



## Laugharne & District History Society

### Local Guides

#### LLANDAWKE CHURCH

*Llandawke is about 1 mile west of Laugharne. Travel along Water Street (at the back of The Grist) heading uphill, forking right at each junction. About 1/3 mile past the second junction, just before a tight right bend there is an old building on the right and a newer bungalow on the left. Park here and walk down the steep, wet track beside the house to the church. The church is always open, maintained by The Friends of Friendless Churches.*



**The site:** The circular shape of the church grounds suggests an early site – a 'llan' that may have begun as a local family burial ground. The presence of a stream alongside indicates springs close by, so was the site chosen because it was close by a holy well venerated in prehistoric times?

As a Christian site it was probably first established as an estate oratory close by the original manor house which was in the hollow beyond the church. The present house, further back and higher, was built by Lord Kensington in 1841, to replace that.

#### How old is the site?

Llandawke Parish boundary closely follows that of the estate and so it probably came later than both the estate and its church. Parishes developed between C7 and C12. Churches in Wales were built of wood before the C12, so today's building does not tell us when the site first developed. However, inside the church there is a memorial stone which bears the Latin inscription:

Barrivendi Filius Vendubari hic iacit  
*Here lies Barrivendi, son of Vendubari*



It is clearly a memorial stone, which had been re-used because also carved on it are older runes called 'Ogam', the written language of the Irish Deisi tribe who settled here in the C4 -C5. The Ogam writing reads:

Dumeledonas maqi mu (coi...)

*(The stone) of Dumeledo, son of the kin of...*

The stone is dated to the C5-C6, suggesting that this site may have been in use as a burial site then, before becoming a 'llan' burial enclosure, then a centre of worship, and finally a church- perhaps at first of wood, before a stone building replaced it.

The name of the parish – Llandawke – suggests the original dedication was to St Oudoceus (Euddogwy in Welsh) a C7 bishop of Llandeilo – perhaps that was when the first church was built here? He was the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> bishop of Llandeilo Fawr but helped to establish Llandaff Cathedral and his name was included in the original dedications of that cathedral. He died on July 2<sup>nd</sup>, AD700.

#### The church

The oldest features of today's church are its north wall and the chancel, including the piscina basin and sedilia seat close by the altar, which are thought to be C13. It is possible that the original church was just the present chancel, for the earliest churches in Wales were very small indeed- perhaps only 3 X 4 metres.

But the church was rebuilt in the C14 reputedly by Sir Guy de Brienne VII (of Laugharne Castle) to help save his soul in the afterlife. He rededicated it to St Margaret Marloes who may have founded a nunnery here. She was the daughter of Sir Guy's sister, also Margaret, who married Sir Robert Marloes, and it is thought that it is her effigy that lies beside the altar.



This original church was of course Catholic until the Reformation. It would have been colourfully decorated and the chancel would have been separated from the nave by a rood screen, usually carved from wood. Access to a balcony on top of

the rood screen would have been by the spiral staircase, still visible above the pulpit, and stone supports, or 'corbels', for it can be seen on either side of the chancel arch. This balcony was often used by singers and musicians to support the congregation's singing.

At the opposite end of the nave there is an arched opening through which a bell-ringer on the first floor of the tower would have been able to observe the service in progress and know when to chime the bell.

### **The font**

The font can often be the oldest feature in a church but was often replaced when churches were rebuilt during the C19. The font was retooled at some time, but there looks to be the remains of an older font – perhaps the original? - lying in the corner at the base of the tower.

### **Furnishings**

The church was in a very poor condition by 1710:

*The Steeple is very ruinous, the Top is fallen down, the stones at the bottom are so much fallen away as to endanger the falling of the part of the Steeple that is yet standing, which is in a great measure cover 'd with Ivy, which if it be not timely destroy'd will quite ruin the Steeple, the roots are grown so very large that they have thrown down a great part of it already. The Ivy on the south side of the Church, & the Ash growing over the Chancel at the East end of the Church, the Elder & Ivy at the east End of the Chancell, the black thorn on the north side of*

*the Chancell, & the great Ash growing out of the wall near the roof, & the Ivy & other Plants which cover most part of the north wall ought out of hand to be remov'd, & the walls & steeple to be repair'd. The windows of the Chancell & Church want to be glaz'd, & the walls to be new render'd. The floor is uneven. No Register in this Parish, nor has been for many years. No Canons, Homilies, nor Table of Degrees. Mr John Evans the Minister is nonresident. He lives at Bridell his other Cure within 3 miles of Cardigan. The reputed annual value is between 30 & 40 £. The allowance to the Curate for serving Llan Dawc & Pendein is 8 £.*

It was reroofed in the C18 and restored in 1882 by Thomas David of Laugharne, when the wooden furnishings were fitted including the elaborately oak altar, carved by Owen Williams, a local man.

Most recently the church has again been re-roofed and is now maintained by the Friends of Friendless Churches.

***This leaflet was produced to accompany a visit to the site by the Society in July, 2014.***