

**T**al-y-Llyn church has been dedicated for centuries to the Blessed Virgin Mary. There is some evidence to suggest that it was earlier dedicated to St Tudur, one of a family of 6<sup>th</sup> century saints associated with Anglesey. His brother Tyfrydog is the patron of Llandyfydog, about ten miles away. As with so many Welsh saints of this era, it is believed Tudur was buried on Bardsey Island. The church, originally a chapel-of-ease to nearby Llanbeulan (also, since 2005, in the care of the Friends) now stands in splendid isolation on a raised mound which may date from prehistoric times, but in the Christian era formed the “llan” or sacred enclosure with the saint’s House of Prayer at its heart.

## History

The church once served a community of more than twenty households, which was all but destroyed by the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century ‘Black Death’. As with other simple buildings of this type, it is difficult to date, but the nave, almost a double-square, may be of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, a dating strengthened by the round heads of the west door and of the belfry aperture above, and the fact that the original font, now in nearby Llanfaelog Church, is of that period. The building has undergone several enlargements. The 13<sup>th</sup> century chancel seems to have been enlarged in the 16<sup>th</sup>, probably at the same time as the Wood family chapel was erected. The family undertook major alterations to their house, Tal-y-Llyn, c.1597, and the enlargement of the church is probably of the same date (one of the chancel roof trusses is of this period). The church was refurbished in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, and remained largely unaltered after that. It passed into the care of the Friends of Friendless Churches in 1999.

## The church today

St Mary’s is of plain and simple construction, the dressed stonework largely confined to the late 16<sup>th</sup> century windows. On the exterior of the three-light east window are two matching stones, the one carved with an H, and the other, now indecipherable, may have been a W. A similar feature, a stone with the initials HW, appears on one of the windows, of 1597, at Tal-y-Llyn House, the home then of the Wood family.

The floor is stone-flagged, and the nave retains its medieval, narrow, stone benches, the sole seating provided in that period, along the north and south walls. This feature, rather curiously, is repeated in the 16<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> century chapel, by which date, it would be supposed, it was redundant. The octagonal font, a sophisticated piece of work, dating from the 15<sup>th</sup> century and replacing the earlier one, is placed now, rather awkwardly, against the south wall of the nave, a positioning probably dictated by the 18<sup>th</sup> century refurbishing.

The nave seating is of particular interest, being no more than a series of backless planks trenched at one end into the stone benches, and supported by timber paddles at the other. Similar plank benches also survive at another Friends’ church on Anglesey, Llanfigael. Here at Tal-y-Llyn one bears the date 1786. Unfortunately, before the church came to the Friends, all but one of these benches were stolen, and except for that survivor they are now skilful reproductions of the originals. Such rudimentary seating may indicate that the traditional posture of the congregation, standing for worship and sitting only for the sermon, survived here rather later than elsewhere.



Font



View of the nave and chancel

Of particular interest in the chancel are the Communion rails and sanctuary panelling, the former clearly dated 1764. Their blue-grey paint is characteristic of the period. Since coming into the care of the Friends, the interior walls of the church have been limewashed by Ned Scharer.



Text: Matthew Saunders, revised by John Morgan-Guy. Photography: Martin Crampin



Date on the communion rails



## Other Friends' churches near St Mary, Tal-y-Llyn

**St Bigail, Llanfigael** 18<sup>th</sup> century church rebuilt in 1841 with a complete Georgian interior and three fountains, the earliest of them 14<sup>th</sup> century (church open).

**St Afran, St Ieuan and St Sannan, Llantrisant** The present building dates from the 14<sup>th</sup> century but is on an earlier site, with a 17<sup>th</sup> century south chapel. One of our most remote, but most frequently visited, churches (church open).



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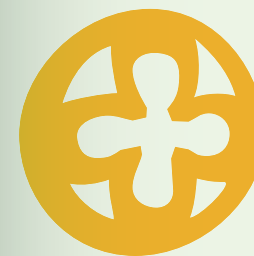
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## Church of St Mary Tal-y-Llyn

a guide to its history

**St Peulan, Llanbeulan** Not far from Tal-y-Llyn. The carved font in this medieval church is an extraordinary work from the first half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century (church open).



**St Baglan, Llanfaglan** The church lies close to Anglesey overlooking Caernarfon Bay, a short distance from Caernarfon. Situated in a large field its form suggests pre-Christian origin and there is a fifth or sixth-century carved stone set in the porch (church open).

