly situated on the lower extremity of the Green and partly screened by its skirting wall, the church in the village of Llangwm has not received the attention of it deserves as the parish's oldest and most resilient institution.

According to reputable tradition, it was built during the 12th century by the Great Nash branch of that distinguished de la Roche family who erected the early Roch Castle in about 1140 and granted the charter to the monks of Tiron, a reformed Benedictine order, for the founding of Pill Priory, Milford (1170). Certainly, the basic layout of the structure – a cruciform shape with a nave, a chancel, a north chapel and a south transept – conforms to the pattern of the 12th to 13th centuries. The first explicit documentary allusion occurs in the *Taxatio Ecclesiastica* of 1291 (Public Record Office, London) when, as the church of 'Landegoin or Landegom', it was assessed for tenths to the King at £8 – the actual tax being 16 shillings.

The parish was a rectory in which the annual tithes to which all the inhabitants were liable for the upkeep of the church were paid directly to the incumbent. For centuries the advowson – the right of presentation to the living – was passed down the de la Roche family and their descendants like a piece of real estate. When the male line was extinguished with the death of Thomas de la Roche in about 1410, it was bestowed upon his daughters, one of whom married Sir George Longueville (died 1457) of Wolverton, Bucks; and the other married Edmund, Lord Ferrars of Chartley, from whom the Devereux of Lamphey, the Earls of Essex, were descended. Unquestionably, there were rectors before the John David (1488) who heads the Roll displayed in the church and Francis Green's list (West Wales Historical Records vol. 2). Recent research has uncovered a John Don, who was rector of 'Landegon' (1440), over 40 years before that.

The small but elegant lady chapel (north aisle) lady chapel (north aisle) contains several late medieval artefacts, evidence of the time when the church was a Roman Catholic place of worship. The chapel, which was either built or re-constructed during the second half of the 14th century, is entered through two small pointed arches of cut stone of the late Decorated period (1330-1380), which have fine mouldings quite unlike the usual Pembrokeshire Gothic, and which rest on a plain octagonal pillar.

On the northern wall of the chapel are two boldly carved ogee-arched canopied recesses, of the late Decorated or early Perpendicular period, under each of which is an effigy. The one on the west is a mutilated female form which originally was not in this position, but rested on the pavement beyond the communion rails. The one on the east is the effigy of a fully armoured knight, lying cross-legged, his right hand on his sword (broken), his left hand clasping his shield belt and his face turned towards the spectator. Tradition has confidently identified the effigy as that of a member of the de la Roche family and

the viper story, relayed by Fenton, is well known. But the identification has been disputed. Influenced by the heraldic evidence on the tomb, some have claimed the effigy was one of the Nash family who lived at Great Nash. At the Haverfordwest meeting of Archaeologia Cambrensis (1897), Mr. Stephen Williams, an expert in armour, drew attention to the corbie bird on the knight's helmet, and insisted that the effigy was of one of the Corbets, who succeeded the Nashes at Great Nash (1655). The fascinating issue is discussed in the Society's volume for 1911 (Haverfordwest Reference Library). The lower front of the tomb is enhanced with a geometrical pattern into which a number of shields probably once emblazoned with the bearings of related families, have been introduced.

On the east wall of the chapel is a pillared piscina, allegedly unique in Wales, but similar to some which have been encountered in France. It consists of a canopy under which there is a basin supported by a shaft covered with a succession of unblazoned escutcheons. The rather crudely made canopy has a pinnacle, which is crocheted and surmounted by a finial in the form of a fleur-de-lis. Dating from the early 15th century, the piscina was used for priestly ablutions during the Consecration.

Near the piscina is a squint or hagioscope which was discovered by Dr. Henry Owen during the first part of the 20th century. An oblique aperture through the wall, with a lighted loop, it enabled those in the lady chapel to view the High Altar during the Elevation of the Host in the Eucharist.

On the eastern wall of the south transept is the blocked wrongly named trefoil 'leper's window', from which a bell was rung at the Sanctus and at Consecration of the elements to announce the Real Presence to those outside in the churchyard.

In the transept itself, resting on an 18th century table is a large black marble altar stone and leaning against the entrance to the transept are two 14th century Calvary slabs.

In her invaluable manuscript 'Llangwm Scrapbook' (1953), the late Elizabeth Morgan reported that there had been an underground passage from Great Nash to the vicinity of the church, but for safety reasons, it had been filled in at the Nash end by Mr. George P. George (died 1939).

Even a parish with only 15 households in the far west of a sprawling and populated diocese could not remain indifferent to the 16th century Reformation. The parish church of 'Langome' was mentioned in the Valor Ecclesiasticus of 1535/36, the national survey which preceded the Dissolution of the Monasteries. Written in Latin (West Wales Historical Records Vol. 2) the extract confirms that the advowson was still in the hands of the Longueville and Ferrars families, that the rector was William Wogan, and that the benefice was £7.12.11d – the average for the diocese was £10. Much more riveting is

the revelation of the Calendar of State Papers that Wogan's successor, Richard Smithe, was imprisoned by the bailiff (February 1540) for treasonable words. The iconoclastic, abrasive, and sometimes litigious, Bishop Barlow (1536/47) had adopted a radical Protestant policy, and the likelihood is that the hapless rector indiscreetly expressed conservative Catholic sentiments which were unacceptable to the aggressive new establishment.

Though there is no direct evidence to verify it, it is tempting to conclude that the John Bathoe who became the rector of Llangwm in 1561 was the man who had been ousted (1536/37) as the prior of the Augustinian friary at Haverfordwest during the Dissolution. (Pembrokeshire County History, Vol. 3).

The Elizabethan Settlement (1559-1563) created the Anglican Church and restored communion in

both kinds of the laity. One of the church's most prized possessions is an Elizabethan chalice, with paten cover, which has been carefully described in J. T. Evans' 'The Church Plate of Pembrokeshire' (1905). Six and three quarter inches high and over 12½ ozs. in weight, the bowl has been rather rudely repaired – in December 1832 – with a band of silver around the base. Within the lower band on the bowl is inscribed “+ POCYLUM + ECCLESIA + DE + LANGOM +” and underneath the foot ‘RBP’ and ‘RN’ have been roughly scratched. The oft-repeated assertion that the chalice was a coronation gift from the legendary Queen is not convincing. Like the other 59 Elizabethan chalices in Pembrokeshire it was made by an unknown smith whose mark consisted of four oval-shaped objects. The overwhelming majority of these chalices bear the dates 1574 or 1575 – 15 years after the Queen's coronation.

Although its position obviously precludes careful scrutiny the church bell is reputed to be Elizabethan. It has a Latin inscription which translates into “Holy Trinity, One God. Have Mercy on Us.”

At a time when most of the parish clergy were ‘simply learned’ or ‘meanly learned’ and had not acquired the civilised restraint of their 20th century counterparts, there was a marked difference in the quality of rectors.

Griffiths Toye, the incumbent for four years after 1583, was exceptional in that he was a graduate (B.A and M.A.) of both Cambridge (1571) and Oxford (1574), who had been recruited as part of a diocesan campaign to raise the academic and preaching standards of the clergy.

His long-serving successor Richard Bathoe was transparently not of the same stature. He formally complained to the Court of Star Chamber (1602) that in a fracas at Pembroke, he had been set upon by an armed gang of Essex sympathisers including some women, after he had made a slighting reference in private conversation to the late Earl executed for an abortive coup against the Queen. When indicted, the accuser counter-alleged that the rector was ‘a common haunter of alhouses and wintaverns’ a card and dice-player and an all-night dancer, that for 12 months he had disturbed the peace of Haverfordwest and Pembroke by riding about provocatively waving his sword and pistol, and that he was so lacking in elementary learning as to be, by common consent, unworthy of his priestly office!! (Pembrokeshire County History, Vol. 3).

It was the rectorship (1643-1663) of Peregrine Phillips – coinciding with the Civil Wars (1642-1648), the Protectorate (1652-1658) and the Restoration (1660) – which was memorably eventful. According to J. T. Rees' 'History of Protestant Nonconformity in Wales' (1861), the Oxford-educated Phillips, the son of a vicar of Amroth, was appointed to the Llangwm living after briefly serving as his uncle's curate at Kidwelly. Pluralism was very common, and with the backing of such gentlemen as Sir Roger Owen, Sir Roger Lort and Sir John Meyrick, he was preferred first to Monkton and then to St. Mary's, Pembroke. When he preached before Oliver Cromwell and his troops during the siege of Pembroke (1648), he so impressed the future Protector that he was invited aboard the men-of-war about to undertake the Irish campaign.

During the Protectorate, Phillips became widely known as a committed advocate of the government's religious policy. A very accomplished orator, hailed by many as the best in the county, he preached in almost every church, English and Welsh, and before the Justices of the Assizes at Cardigan, Haverfordwest and Carmarthen. He must have relinquished his Pembroke incumbency when the parishes of Llangwm, Freystrop and Rosemarket were united (July 1656).

On one occasion, the intrepid rector had an experience which convinced many of his admirers that

Providence had a special affection for him. When riding homeward late at night, both he and his horse plunged into a deep coal-pit at Freystrop, and were firmly wedged in the narrow mouth a few feet from the surface. He was rescued by the proprietor, Captain Longmans, who had been apprised of his perilous predicament by an unnamed deaf woman and her alert grandson.

Peregrine Phillips continued to be very active as an open-air preacher and public evangelist until soon after the Restoration he fell of the Act of Uniformity (1662) which banned all acts of worship not conducted in accordance with the Book of Common Prayer. Ejected from the Established Church, this amiable but unrepentant nonconformist withdrew to Dredgeman Hill Farm, which he held from Sir Herbert Perrot, of Haroldston, and which he converted into an Independent house church (1665). Thereafter, he became the accredited pastor of the Green Meeting, a nonconformist group of 50/60 which assembled in a little room on St. Thomas' Green, and which was to develop into Albany Congregation (now United Reformed) Church, Haverfordwest.

Upon his death at 68 years of age in September 1692, this unforgettable former rector of Llangwm was buried near the pulpit at Haroldston church.

In contrast, one of his successors, Richard Lloyd, achieved distinction within the Established Church. Rector of Llangwm (1671) and Burton (1672), he eventually reached the elevated rank of Bishop of St. Davids (1686).

Part Two

Llangwm Parish Church was associated with a number of important developments during the Hanoverian period. Griffith Jones' Charity Circulating Schools (1738/61) are readily recalled from School Certificate History courses as the most remarkable experiment in mass education undertaken anywhere in Britain during the 18th century.

More concerned with saving souls and improving minds, they nevertheless accomplished the amazing feat of teaching 200,000 – almost half of the population of Wales – to read. One such school, using the English language, was held at Llangwm for three to four months between May and September of the year, and was probably conducted in the Church by the Rector, the Rev. Charles Bowen. The discovery that it was attended by 133 scholars might provoke surprise, but the number would have included adults of all ages as well as children.

Howell Harris, one of the three outstanding leaders of the Welsh Methodist Revival, visited the parish on at least two occasions during his 31 preaching tours of the county. His surviving diary records that on his second visit – February, 1750 – he 'discoursed' on the text "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all men to be received"; was very sympathetically entertained by the Owenses, the gentry family at Great Nash, and spoke 'very convincing and plain' to the boatmen at Llangwm Ferry.

During the second half of the 18th century, the Church took a step which it is frequently assumed to have taken several centuries before. Following the example of the churches Llangwm, at Monmouthshire and Llangwm, Denbighshire, it was dedicated to St. Jerome, the 4th century Roman Catholic scholar and translator of the Old Testament, who was greatly revered in monastic circles. The event does not seem to have made much of an impact on church records, but it formally noted in Bacon's

'Liber Regis' (1786), and confirmed in N. Carlisle's 'Topographical Dictionary of the Dominion of Wales' (1811).

It was also during the second half of this century that such now familiar parish surnames as John, Cale, Brock, Skyrme, Palmer, Goodridge, and Folland – the Church also serves the village of Hook – began to appear with increasing frequency in church registers.

The union of the parish with Rosemarket in 1809 was revived during the rectorship (1799-1833) of the Rev. John Morris, to whom there is a memorial tablet on the floor of the chancel.

The advent of the first 'Galilee' chapel (1831) and of the first Wesley Church (1834) mounted a powerful challenge to the Parish Church's monopoly of religion. But fortified by centuries of tradition, and with a substantial territorial stake in the locality, it was too deeply entrenched to fade into obscurity.

The available copy of the Tithe Map of 1840 (Record Office, Haverfordwest) demonstrated that 35 of the parish's 1,817 acres, together with five cottages, was glebe land belonging to the church. It included all the fields along Rectory Road (Parsonage Lane) to Edwards Pill, and those beyond Vinegar Hill to Black Tar Point. The Rector's was considerably supplemented not only by rents, and the profits of working some of the land, but by his income from tithes which amounted to £193 per annum.

Upon her death in 1844, Lady Anne Barlow, of Lawrenny, and formerly of Great Nash - the owner of most of the land in Llangwm parish - willed annually and for ever £20 to the poor of Lawrenny parish and £10 each to the poor of the parishes of Llangwm, Rosemarket and Nolton. The benefaction is recorded on a gold embossed black wooden plaque on the west wall of the Lady Chapel.

Like several other Pembrokeshire churches, the parish church at Llangwm did not escape the attention of those Victorian modernisers whose well-meaning zeal often eclipsed their good taste.

During the second half of the inordinately long rectorship (1833-1882) of the Rev. Thomas Williams, to whose family there is a memorial tablet on the northern wall of the chancel, an escalating renovation programme was carried out.

All the windows, except one on the east wall of the Lady Chapel, were replaced, the floor of the chapel was raised and the female effigy was removed there from the chancel. The rood loft was removed, leaving only a few projecting corbels over the pulpit. The font was remounted on a modern circular shaft and base, and an entrance porch was added.

In memory of the Rector's daughter, Mrs Anne Beatson, who had died in Nagpore, India, in 1869, a fine Bath stone pulpit was installed.

When the fastidious members of *Archaeologia Cambrensis* visited the church in 1885, they were somewhat dismayed to discover that the outer walls had been rough cast and the inner were 'fantastically painted red'!

The protracted process of renovation reached its climax with the acquisition of a Norman and Beard pipe organ at a total cost £78.5.1d in April, 1892.

With the formidable assistance of Squire Allen, of Cresselly, Rector Thomas Williams played a leading role in the project for a National village school at the Gail. The school was formally opened on September 21st, 1871, with a service at the parish church in which the sermon was preached by Venerable Archdeacon Clark. Beginning with 102 pupils on the roll, it so established itself under its first

headmaster, Mr H. J. Simlett, that by 1893 - with 229 pupils - it was the largest rural school in Pembrokeshire.

When the churchyard was closed for further burials, in the year Guildford Bridge was completed, Squire J.F. Lort Phillips, of Lawrenny Park presented one acre and 12 perches of Pill Meadow 'fully, voluntarily and without any valuable consideration' to the Rector and his successors in January, 1881. The land had been properly enclosed on the south and east by stone wall, and was to be 'applied as a burial ground and for no other purpose'. Until 1896, all burials there had to be in accordance with Anglican rites, but thereafter Nonconformist ministers were permitted to officiate, and doleful 'Cemetery Road' entered the vocabulary of the visitors.

At least in retrospect, the most striking development of the first half of the 20th century was the loss of the glebe. Over 29 acres in 1898, it was so reduced that by 1929 it amounted to just over four acres.

The Welsh Church Act of 1914, strongly disapproved of by Rector Henry Evans, was delayed by the First World War. But when it came into operation, it created the Church-in-Wales (1920) and obliged the churches to dispose of all property accumulated since 1662, and to devote the proceeds to cultural and educational projects. Since that time, the historic Rectory house has been sold, and the parishes of Llangwm and Freystrop have been re-united (1980).

During the 1920s most of the Llangwm glebe was sold to local farmers and householders, and the remainder, at Well Field and Church End, was later – 1948 and 1960 – bought by the Rural District Council and used for the construction of bungalows.

During the last 40 years, the church building has been further adorned by a number of appropriate memorial gifts which include an exceptionally stout lectern to Canon J. Ifor Jones, the Rector from 1938-1948, and his wife (1960); a beautifully illuminated Roll of Rectors presented by the late Alderman James John as a tribute to his wife Martha (1954); a heavy wooden font cover in memory of the late Colin Cales, of Main Street (1966), and a processional cross in memory of Archie Lawrence Smith, of Beggars Reach (1978). Perhaps the most poignant of the memorials is that to Air Gunner William Arla George, a fondly remembered young man with marked artistic flair, who was killed over Abbeville, France, in February, 1945.

The liturgical resources of the church have been periodically augmented – by a leather-bound lectern bible given as a thank-offering by the late Mrs. J. Morgan of Rectory Road (1903), and by two Prayer Books presented by the well known Wellhead family in memory of their parents, Edwin (died 1969) and Winifred (died 1979) Morgan, and their brother Selwyn (died 1984), the rector's warden for 48 years.

As the Parish has become more cosmopolitan during the last ten to 15 years, the chapels have declined, but the parish church has displayed signs of continuing vitality. In particular, under the present Rector, the Rev. G. Hooper, it has developed a commendable ecumenical dimension to its witness.