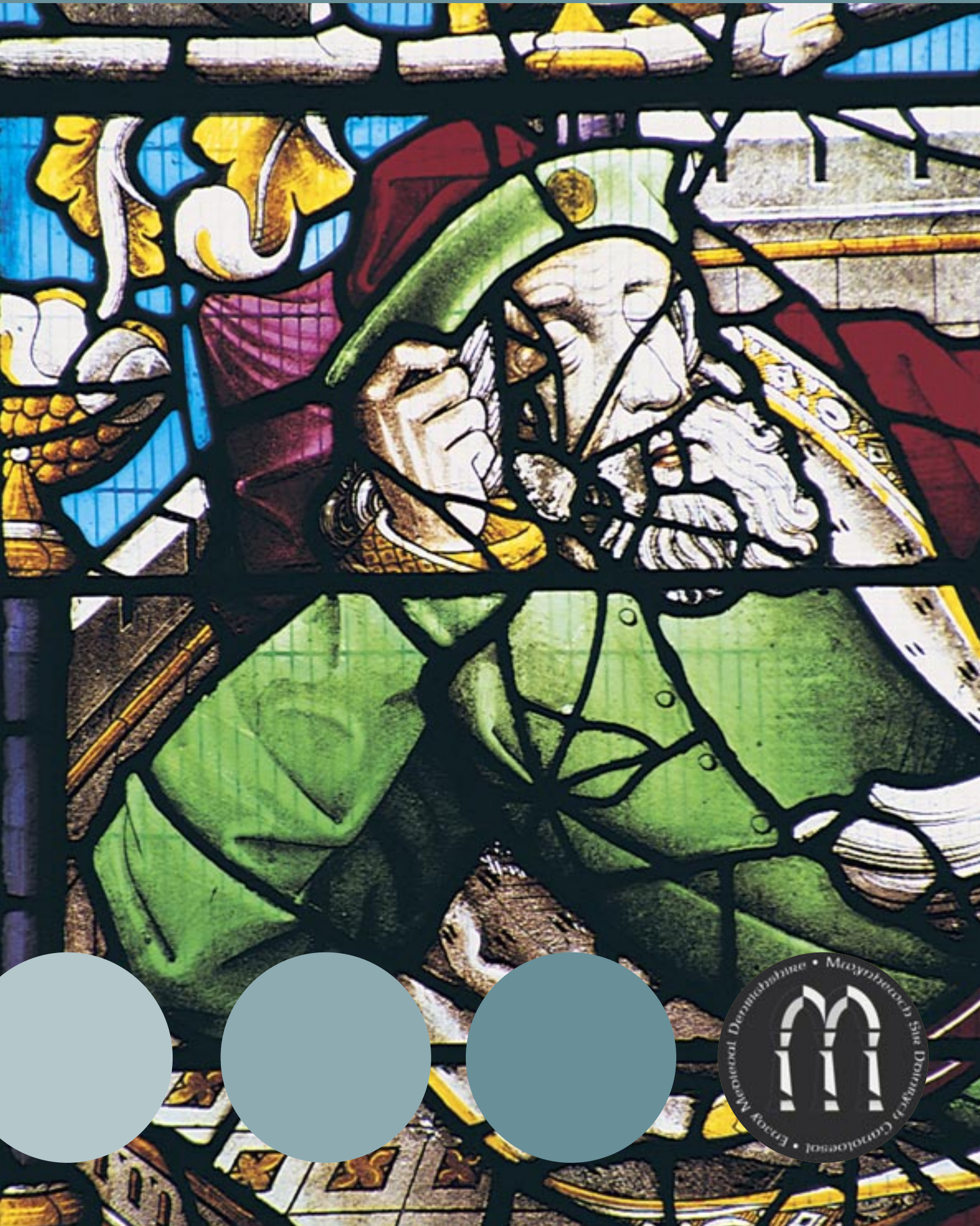
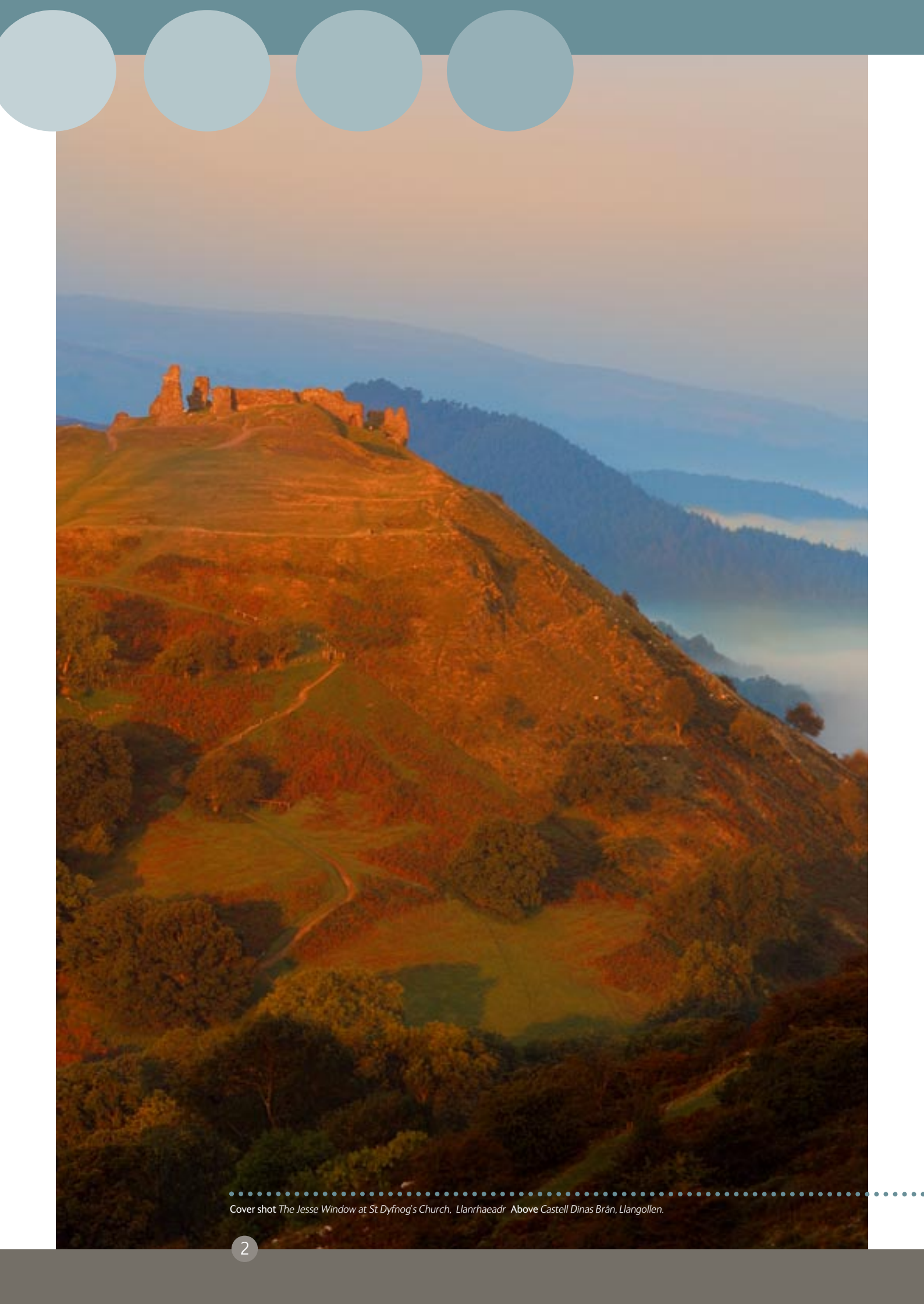


ENJOY MEDIEVAL DENBIGHSHIRE





.....
Cover shot *The Jesse Window at St Dyfnog's Church, Llanrhaeadr* Above *Castell Dinas Brân, Llangollen.*

INTRODUCTION

This brochure hopes to tempt the visitor to explore Denbighshire by highlighting some of the listed medieval sites and buildings which survive throughout the county. All the places mentioned have their origins prior to 1600 but what you see today is the result of several centuries of use. Time spent in Denbighshire will reward you with a flavour of its fascinating history.

The map (page 4) gives an indication of location, but Ordnance Survey maps provide more detail. Make your own choice of towns, villages and unspoilt countryside. Towns and larger villages are accessible via 'A' roads. Most other villages are well signposted from the main roads and many sites are accessed via country lanes: these are often winding single track, so travel very carefully and be prepared to take time for the journey.

Approximate distances

Corwen to Ruthin (direct) 12 miles
Llandrillo to Llangollen 15 miles
Ruthin to Llangollen 15 miles
Ruthin to coast 20 miles

Cycling

There are way-marked scenic routes for cycling in the county and a leaflet is available from the Tourist Information Centres. For more information look at www.ridenorthwales.co.uk

Walking

There are leaflets detailing way-marked routes, including both local as well as longer distance walks such as Offa's Dyke Path, available from the Tourist Information Centres. For more information look at www.denbighshirecountryside.org.uk

Eating and drinking

The enjoyment of good food and drink is all part of a holiday and Denbighshire offers a wonderful choice. There is a splendid range of town and country pubs and inns providing excellent food in traditional surroundings. Cream teas, wine bars, more formal hotel and restaurant dining and even a complete medieval banquet are also on offer.

Accommodation

There is a wide range of accommodation in Denbighshire for you to choose from. Tourist Information Centres can give details of verified accommodation, and will help you book.

TIC North 01745 344515

TIC South 01978 860828

Events and entertainment

There is a yearly cycle of events in the towns and villages of Denbighshire. Large scale events, music festivals, local shows, sheep dog trials, outdoor Shakespeare and harvest festivals are part of the fabric of daily life. For more information look at www.eventsnorthwales.co.uk or www.denbighshire.gov.uk/whatson or pick up a copy of the latest What's On from any of the TICs.

Arts and crafts

The creative arts flourish in Denbighshire. Displays of both local and international work can also be found at Y Capel in Llangollen and at the Royal International Pavilion in Llangollen as well as Ruthin Craft Centre, a centre for the applied arts (01824 704774). Local libraries across the county often have interesting exhibitions of work, and craft workers and studio shops can be found alongside some of the medieval sites.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Although much of interest is included, this brochure does not claim to cover all there is to see and do in the region. Local book shops, libraries and Tourist Information Centres have more detailed information.

The two tourist information centres in the county are:

Rhyl TIC
01745 344515
rhyl.tic@denbighshire.gov.uk

Llangollen TIC
01978 860828
llangollen@nwtic.com

For more information about the area please visit www.discoverdenbighshire.co.uk.

To download a digital version of this book visit <http://medieval-wales.com>

Whichever way you choose to enjoy Medieval Denbighshire please remember the Countryside Code. Also remember that churches are places of worship, meditation and quiet, and much valued by their communities: please respect this heritage and note that, as churches do not charge an entry fee, all donations towards upkeep are most welcome.

Acknowledgements

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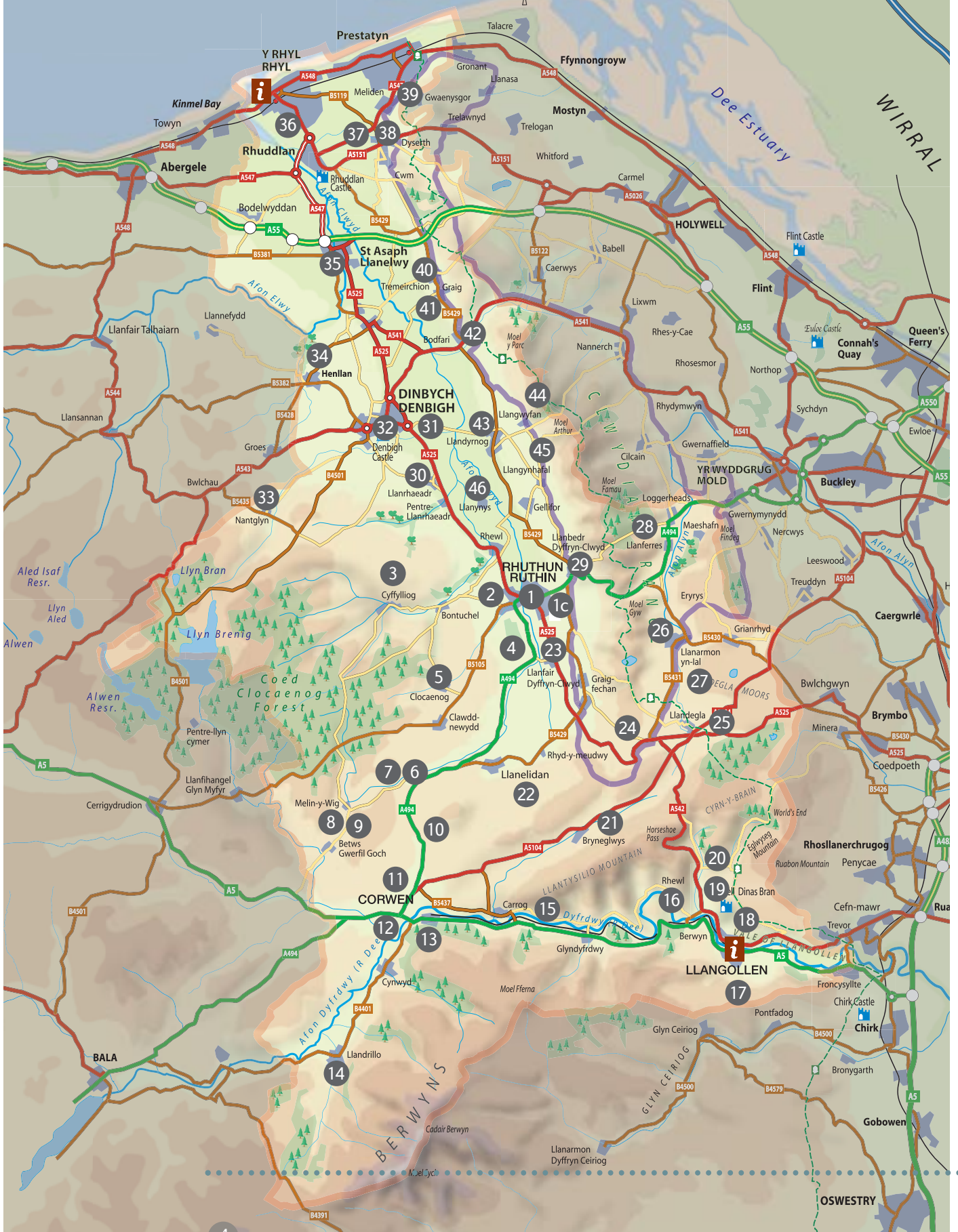
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Whilst every effort has been made to ensure accuracy within this publication, the publishers can accept no liability whatsoever for any errors, inaccuracies or omissions for any matter in any way connected with or arising out of this publication.

You are advised to check opening times before setting out on your journey.

DENBIGHSHIRE



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THE LANDS BETWEEN



*Llwyd's map of Wales, 1573.
By kind permission of the
National Library of Wales.*

Throughout the Middle Ages, the region covered by this trail was a borderland – and generally a disputed borderland. The old name for much of it, indeed, was 'Y Berfeddwlad', 'The Middle Country' or 'The Lands Between': between, that is, the Welsh principalities of Gwynedd to the east and Powys to the South, though more crucially it also lay between England and the heartland of North Wales. It was itself divided into districts or 'Cantrefli' – literally 'a hundred settlements' – which even now retains a recognizably distinct local character. In the north were the 'Four Cantrefs': Rhos between the Elwy and the Conwy; coastal Tegeingl, between Rhuddlan and the Dee estuary; mountainous Rhufoniog, with its capital at Denbigh and its sub-district of Cinmeirch; and fertile Dyffryn Clwyd, the southern Vale of Clwyd, centred on Ruthin. Further south still, between Corwen and Llangollen, was the Deeside cantref of Edeyrnion; and to the east the upland cantref of Iâl or Yale – which would much later give its name to an American university.

When early medieval Wales emerged from the wreck of Roman rule – during the little-known, legend-haunted period sometimes called the Age of Arthur – the Middle Country was already disputed between rival native rulers. These Welsh warlords – as recorded on **Eliseg's Pillar** (Site 20) – claimed descent from Roman Emperors and founding heroes, and sought the blessing of Christianity. For this was also the Age of Saints,

when the region's multitude of holy men and women founded the churches which still bear their names. Meanwhile a new and terrible threat was brewing in the east, from the initially pagan and ever-encroaching Anglo-Saxons. At first the dominant Kings of Powys – men like Cyngen and Eliseg of the pillar – bore the brunt of their attack: then, weakened by it, they gave way to the mightier rulers of Gwynedd, who stemmed the Anglo-Saxon advance at the mouth of the Clwyd.

After 1066, however, the eastern threat was renewed by the still more formidable Normans, spearheaded by the freelance adventurers called 'Marchers' or borderers men like Robert of Rhuddlan, who raised the big 'Twthill' fortress there. By 1100 the Norman war-machine of castles and mounted knights seemed likely to overrun not only the Middle Country, but all Wales. Then a powerful Welsh counter-attack, again led by the princes of Gwynedd, forced the invaders back and re-established a frontier east of the Lands Between, guarded by Welsh-built strongholds like **Tomen-y-Rhodwydd** (Site 24) and **Tomen-y-Faerdre** (Site 27).

But the struggle was by no means over. Throughout the 12th and early 13th centuries, Welsh rulers and Anglo-Norman Marchers – sometimes backed by the intervention of English kings – bickered intermittently for dominance of the Middle Country. On the whole the Welsh prevailed, and during a period of peace a

local ruler founded **Valle Crucis Abbey** (Site 19) in 1201. Eventually, in 1267, Prince Llywelyn (the Last) of Gwynedd was formally confirmed by the English as Prince of Wales and undisputed ruler of the Lands Between.

Ten years later disaster struck. Heading a powerful English army backed by Marcher forces and Welsh malcontents – including Llywelyn’s own brother Dafydd – King Edward I invaded Wales and drove Llywelyn back into the heartland of Gwynedd, founding castles like **Rhuddlan** (Site 36) to hem him in. For a few years Dafydd ruled the Middle Country, but in 1282 he turned on his English allies, sparking off the decisive campaign of conquest which left all Wales – including the Lands Between – under firm English rule.

To keep it so, Edward commissioned his lieutenants to build new castles, granting **Denbigh** (Site 32) to Henry de Lacy, Earl of Lincoln, and **Ruthin** (Site 1b) to Reginald de Grey. These were the centres of new English Marcher ‘lordships’, and beneath their walls new fortified towns were founded for English immigrants, as sources of supply for the fortresses and (more important) a colonial presence in the conquered territory.

To these English enclaves flocked colonists from the northern English estates of their lords: it is notable that many of the families which later rose to prominence in the area – Goodmans, Myddeltons, Thelwalls, Salesburys and Cloughs – bore distinctly English names. Their descendants would inter-marry and merge with local Welsh families, but at first their presence (and the



St Asaph Cathedral.



Sir Thomas Myddleton, 1586-1666. By kind permission of the National Trust, Chirk Castle.

commercial privileges they enjoyed) was deeply resented. After initial unrest, however, the English dominance of the Middle Country was peacefully consolidated.

The 14th century was a time of comparative tranquillity, when **St Asaph Cathedral** (Site 35) was rebuilt, churches like **St Peter’s Ruthin** (Site 1a) were founded, and fine monuments to Welshmen and Englishmen alike were erected (as at **Tremeirchion** Site 40) and **Llanarmon-yn-Iâl** (Site 26)

In the very first year of the 15th century, nevertheless, smouldering resentment against English rule flared up into **Owain Glyndŵr’s** Rising. For years terrible damage was wreaked on the area by both sides: Owain, for instance, burnt not only Denbigh and Ruthin towns, but also St Asaph Cathedral; while the English ravaged Owain’s lands along the Dee valley. Recovery was slow, and hindered by the endemic lawlessness which plagued the Welsh Marches during the middle years of the 15th century. This culminated in the Wars of the Roses, when Denbigh Castle (a Yorkist stronghold) was three times attacked, and Denbigh town twice burnt. Only after the final triumph of the part-Welsh Henry Tudor in 1485 did the Middle Country at last begin a long period of settled peace and prosperity.

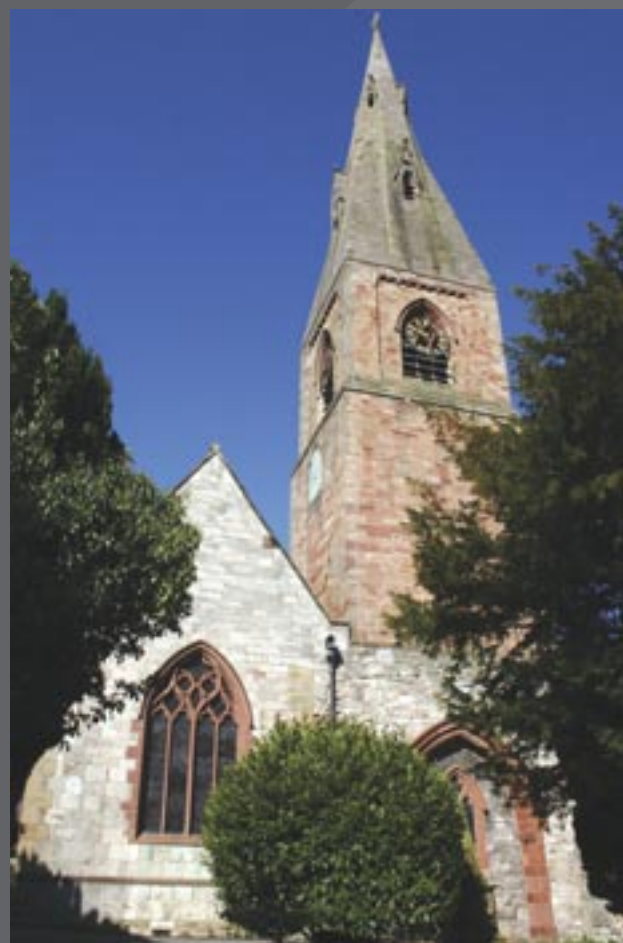
During the decades between 1490 and 1540, the Middle Country blossomed like a desert after rain. Users of this guide will find that this is no exaggeration, for the overwhelming majority of medieval treasures in it belong to this period. Of the thirty churches covered, for instance, no fewer than twenty-two were rebuilt, enlarged or substantially embellished during this time. All the region’s surviving medieval stained glass was now installed, and so were nearly all the roofs, rood screens and other carved timberwork for which the

Lands Between are famous. (**Medieval Parish Churches, Roofs and Rood Screens.**)

The Lands Between, however, were about to take on a new name: for between 1536 and 1543 sweeping changes in Church and State were under way. The first was the Protestant Reformation, which destroyed many medieval church treasures but greatly enriched the many local landowners who acquired monastic estates. At the same time Acts of Union were passed, removing medieval legal discrimination against Welshmen and giving them representation in Parliament for the first time.

The Acts divided the medieval 'Marches of Wales' – which had included the Middle Country – into new countries. Thus the Lands Between became the County of Denbighshire.

The gentry, merchants and clergy of newborn Denbighshire flourished exceedingly under the new order. Their path to prosperity now lay open as magistrates or MPs; courtiers or entrepreneurs; bishops or deans. And though religious changes meant that they no longer built or embellished churches, they proclaimed their success instead with grand houses and sumptuous monuments. During the Tudor and early Stuart periods, indeed, Denbighshire became the **Power House of Renaissance Wales**, ending the Middle Ages in a blaze of glory.



St Peter's Church, Ruthin.

MEDIEVAL PARISH CHURCHES

The most numerous medieval treasures of Denbighshire are its parish churches. They are also the county's greatest glories, and the places which bring us closest to its medieval people. The great castles of Denbigh and Rhuddlan may be more spectacular, the abbey church of Valle Crucis and the cathedral of St. Asaph bigger and more dignified. But these were built by and for the area's overlords – royal, baronial or priestly outsiders. The parish churches were raised for (and usually by) the local people who worshipped there, and whose greatest pride they were.

Visitors will find that these churches are of two basic

types. Some, particularly in remote upland country, are small and simple buildings like **Efenechtyd** (Site 4) or **Betws Gwerfil Goch** (Site 9). But in the richer Vale of Clwyd and among the Clwydian Hills they are often much bigger, and of a very distinctive type – the 'double-naved church'. These wide and spacious buildings, consisting essentially of two rectangles side by side divided by a row of pillars, are indeed known as 'Vale of Clwyd churches'. Though numerous in the Denbighshire region – there are over twenty of them, thirteen included in this trail – they are exceedingly uncommon elsewhere in Britain. Strikingly unfamiliar to visitors, they merit some explanation.

It must first be said that these distinctive churches were never built as double-naved from the outset. They result rather from the sideways enlargement of existing churches by adding a second rectangular nave alongside one already there, thus doubling the size of the building. Such enlargement almost invariably took place during a short span of five decades: between the Wars of the Roses and the religious upheavals of the Protestant Reformation. But the reasons why the enlargements were done in this unusual way – why, as it were, two parallel churches were created, instead of lengthening the building or giving it projecting cross-arms – have long been the subject of speculation.

All kinds of explanations have been advanced for the double-naved church phenomenon. Some say the two naves were built by rival families, or that one was for worship and the other a hostel for pilgrims, or even that cattle drovers were lodged in one nave and their beasts in the other. There is however not a scrap of evidence for these tales. More plausible is the belief that each nave was dedicated to a separate saint, or that one housed an altar to the church's patron saint and the other to the Virgin Mary. Here again evidence is lacking, and only two of the double naved churches have 'two saint' dedications and only one of these, **Llanfair Dyffryn Clwyd** (Site 23), including a dedication to the Virgin.

A more prosaic but more likely explanation is that double-naving was a cheap and easy way of increasing the size of a church, with minimum structural change. Only one wall of the original building needed to be

removed, and what resulted was a church with doubled floor-area, better lit by two big eastern windows which could also display more stained glass. Two roofs of manageable span, meanwhile, gave ample rein to the region's other medieval speciality, ornate wood carving (see **Roofs and Rood Screens**).

Why, then, were double-naved churches built around the Vale of Clwyd, and not generally elsewhere? The answer may well be the influence of fashion. In other parts of medieval Britain, for example, the fashion was for grand church towers – as in South-West England – or tall spires, as for example in the East Midlands. Visitors may notice that medieval church towers are quite uncommon in



St Marcella's Church, Denbigh.

Denbighshire, and medieval spires non-existent. Here the fashion was clearly for double-naved churches. It all but certainly began at **St Peter's, Ruthin** (Site 1a), the wealthy and prestigious church of the Vale of Clwyd's capital and the first church to be 'double-naved'.

St Marcella's, Denbigh (Site 31) later followed suit. Then the wealthier villages or their squires, unwilling to be outdone by the towns or (worse still) by their rural neighbours, also double-naved their churches in quick succession. What better way to proclaim community pride, keep up with fashion, make more room for ceremonial – and at the same time assure a place in Heaven? (See also **Roofs and Rood Screens – The Glories of Denbighshire Woodworking**.)



St Dyfnog's Church, Llanrhaeadr.

ROOFS AND ROOD SCREENS

THE GLORIES OF DENBIGHSHIRE WOODWORKING



St Collen's Church, Llangollen.

'We will make an altar, a choir, a white Virgin, candles, a chalice, a roof beam, sculptured stones and a carven roof.'

So wrote the bard Lewys Môn in the early 1500s, voicing the people of Llangollen's determination to rebuild their fire-shattered church. The astonishing carven roof which resulted is among the finest medieval works of art in Britain, striking proof of the craftsmanship of local woodcarvers and carpenters. Fine quality woodwork, indeed, is a distinctive hallmark of many Denbighshire churches.

It appears most impressively in their timber roofs. Those at **St Marcella's Denbigh** and **Ruthin**, for example, would be outstanding anywhere, and some village churches (albeit on a smaller scale) are not far behind – **Llanrhaeadr's** roofs being especially fine. Visitors may notice that many Denbighshire church roofs bear a noticeable family resemblance, and indeed they all belong to the same period (c.1480 – 1540). Most are technically known as hammer-beam and arch-braced roofs, and in many cases the protruding hammer beams are adorned with carved angels – one can be seen close-to at **Llangynhafal**. Several, too, have especially richly carved and barrel-vaulted canopies of honour, emphasizing the holiness of the altar beneath.

Local woodcarvers also displayed their art on timber porches (as at **Llanrhaeadr**) and the beautiful **rood screens** which separated the altar area from the congregation. The most imposing example is at **Derwen**, complete with its rood loft (church currently for sale). Here again a family resemblance is noticeable, indicating the work of the same carver or group of carvers. An unusual motif of trailing ivy-berries, for instance, was

the trademark of the craftsmen who made the screens at **Clocaenog**, **Llanrhydd**, and **Llanelidan**. The touching rood screen panels at **Betws Gwerfil Goch**, however, are unique survivors of the destruction which engulfed many screens during the religious upheavals of the Reformation.

Thereafter local carvers turned their attention to other furnishings – like pulpits (as at **Llanelidan** or **Llangynhafal**; altar rails (**Denbigh**); and communion tables (**Denbigh** again and **Llanrhydd**). That their expertise continued undiminished is proven by the wonderful 17th century woodwork at **Rug Chapel** – a reminder that much carved timberwork was originally also brightly painted. The tradition of local woodworking indeed persisted into the Georgian period and beyond – as witness the timber chandeliers of **Llanynys**, **Clocaenog** and **Betws Gwerfil Goch**; the pelicans at **Llangynhafal** and **Llanrhaeadr**, and many a fine chair, chest and pew still gracing Denbighshire churches.



Rug Chapel.



Jesse Window, Llanrhaeadr.

STAINED GLASS

Medieval stained glass is rare in Wales, but Denbighshire has more than its fair share of the national total. Most outstanding of course is the magnificently complete Jesse Window at **Llanrhaeadr**, probably the finest of all Welsh windows. There is another good Tree of Jesse at **Dyserth** (Site 38), and an unusual Seven Sacraments window at **Llandyrnog** (Site 43), along with a glass portrait gallery of Welsh saints. Mosaics of medieval fragments or single figures – evidence of lost glories – can be seen at **Llanfair Dyffryn Clwyd** (Site 23), **Tremeirchion** (Site 40), **Clocaenog** (Site 5), **Llantysilio** (Site 16), **Llanelidan** (Site 22) and elsewhere, and the remarkable Georgian painted window at **Llandegla** (Site 25) should not be missed.

HOLY WELLS

Due either to the virtues of its saints or the nature of its geology, Denbighshire boasts many holy wells. Six of the most accessible are included in this trail, but there are many more to be sought out. These allegedly healing water-sources may well be the oldest of the area's places of worship. Certainly there was a thriving cult of wells, pools and lakes among the pagan Celts, if not long before: offerings were made to them, and in

some places they were also associated with the Celtic cult of the prophetic severed head (see **Tremeirchion**, **Ffynnon Beuno** Site 40).

By the Middle Ages, however, these wells had been 'christened' and dedicated to local saints – though there is also a strong likelihood that some were Christian from the outset, natural springs sanctified by their nearness to the hermit's cell or early church. Some of the rituals associated with them – as at **Llandegla** (Site 25) – nevertheless point to a comfortable blend of old and new beliefs.

Holy wells (like St. Dyfnog's at **Llanrhaeadr** Site 30) reached a zenith of popularity just before the Protestant Reformation. Thereafter their use was officially condemned as superstitious – though many Denbighshire people apparently took little notice. For poorer people, indeed, they must always have been the only available remedy for disease or disability, and by more fashionable bathers, becoming part of the contemporary craze for medicinal spas.

Then, rejected by science, their popularity ebbed again, and many were lost, forgotten, drained or filed in – remote **Ffynnon Sarah** at Derwen (Site 7), recently restored, being a notable exception. Now, fortunately, interest in them is again reviving: even if they do not always cure 'warts, scabs and the itch' – remember to offer a prayer, a pin or a coin, according to inclination – these venerable holy places are worth seeking out.



Ffynnon Sarah, St. Saeran's holy well.

THE POWERHOUSE OF RENAISSANCE WALES



Far left Katheryn of Berain by Adriaen Van Cronenburgh. By kind permission of the National Museum of Wales.

Left 'Old Blue Stockings'. By kind permission of Nancy, Lady Bagot.

During the century and a half between the War of the Roses and the Civil War (1480-1640), Denbighshire produced more outstanding personalities than any other part of Wales. Poets flourished here; the scholars of **St Asaph** translated the Bible into Welsh; and Humphrey Llwyd of **Denbigh** became 'the father of Modern Geography'.

Meanwhile a band of closely inter-related merchant-gentry spread out from the country to grow rich in London, at court, and even further afield, frequently returning to proclaim their success with fine houses and splendid monuments at home. These Myddeltons and Salusburys of **Denbigh**, Goodmans of **Ruthin** and courtier Thelwalls from **Llanrhudd** all made their mark on British history, and on the surviving buildings of Denbighshire. So too did the extraordinary Sir Richard Clough of **Bach-y-Graig**, the fifth son of a Denbigh glover, who prospered in Antwerp and died abroad, but sent his heart and right hand in a silver casket for burial in his parish church of St. Marcella (Site 31).

Among all these remarkable men, one remarkable woman should not be forgotten – Katharine of Berain (Catrin o'r Berain). This Denbighshire heiress (a distant cousin of Queen Elizabeth) married in turn a Salusbury; Sir Richard Clough; a Wynn and a Thelwall, producing so many noble descendants that she is called 'Mam Cymru' – 'the Mother of Wales'.

OWAIN GLYNDŴR

Owain Glyndŵr (c.1359 – 1417) is Denbighshire's most renowned hero. Taking his name from his estates around Glyndyfrdwy – between Corwen and Llangollen – he led the last great Welsh rising against English rule, and very nearly made Wales an independent nation. A wealthy middle-aged landowner, educated in London and with a distinguished service record in English armies and fleets, Glyndŵr seemed an unlikely rebel leader. But he was also the descendant of three Welsh princely dynasties, identified by bards as the prophesied saviour of his people.

When his neighbour Lord Grey of Ruthin seized part of his estate, Owain appealed for redress to King Henry IV and his own establishment contacts in Parliament – only to be contemptuously rebuffed. He reacted with striking suddenness, declaring himself Prince of Wales on 16th September 1400 – traditionally at the site of **Owain Glyndŵr's mound** (Site 15). Next he set out with a small but determined force to raid and burn **Ruthin** (Site 1) – crowded with visitors to an annual fair – moving on to ravage the English settlements of **Denbigh** (Site 32), **Rhuddlan** (Site 36), Flint, Hawarden, Holt, Oswestry and Welshpool, all within a week. Then

he was crushingly defeated by an English levy, retiring into the hills with only a handful of followers.

Apparently so soon extinguished, Glyndŵr's rising had in fact scarcely begun. News of it spread quickly through Wales and into England, drawing Welsh students at Oxford and Welsh emigrant labourers home to join



Owain Glyndŵr statue, Corwen.

his banner. Meanwhile the English government enacted sternly anti-Welsh laws – which only served to increase support for Glyndŵr. During the next two years he struck unexpectedly in many parts of Wales, melting away before superior English forces to appear again at the other end of the country. In 1402 he achieved two spectacular coups – heralded, it was believed, by a blazing comet. In April, near Ruthin, he ambushed and took his arch-enemy Lord Grey – later ransomed for a huge sum – and in June he routed an English army at Pilleth in Radnorshire, capturing their leader Edmund Mortimer. Moreover, when three avenging English expeditions advanced against Owain, they were driven back by appalling weather. The King's own pavilion was demolished by a sudden storm. Such disasters, it was thought, could only be explained by Owain's skill in wizardry – a legend recalled by Shakespeare in his play *Henry IV Part I*.

In May 1403, the King's young son Prince Henry – later Henry V – began to emerge as Glyndŵr's most formidable opponent, ravaging his Denbighshire lands in a

destructive lightning raid. But this setback was more than redressed by successes in south-west Wales, where Owain took fortress after fortress, and by the acquisition of powerful new allies – including the captured Mortimer (who married Glyndŵr's daughter) and Mortimer's famous brother-in-law 'Harry Hotspur'.

The years 1404 and 1405 saw the zenith of Glyndŵr's fortunes. He already dominated much of Wales, and when the strong English castles of Harlech and Aberystwyth surrendered to him he ruled undisputed from Cardigan to Caernarfon. Now therefore he began to act as an acknowledged sovereign prince, summoning Welsh Parliaments at Machynlleth and Harlech and drawing up a programme for an independent Welsh church and two Welsh universities. As 'Owen, but the Grace of God Prince of Wales', he also negotiated a treaty with England's opponent the King of France.

This bore temporarily hopeful fruit when a Franco-Welsh expedition advanced to within eight miles of Worcester – only to retire again after an indecisive stand-off with an English army. Thereafter, Owain's star gradually waned. Under energetic pressure from Prince Henry, outlying parts of his domain began to capitulate to the English. Aberystwyth Castle fell in 1408, and Harlech – after a bombardment by English heavy cannon – in 1409, leaving Owain's wife and daughters in English hands and his prestige greatly reduced. Denbighshire apparently remained loyal to him, and from there he launched his last major raid on the Shropshire borders in 1410: it failed disastrously, and the rising was now a spent force.

Glyndŵr nevertheless remained at large, rejecting a reconciliation and pardon offered in 1415 by his erstwhile opponent, now King Henry V. Soon afterwards he simply disappeared. He was probably dead by 1417, and perhaps lies buried near his daughter's home in Hertfordshire. But we do not know for sure, and some contemporary Welshmen believed he never died at all. Whether or not (like King Arthur) he still lies sleeping until his country's greatest need, his memory certainly still lives on: nowhere more so than in his ancestral lands around Corwen (Site 13).

1 RUTHIN



Nantclwyd y Dre, Ruthin.

Ruthin is one of the most picturesque historic towns in north-east Wales. It began as a Welsh settlement – its name means ‘the red fortress’ – on a strategic ridge above the Clwyd river, with a mother church to the east at **Llanrhydd** (Site 1c below). Then, following decades of disputes, it finally fell under English control in 1282, becoming the site of a strong **castle** (1b). Under its new owners the baronial de Grey family, Ruthin developed into a prosperous Anglo-Welsh community, with a big **church** (1a) and a busy market. Despite a setback when Lord Grey’s Welsh rival Owain Glyndŵr burnt the town in 1400, its prosperity increased in the early Tudor and Elizabethan periods, when it was described as ‘the greatest market town in all the Vale, full of inhabitants and well replenished with buildings’. This brief description will concentrate on the oldest of these buildings, beginning in the hilltop market place, St Peter’s Square.

The earliest building here is the Old Court House (now the National Westminster Bank), built in 1401 – after Glyndŵr’s attack – as the local administrative centre, court, and gaol. Visible within are fine old roof timbers, and on the north-west outside corner is the stump of a gallows beam. The two neighbouring banks are also half-timbered, but were in fact built in the 1920s. In front of Barclays is the enigmatic boulder called the

Maen Huail, traditionally the stone on which King Arthur beheaded a love-rival, variously reputed a giant, a bandit or a saint. Across the square is the imposing Georgian Castle Hotel, beside the 17th century Myddelton Arms with its triple tier of dormer windows, ‘the Seven Eyes of Ruthin’. Further along past another timber framed house, are the wonderful wrought-iron gates – made in the 1720s by the famous Davies Brothers, master craftsmen of Bersham – to St Peter’s churchyard.

1A ST PETER’S CHURCH

St Peter’s Church was founded by John de Grey in 1310 as a collegiate church – which is to say a church staffed by a community (Latin ‘collegium’) of priests, in this case seven. It has been much altered since then, particularly by a Victorian restoration in 1854-9, when its trademark spire – the only spire in the Vale of Clwyd – was also added. Within, the most immediately striking feature of St Peter’s is that it is double-naved, consisting of two rectangles of equal length, built side by side and divided by a row of pillars. This arrangement resulted when the originally ‘single rectangle’ church was laterally doubled in size in the late

14th century. Uncommon elsewhere in Britain, this double-naved form was much favoured in the Vale of Clwyd, becoming a distinctive local style. There are no fewer than 21 such double-naved churches in the district.

Both naves have magnificent timber roofs, added in the early Tudor period (c1500-40). The northern nave roof is particularly elaborate, with decorated beams and over 400 panels carved with an immense variety of devices, flowers, badges and heraldry of baronial families. The later southern roof is simpler, with plain panels but decorated bosses (and a recently painted section near the altar).

Among the many memorials are two monumental brasses – very rare in Wales – on the north nave wall. The single figure depicts Edward Goodman, a cloth



Gabriel Goodman.

merchant who died in 1560, in his robes as Mayor of Ruthin. Unusually he appears again on a second brass with his wife (he lived to be 84, she 90) and their eight named children. Their second son, Gabriel Goodman, is again commemorated by a strikingly painted bust near the altar. He was a most distinguished cleric, chaplain to Queen Elizabeth's 'prime minister' William Cecil, and Dean of Westminster. A great benefactor to his home town, he founded both a grammar school and a hospital in the close behind the church. Goodman also helped finance the Welsh translation of the Bible (see Site 35, St Asaph).

The Church Close. The attractive group of buildings behind St Peter's have very much the feeling of a small cathedral close. Originally the precinct of the medieval priests' college, they were bought by Dean Goodman to house his benefactions. Much the earliest is the 14th century Old Cloister with its pointed windows, attached to the church: now part Masonic Temple and part music rooms, this was the priests' communal residence. At right angles to the cloister is the 18th century Old Grammar School, and, opposite, the (rebuilt) single storey hospital almshouses, founded by Goodman for ten men, and two women who did the washing. At the opposite corner of St Peter's Square is Castle Street, the prettiest of all Ruthin's streets. It begins with the colonnaded Wine Vaults and the attractively Dutch-gabled Corporation Arms. Further along is Sir John Trevor's House with its jutting timbered gable, then big Nantclwyd House with its characteristic 'porch on stilts'. Tree-ring dating has proved Nantclwyd House was begun in c.1435, making it the oldest timber-framed house in Wales: it assumed its present impressive appearance in the later 17th century. At the end is the Victorian gateway to the grounds of Ruthin Castle, now a hotel. www.ruthincastle.co.uk



The Seven Eyes of Ruthin.

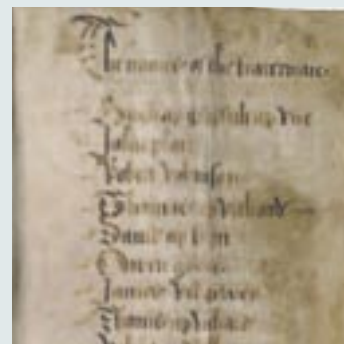
St Peter's Church open April-September most days 8.45am-4pm.



Ruthin School's Royal Charter, 1595.



Sir Thomas Exmewe, born in Ruthin c1454, Lord Mayor of London 1517, attributed to John Bettes.



The first page of the Register of the Corvisers of Ruthin, 1570. Courtesy of the National Library of Wales.



Ruthin Castle as it appeared in an engraving by Samuel and Nathan Buck, 1742.

1B RUTHIN CASTLE

The strong castle of Ruthin was begun in earnest in 1282, when Reginald de Grey was given the site by King Edward I after recapturing it from the Welsh. The King had in fact already started a fortress here – intended, like **Rhuddlan**, to consolidate his newly- conquered territory – and the royal masons continued the work for the new owner. The castle held out against Owain Glyndŵr in 1400 – though its defender, Glyndŵr's arch-enemy Lord Grey, was lured out and captured nearby. It also survived an initial siege by Parliamentary forces during the Civil War, but surrendered in 1646 and was substantially demolished. The ruins were later the setting for an immense mock-medieval mansion, whose Victorian battlements and towers so dramatically punctuate Ruthin's skyline.

Part of the original fortifications, with five towers and the remains of a gatehouse, can still be seen by permission of the hotel management – or glimpsed over the wall from **Cunning Green**, the footpath turning right outside the Victorian gateway.

The castle stands at the south end of the old town ridge, with the church at its northern extremity and St Peter's Square in the middle. From there Ruthin's other streets drop away to the east and west, displaying glimpses of the hills beyond and attractive old frontages.

At the top of Well Street – formerly 'Welsh Street' because favoured by Ruthin's Welsh inhabitants – are a fine row of timber-framed shops, including 'Siop Nain' where the Welsh national anthem was printed in 1860. In Upper Clwyd Street the originally 15th century bookshop bears the double-headed eagle arms of the Goodman family, and the long sweep of Clwyd Street has many timber-framed house fronts. At the bottom, opposite the Old Gaol, is the turning to Mill Street with its basically 13th century Town Mill, now flats but still displaying original pointed windows. These and other later Ruthin buildings are included in two town walks described in *Exploring Ruthin*, available at the town's Tourist Information Point in Ruthin Craft Centre.

Ivy-berry trail, Llanrhydd.



1C LLANRHYDD CHURCH OF ST MEUGAN

Directions: From central Ruthin or the by-pass, follow signs to hospital: after passing this, take the left hand road at the fork and continue half a mile.

In a tiny rural hamlet a mile or so from the town centre, St Meugan's was the original mother-church of the Welsh settlement which became Ruthin. The pretty little 15th century building (dedicated to a hermit-saint from Carleon in Gwent) contains many notable furnishings – above all the lovely rood screen which once supported a rood or crucifix (see **Derwen** Site 6). Dating probably from the early 1500s, this fine example of local carpentry is richly carved with intricate tracery, with an ivy-berry trail (a Vale of Clwyd speciality) along its upper rail. The Georgian west gallery opposite (for choir and church band) is an even rarer survival, dated 1721: most such galleries hereabouts were removed by the Victorians. Rarer still is the ornate 17th century altar table, guarded by rampant lions.

On the walls nearby are the intriguing monuments of the Thelwall family, who came to Ruthin with its de Grey

overlords. The oldest depicts Elizabeth John and Jane Thelwall with their ten sons and four daughters, all named and some holding skulls to show that they died before their parents. The ninth son Ambrose is again commemorated by a fine portrait bust: a courtier to three Stuart kings, he retired here in the 'troublesome times' of Republican rule and died in 1653.

In the churchyard (not far from the south porch) stands the decorated nine-foot shaft of a medieval preaching cross; and in the north-east corner is the gravestone of 'Alfred Corbett, Tramp' a popular figure who died in 1947. A good guidebook is available in the church.

St Meugan's church open by appointment. Call the Cloisters on 01824 702068.



St Meugan's Church, Llanrhydd.

2

LLANFWROG

CHURCH OF ST MWROG
AND ST MARY

The sturdy medieval tower of St Mwrog's crowns the hill west of Ruthin, marking the point where town gives way to countryside. Double-naved in the distinctive Clwydian style, the church is basically late medieval, but was much altered by Victorian restoration. The church was again restored in 1999. There are fine views from the circular Celtic churchyard – St Mwrog was a little known Welsh saint, perhaps from Anglesey. On a rise to the south by the road to Efenechtyd stands an ancient thatched and whitewashed house (private).

Church open most days, mid morning to late afternoon.



Church of St Mwrog and St Mary, Llanfwrog.

3

CYFFYLLIOG

CHURCH OF ST MARY

The church of a remote and attractive village in the wooded Clywedog valley (signposted from Llanfwrog). Heavily restored, it retains a late medieval ceiling and an unusual Georgian hearse house.

Church open by arrangement only. Please contact church wardens on 01824 750784/750246 to arrange visit.



Church of St Mary, Cyffylliog.



Church of St Michael, Efenechtyd.

4

EFENECHTYD

CHURCH OF ST MICHAEL
AND ALL ANGELS

Set amid a cluster of old houses in a deep and remote valley, St Michael's is the tiny church of a pretty hamlet. Its circular yew-grown churchyard is a sign of Celtic origins, and the first church here may have been founded by monks from St Saeran's community at Llanynys (Site 46): the name Efenechtyd could mean 'place of the monks'. The present building – only twenty feet wide, and the second smallest church in the diocese of St Asaph – probably dates from the 13th century, but was extensively restored in 1873.

The ancient door with its spur-shaped iron knocker leads to a simple and very peaceful interior. Its most remarkable treasure is the rare medieval wooden font, a single circular oak block hewn with fourteen facets over a ring of beading: it is probably a 15th or 16th century local copy of the stone fonts then fashionable. The low battlemented rail nearer the altar is also late medieval, and part of a rood screen (see **Derwen** Site 6), but the east window is older and perhaps of c.1300.

Notable later features include a rare fragment of a Welsh wall-painted Ten Commandments (doubtless Elizabethan or Jacobean) and a painted timber monument to Catherine Lloyd (1810), with cherubs and skull and cross-bones. The Georgian monument to Joseph Conway displays his family crest of 'a blackamoor's head': similar heads adorn the gateposts of his (private) house, Plas-yn-Llan, a short step from the churchyard gate. The rounded stone by the font is the 'Maen Camp', formerly used at the local 'campau' ('Sports') on St. Michael's Day, the 29th of September. Village Samsons strove to hurl it backwards over their heads; please do not try this!

The church is generally open for visitors.



Rare medieval font.

5

CLOCAENOG CHURCH OF ST FODDHYD (MEDDVYTH)

This neat and well-kept church stands on a hill – Clocaenog means ‘mossy knoll’ – above the village. Dedicated to St Foddhyd (Meddvyth), ancient records show that its patron was St Meddvyth the Virgin, daughter of St. Idloes of Llanidloes in Powys. The restored interior is dominated by a fine rood screen (see Derwen), its top rail intricately carved with trailing foliage and its lower panels with candle-flame motifs. These date to about 1538, the date once inscribed in the big east window above the altar. The window now displays fragments of its original stained glass, including heads of men and angels and (in the topmost left-hand light) the nail-pierced feet of a crucified Christ. The roof is also late medieval, as may be the massive dug-out chest hewn from a single tree trunk. Later treasures include the pulpit of 1695 and an elaborate wooden chandelier with beast-head decoration, dated 1725.

Church open by arrangement. Please see church notice board.



Dug-out chest hewn from a single tree trunk, Church of St Foddhyd, Clocaenog.



Chandelier, Clocaenog.



Preaching cross, Derwen.

6

DERWEN PREACHING CROSS AND CHURCH OF ST MARY

In a hillside village high above the Clwyd valley, St Mary's displays two outstanding medieval treasures. The first is the 15th century preaching cross in the churchyard, now in the care of CADW: Welsh Historic Monuments. Among the best-preserved examples in Wales, the cross was the focus of open-air sermons by travelling friars and other visiting preachers. Its carved octagonal shaft supports a box-like head with canopied figures: the Crucifixion on the west side (facing away from the church); a battered Virgin and Child on the south; the Coronation of the Virgin to the east; and on the north side a fine figure of St Michael the Archangel, with raised sword and scales of weighing souls. (The adjacent church house is a walled-up churchyard gateway, with schoolroom above.)

Within the church is an even more unusual medieval treasure – a 15th or early 16th century **rood screen** complete with its **rood loft**. Surviving medieval rood screens are themselves quite uncommon (there is a fine example at **Clocaenog**) but the galleries or ‘lofts’ which originally surmounted them are very rare survivals indeed: Derwen's is one of only a dozen or so in Wales. Thousands of lofts were destroyed during the Tudor Protestant Reformation, because their main purpose was to display the large painted roods (an Old English word meaning crucifix) which reformers condemned as idolatrous. Reached (as here) by stairways set into the wall, loft galleries were also used by preachers, musicians and singers, their parapets being lined with candles on special occasions.

Derwen's screen and loft, richly carved with intricate foliage and delicate tracery, is a striking tribute to the skills of medieval Welsh carpenters. Though its rood and original coat of bright colouring have long gone, it provides a very rare reminder of what church interiors looked like before the upheavals begun by Henry VIII.

Please note the church is for sale and not open for visits but the cross can still be seen in the churchyard.



Ffynnon Sarah, St Saeran's holy well.

7 FFYNNON SARAH ST SAERAN'S HOLY WELL

Directions: From Ruthin, it is possible to take the B5105 road towards Cerrigydrudion. At Clawdd Newydd fork left onto the minor road (the Pilgrim Track) towards Melin-y-Wig. Pass the first left turn to Derwen and drive on about half a mile. The well is on the right, by a dip in the road and the signed track to Braich farm. Look for a layby near a low stone wall with a gate and stone plaque inscribed Ffynnon Sarah. The well is then accessible via a paved flat path.

Now called Ffynnon Sarah but originally dedicated to St. Saeran of **Llanynys**, this remote and atmospheric holy well stands by the ancient pilgrim trackway above Derwen. After long neglect, it was sensitively restored by the Rector of Derwen in 1972-3. The spring bubbles into a tree-shaded stone bath, overflowing into the little Nant Mynian brook. It was believed to heal not only rheumatism but also cancer, and sufferers dropped in gifts of pins before descending the three steps to bathe in the well-tank. Those cured here left their sticks and crutches as thanks-offerings in a nearby cottage, now vanished. Cure-seekers came here well into the Victorian period, and may come still – but modern visitors are warned 'This water is not suitable for drinking'.

8 THE PILGRIMS' TRACK CLAWDD NEWYDD TO BETWS GWERFIL GOCH

The minor road from Clawdd Newydd via Ffynnon Sarah to Betws Gwerfil Goch formed part of an ancient long distance route from the north-east corner of Wales to its south-westernmost tip. It would have been



Church of St Mary, Betws Gwerfil Goch.

used by medieval pilgrims journeying from the famous shrine of St Winifred at Holywell in Flintshire to the tomb of St. David in his Pembrokeshire cathedral. Running along the hill tops between Clawdd Newydd and Melin-y-Wig, it often provides dramatic views both towards the Clwyd Valley and the wild country to the west, with glimpses of dry-stone walls and Welsh Black cattle. But modern travellers must beware: the road is often very narrow, with occasional steep inclines and sharp bends – and cars travel much faster than medieval pilgrims.

9 BETWS GWERFIL GOCH CHURCH OF ST MARY

The remote hamlet of Betws Gwerfil Goch – 'the prayer-house of Gwerfil the Red' – lies in a steep-sided valley, on the ancient Pilgrims' Trackway across Wales. At its hub is the prayer house itself, traditionally founded for pilgrims by the 12th century Princess Gwerfil of Meirionydd, red-haired granddaughter of King Owain Gwynedd of North Wales. Her church was rebuilt in the 15th century and restored in 1879: entered via a doorway formed from three big stone slabs, its interior is packed with interest.



Rood panel screen, Betws Gwerfil Goch.

Foremost are the carved panels behind the altar, which are unique in Britain. Made in the late 15th century, they depict a crucifixion scene, and were once part of a rood screen (see Derwen Site 6): thousands like them were destroyed as idolatrous at the Reformation, or discarded by later 'restorers'. Perhaps because of its remoteness, the panels at Betws have alone survived, to be rediscovered under a 'heap of rubbish' in 1840. Crudely carved and worn by time, and perhaps the hands of pilgrims, the three central panels show a cloaked Christ (beneath the Latin words 'Ecce Homo' – 'Behold the Man') flanked by weeping figures of St. John the Beloved Disciple and the Virgin Mary. On either side are the symbols of the Crucifixion – hammer, spear, club, pincers, nails and crown of thorns.

The panels alone would be worth a visit, but there is also plenty more to see. The present rood screen is recent, but fragments of its original predecessor, carved with beasts and flowers, remain in the roof flanking the altar, and the fine medieval roof has carving of its own – notably a maned lion above the pulpit. From the roof hangs a spectacular and most unusual chandelier of turned wood with brass arms, probably 17th or 18th century, with Victorian oil lamps nearby. The Georgian pulpit and the sturdy bench pews, the harmonium, Welsh memorials and churchwardens' chest-cum-settle all help to make St. Mary's one of the region's most atmospheric country churches; yet it remains a well-used and well-loved 'prayer house' still.

NB The church is currently closed as it is a home to a protected colony of bats which restrict access.

10 GWYDDELWERN CHURCH OF ST BEUNO



Gwyddelwern.

Though lavishly rebuilt in 1880, with a spired tower, St Beuno's still displays a fine carved late medieval wagon roof and other ancient woodwork.

NB The church is currently closed for visitors due to a Health and Safety issue.

11 RHUG CHAPEL NEAR CORWEN

While not strictly medieval, Rug Chapel should not be missed by any visitor to the treasures of medieval Denbighshire. This gem of a building strikingly preserves the spirit of late medieval church decoration, exuberantly demonstrating what local painters and carpenters could do when given free rein by a wealthy patron who scorned Puritan simplicity. Such was Colonel William Salesbury, nicknamed 'Old Blue Stockings' and later famed as the Royalist defender of Denbigh Castle, who commissioned the private chapel in 1637.

Modest in its garden setting, the exterior gives no warning of the richness within. There almost every available timber surface is either carved or painted, and frequently both. Most spectacular of all is the roof, panelled and coloured from end to end, decked with cut-out angels, and lined with a frieze of flowers and beasts. Even more carved animals (real and imaginary) play among the foliage of the bench ends. Carved and canopied family pews flank the altar, looking westward through the (later) carved screen towards the painted cherub chandelier and the turned, carved, painted and marbled parapet of the gallery. More soberly, a rare 17th century wall painting with skeleton, skull and hourglass reminds viewers (in Welsh verse) that time flies by and life is short. Rug Chapel itself meanwhile survives to remind us how colourful many Welsh churches were, before either Puritans or Victorian restorers had their way with them.

**Open 1st April- 31st October, Weds to Sunday
10am -5pm. Adult admission £3.80.**



Rug Chapel.

12

LLANGAR

CHURCH OF ALL SAINTS

Directions: The church is signposted from the B4401 Corwen to Bala road (signposted Cynwyd). Park in lay-by and descend rocky footpath by a brook, passing a house and looking for a labelled gate on the right. The church will then come into view. The footpath is not suitable for the disabled or infirm. The interior can be viewed through the east window.

A walk down the footpath to the isolated church of Llangar is amply rewarded by its idyllic setting above the confluence of the Dee and Alwen rivers, in a steeply sloping churchyard with jumbled tiers of tombstones. According to legend, it was originally named 'Llan Garw Gwyn', 'the church of the white stag', after a magical deer whose appearance prompted its foundation. Today the exterior is brightly whitewashed, as most local churches were until Victorian times. Its present neat appearance (and indeed its survival) is due to a rescue operation by CADW: Welsh Historic Monuments, after over a century of abandonment and decay.

CADW's painstaking restoration retained Llangar's charming Georgian furnishings: the towering three-decker pulpit; the box-pews for gentry and rough benches for lesser mortals; and the singing gallery with its four-sided music stand. It also revealed many much earlier features, including the medieval timber roof with its barrel-vaulted canopy of honour over the altar. No fewer than eight layers of wall paintings were rediscovered and restored, ranging from medieval saints and deadly sins within painted timber framing to the grim 18th century figure of death with dart, hourglass and gravediggers' tools. Here then are five centuries of history, revealed without disturbing the powerful atmosphere of this lonely and magical place.

**Open 1st April- 31st October, Weds- Sunday
12.30- 2.30pm. Guidebook available.**



Church of All Saints, Llangar.



Early 19th century engraving, Corwen.

13

CORWEN

Picturesquely set between the foot of the Berwyn Hills and the fast-flowing River Dee, Corwen is known as the Crossroads of North Wales. Here for many centuries travellers along the A5 London-Holyhead road and the route from Bala to Chester have halted, among them invading or defending armies, Welsh drovers, stage-coach passengers and visitors to the town's once-famous fairs. As its name indicates – Corwen means 'the white church' – the town's origins date back to the 6th century, when it grew up around a religious community founded by the Breton-Welsh saints Mael and Sulien. Corwen's medieval treasures are still concentrated around the parish church which bears their name.

CHURCH OF SAINTS MAEL & SULIEN

Begun in the 13th century, the church stands back from the main street, in a yew-grown churchyard beneath a wooded hill-slope. Built into its entrance porch is a prehistoric standing stone – 'Carreg y big yn y fach rhewlyd', 'the pointed stone in the icy corner' – perhaps indicating that this was already a pagan sacred site when Mael and Sulien came here. To the right of the porch stands the tall shaft of a preaching cross, its broken head displaying carved interlacing: it may date from the 9th century. Another ancient stone forms the lintel of the south door, at the opposite corner of the church. This stone is incised with a dagger-like cross, supposedly cut by the weapon of Owain Glyndŵr, hurled in rage from his Seat on Pen-y-pigyn hill behind the church. The Dee Valley was this great Welsh hero's ancestral homeland, and he is well remembered in Corwen, most recently by a statue in the market square.

The church's interior was drastically remodelled in Victorian times. Medieval survivals include the ancient 12th century font, a massive dug-out chest and in a niche by the altar the splendidly carved memorial to a 14th century vicar. Iorwerth Sulien lies in his mass vestments, holding a communion chalice, beneath an inscription requesting our prayers.

The Iron Age hill-fort of Caer Drewyn, incorporating the remains of medieval dwellings, commands a hill to the north-east of the town, beyond the Dee. The fort can be reached by a signposted path starting near the swimming pool and leisure centre.

The church is usually open during the day.

14 LLANDRILLO CHURCH OF ST TRILLO

A circular churchyard and a very old yew tree indicate an ancient foundation. The church was restored 1887-8, and a spire added to the tower of c.1500. A rare early eighteenth century hooded tomb can be found in the churchyard.

The church is open daylight hours.

15 OWAIN GLYNDŴR'S MOUND



Owain Glyndŵr's Mound.

Directions: The mound stands prominently on the left of the A5 Corwen-Llangollen road, seven miles east of Corwen and about a quarter of a mile east of Lliidiart-y-Parc. On private land, it can be viewed from beside a busy road, where there is limited parking and an interpretation board.

This impressive tree-ground mound was originally the 'motte' – strongpoint of a Norman earthwork castle, and was later part of the ancestral home of **Owain Glyndŵr**, whose mansion (destroyed by the English in 1403) stood in the adjacent field. According to tradition, it was on this mount that Owain was formally proclaimed Prince of Wales on 16th September 1400, thus beginning his famous uprising against English rule.



Church of St Tysilio, Llantysilio.

16 LLANTYSILIO CHURCH OF TYSILIO

Directions: Turn sharply left off the A5 one mile west of Llangollen, at the Chain Bridge Hotel: the road is signposted Horseshoe Pass. After crossing the Dee and climbing a hill, turn left at sign for Llantysilio: the church is half a mile further on, to the left.

A more delightful setting for a church could scarcely be imagined. All around are steep wooded hills, and below the sloping churchyard the Dee plunges over the picturesque Horseshoe Falls: picnic and parking places are provided. St. Tysilio's itself – dedicated to a princely abbot of the Powys royal house – also has plenty to offer. It was probably built in the 15th century, though fragments of earlier carved stones surround a little north window. There is a fine late medieval roof with panelled canopy of honour over the altar; a rare medieval oak eagle lectern; a sculpted font; and two little 15th century stained glass figures in the north window. The lower figure is St James of Compostella, patron of pilgrims. Much good late Victorian and Edwardian work is also on view, notably the Pre-Raphaelite east window and the monument of Lady Martin of nearby Bryntysilio, a Shakespearean actress. St. Tysilio's is kept open on some summer afternoons with assistance from Andrew Lloyd Webber's Open Churches Trust.

Church is generally open during the day. Telephone Vicarage on 01978 860231.

17 LLANGOLLEN



Early 19th century engraving, Dinas Brân and Llangollen.

Renowned for its International Musical Eisteddfod, Llangollen occupies a supremely picturesque setting by the Dee, sheltered to the south by the Berwyns and to the north by Ruabon Mountain, and overlooked by **Castell Dinas Bran** (Site 18). The town has been a magnet for travellers and visitors since the early 19th century, many of them initially attracted by the publicity surrounding the romantic Ladies of Llangollen. In medieval times, however, Llangollen was little more than a large village, chiefly known for its (still surviving) stone bridge – probably begun in about 1400 – and its famous church of St Collen.

CHURCH OF ST COLLEN

The first church here was founded in the 6th century by the Welsh-Irish Saint Collen, the subject of many tales and legends.

A warrior-champion of Christianity and later a hermit on Glastonbury Tor, he is said to have retired here after vanquishing a local man-eating giantess. Until the

mid-18th century – when it was demolished to provide stone for the present tower – his tomb-shrine (or ‘Old Church’) survives in the churchyard. The present building was begun in the 13th century, but drastically remodelled in 1864-7, when it was altered from the local double-naved form into a conventional three-aisled church – a rare thing in these parts. Thankfully, however, the fabulous pair of hammer-beam roofs were spared: they remain among the greatest medieval treasures of Denbighshire.



St Collen's Church, Llangollen.

Erected in about 1530 after a disastrous fire, these amazing works of art are sometimes (wrongly) said to have come from Valle Crucis Abbey: in fact they were made for the church, a striking testament to local pride and craftsmanship. Most elaborate is the roof of the central aisle: it is bedecked with choirs of angels – blowing trumpets, holding shields, swords, books and spears. Towards the east end (where it is panelled-in as a canopy of honour over the original altar-space) the carving grows richer still: the roof members themselves are embellished, and the angels are interspersed with pious or comic figures. (Many of these carvings are illustrated in a special guide pamphlet).

The roof of the north aisle is plainer; but this too is adorned with angels and carvings of beasts, birds, fish and flowers and an old Welsh inscription ('Y nav i ti, Mair, vydd barod bob awr') meaning 'For thee, Mary, heaven will be open every hour'.

There is much else to see here, including a finely carved 14th century founder's tomb in the north aisle and many later features. Among the most remarkable is the south aisle's plaque to the Ladies of Llangollen, given in 1937 by Dr. Mary Gordon: curiously, the figures are modelled not on the Ladies but on the donor and her sculptress, Violet Labouchere. The Ladies themselves lie beneath a triangular monument outside the entrance door, along with their beloved housekeeper Mary Carryl.



Plas Newydd.

PLAS NEWYDD

The Ladies' amazing 'Romantic Cottage' stands (well signposted) to the south-east of the town. Among the curiosities they collected there are the shaft of Chester's medieval High Cross and the font from Valle Crucis Abbey.

**Church open May-September, Mon-Fri
1.30pm-late.**

Plas Newydd open April-October daily 10am-5pm, Wed-Sun and Bank Holiday Mondays. Last recommended admission 4pm. Entrance charge £5.50.

18 CASTELL DINAS BRÂN NEAR LLANGOLLEN

Directions: (On foot from Llangollen.) Take waymarked footpath beginning at north end of canal bridge. Note: This site is only accessible via a steep climb: boots necessary.

Crowning an isolated hill 750 feet above Llangollen, the dramatic ruins of Castell Dinas Brân are visible for many miles around. (Those who want a closer look must tackle a steep climb.)

Unlike many castles in Wales, it was not built by invading Normans or English, but by a native Welsh ruler Gruffydd ap Madoc, Prince of Powys Fadog.

He adapted the site of a prehistoric hill fort, strengthening its defences by hewing deep rock-cut ditches to the south and east: the north and west sides are naturally protected by steep drops.

At the east end (furthest from the footpath entrance) is



Castell Dinas Brân.

a rectangular keep, with a gatehouse beside it. The keep is joined to a D-shaped tower – a type favoured by Welsh builders – by a hall, whose twin windows (now worn to gashes) figure prominently in distinct views.

Constructed in about 1260, Dinas Brân had a very short active life. In May 1277, during Edward I's initial Welsh campaign, it was deliberately abandoned and fired by its Welsh garrison to prevent its use by the invaders. The English did nevertheless occupy the site, but never rebuilt the fortress. All the same, a visit to Dinas Brân is well worth the effort: the grandeur of its setting is unmatched, and the views over the Vale of Llangollen are breathtaking. Guide book available at Tourist Information Centre, Llangollen.

19 VALLE CRUCIS ABBEY

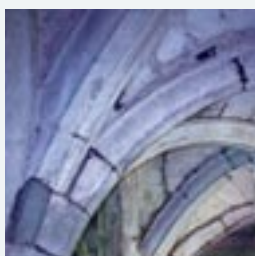
NEAR LLANGOLLEN

Taking its Latin name from the 'vale of the cross' – the cross being nearby Eliseg's Pillar – Valle Crucis stands in a lovely valley at the foot of the Horseshoe Pass. This best-preserved of all North Wales monasteries was founded in 1201 by the local Welsh ruler Madoc ap Gruffydd, for the white-robed Cistercian monks whose rule directed that they settle in such isolated places. The shell of their magnificent cross-shaped abbey church is nearly complete, its west front (facing the road) displaying triple pointed lancets with a lovely circular wheel window above.

The east front – overlooking the only surviving monk's fishpond in Wales – is still more distinctive, with a beautiful arrangement of five pointed windows framed by curving buttresses.

The abbey was a prosperous one, the second richest (after Tintern) in all Wales. Its wealth is reflected in the well preserved east range of the cloister, rebuilt in the finest quality stone after a 15th century fire. Here the serried rank of arches leads to the sacristy; the book-cupboard or library with its traceried screen; and the chapter

The Chapter House, Valle Crucis Abbey.



Valle Crucis Abbey.



house – the meeting room where monks assembled daily to hear a chapter of their rule read out. The chapter house is one of the most beautiful parts of the abbey, with ribbed roof vaulting and fine traceried windows. Above is the monk's dormitory, connected at one end to a first-floor communal lavatory and at the other to the night door through which monks processed to their 2.00am matins, one of the eight services a day they were required to perform. Here too are displayed a collection of monuments to local Welsh nobles, including the splendid sculptured slab of Madoc, great-grandson of the founder and great-grandfather of Owain Glyndŵr.

Well worth a lengthy visit aided by the guide book, Valle Crucis will provide a telling insight into the lives of the monks whose influence on medieval Wales was so strong. It is truly one of the greatest treasures of Medieval Denbighshire.

Open 31st March to 31st October, 10am to 5pm. Adult charge £2.80. Tel: 01978 860326. Free access to grounds in winter.

20 THE PILLAR OF ELISEG

NEAR LLANGOLLEN

Standing on its low burial mound in a field beside Valle Crucis Abbey, Eliseg's pillar is easy to miss. Yet this is a monument of great importance, a rare link with a shadowy but crucial period of early Welsh history. It once stood some twenty feet high, surmounted by a cross which gave its name – 'Valle Crucis', 'the vale of the cross' – to this whole valley. An inscription (now almost worn away but copied down three centuries ago) records that it was raised in the early 800s by Cyngen, last independent King of Powys, in memory of his great-grandfather King Eliseg 'who recovered the land of Powys from the English with fire and sword'. This Eliseg, the inscription claims, was the direct descendant of Vortigern (Gwrtheyrn) 'whom St. Germanus blessed', and of the Emperor Magnus Maximus, one of the last Roman rulers of Britain in the late 4th century. Vortigern, Germanus and Maximus figure in legend alongside Merlin and Arthur, Hengist the Saxon and Helen of the Hosts: Eliseg's Pillar proclaims a proud link with these founding heroes of Wales.



Eliseg's Pillar and reconstruction drawing.

21 BRYNEGLWYS

CHURCH OF ST TYSILIO

On the fringe of the village and flanked by yew trees, St Tysilio's is dedicated to the Welsh saint who may have established a church here thirteen hundred years ago. The present building dates largely from the 15th century, with an Elizabethan addition recalling a famous American association. Though its bright, cheerful and clearly well-loved interior reflects an extensive Victorian restoration, several older features remain, including the medieval east window and barrel roof above the altar. More ancient still is the memorial slab set into the floor of the Yale side chapel. Carved with intricate foliage and a worn inscription, it commemorates Tangwystyl daughter of Ieuaf ap Maredudd, who died in about 1320; it was brought here from Valle Crucis Abbey.



Church of St Tysilio, Bryneglwys.



Interior, Church of St Tysilio.

The chapel where it lies – separated from the church by two immense rough-hewn timber pillars – was added in about 1575 by Dr. Thomas Yale, Chancellor to the Archbishop of Canterbury under Queen Elizabeth 1. Dr. Yale came from nearby Plas-y-Yale, and a later member of his family – Elihu Yale (1649-1721) – grew immensely rich by trading in India. Born in America (where his Puritan parents had sought refuge from persecution), Elihu Yale helped to found the most famous of American universities. Thus Yale was named after a Welshman, who was himself named after the Yale (Tâl) district of Denbighshire.

Church usually open daylight hours.

22 LLANELIDAN

CHURCH OF ST ELIDAN



Carved woodwork, Llanellidan.

Llanellidan is a pretty, scattered hamlet in the green valley of the Afon y Maes, a tributary of the Clwyd. The church – uniquely dedicated to an obscure local saint – stands beside the inn, surrounded by yews and old Welsh tombstones. Built in the 15th century and double-naved in the distinctive local style, it retains many medieval features despite extensive Victorian restoration. There are a pair of barrel-vaulted canopies of honour over the altar spaces, fragments of medieval glass – notably the symbols of the crucifixion in blue shields above the altar – and above all a wonderful display of carved woodwork. Sections of the medieval rood screen (which must have been especially fine) are set by the pulpit, including horse-like beasts, intricate roundels, and trails of vines and ivy-berries. The Jacobean pulpit has carvings of its own, with more panels of the same date behind the altar. Old box pews, monuments to successive squires of nearby Nantclwyd Hall and a touching portrait of the local Roman Catholic martyr Edward Jones all help to make this a church well worth a detour.

Church usually open daylight hours.

*Church of St Mary and St Cynfarch,
Llanfair Dyffryn Clwyd.*



23 LLANFAIR DYFFRYN CLWYD

**CHURCH OF ST MARY AND
ST CYNFARCH**

The church of St Mary in the Vale of Clwyd – in Welsh Llanfair Dyffryn Clwyd – shares its dedication with ‘Saint’ Cynfarch, apparently a Celtic chieftain from northern Britain, related to Coel Hen or ‘Old King Cole’. A fine big 15th century double-naved church with an impressive tower – an unusual distinction hereabouts – it also shares its churchyard with massive yew trees, the stump of a preaching cross, a Georgian vestry house and a timbered lychgate inscribed ‘Heb Dduw, Heb Ddim’ (Without God, Without Anything).

Though the interior is much restored, medieval features remain here. Both roofs have carved canopies of honour over their east ends – a distinctive local feature – and part of the medieval rood screen still stands in the south aisle. Beside the altar, and perhaps two centuries older than this woodwork, lies a splendidly preserved monument to an early 14th century Welsh knight, David ap Madoe: it depicts his hand clutching his sword, and a delightfully cat-like lion on his flowery shield. The most outstanding medieval survival, however, is the mosaic of stained glass (dated 1503) in a south window, including figures of saints and the feet of Christ pierced by a huge golden nail. According to tradition, this glass was once in the big window above the altar, and was preserved from destruction during the Civil War by being buried in the mighty iron-bound oak chest which stands below its present position. There is more medieval glass in the window by the font, near the Elizabethan memorial to Thomas ap Rice, who died ‘at cock-crow’ on a Sunday in 1582. The well-written guide book will enhance a visit to this attractive church.

Church generally open daylight hours.

24 TOMEN-Y- RHODWYDD NEAR LLANDEGLA

Directions: The earthwork stands prominently to the left (north) of the A525 Ruthin-Wrexham road, soon after this passes through the wooded Nant-y-Garth pass. On private land: access on foot via the field reached by turning sharp left soon after the earthwork and continuing up lane. Permission must be obtained at the farmhouse.

Among the finest medieval earthwork castles in Wales, Tomen-y-Rhodwydd was raised by Owain Gwynedd during his conquest of northern Powys in 1149. It occupies a strategic site, controlling the approach to nearby Nant-y-Garth pass through the Clwydian Hills. The earthen motteor mound would originally have been topped by a timber tower and the encircling enclosure by a wooden stockade. It was later occupied by King John of England during his campaign against Llywelyn the Great in 1212.

25 LLANDEGLA CHURCH OF ST TEGLA AND ST TEGLA’S HOLY WELL

Directions: Ffynnon Tegla (the holy well) is now hard to find, and on private land. Starting from the church (and after asking permission at Mill Farm) go through the aluminium gate to the right of the new row of cottages, past farm buildings, and then over a stile by the next gate: bear right off the footpath and walk across a field towards the stream until you reach a low bank. Turn left along this bank to find the unobtrusive well – a sunken stone trough – between the bank and the stream.

The neat church of St Tegla was entirely rebuilt in 1866, but retains its old font and a quite outstanding medieval brass chandelier, probably made in Bruges (Belgium) in about 1500. It has twelve elaborately branched and foliated arms, with a beast-head ring below and a crowned image of the Virgin Mary above. Like a similar chandelier at neighbouring Llanarmon (Site 26) it is said to have come from Valle Crucis Abbey.

The chandelier hangs before a truly remarkable Georgian window, originally made in 1800 for St Asaph Cathedral. Of painted (rather than stained) glass, it depicts a youthful Jesus contemplating a vision of his future Crucifixion, enacted by a bevy of chubby cherubs.

Most remarkable still is the story of St Tegla’s holy well, by the river Alun just outside the village. According to a

document written in the 2nd century, the saint was a female disciple of St. Paul, who lived at Iconium (Konya in modern Turkey): renowned for her healing powers, she was eventually martyred at the age of 90. Quite how this person came to be honoured in Denbighshire is unknown, but the Welsh Tegla was likewise famous for healing, through the waters of her well here, the sickness called 'Clwyf Tegla', or epilepsy. Sufferers performed a complex ritual which included bathing in the well, walking round it three times carrying a chicken (a hen for a woman, a cockerel for a man) and sleeping under the church altar (with the chicken) using the Bible as a pillow. Pins driven into the bird were cast into the well, and finally its beak was put into the patient's mouth. The epileptic fits were thus transferred to the chicken, which (not surprisingly) staggered about to confirm the cure. Though condemned by the church authorities, these rites were allegedly often successful, continuing until at least 1813.

St Tegla's Well is still honoured annually on her feast day in September. Its never-failing spring provided fresh water during a drought in 1921, and when excavated in 1935 produced many pins, coins and other offerings.

Church open during daylight hours.

26 LLANARMON-YN-IÂL CHURCH OF ST GARMON

The capital of the upland region called Yale or Iâl – which means the hill-country – Llanarmon possesses one of Denbighshire's most notable churches. It stands in a big churchyard like a village green, the site of a clas or Celtic religious community dedicated to St Garmon, the Welsh name for St. Germanus of Auxerre in Burgundy. This 5th century warrior bishop (c.378 -448) was very much an historical figure. Sent to Britain to combat heresy soon after the end of Roman rule, he found himself commanding the nervous local forces against an invading army of pagan Picts and Saxons. Setting an ambush in a narrow pass, he told his men to cry out 'Alleluia' as he raised the standard: their sudden shout echoed round the pass, whereupon (reported Bede) the enemy fled in panic, 'thinking the very rocks and sky were falling on them'. This bloodless 'Alleluia Victory' (probably in AD 429) may have taken place at Maes Garmon near Mold, or in the Horseshoe Pass – near which Germanus' name appears on the **Pillar of Eliseg** (Site 20).

Pilgrims continued to flock to Garmon's shrine at Llanarmon until Tudor times, probably helping to finance the building of the big double-naved church. It was extensively restored during the 1730s, giving it a Georgian character unusual in these parts. To this period belong the big round-topped windows, the



Classical-style porch, the elegant Georgian font and the timber pillars separating the two halves of the church.

Yet many outstanding medieval features remain, including the fine **timber roofs**. Near the altar hangs Llanarmon's greatest treasure, an 18-branched brass chandelier made in Bruges (Flanders) in about 1500. Even finer than its counterpart at **Llandegla**, its triple tier of leafy arms enclose a canopied statue of the Virgin: it may have come from **Valle Crucis Abbey**, or from the nearby mansion of Bodidris. Certainly two lords of Bodidris lie in the south aisle, the earlier the Welsh knight Gruffydd ap Llywelyn ap Ynyr. His well-preserved effigy of c.1320 wears a padded surcoat over chain mail, with his sword in hand and his name inscribed round his shield. On the wall nearby is the magnificent and most unusual monument of his descendent Captain Efan Llwyd, who died in 1639. Retaining much original colouring, it shows his bearded and armoured figure reclining in a triple-arched niche, behind an inscription remarkable for its early use of Welsh to record his offices and services to 'Brenin Siarls yn Ywerddon' (King Charles I in Ireland).

The third monument here, of a 14th century priest battered from its long sojourn in the churchyard, may perhaps represent St. Garmon himself: a later image of the saint stands just within the entrance door. Then there are two fine old parish chests; a gilded coffer given by the owner of Gwrych Castle; and a vestry screen made from old box pews. More than enough, indeed, to encourage anyone to visit this fascinating church.

A guide pamphlet is available, and a comprehensive history of the village (including Site 27) can be bought in the nearby post office.

Church usually open daylight hours.



Top Monument to Captain Efan Llwyd, Llanarmon-yn-Iâl.

Middle Church of St Garmon, Llanarmon-yn-Iâl.

Above Detail of monument to Captain Efan Llwyd, Llanarmon-yn-Iâl.

27 **TOMEN-Y-FAERDRE** LLANARMON-YN-IÂL

Directions: Just outside the village left over the B5431 immediately after the bridge over the Alun. Some parking on verge, near the signed footpath through the castle site.

This medieval fortress is picturesquely sited by the river Alun. Its mound (or motte) is adapted from a natural rocky outcrop, ditched round on the sides away from the river. Doubtless the home of the lords of Iâl, it was once crowned by a stone tower: it may originate from the 11th century, and was strengthened by King John during his campaign against Prince Llywelyn the Great in 1212.

Visible across the road is a large cave (private) where prehistoric remains were found. The white farmhouse nearby (Plas Isaf) was part of the medieval manor house of Llanarmon.



Tomen-y-Faendre, Llanarmon-yn-Iâl.



Church of St Berres, Llanferres.

28 **LLANFERRES** CHURCH OF ST BERRES

Originally medieval, a now mainly Georgian and Victorian church with a jolly lantern bellcote. The church, adjacent Druid Inn and farm (private), form a pleasing group. A visit will be enhanced by the guide pamphlet available in the church.

29 **LLANBEDR** DYFFRYN CLWYD OLD AND NEW CHURCHES OF ST PETER

The village of Llanbedr, by the A494 as it snakes down the Clwydian Hills, has a pretty little Victorian church, with stripey roof and walls and a spikey spire-turret. The church is a place to sit, ponder, gaze, and experience an atmosphere of friendliness, peace and tranquillity. The only medieval feature is a fragment of carved slab in the porch, with a curly-headed face in the corner. Part of a 14th century gravestone, it was brought from the medieval church in the old village site along the slope to the north. Abandoned when the new church was built, the old church is now a ruin, distinctly visible from the B4529 to Llandyrnog and only accessible by a footpath.

St. Peter's (New) open daylight hours.



St Peter's (New), Llanbedr Dyffryn Clwyd.

LLANRHAEADR-YNG-NGHINMEIRCH

HOLY WELL AND CHURCH OF ST DYFNOG



Far left Golden Pelican, Llanrhaeadr.

Middle Church of St Dyfnog, Llanrhaeadr.

Left Jesse Window detail, Llanrhaeadr.

'The church of the waterfall in the district of Cinmeirch' ranks very highly among Welsh medieval parish churches. It has an almost unfair number of attractions, beginning with its village setting surrounded by an inn, a smithy (turned pottery), a fine range of whitewashed Georgian almshouses, and the wooded dingle of a little stream. A stream-side path from the tower winds up the dingle to the reason for its name and the source of its medieval wealth – St Dyfnog's Holy Well.

Here an underground stream gushes from a rocky bank, descending as a waterfall into the well tank. And here, according to tradition, lived the 6th century St Dyfnog, doing penance by standing under the torrent in his hair shirt belted with an iron chain. His virtues gave the water miraculous healing powers, capable of curing not only 'scabs and the itch' but also (some said) smallpox and even dumbness and deafness. By the late middle ages his 'mighty spring' was among the most renowned Welsh holy wells, attracting numerous pilgrims and bardic poems in its praise. It was still 'much resorted to' in the 18th century, when the bath was paved with marble and 'provided with all conveniences of rooms for bathing built around it'. These buildings have disappeared, along with the 'small human figures' which bedecked them: but the waterfall and bath remain, and so (within the church) do the products of well-pilgrims' offerings.

The late medieval rebuilding of the double-naved church, indeed, may have been among these benefits. It is entered by a fine timber porch, richly adorned with carving of about 1530 and surmounted by a niche for St. Dyfnog's lost image. Once inside, Llanrhaeadr's great medieval treasure is immediately apparent: the big, glowing **Tree of Jesse window**, called 'the finest Glass window in all Wales, exceeded by few in England'. It depicts the descent of Christ from Jesse (father of King David) who lies asleep in a walled garden at its base. From him springs a many-branched family tree inhabited by Christ's kingly ancestors, with King David holding his harp in the central position. The figures rather resemble

'court' playing cards, which took their present form at about the time the window was made in 1533, the date inscribed in Latin in the bottom right corner. Near the top, in pride of place, stand the Virgin and Christ-child in a blaze of sunrays.

Much is known about this truly magnificent work of art (whose detailed history is given in a fine colour booklet available in the church). According to one tradition, it was paid of by pilgrims' offerings, though an inscription recorded it as the grateful gift of a priest named Robert Jones. It was preserved from destruction during the Civil War by being buried in the massive dug-out chest which still stands beneath it. More **medieval glass**, albeit fragmentary and overshadowed by the nearly perfect Jesse window, is displayed in the window over the vestry. Dated 1508 and including part of Gabriel's Annunciation to the Virgin Mary, it was found in a local farmhouse in Victorian times.

The glass is not Llanrhaeadr's only outstanding medieval treasure, for both naves have splendid **hammer-beam roofs**, of much the same date as the Jesse window. That of the north (altar) nave is also decked with angels, and above the altar forms a barrel-vaulted and elaborately carved canopy of honour, an unusually fine and well-preserved example of this characteristically local feature. Its roofs alone, indeed, would make St. Dyfnog's worth visiting.

Visitors should not miss the golden pelican near the Jesse window, copied in 1762 from the mythical bird painted above the Virgin's head in the window itself. Feeding its young with its own blood, it symbolises Christ's sacrifice for his people. Nor can one ignore the imposing marble monument to squire Maurice Jones of Llanrhaeadr Hall, shown reclining in his Queen Anne periwig amid weeping cherubs.

St. Dyfnog's is generally open all year during daylight hours.

31

DENBIGH

ST MARCELLA'S (LLANFARCHELL)
PARISH CHURCH

Top The local double-naved style.

Middle Detail from the painted alabaster monument.

Above Monument for Humphrey Llwyd.



Magnificent painted alabaster monument.

The grandest of all medieval Denbighshire parish churches, St Marcella's (or Llanfarchell) is also known as Whitchurch or Eglwys Wen – 'the white church', probably from its originally whitewashed exterior. Its patroness Marchell the Virgin is said to have established her hermitage by a holy well here in the 7th century, and clearly the site was honoured as especially sacred. For though it now stands alone a mile from the present town centre (and further still from the old walled town by the castle), St. Marcella's has always been Denbigh's parish church. As such it was lavishly rebuilt in the local double-naved form during the late 15th century, with an imposing tower and a noble range of big Perpendicular style windows.

Its impressive exterior is more than matched by an interior filled with light from these great windows. Slender central pillars and finely moulded arches rise to a pair of grand **hammer-beamed roofs**, panelled and decked with angels. They rest on stone corbels sculpted with beasts and more angels, and a stone frieze also exuberantly decorated with flowers and heads and grotesques – a boy pulling a donkey's tail, a fox and hare – all recently and vividly re-painted.

Below, around the twin altars are the monuments of Denbigh and Denbighshire's Elizabethan notables. On the north side, Humphrey Llwyd kneels in a Classical temple, with angels holding a globe and a geographer's dial. Physician, musician and Member of Parliament, renowned scholar and 'Father of Modern Geography', he produced the first accurate maps of Wales just before his death in 1568. Nearby, a monumental brass (rare in Wales) portrays Richard Myddelton (d.1575) with his wife and their sixteen children, seven fashionably dressed daughters and nine sons. One of these, Sir Thomas Myddelton, became Lord Mayor of London and founded the Chirk



St Marcella's Church.

Castle dynasty: another, the goldsmith-entrepreneur Sir Hugh, transformed London's water supply with his 'New River' project.

The south altar was once the private chapel of the powerful Salesbury family – hence the splendour of its carved communion table and altar rails. Here stands the magnificent painted alabaster monument of Sir John Salusbury (d.1578) and his wife Dame Jane (another Myddelton). He lies in armour, with sword and hunting knife – its scabbard housing a miniature knife and fork set: his feet rest on a strange animal – not his hound, nor the mythical 'Beast of Caledfryn', but simply a badly-carved lion. Dame Jane wears her high-ruffed widow's dress, her feet peeping out from stiff petticoats. Round them stand their nine sons (all armoured except a black-gowned cleric) and four daughters, two who died in infancy shown as swaddled babies.

On the wall nearby, is the monument to the last Salusbury heiress, with her vast fortune 'honestly gotten, well bestowed and prudently managed': and at the back of the church are nine hatchments – diamond-shaped heraldic panels carried at funerals – of other Denbighshire gentlefolk. These were the very people that Twm o'r Nant, 'the Cambrian Shakespeare', loved to satirize in his Welsh verses and dramatic interludes. Ironically, he is now commemorated among them (back of the north aisle). Self-taught bard and actor, by turns farmer, mason, toll-keeper and bankrupt, he died in 1810 and lies in the churchyard, where many still visit his (signposted) grave.

**Church open the first Saturday of each month
10am-noon, Easter to October. Tel: 01745
812284.**

The main reason for Denbigh's existence is the steep rocky outcrop on which its castle and old town stand. Here, overlooking the wide Vale of Clwyd, stood a residence and stronghold of the Welsh princes, the capital of their district of Rhufoniog. Llywelyn the Great and Llywelyn the Last both held court here, and from here in 1282 the latter's brother Dafydd launched the war which ended with Edward I's decisive conquest of North Wales. Nothing now remains of this Welsh 'little fortress', the origin of the name 'Denbigh': taken by the English in the autumn of 1282, it was immediately superseded by the present mighty stronghold.

32A DENBIGH CASTLE

Among the biggest and most spectacular – yet among the least known – of all castles in Wales, Denbigh was built for Henry de Lacy, Earl of Lincoln, the English commander granted the site by King Edward I. Begun in 1282, it was intended (like **Ruthin** and **Rhuddlan**) as part of Edward's ring of fortresses around the heartland of North Wales, and was doubtless designed by the King's famous architect James of St George. Delayed when a new Welsh rising temporarily captured the half-built works in 1294, it took nearly thirty years to complete. A strong local tradition maintains that finishing touches were abandoned after de Lacy's young son fell to his death in the castle wall.

The fortress consists essentially of a strong enclosure wall defended by seven towers and a mighty gatehouse, and additionally protected by a walled town occupying the remainder of the hilltop. On the southern and western sides, where the slope is steepest and most easily defended, the plain half-round towers are small –



Reconstruction of Denbigh Castle as it would appear in the early 14th century.



Early 19th century engraving of Denbigh.

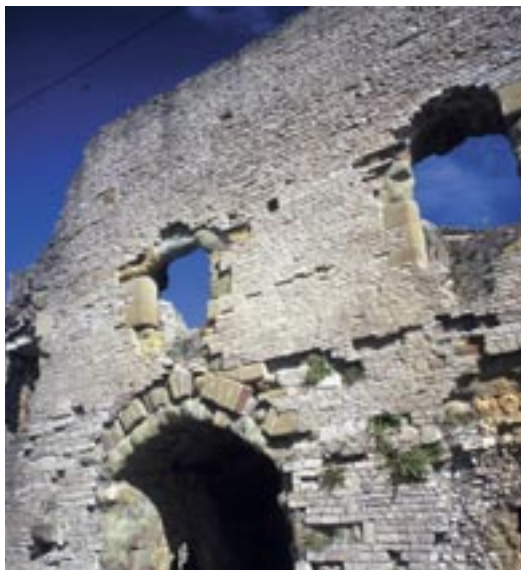
though this part of the castle was reinforced by an outer mantlet after its capture in 1294. But on the northern and eastern sides – facing the town and the flatter, more dangerous approach – the towers are polygonal and much stronger. Strongest of all is the great gatehouse, still the castle entrance. Here three grouped octagonal towers cover a long passageway, originally defended by a drawbridge, arrow-slits, murder holes, three successive portcullises and two pairs of outward-opening doors. In a niche above the outer gateway stands a time-worn statue, most probably King Edward I.

32B THE WALLED TOWN

Like all Edward's castles, Denbigh was never intended to stand alone. Alongside them, the king and his lieutenants (like de Lacy) founded fortified towns, to be settled by English immigrants who would both service the fortress and become a colonial presence in conquered Wales. To Denbigh, then, came families from de Lacy's estates in northern England, tempted by grants of cheap land and commercial privileges.

Their settlement (or borough) was protected from the outset by a fortified wall, eventually over a kilometre (1,200 yards) long and defended by four towers and two gatehouses. One of these gateways – the strong, twin-towered Burgess Gate – still survives, as does the greater proportion of the wall. The most impressive section accessible to visitors runs from the Countess Tower to the big Goblin Tower, which protected a vital well. Added after the Welsh rising of 1294, this protruding salient of defences was later to play a leading part in the castle's last battle.

Burgesses Gate, Denbigh town walls.



Visitors will by now have noticed, however, that much of the space enclosed by the town wall is currently occupied by open spaces or relatively recent housing. This is because the fortified town was, in the long term, a failure. Its walls did not protect its inhabitants in 1294, or against Owain Glyndŵr's raid in 1400, or against Jasper Tudor's Lancastrians who burnt the town in 1468 – though on both the latter occasions the castle itself held out. Besides, the hilltop walled town was cramped,

St Hilary's Chapel, Denbigh.



cold, and inconvenient, lacked a convenient water supply and stood far from the main road. By 1305 there was already twice as many houses outside as inside the walls; by 1540 the walled town was mostly derelict; and by 1586 it was deserted. Its inhabitants had progressively voted with their feet, establishing a new, much larger and highly successful town on its present site further downhill.

32C ST HILARY'S CHAPEL

One of the few surviving ancient buildings within the town walls – nearby Bryn Awelon (private) is probably the only remaining medieval house – is the 14th century tower of St Hilary's: the rest of the church was demolished in 1923. It was built for the inhabitants of the castle and fortified borough (whose official parish church was over a mile away at St. Marcella's) but continued to serve the new town until Victorian times. Leicester's Church (32d), whose ruins stand nearby, was intended to replace St. Hilary's. The only large new church founded in Britain during the Elizabethan period, it was begun in 1578 -9 for Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester and Lord of Denbigh – a favourite of Queen Elizabeth, but perhaps the most violently unpopular man in North Wales. Only five years later, 'by reason of the public hatred he had incurred (by) his tyranny', Leicester abandoned the building, which was never completed. Its remains show that it would have been a big plain rectangular church, designed for the strictly Protestant worship which Leicester favoured.

Further away, at the northern extremity of the later medieval town outside the walls, stands Denbigh Friary (32e). Founded in 1289 for Carmelite White Friars, the shell of its church largely survives, with a large traceried east window.

THE FINAL ACT

The fortress of Denbigh played its final part in history during the Civil War. By then the abandoned walled town was part of the castle's defences, though both were badly decayed. All the same, the elderly Royalist Colonel William Salesbury – 'Old Blue Stockings' of Rug (Site 11) – gallantly withstood a six month siege in 1646.

The Parliamentary attackers fruitlessly concentrated on bombarding the Goblin Tower, hoping to cut off the castle's main water supply: the siege works they raised to protect their cannon can be still be traced in the playing fields below. Only when all hope of relief had gone – and then only after receiving the King's written order – did Old Blue Stockings at last surrender.

A leaflet describing four interesting town walks is available from the library. There is also an excellent CADW guide to the castle and old town.

Castle is open 31st March- 31st October, 10am-5pm. Adult £3.20. Tel: 01745 813385.



'Old Blue Stockings'. By kind permission of Nancy, Lady Bagot.

33 NANTGLYN ST JAMES

Near to Denbigh, on the B5435 heading towards Lake Brenig and its archaeological trail, can be seen the exterior of the little Church of St. James with its intriguing open air pulpit built into a churchyard yew tree.

Open only occasionally.



Henllan church tower.

34 HENLLAN

The one and only church dedicated to the local hermit St Sadwrn or Saturnas, this 'old church' – Welsh 'hen llan' – is also unique in Denbighshire for its fortress-like detached tower, built on a rocky outcrop above the steeply-sloping churchyard. One reason for this (it is said) is that the bells could be heard better from here than from the church below – very necessary in a parish once sixteen miles long. The tower probably dates from the 15th century, but the church itself was twice drastically remodelled during the Georgian and Victorian times. All the same, it retains a 14th century vestry door, a late medieval east window, a fine Jacobean altar table and a pair of Georgian chandeliers. Outside the porch are the shaft of a medieval preaching cross and an ancient font.

Opposite the lower gate to the churchyard stands the thatched Llindir Inn, named from the flax (Welsh 'llin') once grown hereabouts: late medieval in origin, it is said to be haunted by the murdered wife of a former landlord.

Church is open daylight hours Easter-September.



Top Church of St Sadwrn, Henllan.

Above Llindir Inn, Henllan.

35 ST ASAPH



Top William Morgan, Translators' Memorial, St Asaph Cathedral.



Above Parish Church of St Kentigern and St Asaph.

Right St Asaph Cathedral.



St Asaph, the tiny cathedral city of north east Wales, has very ancient origins. Whether or not the Roman fort of Varae really stood here, the site was certainly settled in about 560 by St. Kentigern, a son of the Arthurian hero Owain ab Urien who was forced to flee his native Scotland.

Nearly a thousand monks (it is said) gathered round this charismatic figure, also known by his childhood nickname Mungo ('most dear') as patron saint of Glasgow. When he returned there, he consigned his Welsh monastery to his favourite pupil, a local man named Asaph. In time Llanelwy – 'the church by the river Elwy', still its Welsh name – became known as St Asaph: its continuous history as a bishopric dates from 1143.

ST ASAPH CATHEDRAL

The smallest ancient cathedral in Wales or England – it is only 182 feet long, smaller for example than the church of Valle Crucis – St Asaph suffered from its proximity to the main invasion route into North Wales. Begun in about 1239, it was disastrously burnt by Edward I's English soldiers in 1282; substantially rebuilt between 1284 and 1381; but burnt again by Owain Glyndŵr's Welsh troops in 1402; repaired in the late 15th century; and thoroughly remodelled by the Victorian architect Gilbert Scott in 1867-75.

What now remains is a largely 14th century shell with many Victorian alterations. The most striking medieval features within are the unusual pillars and arches of the

spacious nave, flowing into each other uninterrupted by capitals (heads) on the pillars. The somewhat severe effect produced is attributed to masons from Caernarfon Castle, and accustomed to military architecture: it contributes much to the 'dignity and grandeur' (Dr. Johnson) of this 'strong and grave Welsh cathedral church' (Hubbard).

The canons' stalls by the high altar – the only medieval canopied stalls in North Wales – are by contrast elaborately decorated and carved. They date from the late 15th century, when local woodcarving reached a peak of excellence. Finely sculptured, too, is the tomb of Bishop Anian II, who began the great rebuilding of the cathedral in 1284. The tomb lies in the south nave aisle, near the Greyhound Stone with its hound, hare, shield and sword, a knightly memorial of c 1330. Two and a half centuries later, in Queen Elizabeth's reign, St Asaph became a focus of an enterprise crucial to the survival of the Welsh language – the translation into Welsh of the Bible and Prayer Book. The translators, including Bishop William Morgan and other St Asaph clergy, are remembered in the north transept by a display of early Welsh editions, and again by the prominent Translators Memorial on the Cathedral Green.

The main street of old St Asaph city runs downhill from the cathedral to the river Elwy, past several old houses largely disguised by later frontages. At the bottom is the parish church of St Kentigern and St Asaph, a late medieval double-naved building with an attractive interior. Separated by slender pillars, the two naves have very different east windows, but both have fine hammer-beam roofs, decked with angels in the older south aisle. By the altar there is a rare 14th century double piscina sink for washing sacred vessels.

Cathedral usually open daily 9am-6.30pm; closes at 4.30pm in winter. Tel 01745 583429. St. Kentigern's open weekdays by appointment. Tel 01745 582245.



Engraving of St Asaph, dated 1860.

36 RHUDDLAN

Rhuddlan – meaning 'the red bank', from the colour of the riverside soil – owes its great historical importance to its position by an ancient crossing of the river Clwyd: whoever held this ford also controlled the easiest invasion route to (and from) the heartland of North Wales. Thus for five centuries Rhuddlan was a flashpoint in Anglo-Welsh wars, the site in turn of a great battle between King Offa of Mercia and the Welsh; a Saxon fortified borough; a Welsh princely palace; a Norman fortress (the 'Twthill'); and finally a powerful stone castle.

RHUDDLAN CASTLE

Begun in 1277, this castle remains Rhuddlan's outstanding medieval treasure. It was designed for King Edward I by the famous architect James of St. George, the first of the revolutionary 'concentric' fortresses – among them Conwy, Harlech and Beaumaris – which Edward raised to hem in and control North Wales. Instead of the traditional keep, its defences consist of three concentric rings of fortification. The inmost and most impressive is a diamond-plan stronghold, with twin-towered gatehouses at two corners and single round towers at the others. Beyond this is an outer circle of lower turreted walls, and beyond again a deep moat linked to the river Clwyd.

By an amazing feat of medieval engineering, this then sluggish and winding river was converted into a deep-water channel to the sea, so that Edward's ships could relieve the castle at times of siege. Some seventy labourers – conscripts from the Lincolnshire Fens, using only hand tools – took three years to complete the two mile long channel. Rhuddlan Castle thereafter became the base for Edward's decisive invasion of Wales in 1282. According to the oldest versions of the tale, it was here – and not Caernarfon – that he proclaimed his baby son ('born in Wales, and without a word of English') the first English Prince of Wales, promulgated by a parliament held here in 1284.

TWTHILL MOUND

King Edward's great stone castle, however, is only one element of Rhuddlan's surviving medieval heritage. A short walk away (via a well marked footpath) stands the impressive earthen mound called Twthill – 'look-out hill'. Once crowned by a timber tower, this was the strongpoint of the Norman predecessor to Edward's fortress. It was raised in 1073 by Robert of Rhuddlan, traditionally on the site of an earlier Welsh palace. At its foot was a stockaded enclosure, and beyond that again a ditched Norman town. This had its own priory of



Rhuddlan Castle.

Dominican black friars, some of whose buildings form part of Abbey Farm (private).

THE LATER MEDIEVAL TOWN

When Edward built his new castle, he also established a new town north of his fortress. Its original grid-pattern of streets – the present High Street, crossed by Castle and Church Streets and Parliament and Gwindy Streets – still forms the heart of modern Rhuddlan, and part of its ditched defences are still visible between Vicarage Lane and Kerfoot Avenue. At the corner of High Street and Parliament Street stands the (so called) Parliament House – not, as its inscription claims, the site of a parliament but perhaps the medieval town's court house.

THE CHURCH OF ST MARY

St Mary's was founded in about 1300 to serve the new community. Some two centuries later it was doubled in size by the addition of a second nave – turning it into a typical double-naved Vale of Clwyd church – and the tower was added. Later still, in 1820, a kind of fortified mausoleum was attached to the north side, as a secure burial place for the family of **Bodrhyddan Hall** (Site 37). Though much restored in 1868, the spacious interior of the church preserves earlier features, including the 17th century Welsh texts painted high on the north and south walls. There are 13th and 14th century monuments (mainly at the back of the south nave) brought here from the old friary at Abbey Farm. The most remarkable of these (by the altar) is the engraved slab to Friar William de Freney, wearing his full regalia as Titular Archbishop of 'Rages' or Edessa (in modern Turkey).

An excellent CADW guide to the castle and town is available at the castle, and a comprehensive guide to the church at St. Mary's.

Church open Thursday afternoons during the summer months. It is also possible to visit around service times. Castle open 31st March to 31st October, 10am-5pm daily, £3.20. Last admission half an hour before closing.

Below Reconstruction of a motte and bailey at Twt Hill.

Bottom Church of St Mary, Rhuddlan.



37 ST MARY'S WELL

BODRHYDDAN HALL
NEAR RUDDLAN

St Mary's Well – Ffynnon Fair in Welsh – presents a complete contrast to remote holy wells like Ffynnon Sarah (Site 7). It stands in the attractive gardens of Bodrhyddan Hall, the grade I listed home of Lord Langford – a fine house of the 17th century, remodelled in Queen Anne style in 1875, yet with traces remaining of an earlier building. The well-spring itself was enclosed in 1612, allegedly by the great architect Inigo Jones, in an octagonal well house, surmounted by a pelican in her piety, part of the coat of arms of the Conwy family. The water flows into a big rectangular pool and, according to legend, the well was once a favoured site for clandestine marriages.



Right Bodrhyddan Hall.

Below St Mary's Well.

Bottom Church of St Bridget and St Cwyfan, Dyserth.



House and grounds open June-September, Tues and Thurs 2pm-5.3 pm. Special group visits by arrangement. Tel: 01745 590414. Entrance charge £5 house and garden, £2 garden only.

38 DYSERTH

CHURCH OF ST BRIDGET AND
ST CWYFAN

Dyserth means 'a deserted place, a hermitage' – perhaps originally of the Denbighshire saint Cwyfan, to whom the church is dedicated along with St Bridget of Kildare in Ireland, most highly honoured of Celtic female saints. Doubtless the first church here developed from this hermit's cell: it is recorded in Domesday Book of 1087, and the nearly complete Celtic churchyard cross (now inside the building) is probably not much later in date. One of a pair of such crosses – only the base of the second remains – it is intricately carved with spirals and interlaced patterns.



Dyserth waterfall.

Prettily sited against the slope of Moel Hiraddug, a short step from the spectacular Dyserth waterfall, the present church was extensively rebuilt by the distinguished Victorian architect Gilbert Scott in 1873-5. Its roof is partly Elizabethan (the date 1579 is carved on a beam) and a 15th century monument to two Welsh knightly brothers also survives. But the great medieval treasure of Dyserth is the glowing stained-glass east window, of two dates. The upper tracery portion (of about 1450) depicts the twelve apostles, each holding the attribute (or trademark) by which illiterate viewers could identify him. In the uppermost right-hand light, for example, is St. John the Evangelist with his palm branch and chalice.

The main section of the window meanwhile displays a Jesse Tree, or family tree of Christ. This was given in the 1530s, making it the exact contemporary of the Jesse Tree at Llanrhaeadr (Site 30) – though the style is noticeably different. The figures of Christ's kingly ancestors throng crowned, sceptred and robed among a forest and the Virgin and Christ-child preside over all, emerging from a lily into a blaze of sunrays. Sadly however, the sleeping figure of Jesse is missing from the window's lowest panels. The churchyard is also worth exploring, especially for the pair of 17th century hooded table tombs – a distinctive local fashion – by the big tree behind the church. A helpful guidebook for church and village is available.

On the hilltop half a mile north-east stood Dyserth Castle, built by the English in 1241 to replace or reinforce their Twthill fortress at Rhuddlan (Site 36). Soon afterwards wrecked by Llywelyn the Last of Gwynedd, very little of it now survives.

39 MELIDEN CHURCH OF ST MELYD

Close by at Meliden is the small medieval Church of St Melyd, thoroughly but attractively restored by the Victorians.

40 TREMEIRCHION

CHURCH OF CORPUS CHRISTI AND ST BEUNO'S WELL

Tremeirchion – originally 'Din Meirchion', the fortress of Meirchion the chieftain – is a pretty village on the slopes of the Clwydian Hills, overlooking the wide Vale of Clwyd. The attractive church, between the village school and the inn, has an 800 year old yew tree for company, and was renowned for a wonder-working cross: dating mainly from the 14th and 15th centuries, it still retains many ancient features. Among the oldest, forming a seat in the porch, is the interlaced 13th century cross-slab to one Hunyd, wife of Carwed. Within the fine old door, the two vestry windows display a mosaic of good late medieval **stained glass**, including the haloed head of St. Ann, mother of the Virgin Mary. A south window near the pulpit has unusual 17th century painted glass portraits (from the old vicarage) of James I, Charles I and John Williams, a North Walian who became successively Bishop of Lincoln and Archbishop of York and then fought alternately for both King and Parliament during the Civil War.

In the north transept extension (added when the church was pleasantly restored in 1864) lies a mail-clad knight of about 1280, shown cross-legged and drawing his sword. Perhaps most impressive of all, by the altar, stands the great canopied 14th century tomb of the priest Dafydd ap Hywel ap Madog, known as Dafydd Ddu Athro o Hiraddug – 'Black David, the Teacher of Hiraddug'. Famous as a bard, writer and according to legend a soothsaying prophet, this vicar of Tremeirchion lies beneath an elaborately cusped arch, on a tomb bedecked with shields of family heraldry and the symbols of the crucifixion (a pew in front folds down to reveal these shields). Among notable later features are a fine Georgian chest, a chained parish handbell, and a tablet to Dr 'Dictionary' Johnson's friend Hester Thrale.

Brynbellla, Mrs. Thrale's 18th century mansion (private) stands below the village, behind a long stone wall beside the B5429. Opposite its lower gateway, in a stone enclosure by a grey-rendered house in a hollow, is Ffynnon Beuno – St. Beuno's Holy Well, 'once in great repute for healing'. As if to emphasize the link between sacred springs and the pagan Celtic head-cult, its water gushes from the mouth of a roughly caved stone head of unknown age.

Open most days. Tel: 01745 730584.

41 BACH-Y-GRAIG

NEAR TREMEIRCHION

Directions: Soon after St Beuno's Well, it is possible to turn right off the B4529 onto a minor road signposted to Denbigh and Trefnant: park about a mile further on, by the bridge over the river Clwyd. The house can be seen across the fields to the left, or reached by a marked track.

Bach-y-Graig (originally 'Bachegraig') is the earliest brick-built house in Wales. It was erected in 1567 by Sir Richard Clough, a Denbigh man who grew rich as a merchant in Antwerp (Flanders), helped to found the London Royal Exchange, and was the second of the four

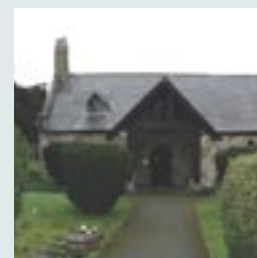


Portrait of Sir Richard Clough.

husbands of Katharine of Berain, 'the Mother of Wales'. Built by Flemish craftsmen in Flemish bricks, this Antwerp-style prodigy house had a towering pyramid roof with tiered windows and soaring chimneys. So alien did the house look that locals attributed it to the Devil himself.

The main house, sadly, was demolished in 1817, but its gatehouse-cum-warehouse and other buildings still survive as a farm. Visitors can walk a nature trail through forty acres of ancient remnant woodland, part of a medieval royal forest hunted by Edward the Black Prince. The forest retains its original earthwork boundary banks and hosts several rare native plant species.

Apply at the farmhouse (private). Entrance charge for trail.



Top Portrait of Charles I, Tremeirchion Church.

Middle Church of Corpus Christi and St Beuno's Well, Tremeirchion.

Above Bach-y-Graig.

42 BODFARI

CHURCH OF ST STEPHEN

The big medieval tower of St Stephen's church stands at the centre of the village and fine views can be had from the churchyard. The body of the church was rebuilt in 1865. Perhaps the site of a Roman way-station, Bodfari was once famous for St. Deifar's holy well, where children were dipped three times 'to prevent their crying at night'.

For opening times contact The Rectory, Caerwys 01352 720223.



Detail of "Seven Sacrament" window, Llandyrnog.

43 LLANDYRNOG

CHURCH OF ST TYRNOG

At the heart of a busy village, St Tyrnog's is dedicated to a local saint, reputedly a 6th century monk and the brother of St. Marcella of Denbigh and St. Deifar of Bodfari. Like so many big late medieval churches hereabouts, it is double-naved. The church has a most distinctive character, largely due to restoration in 1876-8 by the individualistic Victorian architect Eden Nesfield. He rendered it in pinkish pebbledash and left his trademark of flowered roundels ('sunflower pies') on the plaster and woodwork of the timbered porch, as well as on the choir stalls and other furnishings within.



Stained glass window, Llandyrnog.

The outstanding medieval feature here is the **stained glass** of the big east window, partly re-assembled from fragments found in the parish chest or concealed beneath the floor. Dating from about 1490, the main central panel shows the Crucifixion, with streams of blood flowing from Christ's body. Each of these once led to a scene depicting one of the seven sacraments of the medieval church. Such Seven Sacraments windows are extremely rare: this is the sole survivor in Wales, and there are only eight others in England.

On the right of the crucifix, the upper panel shows the sacrament of ordination of a priest by a bishop, with the sacrament of marriage below. More fragmentary panels to the left show the sacrament of extreme unction (last rites) being given to a sick man in a white cap, with a figure knelling before a seated priest to receive penance above. The remaining sacraments (mass, baptism and confirmation) are lost. Flanking the central panels are figures of apostles, while the upper tracery lights of the window contain a portrait gallery of Welsh and other saints. In the uppermost panels, St Asaph and St Deiniol (shown as bishops) flank the coronation of the Virgin. Below them are a row of female saints: (left to right) St Marcella of Denbigh; St Winifred (Gwenfrewi) of Holywell; the Virgin Mary with the angel Gabriel; St Frideswide of Oxford and St Catherine – patroness of pregnant women – with her 'Catherine Wheel'. A helpful guide book – and an exceptionally fine dug-out oak chest – provide further good reasons for visiting this notable church.

Open during daylight hours.

44 LLANGWYFAN

CHURCH OF ST CWYFAN

A pretty little church of medieval origin, St Cwyfan's stands by a steep lane climbing the slopes of the Clwydian Hills. The stocks outside the churchyard are an unusual survival, and more unusually still St. Cwyfan's has largely escaped Victorian restoration. The exterior is rendered, the bell tower simply a pair of pillars joined by a flagstone. The plain whitewashed Georgian interior, with curved ceiling and neat green-painted box pews, can have changed little since Cadwalader Edwards and Thomas ap Hugh, churchwardens, proudly set their names above their new porch in 1714.

Church open daily, Easter-mid October, 10am-4pm.



Carved angel, Llangynhafal.

45 LLANGYNHAFAL

CHURCH OF ST CYNHAFAL



Painted pelican, Llangynhafal.

St Cynfal's is not to be missed. The one and only church dedicated to this saint – probably a 7th century Welsh monk, whose holy well was renowned for banishing warts and rheumatism – it stands in a circular Celtic churchyard against the splendid backdrop of Moel Famau, with a farm and the timber-framed mansion of Plas-yn-Llan for company.

Like so many of the region's larger churches, the grey-rendered building dates from the late 15th or early 16th century, and is double-naved. Each nave within has a fine and also characteristically local **hammer-beamed and braced roof**, with carved heads and angels. One of these has been brought down for closer viewing: winged and crowned, he holds a shield and floats on a stylised cloud. Another little 15th century figure flanks the entrance to the spacious, light-filled and clearly well-loved interior, which abounds in curious and delightful features.

Among the most striking is the painted swan-like pelican on her nest above the south altar, feeding her chicks with her own blood. This symbol of Christ who nourishes His Church with His own blood dates from 1690, like the trumpet-bearing angel painted below. The pelican appears again on the pulpit of 1636, along with a lion, cockatrice and crocodile.

No list of features, however, can convey the peaceful and welcoming atmosphere of St. Cynhafal's, a church well worth seeking out. There is a helpful and amusing guide sheet for visitors which points out the distinctive features.

Key available for church. It is also possible to visit the ancient single chamber church of St Hychan, Llanychan. Contact the parish priest Russell Owen on 01824 704051.

46 LLANYNYS

CHURCH OF ST SAERAN



Mitred bishop, Llanynys.

One of the region's most attractive and fascinating churches, St Saeran's stands in a quiet hamlet, with only a pub and a few houses for company. Yet it was once the mother church of southern Dyffryn Clwyd, the home of a *clas* (or Welsh religious community) founded perhaps in the 6th century and dedicated to the now obscure Celtic bishop-saint Saeran (see also Ffynnon Sarah Site 7).

The oldest feature of the present church, however, is the disused ivy-grown 13th century west doorway, visible as you enter the pretty churchyard with its ancient yew trees. They form an avenue to the imposing and intricately carved timber Tudor porch, dated (in Latin) 1544 above the slightly earlier entrance door.

The interior is large and spacious, as befits the church's former importance and its close links with the Bishops of Bangor, long its 'rectors' or owners. Double-naved like so many Denbighshire churches, it has a fine pair of the characteristically local **late-medieval hammer beamed roofs**. The fluted timber pillars between the naves are more unusual, and much later, dating from a restoration in 1768.

Directly opposite the door is St Saeran's greatest glory, a huge 15th century wall painting of St Christopher. Rediscovered under plaster in 1967, this rare survival is much the finest medieval wall painting in North Wales. The saint – according to legend a giant who served as a ferryman – is shown carrying the infant Christ across a river, with a flowering staff in his hand and a shoal of fish round his feet. The patron saint of travellers, Christopher ('Christ-bearer') was often painted opposite church doorways, where wayfarers could easily glimpse his image and thus (it was believed) be preserved from 'fainting or falling' all that day. The belief lives on in the St Christophers of modern key-rings and car dashboards.

Near the painting are two more medieval treasures. The battered tomb effigy of a priest may be Bishop ap Richard of Bangor (who died here in 1267) while the figure of a mitred bishop on the hexagonal stone may represent St Saeran himself. Crozier in hand, the little figure is apparently standing on a muzzled bear, and on the stone's reverse is a crucifixion scene. It stood until recently in the churchyard, and perhaps marked the saint's tomb or shrine: said to be 14th century, it could be much older.



15th century wall painting of St Christopher, Llanynys.

There are many more delights here. Among them are the charming Elizabethan panels near the altar, carved with fantastic beasts and strange plants: they come from nearby Bachymbyd Fawr, home of the Cavalier Colonel William Salesbury, 'Old Blue Stockings' (Hosana Gleision Hen) of **Rug Chapel** (Site 11) and **Denbigh Castle** (Site 32). More carved woodwork from old pews is set into the choir stalls, and there are three chandeliers, two of Georgian timber and one of Victorian brass. There are bilingual charity boards in Welsh and English, a big painted Royal Arms of Charles II, and even (in a glass case) a rare set of telescopic dog tongs, used to seize and expel unruly hounds.

The guide book will help visitors to explore and enjoy this wonderful church.

Church is open every day.