

Great Archaeological Sites in the Vale of Glamorgan



5. EWENNY PRIORY



In 1141 the church of St Michael at Ewenny was given by Maurice de Londres, the lord of Ogmore to the Benedictine abbey at Gloucester, which used it as the centre of a daughter house under a prior. The church had been built by his father, William, but it cannot have been a new foundation because the site has produced pre-Norman crosses and grave markers, some of which date back to the 8th century. St Michael was a popular choice for dedications at the time. Judging by the quality of some of the sculpture, this early church must have been an important place, even though no records or buildings survive from before the Norman Conquest.

Very little survives of the Norman monastery either, although its cruciform church (SS 9120 7780), has survived all vicissitudes almost intact – the only parts lost were the north transept and north aisle. It owes its preservation to the fact that it had also been the parish church, where the laity shared worship with the monks. This meant that the parishioners were able to lay claim to it after the Dissolution of the Monasteries. A stone screen separated the laity in the nave from the monks in the presbytery and the crossing under the central tower. The architectural detail shows that this screen was added later, probably at the beginning of the 13th century. The

architectural style of the rest of the Norman church suggests that it was built in the 1120s, before the priory's foundation, and not necessarily the sort of thing that would be expected for a parish church. One suggestion is that it was a copy of the abbey church in Gloucester.

The only other structures to survive from the priory are parts of the precinct walls, including some of the gatehouse. They appear remarkably military, but this may have been more of a status symbol than a serious attempt at defence.



Ewenny Priory stands in the outskirts of Ewenny village in Abbey Road (CF35 5BW), a cul-de-sac where there is parking for about seven cars. The eastern half of the church is in the care of Cadw with open access. The nearest railway station is Bridgend. Maps: OS Landranger Series sheet 170, Explorer Series sheet 151.

Timeline (the asterisks indicates 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. Ewenny Priory has the PRN (Primary Record Number) 02252m, the church is 00400m, the defences are 08388m, 08402m, 08406m, 08394m and 08400m, and the collection of pre-Norman monuments are 00414m – 00422m. 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 Christian sites at http://www.ggat.org.uk/cadw/historic_christian/pages/index.html.