

Great Archaeological Sites in Caerphilly



5. CAPEL GWLADYS



Anyone driving along Heol Adam towards the southern end of Gelligaer Common can see a stone cross at ST1249 9928 with a typical Celtic wheel head. But all is not as it seems. Although the site is genuinely an ancient one, the cross is relatively modern, put there to mark the site of Capel Gwladys. All that is now left of it is a low wall of roughly coursed stone, but at the beginning of the 20th century, the notes provided for the members of the Cambrian Archaeological Association who visited the site in the course of their meeting at Merthyr Tydfil in 1900, tell us that 'the foundations of this chapel, consisting of west tower, nave and chancel, within an enclosure' were still visible. By the 1960s, all that could be seen was a low spread stony bank densely overgrown with bracken measuring roughly 14m (E-W) by 7m overall, representing the remains of the enclosure. This was consolidated in the form in which it now appears. It stands within a larger enclosure whose surrounding bank can be seen on LiDAR.

According to legend, St Gwladys was the daughter of King Brychan of Brycheiniog, and married King Gwynllyw of Gwynllwg, and they both later renounced the world to live a life of prayer. Among their children was St Cadoc. Like her husband Gwladys is usually associated with the Newport area, but a 12th charter mentions the 'Land of St Gwladys', later known as Eglwysgwladus, which has been connected with the Gelligaer area.

Whether there was any real connection with St Gwladys during her lifetime, or whether the chapel was just dedicated to her, this site certainly may well have been the site of a church before the 12th century, as an Early Medieval stone slab inscribed with a ring-cross was discovered here in 1906. This cross is of a type that is generally dated to the 8th or 9th centuries, and is now in St Cattwg's church in Gelligaer village.



Capel Gwladys is on the open access land of Gelligaer common, on the east side of Heol Adam. Map: OS Landranger Series sheet 171, Explorer Series sheet 166.

Timeline (the asterisk indicate the time-span)



You can learn more about this site, and other similar archaeological sites in Wales, by going to <https://www.archwilio.org.uk/arch/>. Please read and observe the Conditions of Use. Capel Gwladys has the PRN (Primary Record Number) 00649m, and you can search for other similar sites here too. You can contact us via social media or through the methods given at the bottom of the page. See more about sites in South Wales connected to Christianity at http://www.ggat.org.uk/cadw/historic_christian/pages/index.html

