

# The Friends of Friendless Churches: St Andrew's, Bayvil and St David's, Manordeifi

by

NIGEL YATES

*Bayvil Church has been vested with the Friends of Friendless Churches since 1983. Manordeifi Old Church is one of our newest vestings, being passed over on 1st December 2002. Here the distinguished historian of the Church in Wales, Dr Nigel Yates, describes and compares the two. Visitors are welcome. Manordeifi is always open and the key for Bayvil is held in the nearby farmhouse.*

These two churches, now in the care of the Friends of Friendless Churches, are important examples of unaltered pre-ecclesiological buildings dating from the first half of the nineteenth century. Although there are a significant number of such buildings in Wales, they are mostly to be found in the area now covered by the diocese of Bangor, with smaller groups in the diocese of St Asaph and in the northern part of the diocese of Swansea and Brecon. There are comparatively few such buildings in the remaining dioceses of Llandaff, Monmouth and St David's. Indeed in the last of these dioceses there are only four substantially unaltered pre-ecclesiological churches: Bayvil, Castellwyran (Carms), Llangynfelyn (Cards) and Manordeifi. A fifth church, Yerboston (Pembs), has fallen into an advanced state of decay in the last thirty years. There are also two churches in Pembrokeshire, Nash and Redberth, in which the nave fittings are intact but the chancels have been refurnished, and one in Carmarthenshire, Talley, which preserves a complete set of late-eighteenth-century box pews but in which a new chancel was added in the second half of the nineteenth century, and the original pulpit and reading desk replaced at the same time.<sup>1</sup> Thus the churches at Bayvil and Manordeifi are very significant survivals in an area in which the vast majority of churches were either completely rebuilt or wholly refurnished during the late Victorian period, but in

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Nigel Yates, MA, PhD, FRHistS is Senior Research Fellow in Modern Church History University of Wales, Lampeter.

which the few surviving pre-ecclesiological interiors tend to be of a somewhat later date than similar survivals in most parts of England.

#### ST ANDREW'S, BAYVIL

The church is situated to the north of the A 487 approximately two miles east of Nevern (Pembs) and eight miles south-west of Cardigan. It originally served a small and scattered population. When first seen by the writer some thirty years ago it was in a poor state of preservation but it has subsequently been carefully repaired for the Friends by the architect Roger Clive-Powell and is now in excellent condition. Apart from the reboarding of the roof and the erection of a small vestry in the north-west corner of the nave in 1905, and some minor modifications referred to below, the building is a near perfect example of an unaltered early-nineteenth-century church (Fig. 1).

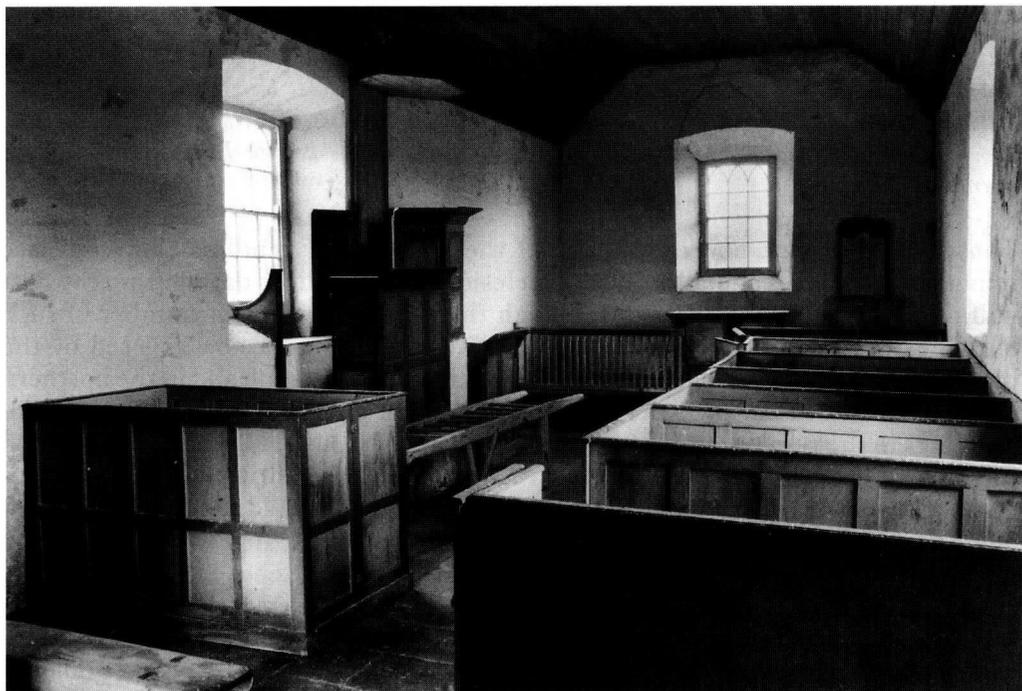


Fig. 1

St Andrew's Bayvil. Interior view showing late Georgian fittings and coffin bier  
*Christopher Dalton, 1997*

The church is largely undocumented and cannot be precisely dated. In 1813 and 1828 it was served by a non-resident minister, who was also vicar of the neighbouring parish of Moylgrove and rector of Martletwy in South Pembrokeshire, but who lived at Emsworth in Hampshire. The curate lived at Eglwysrw and the

fact that the bell-cote at Bayvil is similar to one formerly at Eglwysrwr, suggests that the church was built sometime between about 1810 and 1830, possibly by David Evans of Eglwysrwr, a local architect with an office in Cardigan who designed a number of churches in the vicinity including Cilgerran and Llechryd.<sup>2</sup> Evans also designed the church and vicarage at his native Eglwysrwr, the church at Llangoedmor (Cards), an extension to the gaol and a new jury room at Cardigan, Castle Green House at Cardigan and Union Terrace, Church Lane, Carmarthen; he died in about 1840.<sup>3</sup> In 1828 Bayvil church was described as 'in tolerable repair' and as 'tolerably furnished with all things convenient for the country church',<sup>4</sup> phraseology which neither confirms nor disproves a rebuilding within the previous fifteen years or so. Any date for the rebuilding of the church is therefore highly speculative and, in view of the known conservative character of many rebuilding and restoration schemes in Wales throughout the nineteenth century, it could be later than 1830.

The church is extremely small and there are only four windows, two in the south wall, one in the north wall, lighting the reading desk but not the pulpit, and one in the east wall behind the altar. There are only seven pews, six on the south side and one on the north, to the west of the reading desk. However, the fact that two of the pews on the north side are arranged so that the seats have their backs to the altar, and the statement in 1813 that the church could seat 120,<sup>5</sup> suggests that some pews, perhaps two to the east of the clerk's desk, and one at each end, east and west, on the north side, may have been removed at a subsequent date. The pulpit, reading desk and clerk's desk are placed in the middle of the north wall and their composition is unusual. The pulpit is in the middle and retains its backboard and canopy which extend almost as far as the roof. The reading desk is to the west and the clerk's desk to the east, the more normal arrangement in the three-decker type of pulpit being for the reading and clerk's desks to be placed next to one another. The fact that the clerk's desk is so poorly positioned for the parish clerk to lead the responses and the singing is a further argument to support the suggestion that some seating has been removed.

The open space in the south west corner of the nave is occupied by a modest twelfth-century square font. There is also now an open space in front of the altar rails, these being contemporary with the other furnishings. The sanctuary is raised two steps above the level of the nave but the altar table is not original and looks as if it is part of the alterations carried out in 1905. The possibly original table, however, does survive, doing duty as a convenient piece of furniture on which to place leaflets and the visitors' book. There is no doubt that the interior would be aesthetically improved, as well as being made more authentic, by restoring the original altar table to its place within the sanctuary and removing its later replacement.

On the south side of the east wall of the sanctuary there is a modest memorial to Morris Williams of Cwmgloynne, in the parish of Nevern, who died in 1840. Williams also provides a further connection with David Evans, the possible architect of the church, as the latter had prepared preliminary designs for the former in

respect of a development, of which only two terraces were ever built, at Bridge End, near Cardigan, in 1830. The monument is signed by James Stone of Haverfordwest, a stonemason, building contractor and self-styled architect, who was the contractor for William Butterfield's restoration of St David's Cathedral in the 1840s.<sup>6</sup>

#### ST DAVID'S, MANORDEIFI

Compared with Bayvil, Manordeifi is a reasonably substantial church (Fig. 2). It is situated near the southern bank of the river Teifi about a mile north of Abercych and some six miles south-east of Cardigan. The distance between Bayvil and Manordeifi is about ten miles. The church owes its unaltered pre-ecclesiastical interior to the fact that in 1898-9 it was replaced by a new church, on higher ground nearer to the main centre of population at Abercych, but, as was frequently the custom in Wales, the churchyard was still used for burials and the old church, repaired in 1905, was still used for funerals. Its situation near the river had meant that it was from time to time flooded, a fact attested to by the coracle kept in the west porch. The parish is a large and scattered one containing the villages of Abercych and Newchapel.



Fig. 2

St David's, Manordeifi

View of the west front showing the massive bellcote, almost organic in its simplicity

The old parish church retains some work of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries but was largely rebuilt during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The present church would appear to date from the 1840s. In 1845 it was described as 'a small neat edifice . . . not remarkable for any architectural features; it has been partly rebuilt of late'.<sup>7</sup> Seventeen years previously the visitation return noted that the church, the cost of repairing which was borne by a non-resident rector, was 'in very tolerable repair' and the furnishings 'good'.<sup>8</sup> Further work seems to have been carried out in 1847 as the following entry appears in the vestry book dated 22 April of that year:

It was also resolved that a Church Rate of one penny in the pound be made towards the necessary repairs &c to the Parish Church.<sup>9</sup>

What appears in fact to have taken place in the 1840s is a general overhaul of the building and a re-arrangement of the interior, but with the re-use of at least some of the existing furnishings.

The church comprises a fairly broad nave, narrower chancel, north-east vestry and a west porch; the west gable of the nave supports a much simpler bell-cote than that at Bayvil. The font, thirteenth century but with fourteenth-century decoration, is placed, somewhat unusually, on the north wall of the west porch. The nave has seven box pews on the north side and six on the south, but with some loose benches in the middle of the south



Fig. 3  
St David's, Manordeifi  
Monument immediately to the  
south of the west front. The  
surround is timber and the  
epitaph is on slate.

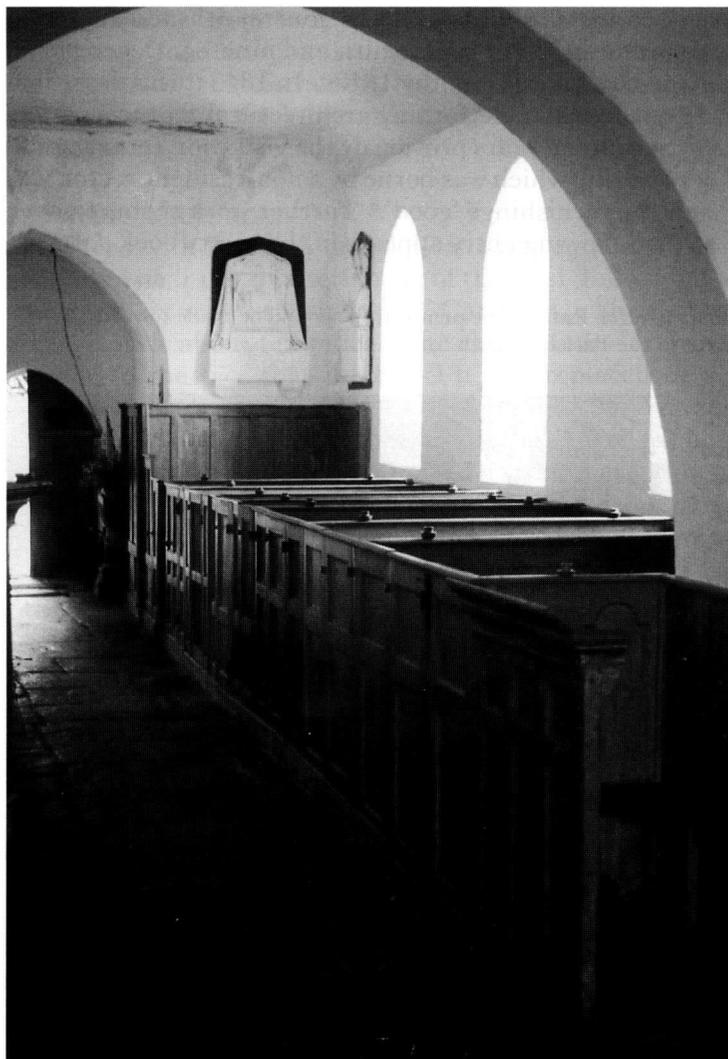


Fig. 4

St David's, Manordeifi

Interior view showing the complete set of eighteenth-century furnishings

side. Four of the pews are family ones. The two at the west end of the nave, on the north and south sides, appropriated to the families of Castle Malgwyn and Ffynone, are slightly raised above the level of the other seating and are decorated with fluted columns. Those in the north-east and south-east corners of the nave, appropriated to the families of Clynfyw and Pentre, have fireplaces. The total extent of the seating does not seem to match the claim in 1813 that the church could seat a thousand people.<sup>10</sup>

The pulpit and reading desk are placed, respectively, on the south and north sides of the entrance to the chancel, but it is clear that these are not the original locations. The block of benches on the south side of the

nave has led Julian Orbach to speculate that a traditional three-decker pulpit may have originally stood in this location,<sup>11</sup> but the north wall shows obvious signs of a pulpit tester having been fixed on this side of the building. What is certainly clear is that pulpit and reading desk were originally placed in the middle of one of the long walls of the nave and that they have been subsequently relocated to their present positions. There was much liturgical pressure from the 1820s onwards for the breaking up of two- and three-decker pulpits, and their replacement by separate



Fig. 5

St David's, Manordeifi

The quality of joinery in the Georgian box-pews is exquisite. Note the delicate turned legs underneath the pew and the brass pull set flush to the timber

pulpits and reading desks on opposite sides of the entrance to the chancel,<sup>12</sup> so such a development at Manordeifi would have been in line with contemporary liturgical practice. It does appear that neither the pulpit nor the reading desk were new pieces of furniture in 1847, or whenever these changes took place, but that they were old pieces adapted to serve in their new locations. It also seems clear that the alterations to the seating, consequent upon the relocation of the pulpit and reading desk, also involved moving and re-arranging some existing pieces of furniture.

In accordance with contemporary liturgical practice before the late nineteenth century, in which it was normal for Holy Communion to be celebrated after Morning Prayer and for the communicants to arrange themselves around the altar, the chancel is entirely devoid of furniture, apart from the altar. The altar table is placed at the east end of the chancel, raised on a slate platform, and railed on three sides (Fig. 7). The vestry is unusual in that it cannot be accessed directly from the interior of the church, a door in the north wall of the chancel leading into the churchyard at right angles to the door in the west wall of the vestry.

Fig. 6  
St David's,  
Manordeifi  
The melancholy  
monument to  
Charles Colby who  
had the  
unfortunate  
distinction of having  
been killed by a  
tiger in India in  
1852



One of the particularly important features of the old church at Manordeifi is its collection of handsome monuments, both within the church and in the churchyard. On the east wall of the chancel is one to Jacob Morgans of Vaenor, who died in 1712, and on the south wall another to a former rector, John Blackwell, who died in 1840; the latter is signed 'Denman, 83 Regent Street, London'. On the north-east wall of the nave is a monument to Leoline Davies of Clynyfw and his wife Anne, who both died in 1747 after a marriage lasting 'about 52 years'. On



Fig. 7

St David's, Manordeifi

The sanctuary rails, with the appearance of lace on a gargantuan scale

the south-east wall of the nave are four monuments, all to members of the Davies family of Pentre: to David Davies, physician, magistrate and deputy lieutenant of Carmarthenshire, who died in 1829; to his wife, Susannah, who died in 1823; to Elizabeth Maria, wife of David Arthur Saunders Davies, who died in 1846; and her two children, Agnes Elizabeth and David Arthur Saunders, who died, aged respectively seven and nine, in 1845. At the west end of the nave, adjacent to the Fynone pew, are monuments to two members of the Colby family of Ffynone, Charles who died in India, having been mauled by a tiger, in 1852 (Fig. 6), and Hugh Owen, who died 'in the 18<sup>th</sup> year of his age' in 1831. Outside the church, immediately to the south of the west door, is a monument, in a railed enclosure, to Thomas Lewis of Clynyfw, who died in 1789, and several other members of his family. The enclosures on the south side of the chancel commemorate various members of the Saunders family of Pentre, including Erasmus, the father of Susannah Davies, whose own monument is adjacent to the Pentre pew in the church. The enclosure near the north west corner of the nave marks the burial place of John Blackwell, the rector commemorated in the chancel, but whose inscription here, in Welsh rather than English, describes him as a priest, poet and 'literary



Fig. 8

St David's, Manordeifi is particularly evocative for the survival of eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century railed enclosures to a number of tombs in the churchyard. These two photographs show one example abutting the chancel to the south and another set on a stone plinth, to the north.

man'. There are two further enclosures on the north side of the church to members of lesser gentry families. The survival of these enclosures, with their elaborate railings and slate inscriptions, are now a rarity, as so many railings were commandeered during the Second World War.

#### THE PARISHES OF BAYVIL AND MANORDEIFI IN THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY

The visitation returns in the National Library of Wales throw interesting light on the pastoral conditions of these two parishes, and others in the diocese of St David's, during the period in which these buildings were renovated and from which the surviving furnishings date. Both parishes had non-resident incumbents who employed curates. At Bayvil the curate's stipend rose from £35 to £50 *per annum* between 1813 and 1828, but it remained stable, at £60 *per annum* at Manordeifi; here the curate also served the neighbouring parishes of Brongwyn in 1813 and Capel Colman in 1828. Both churches had one Sunday service in Welsh. About thirty per cent of the population attended at Bayvil, where there was also a Presbyterian meeting house, but only about ten per cent at Manordeifi, where there was a Methodist and two Baptist meeting houses. Holy Communion was celebrated four times a year at Bayvil, with between ten and twelve communicants, and every month at Manordeifi, where the number of communicants declined from thirty to forty in 1813 to only sixteen in 1828. By 1828 there was both a day and a Sunday school at Bayvil, 'supported at the expence of the parish' for twenty boys and fifteen girls who were 'educated in Welsh and English language, in spelling, reading and arithmetic'. Parents paid three shillings a quarter for each child to the schoolmaster. Catechising, however, took place at the Presbyterian meeting house as the parents were mostly Presbyterians 'and have an aversion to our Church Service'. Spelling books, bibles and new testaments were supplied by the National Society for Education. The Presbyterian meeting house had a resident minister and about a hundred members. At Manordeifi the curate stated in 1828 that he did not live in the glebe house as it was too small but lived instead in the glebe house of Capel Colman, where he was the incumbent. There was only a voluntary school for girls. Catechising took place in church three or four times a year. There was a parish poor house in which 'Prayers are occasionally read, and the Sacrament administered, as circumstances require'.<sup>13</sup>

The two churches at Bayvil and Manordeifi, with their early-nineteenth-century furnishings and liturgical arrangements, are a lasting monument to an older type of Anglicanism, revealed in the visitation evidence quoted above, which had largely disappeared, even in Wales, by the end of the nineteenth century. Their vesting in the care of the Friends of Friendless Churches will help to secure their preservation for future generations and to provide a glimpse into an ecclesiastical past which has frequently been both misunderstood and misinterpreted.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## FOOTNOTES

1. See Yates, W. N., *Buildings, Faith and Worship: the Liturgical Arrangement of Anglican Churches 1600-1900* (Oxford 2000), esp. xxvi, 34-5, 90, 122, 182, 221-7, and 'The Progress of Ecclesiology and Ritualism in Wales, 1840-75', *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, cxlix (forthcoming).
2. Information from Thomas Lloyd.
3. Colvin, H. M., *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects 1600-1840* (New Haven and London 1995), 356.
4. National Library of Wales, SD/QA/15.
5. National Library of Wales, SD/QA/7.
6. Information from Thomas Lloyd.
7. Lewis, S., *A Topographical Dictionary of Wales* (London 1845), ii, 192.
8. National Library of Wales, SD/QA/15.
9. National Library of Wales, Manordeifi Parish Records, Vestry Minute Book 1819-1913.
10. National Library of Wales, SD/QA/7.
11. Draft entry for Manordeifi Old Church in forthcoming *Buildings of Wales: South-West Wales*.
12. Yates, *op. cit.*, 115-22.
13. National Library of Wales, SD/QA/7 and 15; for readers wishing to set these returns into a broader context, the best available survey of the state of the Welsh church in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are the chapters by the late Archdeacon Owain Jones in *A History of the Church in Wales*, Walker, D., ed, (Penarth 1976), 103-20, 144-63. A new survey of *The Welsh Church from Reformation to Disestablishment 1603-1920* is currently in preparation.