

CITY AND COUNTY OF SWANSEA

LISTED BUILDING	Parish Church at St. Rhidian and St. Illtyd, Llanrhidian, Swansea
Grade:-	II*
Date of Notification:-	06.03.64 amended 20.04.00
National Grid Reference:-	SS 4967592250
O.S. 1:10,000 Sheet No.:-	SS 49 SE
CADW Reference No.:-	11533
C & C of S Reference No.:-	LB:033

Notes:-

Location:-

At the centre of Llanrhidian village, surrounded by a rubble limestone churchyard wall with C19 wrought iron gates and three stiles. Macadam path, cobbles at porch.

History

A church here was traditionally first established by St. Rhidian in the C6, to the dedication of which the name of St. Illtyd came to be added. Llanrhidian Church was granted by William de Turberville in about 1167 to the Knights Hospitallers of St. John, by whom the present building was probably commenced in the C13. In 1400 its chancel was described as ruinous, and the present chancel and the tower were perhaps added in the C14. The unusual massiveness of the tower (it includes at its top a base for a beacon fire) suggests construction at a time of serious defensive needs. The chancel has an inclination to the north. Its two south windows have trefoil heads, but the east window has simple perpendicular tracery. By c1854 the church was in poor condition, and plans were drawn up to rebuild the nave and chancel, the tower alone being considered sound. The estimated cost was about £1,400, and much of the expense was defrayed by local landowners CRM Talbot and HH Vivian. £150 was received from the ICBS. The architect of the restoration was R K Penson of Swansea, and the incumbent was the Rev Thomas Matthews, Penclawdd, stipendiary curate. There were difficulties in affording all that was necessary, and following demolition of the nave the decision was made in 1855 to retain the old chancel. Children's pews on a raking floor were formed in the base of the tower, but not in the form of a raised gallery as at first intended, the structural alterations for a raised gallery being found too difficult or expensive. Any intention to use the west door processionally was thus frustrated. By May 1857 the new nave roof was completed. In 1858 the church was re-opened by the Bishop of St. David's. A further restoration was carried out in 1899-1901 concentrating on the chancel. This was at the cost of Miss Emily Talbot. A new oak roof was constructed in the chancel, copying an earlier one; a new chancel floor was laid and a carved altar and other fittings by the Rev J D Davies were installed, including carved bosses added to the nave roof. An ancient stone known as the Leper Stone discovered near the tower was brought into the porch in c1865.

Exterior:-

Nave with south porch, north vestry, chancel and west tower. Both the C19 work and the tower are in irregularly coursed local rubble limestone; the chancel is in uncoursed rubble. Freestone dressings to door and window openings and coped gables, slate roofs with tile ridges. The tower is a special feature, with a slightly battered profile. It has an embattled

parapet carried on double billet corbels. The projecting stairs turret at the south east corner is itself carried up to an embattled and corbelled parapet higher than the main parapet. Prominent string course near the base of the tower, beneath which the batter of the walls is more pronounced. The belfry openings are pairs of small pointed openings to east and west, single square headed openings to north and south. Numerous slit openings to the lower levels of the tower and its stairs turret. Above the west door is a restored windows of three round-headed lights (giving light to the nave) and a small shallow round-headed niche. The west door is a chamfered but otherwise featureless C19 equilateral archway, the stonework of which appears recently re-dressed. The chancel retains original windows at south and east, and an opening appears to have been blocked at the north. A large C19 door opening at south has also been blocked. The east window is of three main lights with two above, with a relieving arch over. The south windows are pairs of trefoil-headed lancets.

The nave, porch and vestry are entirely C19 work. The nave windows are pairs of lancets with top quatrefoil, three at north, two at south; also a single trefoil-headed lancet at north and a pair at south, west of the porch. The vestry has a pair of small trefoil-headed windows and a doorway with a Caernarfon lintel. Numerous memorial stones have been affixed to the south walls; a plain slate monument to John Dunn [1798] and others; monument to Robert Pritchard of Penryalt [1717], round-headed slate with fleurs de lys at corners, crowned and winged head, heart pierced by arrows; large monument to Robert Harry [1646] with pious verses; monument to Samuel Morris [1746], with moulded edge; monument to David Jenkin and to Jenkin ab Jenkin [1678]; others illegible or fallen. At the churchyard entrance two small inscribed stones relating to the nearby ancient site of Llan-elen, one dated 1687, are built into the right gate pier.

Interior:-

The nave is entered by the south porch. Seven-bay roof with braced collar beam trusses. Black and red quarry tiles. Simple Gothic pine pulpit at left; organ at right installed in 1997. Plain pews. C19 hexagonal font. The base of the tower is fully open to the nave, with a pointed stone rubble-masonry vault of considerable height; within it are the C19 children's pews. Steps down at the west end lead to the tower door, now considerably below general floor level. The chancel arch is a tall, wide equilateral form, chamfered, behind which the chancel inclines to the left. Four-bay chancel roof with straight-braced collar-beam trusses, patterned floor in encaustic tiles one step above nave with additional step to the altar. The altar was carved by the Rev J D Davies, whose craftsmanship is seen in many Gower churches. Communion rails on iron and brass standards. Carved Gothic stalls. A piscina is formed below the eastern window at south. The stained glass of the east window is by Jones and Willis; a memorial to the Gordon family (1901), showing the Good Shepherd, true vine and bread of life. Of the same date are the representations of the four evangelists in the south windows of the chancel, as a memorial to the Jenkins family. The glass of the west window is undated, in memory of Anne Davies, on the theme of Christ blessing the little children.

Listed:-

A restored church with surviving mediaeval features in the chancel and a fine west tower incorporating an impressive vault open to the nave.

Reference:-

R N Cooper, Higher and Lower (1988) pp 19-20
J Newman, Glamorgan (Buildings of Wales, 1995) p 394
G R Orrin, The Gower Churches (1979) pp 47-50
Lambeth Palace Library: ICBS file no. 4965