

St Mary's medieval fabric survives in its chancel roof and some window tracery. There are fragments of medieval glass in the chancel north window. The font and cover are late medieval: a second font bowl, Norman, came from an earlier building. The 15th century chancel screen came from elsewhere. Quoins in the west gable are dated 1634 and 1664; monuments and floor slabs are 17th and 18th century. The chancel east (1894) and south (1910) windows are by John Jennings and the organ is by Ireland's foremost organ-builders, Telford & Telford. Other than that, the church is the work of two late 19th century masters – John Dando Sedding (1838–91) and Heywood Sumner (1853–1940).

In 1982 the church was declared first unsafe, then redundant. The diocese proposed to raze it to the ground! The Friends were galvanised to its rescue by local stalwarts, supported by The Victorian Society, and a 100% repairs grant from Cadw. It came to us in 1989. There was a substantial conservation programme 2006–8, helped by The Pilgrim Trust. The church is listed Grade I.

John Dando Sedding

Sedding trained under G.E. Street, alongside Philip Webb, William Morris and Norman Shaw. In 1873 he was commissioned to 'restore' the church: it is effectively a re-build. Sedding's architectural instinct was to respect the past: a careful incorporation of the best of the old with tactful new work – such as the new shaft and head for the medieval churchyard cross. He designed a new reredos and altar rails; the bell gable, and possibly some graveyard memorials. All was completed by 1876.

Sedding went on to build many churches, including the Arts & Crafts masterpiece Holy Trinity, Sloane Street, Chelsea (1888–90).



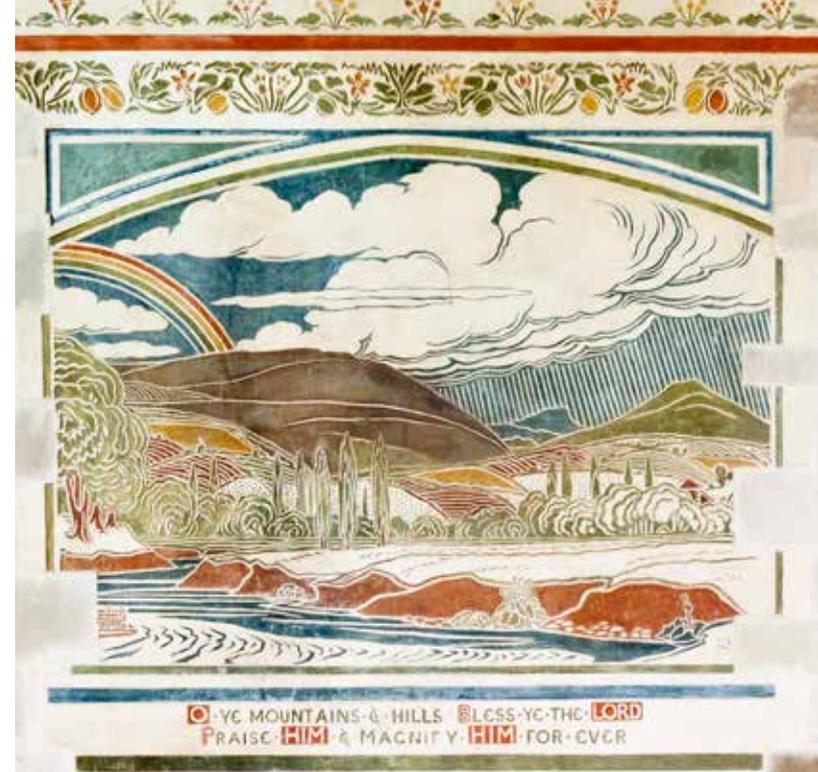
Medieval glass

The Benedicite

The church interior is a symphonic series of colourful wall-panels illustrating the Benedicite, in "sgraffito" work, a laborious decorative process re-invented by Heywood Sumner, who was recommended for the work by Sedding. Sumner spent three summers on it, 1888–90. It is the only example in Wales: Sumner did other sgraffito schemes at All Saints, Ennismore Gardens (1896–1903) and St Agatha, Portsmouth (1901).

Five coloured plaster layers are applied to the wall, each at a different depth, and left to dry overnight. In the morning, the whole is covered in fresh plaster, which is then cut away to the different depths to reveal the desired colours. A single error can mean the day's work lost: the top plaster is too hard to work come lunchtime.

The scenes are of local Monmouthshire landscape – 'O ye mountains and hills' includes Abergavenny's Sugar Loaf, Blorengre and Skirrid Fawr (artistically re-arranged!).



Rosamond Emily Coussmaker

The client for all the work was Revd William Coussmaker Lindsay (1832–1912), of Eton and Trinity College, Dublin – artistic and well-connected: great-grandson of the Earl of Balcarres; brother-in-law to Lord Tredegar's daughter (Tredegar granted him the livings of Llanfaches and Llanfair); second cousin to the founder of the Grosvenor Gallery; and Chaplain to the Earls of Crawford.

The panels are his memorial to his wife, Rosamond (1840–85).



Other Friends churches near St Mary, Llanfair Kilgeddin

St Ellyw, Llanellieu Renowned for its huge 14th century screen with loft painted blood red. Nearby, Llanellieu Court is an enigmatic medieval house which the church originally served (key available nearby).

St Peter, Llancillo Remote church on the Herefordshire side of the border. 13th century font and pulpit with arabesque carvings dated 1632 and 1745 (church open).



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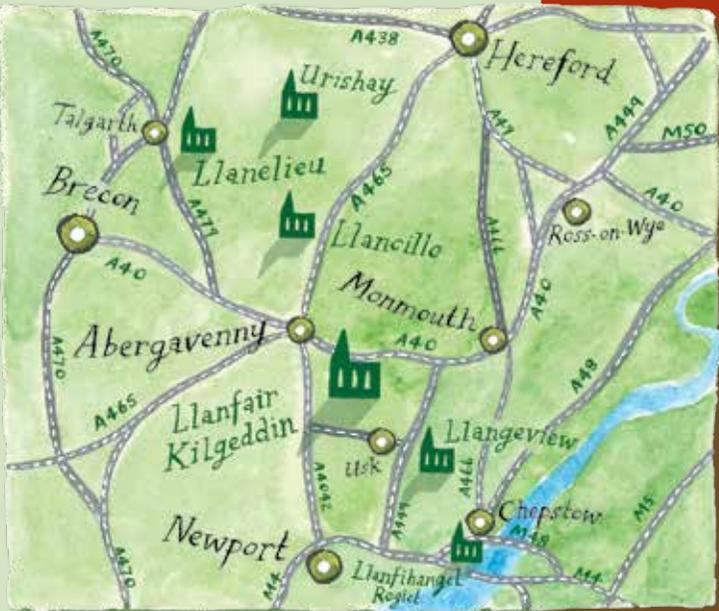


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Church of St Mary Llanfair Kilgeddin

a guide to its history



St David, Llangewydd Not far from Usk. Largely 15th century, with screen and rood loft. Pews, pulpit and large squire's pew are grand eighteenth century work. Remote and tranquil (church open).

Llanfihangel Rogiet Church Stands between two farmsteads. Mostly medieval, with 1904 north aisle. Medieval effigies. Parish's most famous resident was Henry Jones, inventor of self-raising flour! (church open).

