

Historic Wales Report

Dataset	Cadw Listed Buildings
Title	Church of St Mary
Type	Listed Building
Dataset UID	664
Community	Betws Gwerfil Goch

Location

At the centre of the village of Bettws Gwerfil Goch, in a square churchyard which is considerably raised above the surrounding land at the SE. Lychgate to north. Rubblestone churchyard wall, partly earth-backed.

Date Listed	10/20/1966
Last Amendment	8/7/2000
Grade	II*

History

St Mary's church is on the pilgrimage road via Bala to Holywell. An early dedication to St Elian has been suggested. The church is first mentioned in 1254 and was said to have been founded by the Lady Gwerfil in the late C12 or early C13. The present single celled church is perhaps C14; its oak roof is of C14 character, with bosses and other carvings on the underside of the trusses. The date 1606 appears on the tiebeam of the inner truss in the porch, the date 1695 was recorded over the lost north door, and the oak pulpit is dated 1761. Before its C19 restoration the church had a gallery with both external and internal stairs and a west gable bellcote. Important C15 low-relief panel carvings of the Crucifixion were framed to form a reredos in the late 1850s. These carvings are said to have come from the rood, and are of exceptional interest as a complete pre-Reformation set with Christ, St Mary, St John, and the emblems of the Passion; though as now displayed St Mary and St John appear to have been transposed. The carvings' earliest history is conjectural but they are known to have been displayed on a wall during the C18; of six surviving panels one was omitted for the sake of symmetry when reassembled for the reredos.

St Mary's was restored in 1879-80 for the Rev. William Jones by John Douglas, architect, at a cost of over #1000. The contractor was George Audney. Over half of the funds was raised in shilling subscriptions for which the Rector sent out more than 25,000 circulars. Douglas gave the church a spire above the restored west gable bellcote, but neither of these features now survive. Other work by him included the partial rebuilding of walls, new windows, re-roofing, re-tiling, flooring, re-seating, the addition of a north vestry and the rebuilding of the south porch. The chancel screen was rebuilt. The gallery was removed and the north doorways to nave and gallery were converted to windows. A notice in the porch records an ICBS grant of #30.

Reason for Listing

A mediaeval parish church well restored by John Douglas, retaining significant original fabric including an important mediaeval carving of the Crucifixion with St Mary and St John, now mounted as a reredos, said to have come from the Rood.

History

S Glynne, Notes on Welsh Churches. Archaeologia Cambrensis 1884 p268 [written 1849];
D R Thomas, History of Diocese of St Asaph (1906-13) I p145, II p136;
NLW: St Asaph Faculties SA/FO/1: Renovation of church (1879);

RCAHM Merionethshire (1921) p5;
Lambeth Palace Library: ICBS file 8419;
Architect's drawings and church accounts displayed in church.

Interior

The chancel and nave have a single seven-bay timber roof with relief carvings to undersides of trusses; the nave is a little wider than the chancel, though this is a difference not marked externally. Arch braced tie beam trusses with ashlar to the common rafters. All the trusses have C19 tie rods. In the chancel the last two bays of ashlar are concealed by boarding, that each side in the bay nearest the east is also decoratively carved. Bare masonry in both nave and chancel, somewhat battered internally. The nave is paved with small red quarry tiles. C19 bench pews with newel-like posts towards the passage. Georgian pulpit at the right dated 1741, panelled with a stone base.

Two-step rise to the chancel. The division is marked by a pair of internal buttresses and a Gothic oak screen reproduced in the C19 restoration, 2? bays from the east. A semicircular arch at north leads to the C19 vestry. Oak choirstalls and prayer desk. Single sanctuary step with gateless communion rails; this and the altar step have tiled risers with text. Aumbry recess in left wall. The altar has a reredos with five carved mediaeval panels, the crucifixion at centre, inscribed *Ecce Homo*; St Mary and St John; and outer panels with the emblems of the Passion. Cloth hangings to left and right.

In the chancel is a brass plaque to Robert Roberts of Bottegir [1843] and others; another to John Maesmor of Maesmor [1704] with two verses. On the nave north wall are drawings of the church before and after the restoration by Douglas. C19 stone font at west of nave. The east window shows the Resurrection. Other stained glass by Swaine Bourne of Birmingham, including, at south of chancel, a window to Rev. William Hughes, rector 1851-77, showing the Good Shepherd and Christ at the Door.

Exterior

A small church consisting of nave and chancel in one with a north vestry and south porch, built of generally uncoursed local masonry with a slate roof (slightly sprocketed) and tile ridge. A buttress at the south marks the division of nave and chancel. Coped gables to east and west, the east gable surmounted by a Celtic cross. Rafters exposed at the eaves.

The windows, probably including the east window, date from the C19 restoration by John Douglas; the latter window is in Perpendicular style, in three main lights with a prominent label mould. There are pairs of trefoil headed lights with round-headed relieving arches to north and south, plus a pair of lights with ogee heads at the position of the former gallery access door on the north side. The plain round headed south window west of the porch was also added by Douglas.

The porch has stone side walls, with slate seats. Bold outer truss with timber jambs framed into it; inscribed verse on tie beam. The inner doorway is in cyclopean masonry consisting of single stone jambs each side and a single stone lintel carved as a four-centred arch. The arch has a simple chamfer. Oak door with wrought iron strap hinges, handle and escutcheon. At left is a bracket for a water stoup.