The Landmark Trust

# CHURCH COTTAGE

# History Album

**Written and researched**
**by Caroline Stanford**
**May 2005**

The Landmark Trust Shottesbrooke Maidenhead Berkshire SL6 3SW
*Charity registered in England & Wales* 243312 *and Scotland* SC039205

*Bookings* 01628 825925 *Office* 01628 825920 *Facsimile* 01628 825417 *Website*
www.landmarktrust.org.uk

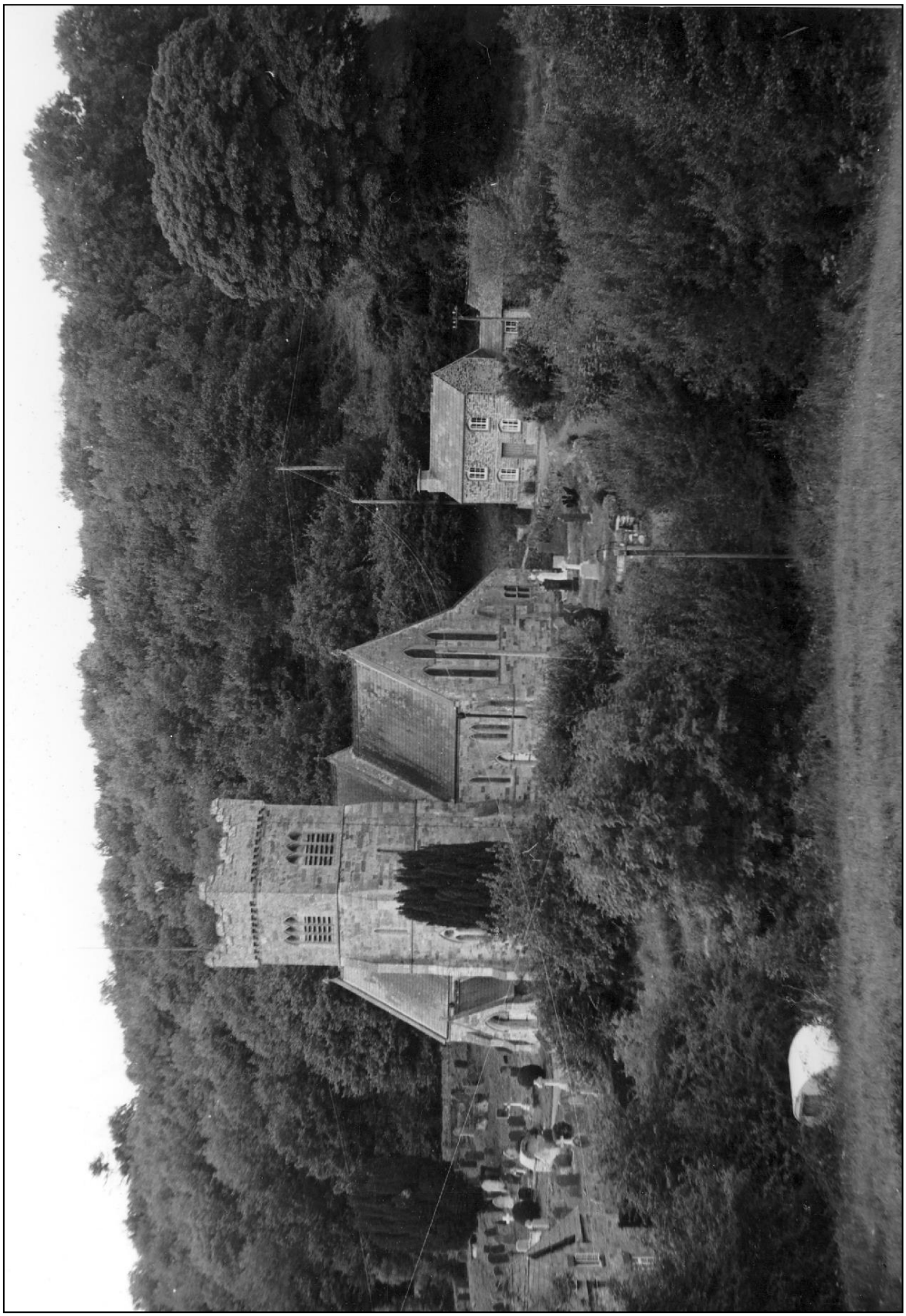
**BASIC DETAILS**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Built:** | **1857** |
| **Architect:** | **R J Withers** |
| **Acquired:** | **1965 (and the first Landmark building)** |
| **Tenure:** | **Freehold** |
| **Listed:** | **Grade II** |
| **Restoration architect:** | **Leonard Bedall Smith** |
| **Contractors:** | **Messrs. Rown of Cilgerran** |
| **Opened as a Landmark:** | **May 1967** |

**Acknowledgement**

**Thanks are due to Margaret and Don Davies of the Old School House, Llandygwydd for their help with this album.**

Contents Page no.



**St Tygwydd' s before demolition of its tower in 1983.**

## Church Cottage: Summary

Church Cottage has a special place in the history of the Landmark Trust as well as Llandygwydd's, as it was the very first building Landmark took on. In 1965, John Smith had the idea of setting up a charitable trust to rescue buildings in distress and then offering them for holidays to secure their future maintenance. He discussed his idea with architect Leonard Bedall Smith of Llangoedmon, who was able to suggest some candidates from his own local patch. One of them was the abandoned cottage beside the church at Llandygwydd, and from here sprang the Landmark Trust which, fifty years later, has almost 200 buildings in its care across England, Scotland and Wales.

The cottage was built in the late 1850s to house a caretaker and sexton for the imposing St Tygwydd's Church, designed by R J Withers in 1857 (Withers also designed the two school houses in the village). John Smith's prescience in stepping in to ensure the cottage's survival was emphasised in melancholy fashion in 2000, when the church itself was demolished. It was at least the third church on the site and the dedication to Celtic St Tygwydd's suggests that Christianity took root here in the earliest times and before St Augustine's mission from Rome in AD 597. Historians disagree about St Tygwydd's exact identity and even whether s/he was male or female. Tygwydd was either the daughter of Tegyd and the wife of St Cunedda Wledyg, (chroniclers tell us that she lived in the early 5th century and was killed in Gwent by the Saxons) – or *he* was St Tyfrïog's brother, with nothing else known except that his feast was variously placed on 13th or 18th January. (St Tyfrïog has left traces in both Brittany and Cornwall and may have had Romano-British, pagan origins).

So we may probably imagine a small, barn-like church in Llandygwydd from very early times. Certainly there was a church here in the years before the Reformation, since a mediaeval calling bell has survived until the present day. The font, too, is unusual in being a fine example of 15th-century stonemason's craft (in Cardiganshire, almost all early fonts are of Norman origin). According to Meyrick, a new church had also been built as recently as 1803 "in a neat, elegant manner for the small sum of three hundred pounds." This was not considered good enough by the evangelical Ecclesiologists, a group of earnest mid-Victorian Anglicans whose mission was to 'improve' both the architecture and seating capacity of the Established Church after a long period of neglect that had seen the rise of Nonconformity in Wales and elsewhere. Their aim was to reintroduce the Gothic architecture of the Middle Ages as the only fit architectural style for ecclesiastical buildings. This Gothic Revival was one of the most important movements in Victorian architecture and religious life, and soon spread to buildings of all kinds, even finding echoes in the little caretaker's cottage and schoolhouses at Llandygwydd.

From an early illustration, the church built in 1804 was a modest chapel and porch, well built of the local stone with a turret to house the calling bell and font. Sixty years later, *The Church Builder* described it as having been 'if not waste and desolate, at least mean, neglected and unsightly…All within and without seemed to say it was the least cared for house in the village.' Money was raised, and Somerset-born Robert Jewell Withers was brought in to design a replacement in the Early English style of the 13th century. Withers was to design many such Gothic churches and municipal buildings. For St Tygwydd's, he designed a tower with a 130 foot wooden spire covered in lead, which local anecdote says was deliberately built to be of a height to be seen from the seats of the four local

landowners who were the main subscribers. A peel of six bells was also installed, but this tower and its spire were to prove the church's undoing.

By 1913, the spire was so unstable that it had to be taken down, and the tower was given crenellations instead. The stone tower survived until 1981, but its weight so de-stabilised the corner of the church that in due course it too had to be taken down. Structural problems continued, however, and in 1996 the church, faced with a repairs bill of some £300,000, also had to be closed. The congregation moved to a new home in one of the school houses. The church was finally demolished in 2000, its footprint and lonely font the only remains of the Ecclesiologists' ambitious project. The faithful mediaeval calling bell now hangs outside 'new' St Tygwydd's at the bottom of the lane, where the best of the Victorian glass has also been moved. To all this Church Cottage has borne silent witness, its own future secure. For all the Victorians' overweening confidence, it is ironic that Established worship in Llandygwydd today continues quietly in a building of a scale and form much closer to its earlier churches.

When Landmark bought Church Cottage from the Representative Body for the Church in Wales, it had stood empty and derelict for a number of years. It was then a very dilapidated two-up, two-down cottage with a rickety staircase and no bathroom. The kitchen and a lavatory were in lean-to sheds at the back. It was virtually built into the bank at the rear, which was causing serious damp problems especially on the west wall. Surrounded by glebe land, access to the cottage was then across the stream beyond the present garden.

First, the site was cleared and the lean-tos demolished. The same team excavated the bank at the back (a laborious process once they hit rock within) and lowered the ground level inside and outside the cottage. They also stripped the plaster from the walls and ceilings and mostly demolished the chimney stack and end wall. In March 1966, builders Messrs. Rown of Cilgerran started work. An extension was added in local materials, which now houses the kitchen, stairs and bathroom. The west wall and chimney stack were rebuilt, the chimney stack and front of the kitchen being refaced with sawn stone rejected from the Cilgerran quarry, thrown aside a great many years ago when the quarry was working. Such thrift informed much of the work done on the cottage: the stone for the repairs to the rear wall came from Mr Beddall Smith's own stables, which he was in the process of demolishing.

Preseli slates from the architect's stables were also used for the front roof slopes, while slates salvaged from Blaen Pant were used at the back, bought for 2s 6d each from Mrs James of Blaen Pant. After stripping, sorting and carriage to Church Cottage, 'the total cost comes to much the same as buying new,' reported the architect, 'but the old slates look nicer.' New window and door frames were put in and floors, beams and staircase renewed in oak. Leonard Beddall Smith designed the quatrefoil device for the window heads, writing that 'The joiners in these parts are accustomed to carving elaborate chairs for the bards for the eisteddfoddau and carving will be no problem.' Suitable mantelpieces were installed in the sitting room and bedroom; a larder was made under the stairs and a back porch built up to and incorporating the outbuilding. The suitably Gothic front door was added. A paved space was laid between the cottage and outbuilding, with terrace and ha-ha beyond and the vicar agreed to a new access off the main road. After an advert in the *Sunday Times*, the first visitors began their holiday in Church Cottage on 27 May 1967. It has been a popular Landmark ever since, and from these modest beginnings, the Landmark Trust was duly launched.

## Church Cottage: Crynodeb

Mae gan Church Cottage le arbennig yn hanes y Landmark Trust yn ogystal ag yn hanes Llandygwydd, gan mai hwn oedd yr adeilad cyntaf i'r ymddiriedolaeth fynd ati i'w adfer. Yn 1965 cafodd John Smith y syniad o sefydlu ymddiriedolaeth elusennol i achub adeiladau oedd yn mynd yn adfail ac yna eu cynnig fel llety gwyliau i sicrhau eu cynnal a'u cadw i'r dyfodol. Trafododd ei syniad â'r pensaer Leonard Bedall Smith o Llangoedmon, a gwnaeth yntaf awgrymu adeiladau addas yn ei ardal. Un ohonynt oedd y bwthyn ger yr eglwys yn Llandygwydd, ac o hynny deilliodd y Landmark Trust sydd â bron i 200 o adeiladau dan ei ofal yng Nghymru, Lloegr a'r Alban ddeugain mlynedd yn ddiweddarach.

Adeiladwyd y bwthyn yn niwedd yr 1850au i ddarparu cartref i ofalwr a chlochydd eglwys Sant Tygwydd, a ddyluniwyd gan R J Withers yn 1857 (dyluniwyd y ddau ysgoldy yn y pentref ganddo hefyd). Pwysleisiwyd rhagwelediad John Smith yn ymyrryd i sicrhau goroesiad y bwthyn mewn modd pruddglwyf yn 2000 pan ddymchwelwyd yr eglwys. Yr eglwys oedd y drydedd o leiaf ar y safle ac mae'r cysegriad i'r Sant Tygwydd Celtaidd yn awgrymu fod Cristnogaeth wedi gwreiddio yma yn y cyfnod cynharaf a chyn cenhadaeth Sant Awgwstin o Rufain yn 597 Oed Crist. Nid yw haneswyr yn cytuno ynghylch cefndir Sant Tygwydd na hyd yn oed os oedd yn wryw neu benyw. Roedd Tygwydd un ai'n ferch i Tegyd a gwraig Sant Cunedda Wledig (dywed yr haneswyr ei bod hi'n byw yn gynnar yn y bumed ganrif ac fe'i lladdwyd yng Ngwent gan y Sacsoniaid) – neu ef oedd brawd Sant Tyfrïog, heb unrhyw beth arall yn hysbys ac eithrio bod ei wyl yn cael ei chynnal ar 13 neu 19 Ionawr. (Mae Sant Tyfrïog wedi gadael olion yn Llydaw a Chernyw ac mae'n bosib fod iddo wreiddiau paganaidd, Rhufeinig-Brydeinig.)

Felly gallwn ddychmygu eglwys fechan fel 'sgubor yn Llandygwydd o'r cyfnod cynharaf. Yn sicr roedd eglwys yma yn y blynyddoedd cyn y Diwygiad Protestanaidd, gan fod cloch canoloesol wedi goroesi hyd heddiw. Mae'r bedyddfaen hefyd yn anarferol gan ei fod yn enghraifft gain o grefft saer maen o'r bymthegfed ganrif (yng Ngheredigion mae bron y cyfan o'r bedyddfeini cynnar yn deillio o'r cyfnod Normanaidd). Yn ôl Meyrick adeiladwyd eglwys newydd mor ddiweddar â 1803 "in a neat, elegant manner for the small sum of three hundred pounds." Nid oedd hyn yn ddigon da ym marn yr Eglwyswyr efengylaidd, criw o Anglicaniaid brwd yng nghanol oes Fictoria a oedd yn benderfynol o 'wella' pensaerniaeth a nifer y seddi yn yr eglwysi yn dilyn cyfnod hir o esgeuluso pan welwyd cynnydd mewn Anghydffurfiaeth yng Nghymru ac ardaloedd eraill. Eu nod oedd ailgyflwyno pensaerniaeth Gothig yr Oesoedd Canol fel yr unig steil pensaernïol oedd yn gweddu i adeiladau eglwysig. Yr Adferiad Gothig hwn oedd un o'r dylanwadau pwysicaf ar bensaerniaeth a bywyd crefyddol oes Fictoria, a lledodd yn fuan i adeiladau o bob math, a gellir gweld adleisiau o hyn ym mwthyn y gofalwr a'r ysgoldai yn Llandygwydd.

Dengys darlun cynnar fod yr eglwys a adeiladwyd yn 1803 yn gapel diymhongar gyda phorth, wedi'i adeiladu o gerrig lleol gyda thwr i'r gloch a'r bedyddfaen. Chwedeg mlynedd yn ddiweddarach, disgrifiwyd y lle fel 'if not waste and desolate, at least mean, neglected and unsightly…All within and without seemed to say it was the least cared for house in the village' gan The Church Builder. Codwyd arian a daeth Robert Jewell Withers, yn enedigol o Wlad yr Haf, i ddylunio eglwys newydd yn steil Seisnig Cynnar y drydedd ganrif ar ddeg. Aeth Withers ymlaen i ddylunio llawer o eglwysi Gothig ac adeiladau dinesig o'r fath. O ran Eglwys Sant Tygwydd dyluniodd dwr gyda meindwr pren 130 troedfedd wedi'i orchuddio mewn plwm, a dywedir yn lleol ei fod wedi'i greu

mor uchel yn fwriadol fel y gellid ei weld o gartrefi'r pedwar tirfeddiannwr lleol a oedd yn brif noddwyr y fenter. Gosodwyd chwe chloch yn y twr, ond y twr hwn a'r meindwr fyddai'n arwain at broblemau adeiladwaith yr eglwys.

Erbyn 1913 roedd y meindwr mor ansefydlog roedd yn rhaid ei dynnu i lawr, a gosodwyd creneliad ar y tyr yn lle. Goroesodd y twr cerrig tan 1981 ond roedd ei bwysau wedi effeithio cymaint ar gornel yr eglwys fel y bu'n rhaid ei dynnu i lawr. Serch hynny, parhaodd y problemau strwythurol ac yn 1996, gyda'r costau atgyweirio tynnu at £300,000, bu'n rhaid cau'r eglwys. Cafodd ei dymchwel yn 2000, ac olion y sylfeini a'r bedyddfaen unig yw'r unig beth sydd ar ôl o brosiect uchelgeisiol yr eglwyswyr. Mae'r gloch ganoloesol bellach y tu allan i'r eglwys Sant Tygwydd 'newydd' ar waelod y lôn, a symudwyd y gorau o'r gwydr Fictoraidd yno hefyd. Mae Church Cottage wedi bod yn dyst distaw i hyn i gyd, gyda'i ddyfodol yn sicr. Mae'n eironig bod pobl yn parhau i addoli'n ddistaw yn Llandygwydd heddiw mewn adeilad o faint a ffurf llawer agosach at yr eglwysi cynharach.

Adfer Church Cottage

Pan brynwyd Church Cottage gan Gorff Cynrychioliadol yr Eglwys yng Nghymru gan y Landmark Trust roedd wedi bod yn adfail gwag am nifer o flynyddoedd. Roedd yn fwthyn dwy ystafell i fyny'r grisiau a dwy ystafell i lawr gyda grisiau bregus a dim ystafell ymolchi. Roedd y gegin a'r toiled mewn siediau to pwyso yng nghefn yr adeilad. Roedd wedi ei adeiladu i'r pridd yn y tu ôl, a oedd yn achosi problemau tamprwydd difrifol yn enwedig o ran y wal orllewinol. Wedi'i amgylchynu gan dir llan, cyrhaeddwyd y bwthyn drwy groesi ffrwd y tu hwnt i'r ardd bresennol.

Y cam cyntaf oedd clirio'r safle a dymchwel y siedau to pwysau. Bu'r un tîm yn gyfrifol am durio'r tir yn y cefn (proses lafurus iawn unwaith iddynt daro yn erbyn craig) i ostwng y lefel y tu mewn a'r tu allan i'r bwthyn. Tynnwyd y plastar oddi ar y waliau a'r nenfydau a thynnwyd y simne a'r wal honno i lawr bron yn gyfangwbl. Ym mis Mawrth 1966, dechreuodd yr adeiladwyr Rown o Gilgerran y gwaith o adfer y bwthyn. Ychwanegwyd estyniad mewn deunyddiau lleol, sy'n cynnwys y gegin, y grisiau a'r ystafell ymolchi. Ailadeiladwyd y wal orllewinol a'r simne, gyda'r simne a blaen y gegin wedi'u gorchuddio mewn cerrig gwrthodedig o chwarel Cilgerran, a oedd wedi'u taflu o'r neilltu sawl blwyddyn yn ôl pan oedd y chwarel yn parhau i weithio. Gwnaed llawer o'r gwaith ar y bwthyn mewn modd yr un mor ddarbodus: daeth y cerrig i drwsio'r wal gefn o stablau Mr Beddal Smith ei hun, gan ei fod yn y broses o'u dymchwel.

Defnyddiwyd llechi Preseli o stablau'r pensaer hefyd ar gyfer tu blaen y to, gyda llechi wedi'u hadfer o Flaen Pant wedi'u defnyddio yn y tu ôl. Cawsant eu prynu am ddau swllt a chwe cheiniog yr un gan Mrs James o Flaen Pant. Ar ôl eu didoli a'u cludo i Church Cottage dywedodd y pensaer fod y gost tua'r un faint â phrynu llechi newydd, ond bod yr hen lechi'n edrych yn llawer gwell. Gosodwyd fframiau ffenestri a drysau newydd, ac adnewyddwyd y lloriau, y trawstiau a'r grisiau mewn derw. Dyluniodd Leonard Beddall Smith y ddyfais pedeirdalen ar gyfer pen y ffenestri gan nodi fod seiri'r ardal hon wedi arfer cerfio cadeiriau cain i'r beirdd yn yr eisteddfodau ac na fyddai cerfio'n peri problem iddynt. Gosodwyd aelwydydd addas yn yr ystafell fyw a'r ystafell wely; gwnaed larder o dan y grisiau ac adeiladu porth cefn at ac yn cysylltu â'r adeilad allanol, gyda theras a 'ha-ha' y tu hwnt a chytunodd y ficer i ganiatáu mynedfa newydd oddi ar y ffordd fawr. Yn dilyn gosod hysbyseb yn y Sunday Times daeth yr ymwelwyr cyntaf ar wyliau i Church Cottage ar 27 Mai 1967. Mae wedi bod yn eiddo Landmark poblogaidd fyth ers hynny, ac o hyn y lansiwyd y Landmark Trust.

## Landmark's Restoration of Church Cottage

When Church Cottage opened as the first Landmark in 1967, features that have since become Landmark institutions, like the History Albums, did not yet exist. Church Cottage eventually acquired a folder of photocopied extracts about R J Withers' other works, but in the year of Landmark's 40th anniversary, it seemed fitting that this first Landmark should have its own proper album. Sadly, no 'work in progress' photographs survive, but reviewing the building's files over the past forty years was in itself an exercise in historical research and conjures much of the atmosphere of the Trust's early days.

Leonard Bedall Smith, architect, of Pantgwyn Mansion, Llangoedmon, Cardiganshire met John and Christian Smith when visiting Shottesbrooke as their diocesan architect to advise on the church of St. John the Baptist on that estate. At that time, John Smith already had the idea of a charitable trust to rescue buildings in distress, ideas that he discussed with Leonard Bedall Smith, who was able to come up with some candidates from his own local patch. One of them was the derelict cottage beside the church at Llandygwydd, and John Smith wrote to the Representative Body of the Church of Wales to enquire about the possibility of its purchase. (Tower Hill at St David's and Tower Hill Lodge - known today as Paxton's Tower Lodge - were other early acquisitions in West Wales, quickly followed in 1967 by the Bath Tower at Caenarvon and Ty Capel at Rhiwddolion).

Group Captain W R (Bill) Williams, Secretary to the newly formed trust, summed up its purpose in a letter to the estate agents acting on behalf of the Representative Body of the Church of Wales in July 1965: 'The Landmark Trust, which is a charitable trust, has been formed with the object of doing up small buildings, which, although not necessarily of great architectural value, can add greatly to the scene if restored in the right way.'

The estate agents valued the cottage at £250 (for, in the days when Landmark was run as a private charity through the generosity of John Smith, it was able to buy its buildings on the open market with the help of the Manifold Trust). This price increased by £20 in compensation to the Parochial Church Council for its recent expenditure in installing mains electricity. Otherwise, the cottage had stood empty and increasingly derelict for several years and was deteriorating because of the damp seeping into it from the bank.

Quite a cosmopolitan team was employed to clear the site and demolish the former kitchen and lavatory. On one site visit, 'one German and two Italians' were found hard at work by Leonard Beddall Smith, and reporting to a Mr Reepslager. The same team excavated the bank at the back, a laborious and slow process once they encountered the rock within, and lowered the ground level inside and outside the cottage. They also stripped the plaster from the walls and ceilings and mostly demolished the chimney stack and end wall, which had become unsound.

The 'best of the local builders' were sought out for the renovation itself ('We must have the best,' annotated John Smith) and Messrs. Rown of Cilgerran started work on Monday 7 March 1966, competent builders with good carpenters and masons able to cut new window arches in Cilgerran stone.

Country-cut oak was ordered for downstairs and the two oak beams across the living room, while prime quality oak for the staircase had to be fetched from Stafford. Leonard Bedall Smith also reported, in February 1966, that 'I have taken down part of the upstairs ceiling and am surprised (and pleased) to find that the roof construction appears to in good order. It is clean and strong.' Stone for the repairs to the rear wall came from Mr Beddall Smith's own stables, which he was in the process of demolishing, while the chimney stack and front of the kitchen were refaced with sawn stone rejected from the Cilgerran quarry,

'thrown aside a great many years ago when the quarry was working.' Such thrift informed much of the work done on the cottage.

Slates from the stables were also used for the front roof slopes, while salvaged Blaenpant slates were used at the back, bought for 2s 6d each from Mrs James of Blaenpant. After stripping, sorting and carriage to Church Cottage, 'the total cost comes to much the same as buying new', reported the architect, 'but the old slates look nicer.'

A larder was made under the stairs and a back porch built up to and incorporating the outbuilding. The Gothic front door was added and a paved space between the cottage and outbuilding, and a terrace with ha-ha beyond.

At John Smith's suggestion, Leonard Beddall Smith designed a quatrefoil device for the window heads. He wrote that 'The joiners in these parts are accustomed to carving elaborate chairs for the bards for the eisteddfoddau and carving will be no problem.' Meanwhile, providing a view into another era, he writes that 'A quite decent wood mantelpiece has just been flung out of a cottage near here in favour of a glazed tile monstrosity. This would do very well for downstairs and the fireplace opening could be rebuilt to the size to suit. For upstairs, I have a plain slate mantelpiece in my store-room which I think will do.'

John Smith's keen interest in all aspects of the project is apparent throughout the correspondence, from the placing of the striplight in the kitchen to an early aversion to pendant lights that persists in Landmark schemes to this day.

By 1 September 1966, a certain note of frustration creeps into the architect's letters of report that has a strangely familiar ring, at some stage, to anyone involved in any Landmark project forty years on! Leonard Bedall Smith writes:

> 'There has been a vast difference between promise and performance on this job but the men are at work most of the time…The plain wall is good and I

> think John will like it. The worked stone is less satisfactory, there are no real masons left in west Wales nor any quarries open… The job is being a bit troublesome and has already taken no fewer than thirty-two visits of site inspection, but one must take the rough with the smooth. In fact I am enjoying this job as it is reviving in a small way an almost dead type of building.' [John Smith marked this last sentence in the margin]

The architect's refreshingly frank comments about lighting also strike a chord today: 'Light fittings are a perennial problem. Nearly all the fittings offered by the trade are ghastly…I would eschew any attempt at making the lights look old. My idea would be to adopt one of the less offensive contemporary fittings….' John Smith's wife Christian, already involved in the furnishings, agreed to his recommendation, 'I think this is quite harmless.' Corynne, Countess de Lukas Lessner, Leonard's wife, also helped acquire many of the items for furnishing.

The then vicar was a little cool about the renovation at first, but soon seems to have come round and was helpful over moving the farmer's access to the field in the November, which passed very close to the cottage originally. Moving the access also required putting in a culvert over the stream, a new splayed entrance with gates and a short length of track. Sycamores, as native trees, were also planted to block the sight line to the nearest houses although sadly the ground was so wet that all died of fungus (and the wasteland on which they stood was anyway requisitioned by the County Highway Engineer as part of a road widening scheme in 1968. (In January 1969, Leonard Bedall Smith reported that, *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*-style, 'The surveyor showed me his hypothetical plan for the road. By means of the beautiful curves, it cuts a swathe through Llandygywdd and obliterates Church Cottage. He told me not to worry, it won't be done in our lifetime, it may never be done.').

On 7 January 1967, the architect was concerned that 'there were no men working when I visited the cottage last Monday. All the builders in the area had taken the whole of last week off as a holiday.' He does however risk a first booking date, Whit Saturday, 13 May. Work at Tower Hill Lodge seems to have

gone more smoothly, so that this, in fact, was to be the first Landmark to open to visitors, on Saturday, 25 March 1967.

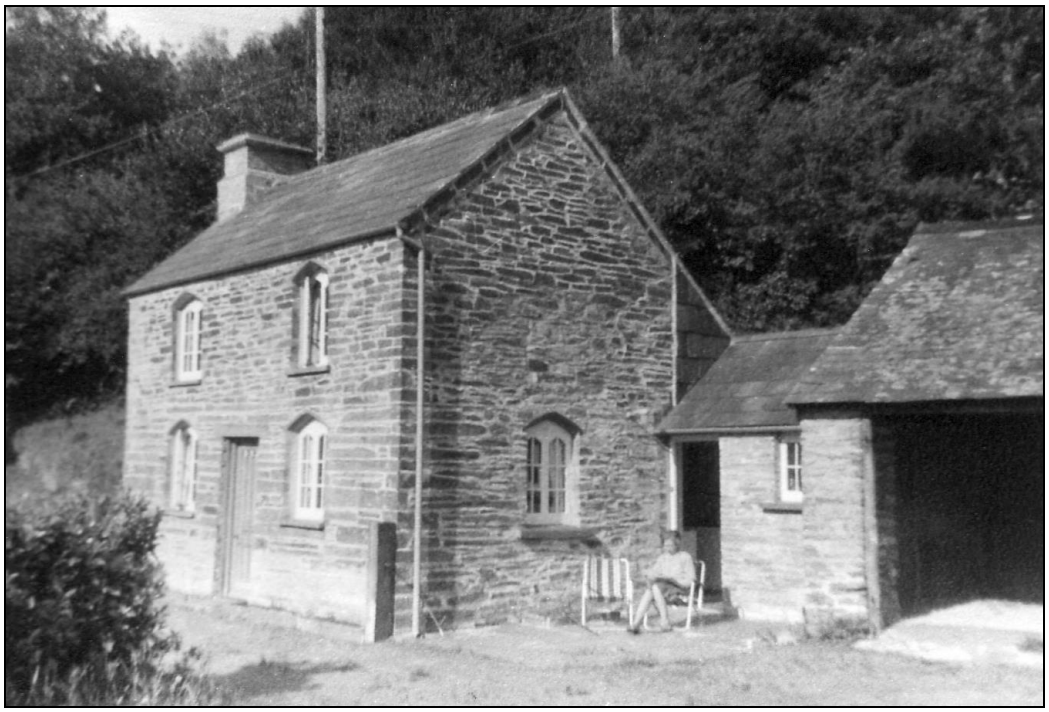
Both cottages were advertised in the *Sunday Times* initially, but 'the response has been very disappointing so far,' which was lucky because by 1 April, the architect was promising completion by 20 May instead. In the event, the first let for Church Cottage was 27 May, beating Tower Hill Lodge to its first visitors by a full month. Mrs James, who lived nearby, was the first caretaker and kept the cottage spick and span from the outset.

On 7 June 1967, the files also introduce a name still familiar to all at Shottesbrooke today: a young solicitor called Donald Amlot, working for Landmark's solicitors Stephenson, Harwood & Tatham of Saddler's Hall, Gutter Lane, Cheapside. In 2015, Donald, though long retired, still serves Landmark faithfully as a volunteer one day a week, when he unravels many an otherwise intractable conveyancing problem.

In mid-June, Group Captain Williams is able to report back that 'the first people into Church Cottage reported very well on their holiday. They did find a lack of mirrors…The next lot of people go in on the 17th and then it is pretty well booked through till September.' Thus the enterprise was launched, with a fair wind set for the future.

In 1969, Landmark applied to the Welsh Office to have Church Cottage included in the (then very recently initiated) List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest. The Welsh Office declined: 'Church Cottage is a 19th Century building and buildings of this century have to be of definite quality and character to merit inclusion in the list.' This refusal highlights very clearly John Smith's prescience in saving buildings of this type; in fact, Church Cottage was eventually listed Grade II in 1995.

There were frequent maintenance campaigns at the cottage, with some issues proving long running: a smoking fire, smelly drains with a tendency to block (and were originally accessed via a manhole cover in the kitchen) and a persistently damp bathroom. Andrew Thomas, another architect who has been involved in many Landmark projects, had periodic involvement with the cottage from the early 1990s. The advent of a fulltime, in-house surveyor, David Alexander, in 1997 also raised standards in Landmarks generally and we hope that all the long-standing problems at Church Cottage have now been solved.



**Staying at Church Cottage, in 1969. It is not clear whether the chairs were the visitors' own, or already part of standard equipment!**

## Christianity in Cardiganshire – A (Very) Brief History

Perhaps surprisingly for such a remote spot, the very existence of an Established (that is, Anglican) church in Llandygwydd, the inferences that can be drawn from its dedication, and the clues that can be picked up of earlier churches on the site encapsulate the whole sweep of British Christianity. There have been at least four churches to date called St Tygwydd's in the village, and to understand why R J Withers came to build a church and cottage here, it is worth reflecting briefly on the history of Christianity in this very precise corner of Wales.

The dedication of the church at Llandygwydd to St Tygwydd (also of course reflected in the place name itself) is a rare one, and interesting in that it suggests that Christianity has been here since the religion's very earliest days in Britain. Historians disagree about St Tygwydd's exact identity and even whether s/he was male or female. Tygwydd was either the daughter of Tegyd and the wife of St Cunedda Wledyg, (chroniclers tell us that she lived in the early 5th century and was killed in Gwent by the Saxons, where there was, at least until 1903, another church dedicated to her) – or *he* was St Tyfrïog's brother, with nothing else known except that his feast was variously placed on 13 or 18 January. (St Tyfrïog is identified with the patrons of Saint-Brieuc in Brittany and St Breoc in Cornwall (the Welsh form of the name is *Briog* preceded by *ty-*, the prefix of endearment. An eleventh-century *Life* of Breton origin names the saint as 'Briocmaglus, a native of the Coritician region,' showing general awareness of his association with Cardiganshire. Significantly, there was a Romano-British dedication near here to Nodens who features in Tyfrïog's Welsh pedigree as Nudd Hael, (which may mean that this saint's origins were originally pagan, consistent with the coincidence of his feast with 1 May.) Either way, all the signs point to a very early dedication, one of only a handful of dedications to Tygwydd that have survived.

The Romans had brought Christianity to Britain around AD 150, a tolerant faith that often assimilated and merged with local pagan gods. But when the Romans

left Britain around AD 400, Anglo Saxon raids soon led to settlements and a reassertion of pagan worship. Christianity was driven to the Celtic fringes of the island. When St Augustine landed in Kent in AD 597, he had a dual mission: to roll back the tide of paganism in the Germanic hinterland stretching to the north and west, and secondly to bring the Celtic bishops back under papal authority. Pope Gregory the Great believed that these Britons were still living in accordance with the rules of the Catholic Church and, by reuniting them with Rome, that the ecclesiastical unity of the province of Britain could be re-established. Augustine was to exercise this authority as archbishop over the Britons – 'We commit to you, my bother', the Pope told him, 'all the bishops of Britain.'

Augustine met the British bishops at Augustine's Oak in Anglo-Saxon territory bordering the Bristol Channel in 600. It was not an easy meeting. Augustine seems to have been intolerant and arrogant, remaining seated in the presence of the British bishops and alienating them to such an extent that that they not only refused to accept him as archbishop but also declined to join with him in preaching to the Anglo-Saxons. This was to be only the beginning of the long process of bringing into agreement interpretations of the Christian message and institutions that already differed significantly in these years after the collapse of the Roman Empire – differences over the dating of Easter, the performance of the rite of baptism and a refusal to submit to the authority of Canterbury, as so vividly chronicled by the Venerable Bede in his *Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation*. It was not until these differences were finally resolved at the Synod of Whitby in AD 664 that the Christian church in Britain could truly be said to be a single entity. Did a humble Christian building in Llandygwydd witness even these early events? It seems at least possible. Summary historical maps of Cardiganshire mark both a mediaeval and a Celtic church in Llandygwyydd, although any further evidence of their exact form remains elusive.

The first definitive proof of a church in Llandygwydd comes in the 13th century and with it the first local evidence of an abuse of church power that was to dog the Established Church (as the Church of England later became known in Wales) well into the 19th century – the alienation of tithes. Tithes were effectively a local tax imposed by the church on its parishioners to fund the care of their souls by providing a living for a parish priest, based on the 'tenth part' that the Bible advocated should be given to the Church. The tithes would in many cases have been ample to provide a more than decent living, but all too often the majority of the income, whether in coin or kind, was siphoned off by more powerful prelates, leaving scope only for poor and ill-educated local clergy.

Llandygwydd has lain in the diocese of St David's from the earliest times. In the 13th century, Thomas Bek, Bishop of St David's from 1280 to 1293, established two colleges of priests to help with the administration of his large diocese. He endowed these colleges with tithes from the various livings in his diocese, and we know that one of these parishes was Llandygwydd. Almost six hundred years later, the 1851 Census of Religious Worship revealed that the Llandygwydd tithes had recently been commuted at a cash value of £450, of which the incumbent received £8 and the rest went to the college. All to the greater glory of God, no doubt, but it is no wonder that parish religion suffered.

That St Tygwydd's Church was thriving, more or less, until the Reformation may be inferred by its fine font and silver. While now set on a 19th-century shaft and base, the font itself is an unusual and fine example of the 15th–century stone mason's craft, unusual for Cardiganshire because almost all its surviving stone fonts are of earlier, Norman origin. The font is also unusual in having quatrefoils in relief rather than *en bas* and all four are different. In 1915, it was Professor E Tyrell Green's view that 'in the merit of its design and stateliness of proportions, this font takes front rank and is certainly unsurpassed in this county.'[1] At the

[1] (Cardigan Antiquarian Society Transactions ii:19)

time of writing the font stands marooned, perhaps misguidedly, in the footprint of the church, exposed to all the Welsh elements may throw at it.

**St Tygwydd's communion cup, dated 1573.**

**The mediaeval calling bell that has hung in at least four of the Anglican/ Established churches that have stood in Llandygwydd.**

St Tygwydd's also had a so-called 'calling' bell, used to summon worshippers, which dates from before the Reformation. A 19th-century incumbent had recorded that it bore the inscription ORA PRO NOBIS SANCTE PETRE and in 1904, George Eyre Evans mounted to the belfry and found the bell, 'tiny and melodious', still hanging, now the smallest of a peal of six. By taperlight, he took a rubbing of the last word and found it indeed to be 'Petre.' This is the bell now that now hangs outside 'new' St Tygwydd's at the former schoolhouse.

A further sign that the church must once have had a wealthy patron appears from an Elizabethan Communion Cup. In 1547, consolidating his father Henry VIII's Protestant Reformation, Edward VI issued Injunctions which ordered that the last trappings of Popery, all 'monuments to superstition', to be utterly defaced and destroyed. A Commission was appointed in 1548 to survey for the purposes of confiscation all such items and revenues of the secular church. All vessels used in the Mass were to be recast into 'comeley Communion Cups of silver' with 'covers for the same.' The result for Llandygwydd was one of the earliest and finest of such pieces in the county and engraved * POCVLVM * ECCLESIE * DE LLAND * OGWY, 1573.

The registers for St Tygwyyd's go back to 1613, a respectably early date for the records of such a remote parish. By the time we move into the 18th century, however, the Anglican Church was facing a new challenge that was again to change the face of Christianity in these islands – Nonconformity, so named after those who refused to subscribe to Charles II's Act of Uniformity of 1662. This required all worship to be according to the practices laid down in the Book of Common Prayer, an attempt to return to a largely illusory orderliness of worship before the Civil War. Some, however, found themselves unwilling to give up the freedom to worship in their own manner that they had enjoyed during recent years.

In Cardiganshire, the Established Church was undeniably dominant at the beginning of the 18th century. It was a pillar of the constitution and its members accepted, as they had done since Elizabethan times, that society was based in wealth, hierarchy and deference. The church was integrated into community life and touched the lives of parishioners in numerous ways, not just through its control over gifts of lands and tithes but also because it was generally acknowledged to offer the only legitimate and reliable means of national salvation. There were hardly any Dissenters and, far from the metropolitan centre, the county was untroubled by heterodox views or radical ideology.

The Anglican Church was, however, increasingly criticised as a complacent, moribund institution lacking inspiring leaders and riddled with deep-seated abuses of position and wealth. By the middle of the 18th century, Methodists and other Nonconformist sects were attacking the Established church in Wales increasingly fiercely, maintaining with some truth that it was undermined by inadequate revenues, antiquated administration and inequitable distribution of its wealth. This was as true in England as in Wales; the root of the economic problem lay in the impropriation of ecclesiastical property as well as tithes by absentee landlords, often not even clerical, who then paid inadequate salaries to overworked curates to minister to local congregations. Cardiganshire suffered from impropriation more perhaps than any other county: more than half the rent charges were appropriated by laymen. This is a theme that surfaces in the histories of Landmarks with church connections from Methwold Old Vicarage in Norfolk to Church Cottage here in Cardiganshire. In 1903, George Eyre Evans recorded finding the gravestone for Revd John Thomas, who died on 2 June 1795, in the Llandygwydd churchyard. Thomas had been curate for 51 years of Blaenporth, rector of Aberporth and perpetual curate of Llandygwydd and Llechryd, an example perhaps of how stagnated pastoral care could become in the Established Church at this time.

The great see of St David's was also hampered by its inability to attract and retain bishops of any ability. Their average tenure in the 18th century was a mere five years and most were remote and distant figures who showed little concern for their flock and even less for the value of the Welsh language. This was all a far cry from the golden days of the late 16th century, when Welsh humanist scholars like Henry Salesbury who lived at Dolbelydr, another Landmark, had worked hard to put Welsh on an equal footing with English and Latin.

Yet at grassroots level, contemporaries commented upon the religiosity of locals in Cardiganshire and most of the parish priests were hard-working native-speakers. Indeed, Cardiganshire became a celebrated nursing-ground for Welsh clerics, who were also crucial agents in producing and disseminating pious books, printed in Welsh, for the growing reading public. This steady flow significantly enhanced people's understanding of the fundamental doctrines of the Protestant Reformation, especially in the lower Teify valley. There was also a strong educational tradition in Cardiganshire from at least the middle of the 18th century, fuelled by Griffith Jones's famous Circulating Schools, a small army of native language teachers who moved from parish to parish, teaching children and adults alike.

These circulating schools also revitalised church life, largely thanks to the Methodist movement, with which Cardiganshire was involved from the outset. Methodism was neither introduced nor imposed from above, but owed its influence in Cardiganshire to local initiatives stemming from personal conversions experienced by the two founding fathers, Daniel Rowland and Howel Harris. It is now generally agreed that for all the enthusiasm of its practice, Methodism spread relatively slowly, in Cardiganshire as elsewhere, but there is no doubt that it injected new life into dormant or inactive churches. Its early evangelists believed they had a God-given commission to win the souls of poor benighted sinners to Christ, leading by their own example and enthusiastic,

emotional preaching. Llangeitho was a focus, from which Methodism spread along the lower Teify valley into north Carmarthenshire, north Pembrokeshire and along the Cardiganshire coastline. It was strongest in rural communities where the resources of the Established church were thinly stretched and where non-resident holders of more than one ecclesiastical living were unable to exercise effective pastoral supervision or to compete with the excitement offered by the young field preachers. Methodists were not generally badly treated in the county and were viewed 'as an organic part of the Established Church rather than some kind of Trojan horse.' Eighteenth-century leaders were also mostly reluctant to sever their ties with the mother church, seldom applying for separate meeting houses or licenses to preach. Weslyan Methodism was far less influential than Calvinist, in part due to a gentleman's agreement between John Wesley and Howel Harris that the Welsh-speaking parts of Wales be left to local preachers.

Other Nonconformist sects – Baptists, Congregationalists, Unitarians – also put down roots to greater or lesser extents through the century, all capitalising on the Established Church's inability to put its own house in order. Where there were dominant local families, these tended to unite with the Anglican clergy to remind local communities of their duty to conform to the Anglican hierarchy. Yet by 1800 even the Methodists were beginning to consider secession from the mother church, however far this was from their original aims. When in 1811 the Calvinistic Methodists became a separate denomination, deciding to ordain their own ministers and empower them to administer the sacraments rather than relying on sympathetic Anglican clergy as had been the case until now, it occasioned little surprise in Cardiganshire, for long a religiously pluralistic county. The claim of the Established Church to economic powers over the other denominations through tithes and church rates could lead to bad feeling, but mostly the different denominations co-existed without great conflict.
'Anglicanism had always been a rickety and barely seaworthy vessel, but it was

now more vulnerable than it had been since early Elizabethan times.'[2] The visitation returns for Cardiganshire in 1804 reveal only 2,157 regular Anglican communicants out of an adult population of some 30,000. The Anglican Church could accommodate some 40% of the population in Cardiganshire, but Llandygwydd fell into an important minority for whom this was not the case. It was one of the largest parishes in the south of the county with a population of 1,113, but in 1811 its little church (newly built as recently as 1804) could only accommodate 70 persons, or 6% its inhabitants. On the basis of the evidence above, this was probably a realistic assessment of likely attendance.

Even the growth of Nonconformity should not be exaggerated. The people of Cardiganshire were neither regular church- nor chapel-goers in the 18th century. The circulating schools had collapsed during the 1770s and most of the labouring classes, it is suggested, remained as influenced by superstition and the occult as they had ever been. The county was still notorious for its remoteness, poor communications and poor economy, with illiteracy and ignorance still the main obstacle to religion of any kind. 'I know of no district so confined within itself,' wrote Benjamin Malkin of Cardiganshire as late as 1804.

Dissenters had less and less inclination to remain within the Established Church. Allegiance to this sect had wider social implications: while free to worship under the 1689 Act of Toleration, until the Test and Corporation Acts of 1828 Dissenters were barred from office in public life. The same was true for Catholics at the other end of the religious spectrum, to whom the 1828 Act also gave fresh life in matters of church building, energised by the liturgical and architectural fervour of Augustus Pugin. In his championship of the 'true principles' of all things Gothic as the only appropriate style for a Christian society, Pugin (who converted to Catholicism in 1834) was part of a wake-up call for the Anglican church. It responded with the development of Tractarianism and the foundation

[2] *Cardiganshire County History,* Vol. III, p. 476 (1998).

of such groups as the Cambridge Camden Society and Oxford Archaeological and Historical Society.

Tractarianism was named after John Henry Newman's *Tracts for the Times*, the first of which was published in 1833. The tracts sought to reinvigorate the Anglican church through a return to the purity of the pre-Reformation church (much as Pugin was more logically seeking to do for British Catholicism). Tractarians wanted more ritual and religious decoration in churches, looking back idealistically to the Middle Ages as a time when the Church had met the needs of its parishioners both aesthetically and religiously. Tractarianism was inevitably a High Church movement and it ended in 1845 when the ineluctable logic of Newman's position led him to convert to Catholicism, to the great disappointment of those of his supporters who felt unable to follow him into the Catholic faith. The Camden Society and OAHS, meanwhile, had spent the decade carrying out a systematic and exhaustive study of Gothic architecture and the general desire to return to the Gothic had infused mainstream Anglicanism. Those who supported this revival became known as Ecclesiologists, and catalogued their progress in the journal of the Camden Society called *The Ecclesiologist.* Camden Society members across the country were encouraged to fill in lengthy 'Church Schemes', blank forms for accurate and detailed architectural descriptions of churches. The core of the Ecclesiologists' belief was the assertion that 'in pointed [i.e. Gothic] architecture Christian symbolism has found its most adequate exponent'[3] and that 'Gothick is the only Christian architecture.'

On Sunday 30 March 1851, a Census of Religious Worship was taken as part of the national decennial census, a snapshot of all those attending a place of worship on this day. The powers that be of the Established Church were appalled by the low attendance recorded at Anglican services, incumbents subsequently blaming the low turn out on, among other things, the poor

[3] *Ecclesiologist*, IV, p.50.

weather, the temptation offered by public houses, seafaring in coastal parishes, small pox in others and even that it was Mothering Sunday. The Census initiated a debate within Anglican circles on 'spiritual destitution' that was symptomatic of the Church's anxieties that it had failed to adjust to the new circumstances of the Industrial Revolution. It seemed the needs of the industrial working class were not being met by the Established Church and that the Nonconformist sects were moving to fill the vacuum.

In Cardiganshire, the census showed that overall provision of places of worship had risen dramatically – but this increase was not provided by the Established Church. There were now 240 places of worship (including schoolrooms etc.). A third were Anglican, 28% Calvinist Methodist (meaning that these were 'traditional' Methodists, adhering to the Calvinist believe in divine election of the individual), 18% Congregationalist, 8% Baptist, 8% Weslyan Methodists and 5% Unitarian. This 40% increase in capacity meant that about 89% of the county population could now be seated in church. In fact, the Calvinist Methodists had marginally overtaken the established Church as largest provider of seatings. In certain areas the Anglican share of capacity was less than a fifth. This provoked an additional spur to the Ecclesiologists' activities: not just to provide suitably handsome buildings to worship in, but also to increase seating capacity for the Anglican revival they sought to achieve.

The building of the church at Llandygwydd in 1857 was thus part of a general process of rebuilding, repair, enlargement and renewal of places of worship in general that took place in the middle decades of the 19th century in Cardiganshire as elsewhere. The Established Church had been slower than the other denominations to get this work underway (as early as 1840 in Llandygwydd parish, the Congregationalists had already built their Bethesda Chapel). This slowness was primarily because of the almost insuperable difficulties of obtaining the necessary faculties (permissions) and of satisfying the highly bureaucratic Church Commissioners on financial as on other matters.

Generally, the need in the archdeaconry of St David's was not for new buildings but rather to repair the neglect of centuries. Only one new Anglican church had been built by 1841, at Llangorwen and this was also the first Tractarian church in Wales – 'a church as it should be', according to *The Ecclesiologist,* 'one of the most complete and successful imitations of ancient models that the present age has produced.'

After 1851, scarcely a year went by without an application from the county for a new church to the Incorporated Church Building Society or Diocesan Building Society – and sometimes, as in 1870, no fewer than four. Leading architects of the day, in which R J Withers may be included, were attracted to Cardiganshire to help in this initiative. William Butterfield, the most renowned of the ecclesiologist architects, designed Elerch (1868); John Pollard Seldon oversaw the restoration of Llanbadarn Fawr (1868 and 1878); R. Kyrke Penson rebuilt Llanrhystud, Llanilar and Rhostie. Apart from the church at Llandygwydd in 1857, R J Withers also rebuilt Lampeter (1868), restored Llannarth (1871), the chancel at Llanddewibrefi (1885) and Llanwnnen (1875). While admiring the evangelical zeal of the mid-Victorians, today it is hard not to feel wistful at the ancient and vernacular fabric that was lost in their self-confidence.

By the beginning of the 20th century the Established Church had been transformed, in Cardiganshire as elsewhere. It now had 115 churches and chapels (compared with 68 in 1831). The number of parsonages had almost tripled to 61. Clergy numbers had also increased, and better local organisation into rural deaneries had reduced individual isolation and ended the curse of pluralism. Ironically, when Disestablishment of the Welsh Church eventually came in 1920, ending the privileged status of the Anglican Church in Wales, its morale was higher than it had ever been.

Other denominations also continued to build actively. In Llandygwydd parish, Capel Cenarth (Calvinist Methodist) was built in 1872, seating 150, and a mission

chapel, Capel Tygwydd, was built in 1880, seating a further 180. The Bethesda Congregationalist/Independent chapel, built in 1840, was successively rebuilt in 1870, 1923 and 1935, eventually seating 450.

It has been a matter of scholarly debate, why the people of Cardiganshire should have been willing to invest such a high proportion of their disposable income and scarce resources in so many religious buildings of all denominations and why, a century or so later, so many have again been allowed to fall in to such a state of neglect or even, as at Llandygywdd, been lost for ever. At the time, contemporaries were in no doubt that it was the force of the Holy Spirit that called on them to erect these buildings that provided an educational and social as well as religious focus for their communities. Cardiganshire had been one of the epicentres of the evangelical revivals of the 18th century and continued to be a powerhouse well into the 19th. Yet at the dawning of the 20th century, new forces were coming into play, especially in rural areas of the county. Amid a decaying agricultural economy, more and more young people were migrating to the coalfields of South Wales, whose gain was Cardiganshire's loss in terms of potential congregations. The parish of Llandygwydd had fallen by 1929 to 615 inhabitants, almost half that of 1833 when it had 1,131 souls. This reflects population change in the county as a whole: the population of Cardiganshire more than doubled from 1750 (32,000) to 1851 (70,796) but almost immediately a process of depopulation began, which was not to be reversed for another century.

**The church built in the early 19th century at Llandygwydd, and demolished to make way for R J Withers' church in 1857.**

## St Tygwydd's Church and R J Withers

So how did Llandygwydd respond to this grand sweep of the evolving national religious feeling? That the village lies somewhat off the beaten track cannot be denied: as George Eyre Evans wrote in 1903,

> 'The church of Llandygwydd, well nigh hidden in its leafy bower, lies just off the high road between Llechryd and Cenarth, in the deanery of Sub Aeron. Few seem to be the books of history, tours or guides which make any allusion whatever to this parish of 5,643 acres; fewer still is the number of tourists who turn aside from the highway to explore the treasures belonging to its parish church.'[4]

Eyre Evans is of course writing of Withers' church, built some fifty years earlier. We know a little of the church that it replaced, from an illustration used in the articles which appeared to announce the completion of Withers' church in *The Ecclesiologist* (1862) and *Building News*' (1 August, 1862 – see opposite).

This church had been built as recently as 1804, but we know nothing of the form of the church *it* replaced. When the one shown overleaf was built, it was thought fitting for its purpose. Writing in 1808, Meyrick describes it as built 'in a neat, elegant manner for the small sum of three hundred pounds.' It consisted 'of a nave and chancel, communicating by means of a pointed arch.' In 1833, Samuel Lewis described it as 'a neat, modern edifice' in his *Topographical Dictionary of Wales.* This must have been the church recorded as seating 70, a mere 6% of the parish population, in the 1811 returns and it is hard to avoid reflecting that it is not very far in size from the building into which the Established Church has settled in Llandygwydd in the 21st century. It did not, however, please the Ecclesiologists. The reporter for *The Church Builder* wrote in 1862,

> 'Six years ago, had the traveller from Cardigan to Newcastle Emlyn been tempted to turn aside from his path to walk up the pretty lane leading to the village, - with its overhanging branches and high banks, on which the feathery fronds of Filex Mas seem like plumed crests knotted together by the broad emerald bands on the Hartstongue Fern, which grows in rich

[4] Evans, George Eyre, *Cardiganshire: A Personal Survey of Some of its Antiquities* (1903), p. 253

> abundance at its root, - he would have found, amidst a cluster of picturesque cottages, with their neat, well-tended gardens, one house, if not waste and desolate , at least mean, neglected and unsightly; and that house was the House of God. All within and without seemed to say that it was the least cared for house in the whole village. It possessed just two objects of particular interest, and those were, the little *bell,* with its quaint inscription, dedicated to St Peter, which was suspended in a kind of dove-cote, painted white, at the west end of the building, and the *font,* of the date of the fifteenth century.'

We can almost sense the correspondent's mouth water with anticipation at the opportunity for another new church. The Ecclesiologists were quite proscriptive in their definition of what a church 'ought' to look like. Architects were enjoined to use 14th-century Decorated as their style of choice (Wells Cathedral and York Minster are famous examples of the period) –

> 'No one can, sensibly, employ Norman, and perhaps not judiciously even Perpendicular when free to choose another style. Early English, though it must perhaps be allowed occasionally, should be used very sparingly. The Decorated or Edwardian style, that employed ... between the years of 1260 to 1360, is that to which only … we ought to return.'
> 'The ground plan of the mediaeval church was held to be the representation of Christ's body as it hung on the cross.'[5]

Not only had 14th-century church arrangements a symbolism and sanctity, but the whole operation of church building was considered sacramental, and of this the conscientious Ecclesiological architect had to be aware:

> 'We are not prepared to say that none but monks ought to design churches … But we do protest against the merely business-like spirit of the modern profession, and demand from them a more elevated and directly religious habit of mind.'

We know nothing of Robert Jewell Withers' church-going habits, but it is sure that he benefited professionally from the mid-century boom in church building and refurbishment. He was born in 1823 or 4 and when he was twenty, became the pupil of architect T. Hellyer of Ryde, Isle of Wight and became a member of the Camden Society almost immediately. Minutes of the Society meeting of 5 December 1843 recorded that R J Withers of Ryde was sending occasional drawings of architectural details and he was elected member on 5 March 1844.

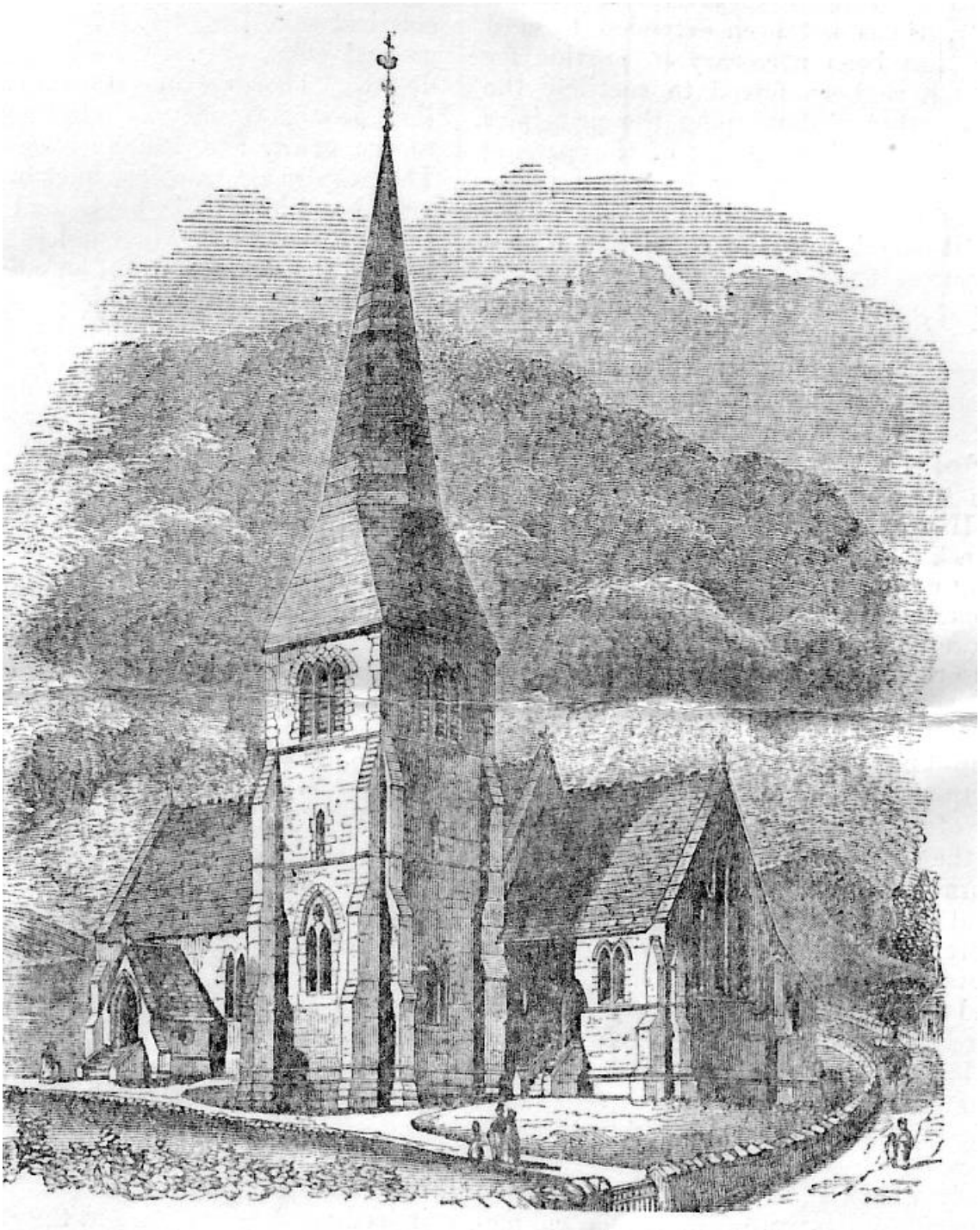
In 1848, he was practising in Sherbourne, Somerset, but by 1855 had a practice in London. Withers married sometime before 1862 and had two daughters and several sons. His older brother Frederick Clarke Withers emigrated to America, where he became a prominent Ecclesiological architect. R J Withers became an Associate of the Royal Institute of British Architects in 1849 and a Fellow in 1871. He retired from the RIBA in the 1880s but continued to practice from his home in Putney until his death in 1894.

Withers' commission for a new church at Llandygwydd no doubt arose from his retention as architect to the Corporation in Cardigan from 1856 to 1859, during which time he built their new Guildhall. The church cost £1500 to build and was mainly funded by subscriptions from the owners of four local seats: the Brigstockes of Blaen Pant (still existing but diminished), the Jones of Penylan (now a private school), Llwyndyrus (broken up in the 1920s) and the Webley-Parrys of Noyadd Treffawr. Local anecdote has it that it was they who were responsible for the ambitious height of the new spire, so that each of them could see it from their houses. This spire and its tower were to prove the church's undoing.

In the late 1850s, however, there must have been great excitement in the village as the new church slowly rose. It was built of Pwntan sandstone with Bath stone dressings – unlike many of the Ecclesiologists churches, Llandygwydd seemed initially fortunate in having a good supply of local stone nearby although the stone's later performance was to belie this. The floorplan nodded decorously towards the cruciform, with nave, chancel, south porch and northern vestry/organ chamber all in 'the Early English style of the thirteenth century' as *The Ecclesiologist* reported approvingly. Its steep roofs were covered in slate. The interior was adorned with pink and white marble and now seated 265, more than three times the capacity of the church it replaced. When the church was finally listed in the late 1980s, it was summed up in the listing description as 'a

[5] *Few Words to Church Builders,* 3rd ed., p5.

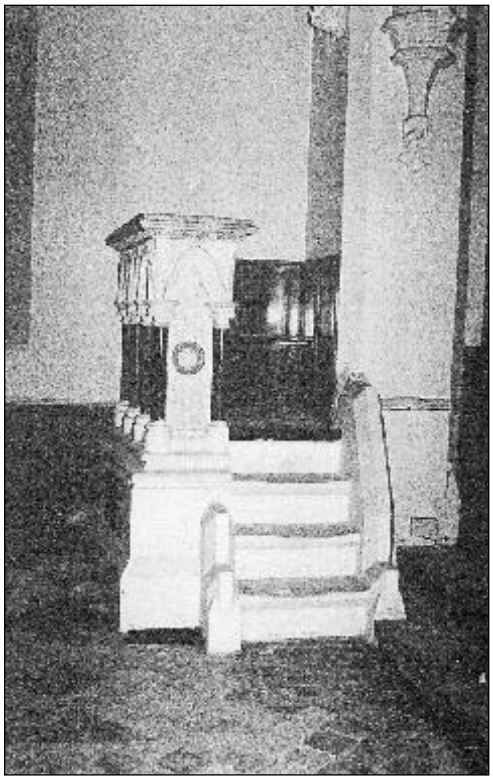
good mid-Victorian church with unusually good stained glass and fittings', despite the loss of its tower and spire.

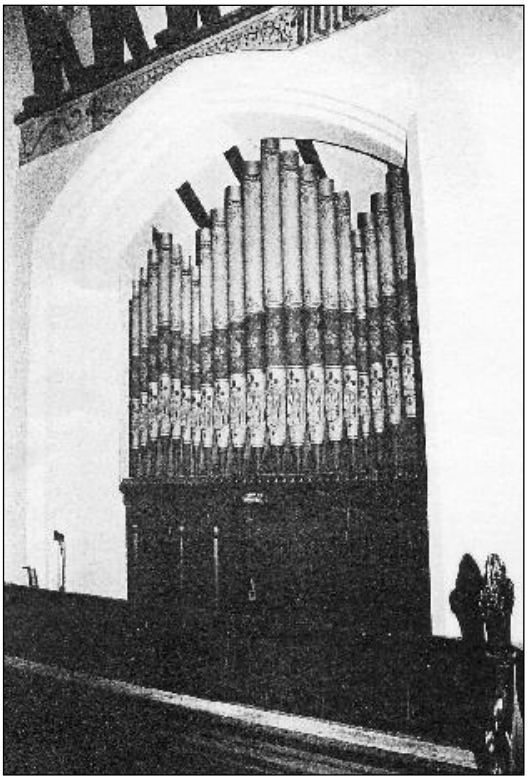


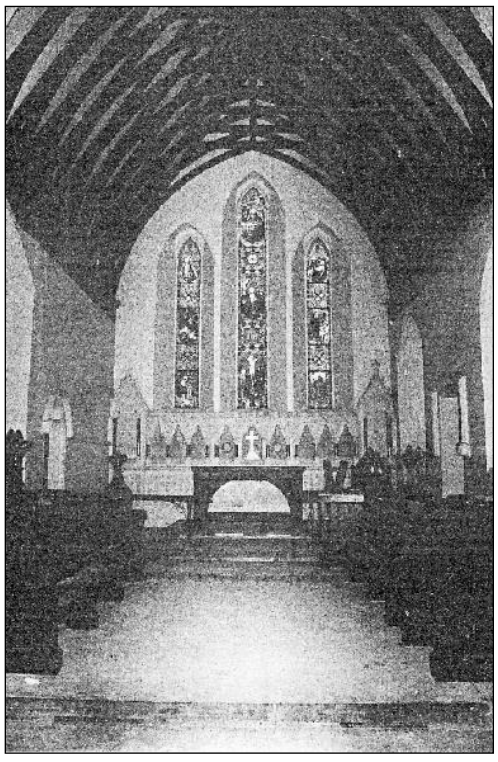
**R J Withers' newly completed church at Llandygwydd in 1862. The corner of Church Cottage is just visible at the extreme right.**

The quality of the stained glass and fittings at St Tygwydd's must have been attributable to the generosity of its patrons over the next four decades. John Griffiths of Llwyndyrus paid for the Elizabethan chalice to be repaired and presented a new silver altar service. The three-light east window was by designed by C Clutterbuck, with others by N. W. Lavers, Lavers and Barraud, Joseph Bell, Powell & Sons, Jones & Willis and C. E. Kempe – a roll call of some of the best late-Victorian designers. One of the windows was presented by Withers himself. A fine Gothic brass lectern arrived after 1870, an organ by Fosters and Andrews of Hull in 1871 and in 1874, a pulpit and reredos by J. Middleton of Cheltenham, the pulpit with a Gothic arcaded front, marble shafts and diapered panels with pink marble roundels framing white marble floral motifs. There is no doubt that this was a cherished church in its first decades of life, and the mediaeval calling bell was joined by a peal of five more bells.

**Sadly, Landmark's files have no photographs of the interior of St Tygwydd's before its demolition so those below have come from the RCAHM of Wales.**



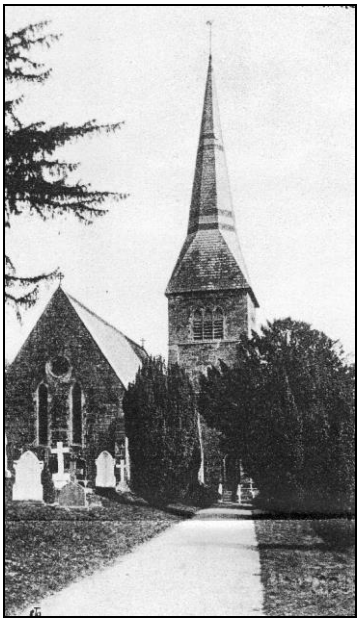


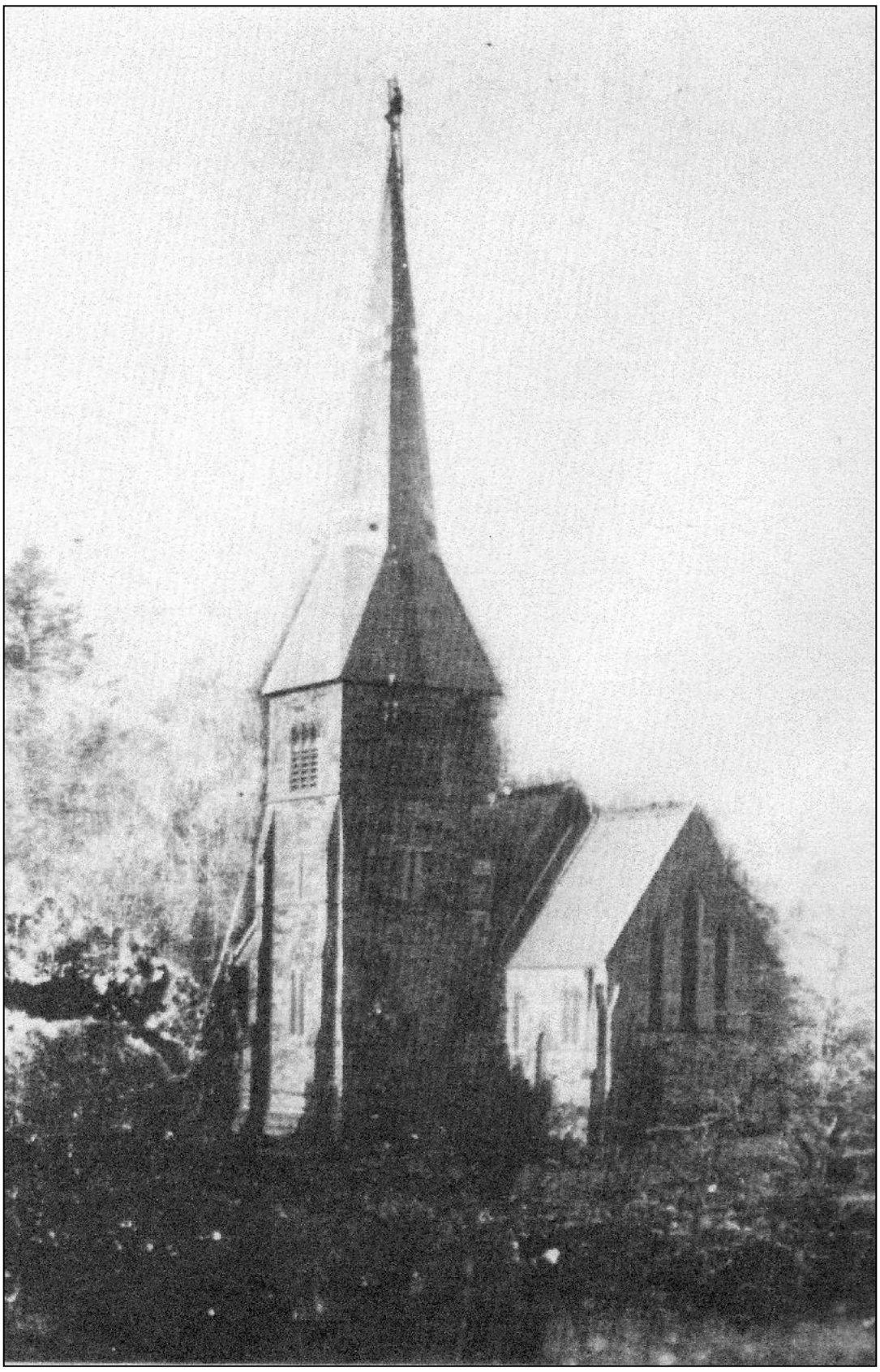


**Clockwise from top left: the altar, the organ (note too the frieze of text at cornice level) and the nave of St Tygwydd's.**

According to The Church Bells of Cardiganshire, a chime of six bells was donated to the new St Tygwydd's by Mrs. Maria Brigstocke of Blaenpant, Mrs. Webley-Parry of Noyadd Trevawr and Lady Webley-Parry-Pryse (the church contained various monuments to these families which predated the 1857 re-building). The tenor bell was 40½ inches in diameter. These bells were not hung for ringing but sounded rather 'by means of an "Ellacombe" chiming manual.' (This did not prevent them from sounding out impressively: at the marriage of the author of *Church Bells of Cardiganshire* in 1935, for example, a peal of Grandsire Doubles and Bob Minor was chimed by the then Master of the Oxford Diocesan Guild of Church Bell Ringers.)

With admirable thoroughness, provision in the budget seems even to have been made for the caretaker's cottage, to house someone to oversee this fine new creation and double as sexton when the occasion arose. From its Gothic windows and the timing of its appearance (shown in the earliest engravings), it would seem certain that the cottage shared its architect with the church. An early postcard shows that the caretaker who lived there kept the churchyard immaculate – perhaps this caretaker was the Thomas Thomas, listed in *Kelly's Directory* for 1895 as 'boot maker and assistant overseer and parish clerk.' The budget also ran to a coach house at the foot of the lane (still standing), to shelter the conveyances that brought the gentry to church.





**This rather grainy photograph from the 1900s shows a steeplejack precariously examining the spire before it was taken down in 1913.**
**(*Cardigan & the Lower Teifi Valley in Old Photos*, Dyfed County Council, 1989)**

However, by the beginning of the next century, this fine spire was giving rise to concern and in 1913 it was dismantled. The Cardiganshire Antiquarian Society reported in its *Transactions* that St Tygwydd's is 'somewhat pretentious with its tall slated spire [and] was ill-constructed. It has now been thoroughly overhauled and put in sound condition under the skilful direction of Mr Caroe, architect to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners…the tower is now more appropriately finished by a stopped battlement similar to those at Llanarth and Llanwnen.'[6]

Even this was to be only a temporary solution. Withers had built up the platform on which the church stood: even without its spire, the weight of the tower was to prove too much. It was surveyed for the RCAHM of Wales in March 1980, when it was reported that 'The tower is very badly cracked owing to uneven settlement and this is distorting the nave walls and roof at their junctions with the tower.' It seems the battlements had already been taken down as unsafe by this time and the report also comments critically on the choice of stone: 'It is built of a local shale stone of seemingly poor quality judging by the shattering of the exterior facing stones.' At this stage, the top two storeys of the tower were demolished, leaving only its ground floor chamber.

Sadly, this did not solve the church's malaise. It soon became clear that the settlement problems were continuing, the church potentially liable to slide away down the SE slope. In 1996, it was closed. The parish was faced with an entirely insuperable repairs estimate for £300,000. The larger of the two schoolhouses was consecrated in St Tygwydd's name two years later and the decision reluctantly taken to demolish the church (plans to leave it a consolidated ruin also proved impracticable). In the event, there seems to have been no great hue and cry, despite its listed status. The stained glass was taken out of the church and the best reinstalled in the new altar window (a transfer which Sir John Smith's Manifold Trust helped fund). The rest was deposited to join the glass

[6] *Cardiganshire Antiquarian Society Transactions*, ii, 101.

collection in Swansea Museum. In 2000, R J Withers' church was finally demolished.

**St Tygwydd's and Church Cottage in 1983, after the demolition of the tower.**

**Demolition of St Tygwydd's Church, summer 2000.**

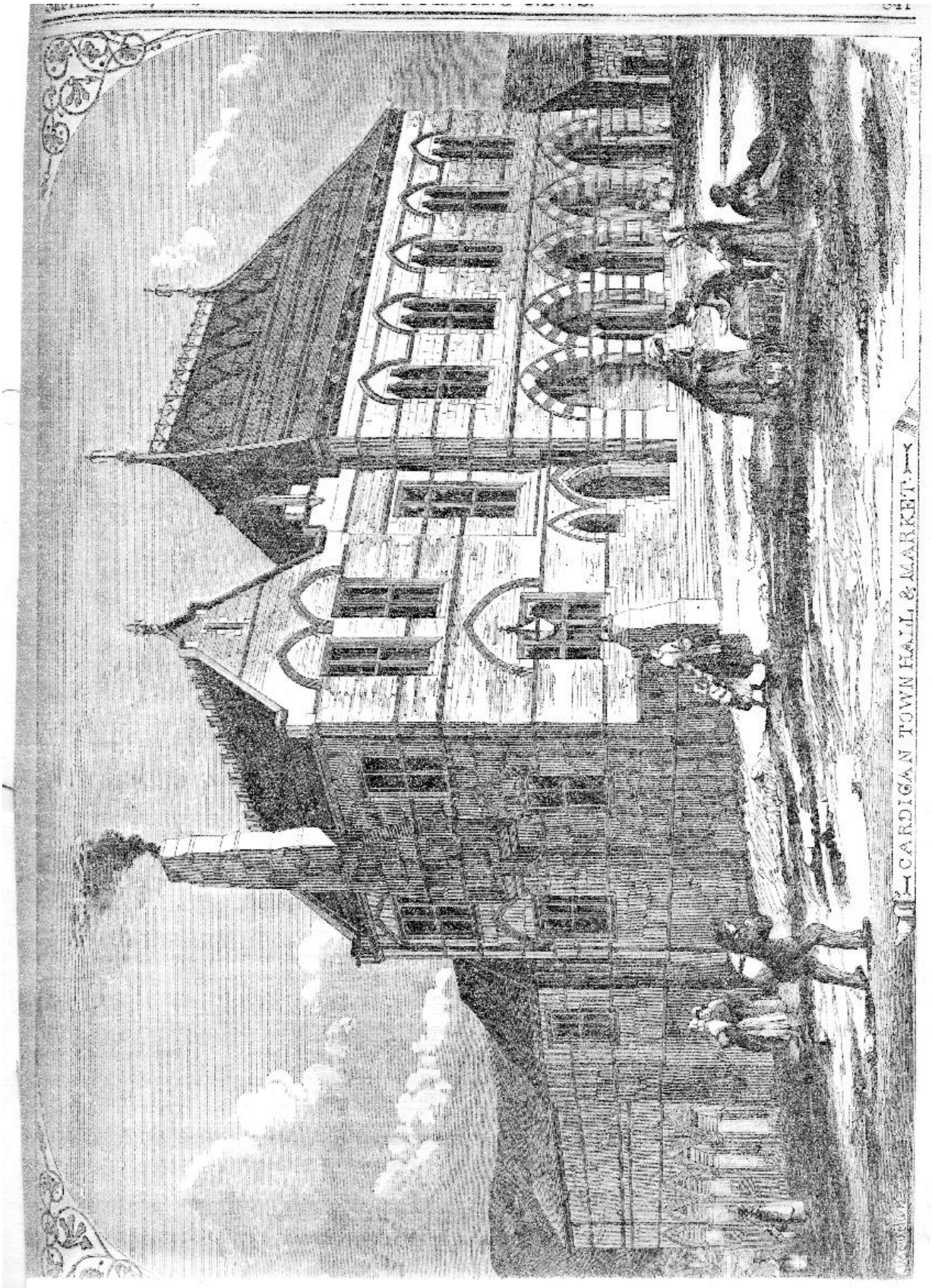
(Photos: Don Davies)

Is it disloyal to point out that St Tygwydd's was not the only work of R J Withers that suffered serious problems? In 1858, the foundation stone was laid for Withers' design for Cardigan Town Hall, an ambitious complex which housed corn, wool, meat and produce markets, the Borough Council Chambers, a Mechanical Institute and a new Grammar School Room, all built on a steep slope. The whole opened in 1860, but in 1866 a section of the Mechanical Institute had to be rebuilt because it was collapsing and in 1874 the front of the Guildhall had to be 'stayed' to the back. To date it is, however, still standing.

Llanlleonfel Church in Powys was likewise rebuilt by Withers in 1876 with a bell turret over the centre of the church, which later had to be moved to the west end. Withers may have been a prolific architect, but structural engineer he was not. The 'peer review' provided by *The Building News* of 1869 rather damns his architectural ability with faint praise too: Withers has sent in a collection of photo-lithographs of his works, no doubt hoping for a good review. The article rather compares him with a Mr Truefitt.

> 'though it may be cruel to do so, we should almost hesitate to allow either architect greater latitude than fate seems to have permitted him; the very essence and character of the work of both apparently lying in the simplicity of modest proportions and absence of precision in detail, admirable qualities in themselves, but apparently unaccompanied by the refinement and care which are necessary in more important works and localities of higher cultivation. There are not many architects of the day to whom it would be safe to entrust the erection of a barn…. but it would be a task which either architect we have named would treat with special ability.'[7]

[7] *Building News,* July 23rd 1869.


CARDIGAN TOWN HALL & MARKET

**Cardigan Town Hall, one of the earliest examples of applying the Ecclesiological approach to a municipal building.**

## Education, Schooling and the Llandygwydd schoolhouses

Llandygwydd children were fortunate in having 'National schools for the gratuitous instruction of both sexes, supported by subscription' as early as 1833.[8] Again, we can detect the influence of philanthropic local gentry. In 1847, the Report of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales was very critical of the supply of elementary education in Cardiganshire, with 'too few good schools' available. By 1851, Llanygwydd was one of those singled out in a report noting that there 'was a decided steadiness of advance among the better class of schools in this county, which must be gratifying to their promoters' and which were 'conducted with great regularity and activity.'

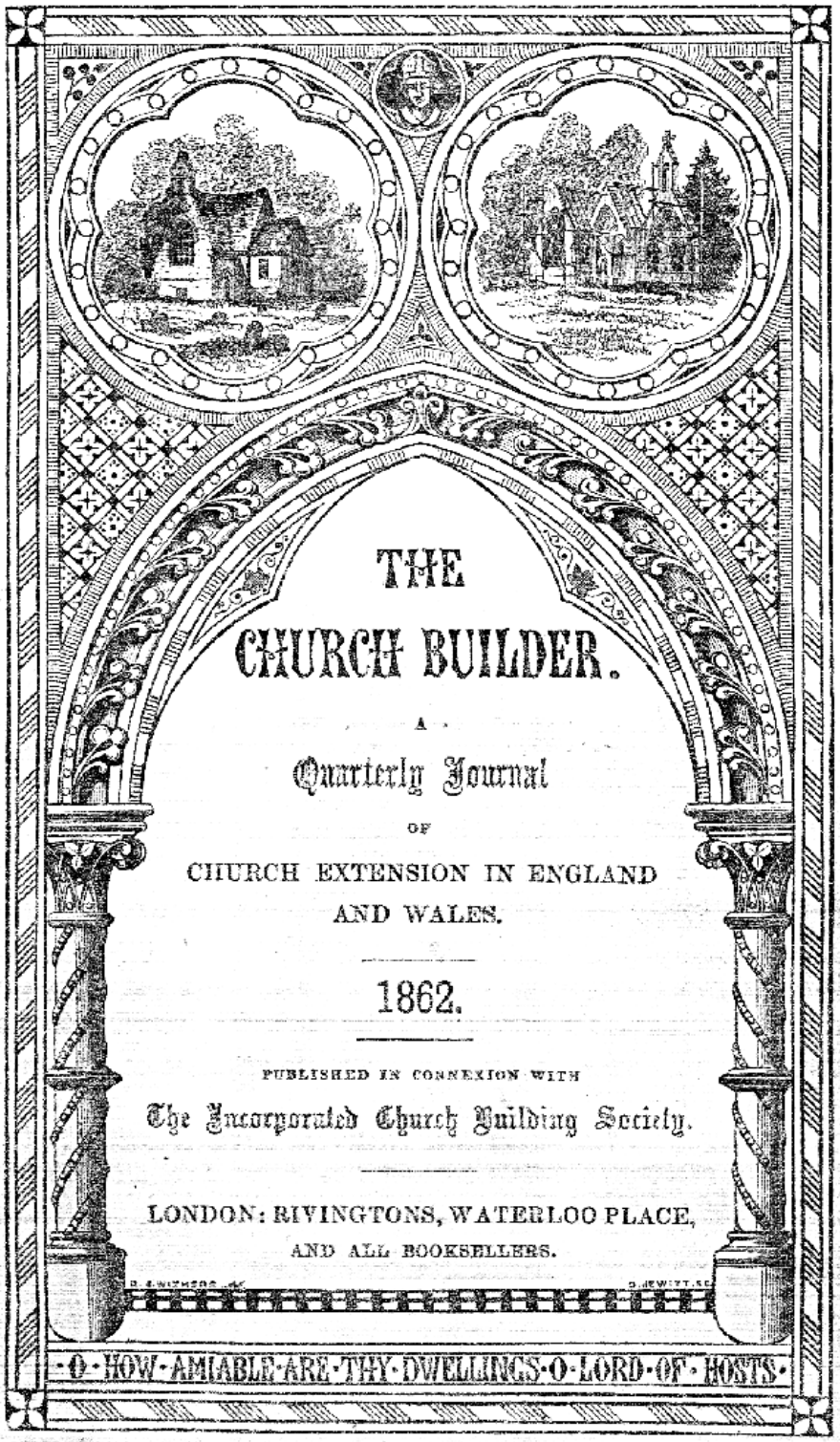
The two schoolhouses were also designed by R J Withers, as part of the Established Church's bid for influence. One was for the older children, the other for younger. The schoolmaster's house, built earlier in 1847, still stands below the churchyard. The daughter of a former caretaker and sexton, who used to live in Church Cottage as a child, remembers the teacher's wife giving her leftover bread and butter pudding and rice pudding as she sat on the churchyard wall. The schoolmaster also had a pigsty, whose incumbents were fed daily by the remnants of the lunchtime soup from the schools. Some children walked the three miles there and back from Cenarth to get to school each day. It is perhaps not surprising that, despite supposedly compulsory attendance under the 1870 Education Act, many children were still known as 'winter children' because of their seasonal attendance.

The school closed in the 1970s; before then, the Brigstocks of Blaenpant would contribute to its running costs in the hope of ensuring a flow of relatively educated servants. It was run in the 1930s by a Mr Pugh, an ex-Major in the Indian Army who was quite a disciplinarian (*Kelly's Directory* for 1895 also lists a William Pugh as master). The children were given drill in the playground – 'hips firm, tough toes' – and were also given voice training and breathing exercises.

The day was punctuated by hymns: 'O Father thank you for another night of quiet sleep and rest' on arriving, 'Be present at our table Lord' before lunch and 'We thank thee Lord for this our food' after lunch. Such schools routinely prohibited the use of the Welsh language in favour of English. Living memory also records use of the 'Welsh not' in the school at Llandygwydd – this was a slate hung around the neck of the last child heard speaking Welsh. The child unlucky enough to be wearing it at the end of the day was not only thrashed but sent home to their parents wearing it, creating a certain incentive to sneak on one's fellows to avoid this fate. When wet, the children would play in the coach house next door, built to shelter the coaches of the local gentry while they attended church.

Today, it seems appropriate that worship should continue in one of Withers' buildings in Llandygwydd, simpler perhaps than the Ecclesiologists' grand scheme but likely to be more durable.

[8] Samuel Lewis, *Topographical Dictionary of Wales.*


THE
CHURCH BUILDER.
A
Quarterly Journal
OF
CHURCH EXTENSION IN ENGLAND
AND WALES.
1862.
PUBLISHED IN CONNEXION WITH
The Incorporated Church Building Society.
LONDON: RIVINGTONS, WATERLOO PLACE,
AND ALL BOOKSELLERS.
O HOW AMIABLE ARE THY DWELLINGS O LORD OF HOSTS

## Llandygwydd Church, Cardigan.

THE little village of Llandygwydd is situated in a lovely and secluded nook of the beautiful valley of the Teify. It is almost surrounded by high hills, on whose slopes the "spiring fir" grows in rich profusion. It is near to the village of Cenarth, and within sound of the falls of Salmon-Leap, the miniature Schaffhausen of South Wales. Six years ago, had the traveller from Cardigan to Newcastle Emlyn been tempted to turn aside from his path to walk up the pretty lane leading to the village,—with its overhanging branches and high banks, on which the feathery fronds of the Flex Mas seem like plumed crests knotted together by the broad emerald bands of the Hartstongue Fern, which grows in rich abundance at its root, he would have found, amid a cluster of picturesque cottages, with their neat well-tended gardens, one house, if not waste and desolate, at least mean, neglected, and unsightly; and that house was the



Llandygwydd Old Church.



Architect.] [R. T. Withers.

Llandygwydd New Church.

House of God. All within and without seemed to say that it was the least cared for house in the whole village. It possessed but two objects of peculiar interest, and those were, the little *bell*, with its quaint inscription, dedicated to St. Peter, which was suspended within a kind of dove-cot, painted white, at the west end of the building, and the *font*, of the date of the fifteenth century [1].

Our engravings faithfully represent the change which has taken place since then, in the aspect of God's House in this village. Nothing remains of the little old Church we have described but its bell and font, which have been replaced in the new building. The style of the present structure is the Early English style of the thirteenth century. The Church is built of local stone, with Bath stone dressings. The tower is of three stages, with a wooden spire, covered with slate with lead bands, and rises 130 feet. The roofs are of stained deal, covered with Bangor slate. The benches throughout are low and open. The chancel is raised two steps, and has stalls and subsellæ, with prayer desk on the south side. The sanctuary is approached by two more steps, and the altar, which is of carved oak, is raised on a foot-pace; on the south side are sedilia. The pulpit, of carved oak on a stone base, is on the north, and the lectern on the south side of the nave. The nave is paved with red and black tiles, and the chancel and sanctuary with rich encaustic tiles. The three painted east windows, presented by Mrs. Collins, represent events in the life of Christ. The three west windows, presented by Morgan Jones, Esq., represent four of the "Works of Mercy." Other stained glass windows have been presented by Mrs. R. T. Withers, Mrs. Collins, Rev. D. J. Evans, Mr. Lavers, and Mr. R. T. Withers, the Architect of the Church. The three east windows are by Clutterbuck, the remaining eight by Lavers and Barraud.

The old Church is supposed to have been dedicated to Tygwy, or Tygwydd, a Welsh saint, who lived in the sixth century.

W. F.

[1] The old Church possessed an ancient silver chalice, bearing the inscription "Poculum Ecclesiæ Lland-Ogwy, 1573." This has been repaired, and new silver altar service presented, by John Griffiths, Esq., of Llwyndyrus.

**(Sadly *The Church Builder* got the architect's initials wrong!)**

**Works of R J Withers**

1848 All Saints Poyntington, Somerset, Restoration of chancel.
Poyntington schoolhouse.

1849 St Nicholas Hillfield, Dorset.
St Margaret Lillington, Dorset.

1850 Holy Trinity Stretford Road, Julme, Manchester. Alterations.

1851 St Mary Melbury Bubb, Dorset.

1852 St James Buttermere, Wiltshire 1852-6.

1854 Warehouse, Fetter Lane.

1855 St Peter Westmancote, Worcester. Chapel cum School.

1856 St Cymfil Aberporth, Cardigan
St Tygwydd Llandygwydd, Cardigan.
Church Cottage, Llandygwydd.
North Aisle to All Saints Warlingham, Surrey.

1857 Church House, Llanfair Nantgwyn, Pembroke.
St Llwchaiarn Llanllwchaiarn, Newquay, Cardigan.
Restoration. St James Great Sailing, Essex.
The Vicarage, Great Sailing, Essex.
Schools, Great Sailing, Essex.

1858 St Michael Tremaen, Cardigan, new chancel stalls.
Pembryn school, Cardigan
Restoration, St Mary Panfield, Essex.
Timber Vicarage, Newcastle, Miramichi, New Brunswick.
Cardigan markets and town hall.
St John Baptist Great Amwell, Herts, restoration.
St Mary Llanfair Nantgwyn, Pembroke, remodelling.

1859 St John Narraghmore, Kildare.
St Rathconnel, Westmeath.
Llanarth school, Cardigan.
Restoration St. Tullyallen, Louth.
St Michael llanfihangel - Penbedw, Pembroke.
St David Llanllawer, Pembroke.
Lavers and Barraud glassworks, Endell St, London.

1860 St Helen Little Cawthorpe Lincs.
St Cymlo Langoedmore, Cardigan.
St Bruno Llanychyllwydog, Pembroke.

1861 Rebuilding St Oswald Rand, Lincs.
Tower Villa, Anerley Grove, Penge, London.
Restoration interior St Ethelburga's Bishopsgate, London.
Llanarth Vicarage, Cardigan.
St Mary's College, Harlow Essex, and chapel.
Rebuilding St Mary, West Torrington, Lincs.
St Dogmael Meline, Pembroke.
Coved tomb, Baumber, churchyard, Lincs.
Castel, Cardigan, chapel and school.
Restoration St John of Jerusalem, Clerkenwell, London.
Curate House, Cranleigh, Surrey.

1862 St Brynach Nevern, Pembroke, restoration.

1863 Rectory, West Liss, Hants.
Restoration St Germa in Wiggenhall St Germans, Norfolk.
St Teilo Cilrhedyn, Pembroke.
Upper Henfyngw vicarage, Cardigan.
St Nicholas Monington, Pembroke.
Asterby Rectory, Lincs.
Restoration Belton All Saints, Lincs.
Restoration St John Capel Cynon, Cardigan.
Garton in Holderness vicarage, E.Yorks.

1864 St David Blanporth, Cardigan.
National school and residence, Elmswell, Suffolk.
Rectory, Elmswell, Suffolk.
Restoration St John Elmswell, Suffolk.
St David Upper Henfyngw, Cardigan.
Abergwill school, Carmarthen.
Chancel, Friesthorpe Church, Lincs.

1865 St Philip's School, Granville Sq. London.
The English Church, Wildbad, Wurttemberg
The Church of the Resurrection, Brussels.
St Mary Magdalene Coatham Mandeville, Durham.
Chapel cum school, Coatham Mandeville.
National School, Shouldham, Norfolk.

1866 Rectory Llanbadarn Fawr, Cardigan.
Bishop Tozer's Chapel, Zanzibar, new fittings.
St Michael and All Angels Hull.
St Edith North Reston, Lincs, restoration. ...cont.

Additions West Torrington vicarage, Lincs.
Remodelling St John Newport, Tipperary.
Remodelling St Peter Moylgrove, Pembroke.
Additions Barton Bendish Rectory, Norfolk.
Chapel and school, Howebridge, Lancs

1867 St Philip's Vicarage, Granville Square, London.
St Mary Coxhoe, Durham.
Alterations, Longdon Vicarage, Worcs.
Remodelling All Saints West Barkwith, Lincs.
Restoration All Stains Harmston, Lincs
New reredos, All Saints Holton.
Tebuilding St Peter Lampeter, Cardigan.
St Mary Edlesborough, Bucks, restoration.
Llanfihangel y Cryddin vicarage, Cardigan.

1868 St Paul Cassop cum Quarrington, Durham.
Christchurch Ive Gill, Cumber,and.
Restoration St Mary East Barkworth Lincs.
St Leonard Warwick, Cumberland, restoration.

1869 St Andrew Westgate, Durham.
St Margaret Habrough, alterations.

1870 St Gabriel Christ St, Bromley St Leonard, London, new chancel.
All Saints Shouldham, Norfolk

1871 Lengthening chancel St Paul Wilton Place, London.
St Michael Llanfihangel-Abergwessin Brec.
St Sulian Sulian, Cardigan, partial rebuild.
Restoration SS Mary and Petroc Bodmin, Cornwall.

1872 St Paul Wilton Place vicarage, London.
St Michael Whitechurch, Pembroke, rebuilding.
St Michael Ebury Square vicarage, London
Partial reconstruction of All Saints Boughton, Norfolk.
Remodelling Llanarth church, Cardigan.
All Hallows village hospital, Ditchingham, Norfolk
St Mark's Institute, George St, (North Audley St) London.
Restoration Holy Trinity Wetheral, Cumberaland.

1873 St James Parochial institute, Notting Hill, London.

1874 St Mary Virgin Graham St, Pimlico, London.
St John Baptist Spalding, Lincs.
School, Spalding, Lincs.
Vicarage, Spalding, Lincs.

1875 St James the Great Great Grimsby, Lincs, restoration.

1876 Salisbury Middle Class School, Wilts.
St James Norlands, Norland Sq, Notting Hill, London, chancel.
St John Baptist Yspytty Ystwyth, restoration. (RIBA drawings catalogue notes two churches, one now, one rebuilt, here by Withers)
SS Mary and Nicholas Beaumaris, Anglesey, restoration.

1877 Further restoration SS mary and Petroc Bodmin, Cornwall.
Refitting St Mary le Strand, London.

1879 Restoration St Mary Shipton, Hants.
Rebuilding St Peter Shipton Bellinger, Hants.
Rebuilding SS Peter and Paul Watlington, Norfolk.

1880 St Leigh, Dorset. recast and new aisle.
Weelsby, Gt Grimsby church.
St John the Divine Penrhyncoch, Cardigan.

1881 Restoration St Bartholomew Wigginton.

1882 St Anselm Madeira Road, Streatham, London
Lampeter town Hall and Court House.
New chancel St John Evangelist Sidcup, London

1883 St Gabriel and the Good Shepherd Clifton St, Notting Dale, London
Chapel of ease to above.

1885 House for Mrs Osborne, Sandhurst, Berks.

1886 St Paul Gt Grimsby

1887 Restoration St Mary North Witham, Lincs
St Michael's vicarage, Portsmouth.

1891 Chancel, Holy Trinity chapel of ease, Charlton, Wantage, Berks.
Remodelling St Mary the Virgin North Stanley, West Yorks.

These dates are sometimes drawn from periodical references, and are thus approximate.

Withers also made alterations to Ashpitel's St Barnabas Homerton, London, and recast St Philip Apostle Granville Sq, London. Some time before 1869 he built national Schools at Mackworth Derby, and at Runcton Holme, Norfolk. He restored the sanctuary of St George in the East, London, c.1880; and St David Llanddewi Brefi, Cardigan 18? He built a warehouse and fine art gallery in Wellington St, Strand, London, and the schoolmaster's house at Burgh-le-marsh, Lincs. In the RIBA drawings collection, there are a group presented by Withers, some of which relate to church restoration work carried out by him; the remainder may or may not.

The source for all this is Professor J M Crook, who kindly let me see his card-index of Victorian architects.

Charlotte Lennox Boyd
September 1984.

## Church Cottage Bibliography


Barnes, David Russell — *People of Sion* (1995)

Davies, J L & Kirby, D P — *Cardiganshire County History,* Vols. I (1994) & III (1998)

Evans, Revd J T — *Church Plate of Cardiganshire* (1914)

Evans, George Eyre — *Cardiganshire: A Personal Survey of Some of its Antiquities* (1903)

Lewis, Samuel — *Topographical Dictionary of Wales* (1833)

I G Jones & Williams — *The Religious Census of 1851*

Jones, I G — *Communities: Essays in the Social History of Victoria Wales* (1987)

Jones, I G & Walker — *Links with the Past,* essay by O W Jones & R W D Fenn, 'Church-building in the nineteenth century', pp. 215-6 – re Llangorwen.

*Cardiganshire Antiquarian Society Transactions*