

Rhoscrowther Church is a complex building, in a community which came to an unhappy end. In 1993 an explosion at the nearby oil refinery caused material damage locally, including the church, which was closed in 2004, and passed into the care of the Friends in 2005. It has a rare dedication, St Decuman, who, it is believed, was born here in the 7th century, but ultimately settled near Watchet in Somerset, where he was martyred by decapitation in AD 706, his head being ultimately returned to his birthplace. Only one other church and two now defunct chapelries, were placed under his patronage.

History

The nave and chancel have been dated to the 13th–14th centuries, with the transepts and chapels added towards the end of the latter, along with the embattled tower, erected over the south transept. Although not endowed chantries, the chapels have been associated with prominent local families, the Perrots of Eastington, whose remarkable 14th century tower house survives nearby, and the Whites of Hentland. A fine 14th-century larger than lifesize female effigy survives in the south-east chapel. Similarities with that of Aveline, Countess of Salisbury (d.1273/4) in Westminster Abbey, were noted in 1909 by the architect W.D. Caroe, and it probably represents a member of the Beneger family of Bangeston nearby. One of this family, Ralph, was rector of neighbouring Pwllcrochan, where his effigy survives, and where he rebuilt the church in 1342. It is probable that the Benegers were largely responsible for much of the work at Rhoscrowther, including the once-elaborate Easter Sepulchre in the chancel. They were settled at Bangeston by 1172, and may have provided the original font of Caen stone, imported from Normandy (the second font, also Norman, came from Pwllcrochan Church after its closure in 1942).

By the 15th century the church seems to have contained an elaborate shrine of St Decuman, probably housing his head, if the ornate step, repositioned at the entry to the north transept is anything to go by. W.D. Caroe was certain that this was originally part of the base of a shrine, destroyed during the upheavals of the Reformation. The tower is topped with obelisk finials, added in the 18th century. The church was restored in 1852, and again in 1869–70, by Frederick Wehnert of nearby Milford Haven. It was repaired, with a light touch, in 1909–10 by W.D. Caroe, and then repaired again when the explosion damage of 1993 was made good by the Oil Refinery.



18th-century memorial



14th-century effigy

The church today

Several features of interest were brought from other churches. The armorial bosses, and charming figure of the resurrecting Christ, in the north porch, are believed to have come from Angle, probably from a now-vanished tomb, when R.K. Penson restored that church at roughly the same time as the 1852 work here. The 1716 monument to a member of the Powell family of Greenhill, in the nave, came from Pwllcrochan.



North transept step

Other Friends churches near St Decuman, Rhoscrowther

Hodgeston Medieval church with a tall 'Pembrokeshire' tower. Fine carving on the sedilia and piscina, probably dating from the 14th century (church open).

St Oudoceus, Llandawke Rescued from a state of dereliction in 2003. 14th century effigy, a 6th century inscribed stone and idiosyncratic carved oak altar of 1882 (church open).



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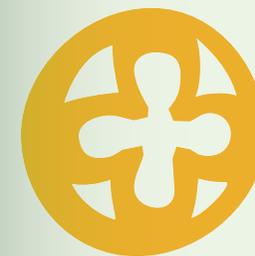
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Church of St Decuman Rhoscrowther

a guide to its history

St Eloi, Llandeloy Tiny Welsh chapel revived and renewed in 1926 by John Coates Carter using local methods and materials, and SPAB principles to 'restore' it to a pre-Reformation framework. Striking woodwork, and reredos of almost childlike directness (church open).



St Andrew the Apostle, Bayvil Modest early nineteenth century church retaining its evocative late Georgian Anglican interior. Painted and panelled pulpit, reading desk and box pews (key available nearby).

