Welsh Historic Churches Project

Glamorgan Historic Churches Survey

Overview: Churches In Gower

April 1998

A report for CADW
by E M Evans BA PhD MIfA

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WELSH HISTORIC CHURCHES PROJECT
GLAMORGAN HISTORIC CHURCHES SURVEY
OVERVIEW: CHURCHES IN GOWER

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INTRODUCTION

The Glamorgan Churches Project (Cadw reference number GGAT 51) started in 1996-7 and was concluded in 1998-99. It followed on from the work on Gwent churches which was carried out between 1995 and 1997.

For the purposes of the Welsh Historic Churches Survey, a historic church was defined as a building in ecclesiastical use (Anglican) or still owned by the Church of Wales or Church of England, on a site which was an ecclesiastical site before 1800. It has long been recognised that the Gower churches form a discrete and distinctive group within Glamorgan (Freeman 1850) and it was therefore decided to provide a separate overview for them. Here Gower is taken as the Archdeaconry of Gower (which roughly corresponds to the medieval Lordship of Gower) rather than just the peninsula. The full list of historic churches is as follows:

Bishopston  Llanrhidian  Pennard
Cheriton    LlanSamlet    Penrice
Ilston      Llanyrnewedd  Port Eynon
Llanddewi   Loughor       Reynoldston
Llangennith  Nicholas    Rhosili
Llangiwig    Oxwich       Swansea St Mary
Llanyfelach  Oystermouth Swansea St Matthew
Llanmadoc    Penmaen      (originally Swansea St John)

Most of the churches were surveyed in February and March 1997, but Llangiwig, Llanyfelach and LlanSamlet were surveyed in June 1997. The churches of LlanSamlet, Llanyrnewedd and Swansea St Mary were completely rebuilt in the 19th century or later, and it does not appear that they have any surviving earlier fabric. LlanSamlet and Llanyrnewedd have therefore been eliminated from the data used to compile the overview of trends, but their churchyards/sites have not. Swansea St Mary has not, but only evidence from the relatively well-recorded medieval church has been used to round out the survey of regional trends. This leaves twenty-one church buildings which have been considered for the purposes of the overview.

METHODOLOGY

A desk-top study was carried out of published and archive material. This was followed by a field visit to each church, during the course of which detailed notes were made. These were transcribed into the computer database (Microsoft Access), and a general account written of the archaeology and architectural history of each church. The entry for each church in the database contains bibliography of published works relating to it, and a separate list of relevant documentary and manuscript sources in W Glamorgan Archive Service, the National Library of Wales and the National Monument Record.

Desk-top study

Published sources

Three main categories of published material can be distinguished: general surveys; specialist articles or books on specific churches, or on individual features within churches in the county of Glamorgan as a whole; and historic descriptions by antiquarians of the 19th century or earlier. There are also a number of privately printed booklets produced by individual churches and sold to help with funds; these are of very variable quality but some are of high standard.

The following periodicals were searched: Antiquaries’ Journal, Archaeologia Cambrensis, Archaeological Journal, Archaeology in Wales, Gower, Journal of the Historical Society of the Church in Wales, Morgannwg, Medieval Archaeology, Journal of Welsh Ecclesiastical History.

General surveys include both county-wide surveys and those limited to Gower. The Gower churches are included by Butler (1971) in the short survey of ecclesiastical architecture which he provided for the Glamorgan County History. Notes are also given by Newman (1995) in The buildings of Wales: Glamorgan, but not usually at any length, and in accordance with his brief, the interpretations are based on the main architectural features rather than a detailed fabric survey; summaries of medieval and Victorian church architecture in general are included in his introduction. A general guide of all the churches in the Rural Deanery of Gower, ie Bishopston, Cheriton, Ilston, Llanddewi, Llangennith, Llanmadoc, Llanrhidian, Llanyrnewedd (Penclawdd) Nicholas, Oxwich, Penmaen, Pennard, Penrice, Port Eynon, Reynoldston and Rhosili, was published by Orrin in 1979, but each entry contains only a short summary of the church’s history with a few notes on the buildings and fittings. A further selection was published by Toft and Grenfell (1981), but with no more than half a page of text and a photograph for each. The popular guidebook published by Salter (1991) contains even less detail and is not
particularly reliable, and the same is true of the accounts of churches given in the guide to Glamorgan published by Evans (1944). References to these works are not given in the bibliographies of individual churches unless they are referred to in the descriptive text.

Specialised articles have been produced on certain aspects of churches and churchyards. Articles specific to Gower are mostly to be found in the journal Gower, on medieval ecclesiastical sites (Toft 1975), bells (Orrin 1988a), churchyard yews in the archdeaconry (Andrew 1992) and defensible towers (Harrison 1995). Carved woodwork has been covered by Crossley and Ridgway (1958), and Early Christian sites by the Royal Commission (RCAHMW 1976), both as part of county-wide surveys. As far as site-specific articles are concerned, Swansea St Mary’s has attracted by far the largest number, but short articles on other churches will be found in Gower, and there is a short popular monograph on Oystermouth (Orrin and Cowley 1990).

Historic antiquarian accounts start in 1684 with Dineley (1888), but the only church he recorded was Swansea St Mary. Of later antiquaries, the most important are Freeman and Glynne, both of whom visited a significant number of churches, and mainly before they were restored. Freeman (1850) published a synthetic article on the churches of peninsular Gower, and Glynne (1887, 1897, 1901) produced short accounts of many of the individual churches. Morgan (1899) includes information on the churches in the E half of the area, but it is important chiefly for the record made of the chancel and tower of Swansea St Mary as it was being demolished.

Unpublished survey work
Little survey work had been done on the churches of Gower before the start of the project. The National Monument Record (NMR) contains work done by RCAHMW surveys and by R E Kay. At the time the material in the National Monument Record (NMR) was examined (March 1997), full surveys had been done by RCAHMW on only one church (Llangiwig), and there are preliminary notes on another two (Cheriton, Pennard), together with a record of some now-destroyed wallpaintings at Oystermouth, copies of 19th century plans of Llangyfelach and Swansea St John (now St Matthew), and photographic recording of most of the churches. The national monument record also holds the notebooks of R E Kay, containing details of his surveys of and visits to churches, mostly carried out in the 1950s and 1960s. These include reasonably full surveys of some seven churches (Cheriton, Llanddewi, Llangiwig, Llanmadoc, Oxwich, Penrice, Rhosili), including measured plans, and shorter notes on many of the rest. The regional Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) held by the Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust contained very little material relating to churches, most of it derived from the NMR.

Documentary material
The catalogues of the principal relevant collections in the National Library of Wales (NLW) and West Glamorgan Archive Service (WGAS) were consulted; the Glamorgan Record Office (GIRO) was also consulted to see if it held any relevant material. In the case of the National Library of Wales, the collection for the Diocese of St Davids contains records for the churches under consideration until the Diocese of Swansea and Brecon was created in 1923, and records of four parishes are also held. The records of the Diocese of Swansea and Brecon are privately held and not available for consultation.

The following classes of document were noted in particular:

Faculties and Archdeacons’ Certificates
This is most important class of documentary material, issued to give consent to alterations to the fabric and fittings of churches, including demolition/rebuilding and more modest repairs. A faculty was issued to the parish concerned, and copies or drafts were retained on the diocesan files, but survival is patchy, particularly since quite extensive work was sometimes done in the 19th century was without faculties.¹ Some survive in the diocesan collection, and other in parish collections. Supporting documentation varies; some faculties still retain their plans, particularly useful where ‘before’ and ‘after’ plans are given or where new work is indicated in a different colour. A few are accompanied by specifications for the work to be carried out. It was only possible within the constraints of the project to examine a selection. On the whole, the catalogue details (especially those given by the NLW) give a reasonably clear idea of their contents, but it should be noted that they may contain important information which is not included in the catalogue entry.

Churchwardens’ Accounts

¹ Note should be taken of a letter held in the GIRO from the agent of Miss Olive Talbot, whose family was very active in the 19th century in restoring churches, including Llanddewi, Llanrhidian, Nicholaston, Oxwich, Penrice, Port Eynon and Rhosili. He writes: ‘I am informed by the Vicar of Pyle that the Chancellor of the Diocese has ordered the restoration of the Chancel to be suspended owing to Miss Talbot’s not having obtained a faculty. I may say that Miss Talbot did not apply for the same as her father never did so for any of the Church work he did, but since your Chancellor decrees it, all due steps will be taken to satisfy him.’
Churchwardens’ accounts, where they exist, are mainly to be found in WGAS, though the accounts for Cheriton, Llanrhidian and Oystermouth are in the NLW. Because of the lack of time, none of these were examined. It seems likely that most disbursements on the fabric will as usual be concentrated on routine maintenance, though fundraising for more major restoration may be recorded. However, where restoration was funded by benefactors rather than the parish, as was frequently the case for the major Victorian work in Gower, no records may occur in the churchwardens’ accounts.

Vestry/Parish Minutes
Vestry minutes are also to be found in WGAS, except for Cheriton, Llanrhidian and Pennard, which are in the NLW. As all petitions for faculties were supposed to be passed by the Vestry Meeting, works on the church of such a nature as to require a faculty should be recorded in the vestry minutes. In addition, other details may be recorded.

Building accounts and architects’ papers and other documents concerning building works
The survival of such papers is less common than other classes, but they can provide information of enormous importance.

Tithe maps
Tithe maps were consulted for all parishes, since in most cases they provide the earliest information on the form of the churchyard, and in addition some have a plan of the church itself, drawn up before the main period of 19th century rebuilding.

Early drawings and photographs
Owing to constraints of time, the only drawings and photographs which were consulted were those which have been published, and those of which copies were available either in the County Record Office or in the church concerned.

Other papers
Terriers survive for some churches from a variety of dates in the 18th and 19th centuries, but the catalogue entries do not give sufficient information to establish whether they are likely to be of assistance in clarifying the history of the church.

Fieldwork
Generally it proved possible to visit two churches a day. Each church was divided into its basic elements (nave, chancel etc). Notes were taken primarily on the structure of each element: a short description was made of the fabric of each wall; the openings (including blocked openings) were counted and a short description given of each. The furnishings and fittings in each element were dealt with more summarily, but an attempt was made to identify all those of archaeological or antiquarian interest. More general notes were made on points of interest in the building as a whole. A series of black-and-white record photographs was taken if time and lighting conditions permitted.

In the office, the field notes were transcribed onto the database. A short description of each church was compiled using the field notes and such documentary and published material as was available. The photographs were catalogued.

This overview was prepared at the end of project, during the course of one week earmarked for this purpose. Statements relating to individual churches within this overview are not referenced; the references may be found in the database.

THE DATABASE
The database has been designed primarily in order that proposals for work on the structure of any church can be checked against (1) the summary of the church in question, and (2) the present description of the elements affected by the work. This will enable the archaeological potential to be identified at an early stage so that appropriate mitigatory measures can be devised. In addition the elements affected can be compared with other similar elements to determine how they compare in terms of rarity, completeness etc; for example, a 13th century chancel can be compared with other chancels containing 13th century work.

The database contains material on the churches from all historic parishes. A manual provides information on database structure and field definitions.
There are four main tables. Three contain material derived from fieldwork, and the fourth contains details of documentation. The fieldwork tables provide (1) a SUMMARY of the churches’ architecture and history; (2) a detailed description of each of the ELEMENTS (nave, chancel etc) within the church; and (3) a summary of features of archaeological interest in the CHURCHYARD. The DOCHURCH table provides locational information (NGR, community, deanery etc), lists published and archive sources, and provides cross-referencing to other relevant monuments which are, or have been, situated on the site (monasteries, churchyard crosses etc). It is also cross-referenced to the reference numbers used by Cadw, Church in Wales and the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments in Wales (RCAHMW). Since this table was compiled at the beginning of the project whilst the parameters were being set, it also contains details on standing buildings which fulfil all the criteria for the definition of historic churches, but which are no longer in ecclesiastical ownership; these were not deleted from the final table, as they may still be required for the monitoring of planning applications submitted to the Local Planning Authority.

SUMMARY: This table contains for each church a record which comprises yes/no checklists for the following categories:
- the different elements of which the church consists (with locations for certain elements, such as towers/bellcotes, porches and rood stairs);
- structural woodwork which does not actually constitute an element in itself (roofs, doors), with locations, and pre-Victorian fittings/decorations (stained glass, wallpaintings);
- principal furnishings (altars, altar rails, fonts, pulpits, seating, chests/cupboards, other non-structural woodwork), by period;
- dates (in centuries) from which building work can be identified, together with yes/no boxes indicating whether the church has been completely rebuilt in the Victorian period or later, and if so, whether its site has been moved from one part of the churchyard to another.
There is also a free-text memo field which contains a summary of the architectural history and principal fittings, with references. This also highlights problems which cannot be resolved in the light of current information but which may be soluble if archaeological recording is done when work is next carried out on the church.

ELEMENT: This table contains for each element a record which comprise a wall-by-wall description including fabric, openings, present surface treatment/visibility, and brief descriptions of the roof/ceiling and floor together with the more archaeologically significant of the fittings. Again there is a yes/no checklist of dates (in centuries) from which building work can be identified. Discussion and interpretation is kept to a minimum so as not to duplicate information in the SUMMARY table. Llansamlet church, which was not rebuilt in the same position as its predecessor has not be recorded on a element-by-element basis, since no structures from the pre-Victorian church can be expected to be incorporated into its fabric, but Llangyfelach has, since it reused the pre-existing tithe barn.

CHURCHYARD: This contains for each churchyard a record which includes details of form, boundaries and entrances, and notes whether drainage around church is likely to have damaged deposits at the foot of the wall, presence/absence of churchyard cross and earthworks, relationship with earlier monastic sites, and features of interest with regard to grave monuments.


ARCHIVE

Detailed records for each church have been deposited in the regional Sites and Monuments Record, held by the Curatorial Division of the Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust, under the Primary Record Number (PRN) for each church. Each file holds material collected on each church during the course of the survey, including copies of published articles, transcriptions of documents (where these were made) and guidebooks. Other files hold copies of articles of more general interest and the catalogued photographic archive.
CHURCH SITES

DEDICATION

Most of the present dedications can be traced back at least to the 16th century, since they are reported by Merrick (ed James 1983, 116-22), and therefore represent dedications genuinely in use by the end of the Middle Ages, rather than antiquarian conjectures (Orme 1996, 47-9). The only dedication which falls into this category is Llanyrnewydd. Besides this, only Oystermouth, Llanddewi and Llansamlet are not confirmed by Merrick.

Five of Merrick’s dedications are different from the present. To Llangennith he attributes a joint dedication of St Mary and St Cennydd. Conversely Llangyfelach and Llanrhidian both have a single patron saint, St David and St Illtyd respectively, and it seems likely that SS Cyfelach and Rhidian have been added respectively to these churches as the result of back-formation; the dedication at Llanmadoc is recorded as St Cadoc, probably a mistake. The church which is now Swansea St Matthew was dedicated to St John Baptist until after the middle of the 19th century when the dedication was transferred to the new church in the Hafod. It can be seen from the table (known changes in dedication marked with an asterisk) below that dedications to Celtic saints slightly outnumber those of the Catholic calendar, though it should be remembered that St Mary and St Michael already appear in Celtic dedications by the end of the Early Christian period, and David as the patron saint of Wales is likely to have remained popular after the conquest.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Celtic dedication</th>
<th>Non-Celtic dedication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cheriton, St Cadoc</td>
<td>Oystermouth, All Saints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Port Eynon, St Cattwg</td>
<td>Penrice, St Andrew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Llangennith, St Mary and St Cennydd*</td>
<td>Reynoldston, St George</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Llangiwg, St Ciwg</td>
<td>Swansea St Matthew, St John Baptist*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Llangyfelach, St David*</td>
<td>Penmaen, St John Baptist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Llanddewi, St David</td>
<td>Pennard, St Mary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Llanynewydd, (St Gwynour)*</td>
<td>Rhosili, St Mary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Llanrhidian, St Illtyd*</td>
<td>Swansea St Mary, St Mary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oxwich, St Iltyd</td>
<td>Llangennith, St Mary and St Cennydd*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ilston, St Iltyd</td>
<td>Loughor, St Michael</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Llanmadoc, St Madoc</td>
<td>Nicholaston, St Nicholas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Llansamlet, St Samlet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bishopston, St Teilo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SITES WITH EARLY ACTIVITY

Pre-Norman ecclesiastical sites

The majority of the sites in the survey area have at least some evidence (sculptured/inscribed stones, documentary, place-name, dedication) to indicate a pre-Norman foundation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definitely pre-Norman</th>
<th>Probably pre-Norman</th>
<th>Possibly pre-Norman</th>
<th>No evidence for pre-Norman</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bishopston</td>
<td>Cheriton</td>
<td>Llanrynwydd</td>
<td>Llanddewi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Llangennith</td>
<td>Ilston</td>
<td>Oystermouth</td>
<td>Nicholaston</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Llangyfelach</td>
<td>Llangiwg</td>
<td>Rhosili</td>
<td>Penmaen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Llanmadoc</td>
<td>Llansamlet</td>
<td>Swansea St Mary</td>
<td>Pennard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Llanrhidian</td>
<td>Oxwich</td>
<td></td>
<td>Penrice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loughor</td>
<td>Port Eynon</td>
<td></td>
<td>Reynoldston</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Swansea St Matthew</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Early Christian monuments (Plate 1) survive in some quantity, being present at all the definitely pre-Norman sites, as well as at Llangiwg, though the monument which actually comes from this site (as opposed to the one which was brought in from elsewhere) is of a type which continues in use after the conquest. The monument at Reynoldston was also brought into the church from elsewhere. Most of these carved stones are of funerary origin, and only at Llanrhidian does it seem to have been derived from a building.

Of the other possible pre-Norman sites, there is a possibility that two (Rhosili and Swansea St Mary) may have moved their sites.
Former monastic churches

There is documentary evidence that five churches had pre-Norman monastic associations. Although Llanrhidian and Rhosili churches have some connection with monastic landholdings, only Bishopston, Llangennith and Llangyfelach have some evidence that the church was attached to a resident monastic community of any size. Of these, only Llangennith seems to have retained this function under Norman rule, and it never grew beyond a cell of the alien priory of Evreux, from which it was confiscated in 1414.

Other archaeological material

Roman remains are known from Loughor and Oystermouth. At Loughor, the church lies in the middle of the Roman fort, and at Oystermouth (Plate 2) fragments of mosaic were found during grave digging in the 19th century, indicating the presence of a building of some pretensions, possibly a villa.

At Llanddewi there is said to have been a bishop’s palace. This is probably in the area of the adjacent farmhouse, but could have impinged at least partly on the churchyard

CHURCHYARDS

Shape: plan and relief

Fourteen churches have curvilinear, partly curvilinear or polygonal churchyards:

Bishopston Llangyfelach Penrice
Ilston Llanmadoc Port Eynon
Llanddewi Llanrhidian Reynoldston
Llangennith Llanyrnewydd Rhosili
Llangiwg Oxwich

and of these, only Llanrhidian is shown in the tithe map with a significantly different shape (irregular). Most of the other have quadrangular churchyards:

Cheriton Oystermouth Swansea St Mary
Loughor Penmaen Swansea St Matthew
Nicholaston Pennard

Comparing these churches with the table indicating pre-Norman foundation shows that there is a tendency for churches with no evidence for pre-Norman foundation to have quadrangular churchyards, but that churchyard shape is insufficiently well established as a marker to provide in itself evidence for early foundation (see also Brook 1988, 72). Raised churchyards are sometimes also cited as evidence of an early foundation date. Ten churchyards which are raised above the surrounding level on one or more sides:

Ilston Loughor Reynoldston
Llangiwg Nicholaston Rhosili
Llangyfelach Oxwich
Llanyrnewydd Port Eynon

In nine of these, however, this is related to the local topography, since the churchyard is on a sloping site and has been terraced out to reduce the slope. The only exception is Llanyrnewydd, where the original small oval churchyard is slightly raised above the extended area. Nicholaston, Oxwich, Port Eynon and Reynoldston also have internal terracing, as do Bishopston, Cheriton, Llanrhidian and Oystermouth. However, at Bishopston, Llanddewi, Llangennith, Llanmadoc and Penmaen no attempt has been made to reduce the slope, and many of the other churchyards are still extremely steep, even after they have been terraced.

Boundaries and entrances

All churches have walls of coursed rubble as boundaries around all or part of their perimeters, sometimes combined with hedges. None of these display any particular signs of antiquity, and have probably been rebuilt on numerous occasions to ensure that they were maintained as a stock-proof barrier. These are combined with banks at Llansamlet (but only to the extension) and Penrice, where the N side of the churchyard retains what may be original boundary banks.
Most churchyards have more than one entrance, but only in a few cases is it possible to establish that the present main entrance is not the original one. Main entrances are more likely to be on the S, or towards the S end of the E and W sides, but this is probably because most of the churches have their porches on the S. Only Llangennith, Llangyfelach and Swansea St Mary have lychgates, and none of these appear to be of any antiquity.

Other churchyard features

Time did not permit anything more than a cursory consideration of burials. No tombstones were noted before the 18th century. Local stones were largely used for memorials, although imported granites and marbles became more common in the 20th century. Some carved tombstones are signed by the maker. A local memorial type, consisting of a coffin-shaped slab laid horizontally over the grave, occurs at many churchyards in the area. In most churchyards, much of the area is now covered by marked burials, but at Llanddewi, Llangennith, Llanmadoc, Nicholaston, Penrice, and to a lesser extent Llangiwg, there are significant areas on the N side of the church which are still free.

Survival of churchyard crosses is very poor. Llangyfelach has a fine Early Christian socket stone in its churchyard, and Penrice’s later medieval socket stone is now situated on the green outside the churchyard. At neither site are the steps preserved. The socket stone of a churchyard cross was reported as extant at Bishopston as late as 1969 but is now no longer to be seen. The cross at Nicholaston is Victorian, with no trace of medieval work.

There is a holy well in the churchyard at Llangiwg, and one is reported to have existed in Oxwich churchyard until it dried up in the 19th century; its position is now lost. Llangennith church was built in close proximity to another well spring, but there is no evidence that it was regarded as being a holy well; however a well close to Reynoldston churchyard and two in the vicinity of Llangyfelach bear saints’ names and were therefore presumably considered to be holy wells.

Trench drains and soakaways can be see at the foot of the church walls in some churchyards, but where they are absent it cannot be concluded that the deposits are undisturbed, since such drains may be filled in to ease churchyard management.

CHURCH BUILDINGS

BUILDING MATERIALS

The vast majority of medieval churches are built in local materials. These notes are based on superficial examination only; none of the building stones have been submitted for geological examination. The geology of the Gower peninsula is extremely diverse, and this is reflected in the building stones employed, a range of sandstones, quartz conglomerate and limestone. Inland, the geology is dominated by the Coal Measures, and Pennant sandstone is the principal stone employed E of a line between Swansea and Loughor. The body of the walls was in rubble of local stones, but freestones used for dressings included Sutton stone brought from near Bridgend.

ORIENTATION

As part of a study to test the validity of the hypothesis that medieval churches were oriented on sunrise of the patronal festival (Morris 1989, 208), and to ascertain whether the nave and chancel were on a common alignment, the orientation of both was recorded to the nearest 5°. The general orientation of the churches in the survey ranged between 60° and 115°; there was usually no obvious reason for the variation, though at Oxwich which lies between the shore and a steep escarpment the orientation is likely to have been constrained by the topography, even allowing for significant erosion on the rocks of the seaward side since the church was founded. The table below shows that there was no standard orientation among groups of churches which now have the same dedication, and no consistent relationship with the patronal festival(s) as given in the Roman calendar.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Church</th>
<th>Dedication</th>
<th>Orientation nave</th>
<th>Orientation chancel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cheriton</td>
<td>St Cadoc</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Port Eynon</td>
<td>St Catwg</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Llanddewi</td>
<td>St David</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Llangyfelach</td>
<td>St David</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ilston</td>
<td>St Illtyd</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Llanrhidian</td>
<td>St Illtyd</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oxwich</td>
<td>St Illtyd</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penmaen</td>
<td>St John Baptist</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swansea St Matthew (St John-juxta-Swansea)</td>
<td>St John Baptist</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennard</td>
<td>St Mary</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swansea St Mary</td>
<td>St Mary</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhosili</td>
<td>St Mary</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Llangennith</td>
<td>St Mary and S Cennydd</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some churches had nave and chancel on different alignments, the so-called ‘weeping chancel’:

- Penrice
- Llangyfelach
- Bishopston
- Llangennith
- Ilston
- Llanddewi
- Penmaen

The most likely explanation for this is that nave and chancel were built at different periods, although it is mostly not possible to prove this from the standing fabric. The discrepancy was generally around 5°, but at Llanddewi it was 10°.

**PLAN**

**Nave and chancel**

Only at Llangiwg (Plate 11) and Swansea St Matthew did the nave and chancel form a continuous block, and at Swansea St Matthew, the chancel is narrower than the nave internally, being flanked by the vestry and organ chamber which are sited in the corners of the block. In the other 21 churches, the nave and chancel are separate (Plates 2 and 5).

It should be noted that many of the chancel arches in the area have no dressings, the heads being turned in plain voussoirs and usually concealed behind plaster.

**Aisles and transepts**

Only two churches, Oystermouth and Swansea St Mary, have two aisles, but in neither case are the present aisles medieval. Swansea is known from documentary sources to have had aisles at the beginning of the 18th century, and it seems certain that these were medieval. At Oystermouth the presence of aisles is due to the 1915 rebuilding, the original medieval church being unaisled. Only one of the other churches has an aisle, Penmaen, but this appears to have been enlarged from an original N transept.

Transepts are much more common. Penrice (Plates 3 and 4) and Swansea St Mary have N and S transepts, Pennard, Port Eynon and Reynoldston all have N transepts besides Penmaen, and the basement of the tower at Ilston originally stood in the nature of a S transept to its nave. The transepts at Penmaen, Pennard, Penrice and Port Eynon, like the tower-transept at Ilston, are probably all medieval in origin. Those at Swansea St Mary and Reynoldston seem to be Victorian in origin, since at Swansea there is no evidence for medieval ones, and at Reynoldston a transept is not noted by Glynne (it may have replaced the rood stair which he saw on the N side of the church).

**Towers and bellcotes**
Fourteen of the churches in Gower have towers. In by far the greater proportion of these (eight), the tower is at the W end of the nave (Plates 2, 3 and 7), including Llangyfelach and Oystermouth in their original form.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Church</th>
<th>Church</th>
<th>Church</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bishopston</td>
<td>Llanrhidian</td>
<td>Penrice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Llanddewi</td>
<td>Oxwich</td>
<td>Rhosili</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Llangiwg</td>
<td>Oystermouth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Llangyfelach</td>
<td>Penrice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ilston and Swansea St Mary both have S towers, the Victorian plan of Swansea following its medieval predecessor in this respect. Llangennith has a N tower (Plate 6), but given the presence of an archway on its E side, it is possible that this tower may also at some stage have been a W tower. Cheriton has a central tower (Plate 5) placed between the nave and chancel and continuous with the latter. This transept-less central tower is a form which is recorded further E along the coastal fringes of S Wales, but was never very common.

Llanrhidian, Oxwich and Oystermouth have external stair turrets, all taking the form of a shallow rectangular projection against the S and rising to parapet level (Plates 2 and 7). Oxwich and Oystermouth towers are also divided into stages above a plinth by string courses; the tower of Pennard church, which is so small as to be little more than a belfry, is divided on its E and W sides only into slightly jettied stages carried on corbel tables. Only the Victorian towers of Llanyrnewydd and Swansea St Mary have buttresses.

The following churches all have battlemented parapets (Plates 2, 3, 5, 6, 7 and 12):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Church</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bishopston</td>
<td>Llangyfelach</td>
<td>Pennard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheriton</td>
<td>Llanmadoc</td>
<td>Penrice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ilston</td>
<td>Llanrhidian</td>
<td>Swansea St Mary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Llangennith</td>
<td>Oxwich</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Llangiwg</td>
<td>Oystermouth</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At Bishopston, Cheriton, Ilston, Llanrhidian, Oxwich, Pennard and Penrice these were carried on a corbel table round all four sides of the tower, but at Llangennith and Llanmadoc the battlements and corbel table were restricted to N and S sides only, the E and W sides being formed by the gable of the saddleback roof. At Cheriton, Ilston, Llanrhidian and Oxwich, the battlements are combined with rows of putlocks for hoardings. At Llangyfelach the battlements rise above a string course, but at Llangiwg they rise directly from the tower wall. There have been claims these arrangements were designed to provide defences for the early English settlers in Gower against Welsh incursions (Harrison 1995), but most of these towers date to after the period at which Welsh incursions were a problem (see also Morris 1989, 252).

The following towers had saddleback roofs:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Church</th>
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<th>Church</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cheriton</td>
<td>Llanddewi</td>
<td>Llanmadoc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ilston</td>
<td>Llangennith</td>
<td>Rhosili</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At Cheriton (Plate 5), Llangennith and Llanmadoc, these have the normal E-W form, but at Ilston, Llanddewi and Rhosili they are all N-S. Bishopston and Llanrhidian towers had pyramidal roofs, and none of the rest were visible from the ground.

Six churches have bellcotes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Church</th>
<th>Church</th>
<th>Church</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Loughor</td>
<td>Penmaen</td>
<td>Reynoldston</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicholaston</td>
<td>Port Eynon</td>
<td>Swansea St Matthew</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All these except for Penmaen, which is central between nave and chancel, are of W gable-end type. All were rebuilt during Victorian reconstruction or later.
Porches

Only two churches, Oxwich and Penrice, lack a separate porch. Oxwich has the entrance through the W tower, probably because the narrowness of the site made the addition of a porch to either side of the nave impracticable. At Penrice, the S transept was adapted for use as a porch, probably not long after its construction (Plates 3 and 4). Apart from Llangennith, which has its porch on the N side, all other churches had a S porch, although at Oystermouth and Swansea St Matthew, this has now been replaced by a Victorian W porch; Swansea St Matthew in its Regency phase had a N porch (Plate 12).

Rood stairs, lofts and screens

None of the churches retains a rood stair, but there is some evidence for a loft at:

- Bishopston
- Cheriton
- Llangennith
- Llanmadoc
- Nicholaston
- Oxwich
- Oystermouth
- Penrice
- Reynoldston
- Rhosili

In addition, the main beam of the W gallery at Pennard appears originally to have been the rood beam.

REVIEW OF CHRONOLOGY AND ARCHITECTURAL STYLES

Medieval

Norman architecture can be seen in seven churches:

- Cheriton
- Llangennith
- Llanmadoc
- Llanddewi
- Penrice
- Rhosili

The finest piece of Norman work in the whole of the Gower (and one of the finest in Glamorgan) is the S door at Rhosili (Plate 8), probably not in situ, but its origin is uncertain. Llanmadoc and Penrice both have Norman chancel arches, and there is also the now-blocked E arch of the tower at Llangennith. Round-headed lancets occur at Bishopston, Cheriton, Llanddewi and Reynoldston, though it is possible that these may be rather later. The tower arches at Bishopston and Oystermouth could also be as early as the 12th century.

Early English architecture survives at seven churches:

- Bishopston
- Cheriton
- Ilston
- Llanddewi
- Llangennith
- Llanmadoc
- Llanrhidian
- Nicholaston
- Oystermouth
- Pennard
- Port Eynon
- Rhosili

Again, a single church, Cheriton (where the settlement was probably named for the church), stands out for its architectural quality; here the arches, S door, and some of the windows are preserved and the carved detail has affinities with Llandaff Cathedral (Plates 5 and 9). Penrice has much plainer transepts of this period (Plates 3 and 4), and the tower arch of Llangyfelach appears to be Early English. Bishopston, Llangennith, Oystermouth and Pennard have windows.

The later 13th and early 14th centuries are otherwise represented at thirteen churches:

- Bishopston
- Cheriton
- Ilston
- Llanddewi
- Llangennith
- Llanmadoc
- Llanrhidian
- Nicholaston
- Oxwich
- Oystermouth
- Pennard
- Port Eynon
- Rhosili

The medieval church of Swansea St Mary was the outstanding representative of this style in the area. There were also major works at Oxwich, where the chancel was rebuilt and the tower added. There are windows of this period at Bishopston, Cheriton, Ilston, Llanddewi, Llangennith, Llanmadoc, Llanrhidian, Nicholaston, Oystermouth, Pennard, Port Eynon and Rhosili. Many of them are fairly elaborate. The E windows of Llangennith and Oxwich churches and the W window of Ilston had tracery (Plate 10), though at Oxwich it was
merely a slight variation on Y-tracery; the E window at Cheriton is a simple pair of trefoiled lancets (Plate 5). Plain Y-traceried windows occur at Llanddewi

Perpendicular architecture is remarkable for its absence in this area, occurring only at Llanrhidian and Pennard. The E window of Llanrhidian church has Perpendicular tracery, but handled with particular awkwardness, as though the builder were working from a drawing rather than from a knowledge of the architecture itself. At Pennard there is no more than a square-headed two-light E window in the chancel.

Post-Medieval

Tudor-style architectural features are to be found at ten churches:

| Bishopston | Llangyfelach | Oxwich |
| Ilston     | Llanrhidian  | Port Eynon |
| Llanddewi  | Penmaen      |          |
| Llangiwg   | Pennard      |          |

It is clear from elsewhere in Glamorgan that such forms had an extended life span, with a date-range from the early 16th century well into the 18th century, and in the absence of date stones or documentary evidence, it is not possible to date any of it closely. Llanrhidian church tower was added or rebuilt in this style (Plate 7), and a new belfry was added to the tower at Llangyfelch. The nave at Oxwich was refenestrated, and a new window was probably provided for the nave at Bishopston as well. Llanddewi, and possibly Pennard, were provided with new porches, and at Ilston, Penmaen and Port Eynon the inner door of the porch is probably post-medieval.

Little survives of early 19th century work. At Llangyfelach the tithe barn in the churchyard was modified for use as a church after the old church, with the exception of its tower, had been destroyed by gales. A dates tone at Llangiwg records a restoration of 1812; after this the church probably appeared much as it is now apart from the later insertion of Y-tracery in the windows (Plate 11). Swansea St Matthew was extensively, if not totally rebuilt, but although the walls of this reconstruction remain, the overall appearance has been modified by the late Victorian restoration, except in the case of the N porch (Plate 12).

Victorian Gothic

Church restoration was widespread between the 1840s and the First World War. None of the Gower churches remained untouched, though some, like Oystermouth, Pennaen, Port Eynon and Reynoldston were more extensively modified than others; at Oystermouth the construction of a new nave and chancel resulted in the downgrading of the medieval ones to aisle and chapel (Plate 2).

OTHER ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES

Early roofs and ceilings

There is an early open roof in the nave at Bishopston, and the chancel at Cheriton may possibly have an early barrel ceiling. Otherwise no early timberwork survives. The basements to the towers of Ilston, Llanrhidian and Pennard churches are all vaulted.

Galleries

Galleries at the W end of the nave were a common feature in post-medieval churches; they survive in the churches of Bishopston and Pennard (Plate 13), and there are traces of galleries at Llanddewi, Llangiwg and Rhosili. New Victorian galleries were built at Oystermouth, Llangyfelach and Swansea St Matthew. The two last still survive; that at Oystermouth does not, though its external stair is still extant.
Wall-finish

The traditional wall-finish for churches in this area was limewash, applied to the body of the church both inside and out. Traces of limewash are to be seen on many churches exteriors, but in none has the tradition been continued.

**FURNISHINGS AND FITTINGS**

Wallpaintings and stained glass

There is no pre-Victorian stained glass in any of the churches in the study area. The only one to retain any paintings on the walls is Ilston, where there are fragmentary remains of miniature figure-painting, probably Victorian, on the walls of the nave.

Wooden doors

The only surviving wooden door is the S door at Ilston, which is of 16th-17th century type.

Piscinae, aumbries and stoups

There are medieval piscinae at Bishopston, Llanrhidian, Nicholaston, Oystermouth and Port Eynon. That in the chapel (formerly the chancel) of Oystermouth church is a pillar piscina, but the others are built into the walls.

Ilston, Nicholaston and Pennard have aumbreys, apparently of medieval date. At Ilston and Pennard they are nearly identical, each with a triangular upper compartment and a lower square one; their placement on the S wall of the chancel suggests a piscina, but neither has any evidence for a drain.

There are medieval stoups at Cheriton, Llangiwg, Penrice and Port Eynon; the stoup at Oystermouth is Victorian.

Fonts

Of all the fittings, it is the fonts which are most likely to survive from the Middle Ages. There are medieval fonts (or fonts containing medieval work) at:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oystermouth</td>
<td>Pennard</td>
<td>Port Eynon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheriton</td>
<td>Llanrhydian</td>
<td>Penmaen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Llanmadoc</td>
<td>Bishopston</td>
<td>Oxwich</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reynoldston</td>
<td>Llanddewi</td>
<td>Llangiwg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ilston</td>
<td>Rhosili</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The font at Pennard is made up of a number of disparate elements, including an arcaded drum which may originally have been the base of the churchyard cross; its Jacobean cover, the only one in the area, is not a local production but came from Berkshire.
Altars, communion tables and communion rails

No medieval altars survive anywhere in the survey area, but there is a single post-medieval communion table of 18th century type at Llangiwg. Two churches, Llanddewi and Pennard, contain post-medieval (‘Laudian’) altar rails.

Pews, pulpits, chests and cupboards

The only church in the area which preserves pre-Victorian seating is Llangiwg, which has a set of early 19th century box pews, but where the matching pulpit has disappeared. The only early pulpit is a Jacobean one at Pennard, but this comes from Oxfordshire and is not local.

There are no early parish chests or cupboards, with the exception of the aumbries noted above.

Monuments

Early Christian monuments are to be found at Llangennith, Llangiwg, Llangyfelach, Llanmadoc, Llanrhidian and Reynoldston (Plate 1). That at Reynoldston was not originally from the church site, but came from elsewhere in the parish. At Loughor the pagan Roman altar with an Early Christian inscription is not kept in the church.

Medieval monumental sculpture survives at Llangennith, Oxwich and Swansea, the double effigy at Oxwich still contained within an elaborate Decorated tomb niche (Plate 14). Swansea also contains a rare 15th century figured brass.

Post-medieval monumental sculpture survives at Penrice.

POTENTIAL FOR FURTHER ARCHAEOLOGICAL STUDY

BUILDINGS ARCHAEOLOGY

The archaeology of buildings has only been established as a separate discipline relatively recently, and the potential of buildings for archaeological investigation is still not widely appreciated. However, detailed examination and recording of the fabric of standing buildings can provide significant information about their history. It should be taken as read that, except in cases where it can be shown that a wall has been completely rebuilt (as opposed to refaced) from the ground up, there is the potential for obtaining further information if it has to be repointed or replastered. For a general introduction to the archaeological recording of churches, see Parsons and Brooke 1994.

Likely damage to archaeological evidence

All renovation work on old buildings potentially involves the removal of archaeologically significant material. The most destructive activity which can be carried out on a wall is obviously demolition, but refacing can be almost as bad. This destroys evidence for the form, and even the position, of any blocked openings, and also evidence for different phases of construction. The raking out of joints can also destroy evidence for mortars and building techniques; and the subsequent repointing will obscure detail, even more so if the wall is then replastered. Renewal of timbers may remove information which is of importance for the original form of the church and its dating, and for the study of medieval technology, and woodland exploitation and management. Removal of old plaster from the walls could result in the loss of wall-paintings.

Archaeological potential

Renovation work normally provides the only opportunity for a thorough study of the fabric of a standing building. Not only does it reveal detail about construction which is normally concealed by pointing and plaster, but where scaffolding is used access can be obtained to parts of the structure which are not easily visible from the ground.
Information which may become available as a result of examination during renovation work includes: the identification of different building periods, and the discovery of blocked doors and windows, both of which can contribute to an understanding of the development and usage of the building; recovery of early decorative schemes; evidence for medieval building technology; evidence for woodland management and exploitation. The opportunity is also provided for the dendrochronological dating of timbers.

**BELOW-GROUND ARCHAEOLOGY**

All pre-19th century churches potentially have important below-ground archaeological deposits in both the church and the churchyard. Burials will exist within both, as may the remains of earlier church buildings, their position depending upon whether the church has become smaller, or larger, or changed its position. The churchyard may additionally contain the foundations of extensions to the church which have now been demolished, as well as such structures as priests’ houses or the foundations of churchyard crosses where these do not survive above ground. In monastic churches, conventual buildings may have existed in the area of what is now the churchyard.

It may therefore be taken as read that there is the potential for the existence of archaeologically important deposits and structures in all churches on medieval sites, those on pre-Norman sites being particularly important, but also more fragile. The problem lies in assessing how well they have survived the vicissitudes of continuous use and modification.

**Churches**

*Likely damage to archaeological evidence*

Only for those churches where archaeological deposits have actually been recorded inside the building is it possible to give an assessment of any archaeological potential, and this does not include any of the churches within the study area. For most churches, it is not possible to establish from the sources available for study how far any below-ground deposits within a church have been damaged by later activity. In some cases it is possible to deduce from the standing building that there has been an appreciable change in level. Vaults may be expected under church floors, where they will have disturbed earlier burials and other deposits or structures, but in most cases there is no clear record; wall tablets will occasionally record a burial ‘in a vault near this place’, but there is no guarantee that the tablet is in its original position.2 The other likely agent of disturbance is underfloor heating. Since some churches have been refloored, and even more carpeted, it is difficult to judge how extensive this is - some churches have a boiler room still extant without there being any readily visible evidence for heating ducts. Where underfloor ducts can be seen, however, the evidence suggests that any disturbance they have caused is likely to be localised; the largest area of destruction will have been caused by the construction of subterranean boiler houses, which are usually under Victorian vestries and therefore outside the area of the standing medieval church. Toilet and cooking facilities have been provided in few churches, but the number of these is likely to increase, and in this case damage to the underground deposits may be caused by the digging of drains.

*Archaeological potential*

All below-ground disturbances provide a potential opportunity for the examination of archaeological deposits.

Too little work has been done within churches in this area for any clear idea to be gained of what range of archaeological material may be encountered. Examination below the floor may help to solve particular problems identified in the development of the church.

The presence of grave stones incorporated in the church floor is not evidence that they are *in situ* over burials, as in some cases it can be seen that they have been deliberately reused as paving, particularly when they are trimmed.

2 Although faculties often specify that tablets, if taken down during the course of restoration work, should be re-erected as near to the original position as possible, there is enough evidence of movement of tablets to indicate that it cannot be taken for granted they are in the usual position.
Churchyards

Likely damage to archaeological evidence
Constant grave-digging in the churchyard will normally be the main cause of attrition of archaeological evidence for earlier use. The walls of the church may have been separated from any associated construction deposits within the church by the digging of open trench-drains or soakaways at the foot of the walls; this does not appear to be a particularly great problem in Gower as relatively few churches display such drains, but it is possible that they may have been dug in the past and filled in for aesthetic reasons. The other main area in which evidence may have been lost is in the levelling of the old boundaries in churchyards where there have been extensions; and where old boundaries still exist, they may have been rebuilt, obliterating evidence for earlier walls and banks on the same line.

Archaeological potential
All below-ground disturbances provide a potential opportunity for the examination of archaeological deposits in the churchyard. These are most likely to relate to the history of the church itself, but at Loughor and Oystermouth are likely to go back to the Roman period. Pre-Norman Early Christian deposits are of particular concern, partly because so little is known of this period, and partly because they are particularly fragile in nature. Where burials have to be disturbed in order for modern extensions and renovations to take place, archaeological excavation will provide information about past populations and burial practices.
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1. Church of SS David and Cyfelach, Llangyfelach: Early Christian cross base

2. All Saints’ Church, Oystermouth from SE
3. St Andrew’s Church, Penrice: S transept exterior

4. St Andrew’s Church, Penrice: S transept interior
5. St Cadoc’s Church, Cheriton, from SE

6. St Cennydd’s Church, Llangennith, from N
7. Church of SS Illtyd and Rhidian: W tower

8. St Mary’s Church, Rhosili: main door
9. St Cadoc’s Church, Cheriton: main door

10. St Cenydd’s Church, Llangennith: E window
11. St Ciwg’s Church, Llangiwg, from S

12. St Matthew’s Church, Swansea, Regency N porch, now disused boiler house
13 St Teilo’s Church, Bishopston: W gallery

[Image of St Teilo’s Church, Bishopston: W gallery]

14 St Illtyd’s Church, Oxwich: 14th century memorial in chancel

[Image of St Illtyd’s Church, Oxwich: 14th century memorial in chancel]