

Great Archaeological Sites in Cardiff



4. LLANDAFF CATHEDRAL



When the Normans began their conquest of Wales at the end of the 11th century, they found a church that was very different from that which they knew in Normandy or had encountered during their conquest of England. Wales had not kept up with the reforms instituted by successive popes, and was still operating under an older model, where the bishops at the head of a group of married clergy operating out of monastic-type communities known as *clasau* passed down their position to their sons. The new Norman lords of Glamorgan established the capital of their lordship in Cardiff, only a couple of miles from the *clas* at Llandaff (ST15557812), which was one of the leasing communities in South Wales, and was said to have been founded by St Teilo. A few tangible remains of pre-Norman Llandaff still survive, of which the most striking is the pillar cross with a ringed head, decorated in interlaced patterns, that stands in the present cathedral.

One of the main men behind transforming the *clas* into the sort of organisation the Normans could relate to was Bishop Urban who took office in 1107. He was responsible for replacing the tiny pre-Norman cathedral, of which nothing now remains, with a fine new building with lavish decoration in the latest architectural style. This still survives in the fine Norman doorways in the north and south walls of the nave and the sanctuary arch. All the rest however has been swept away by later rebuilding. Much of what we now see dates to the 13th century, both the Early English style of the nave and chapter house, and the Decorated style of the aisles

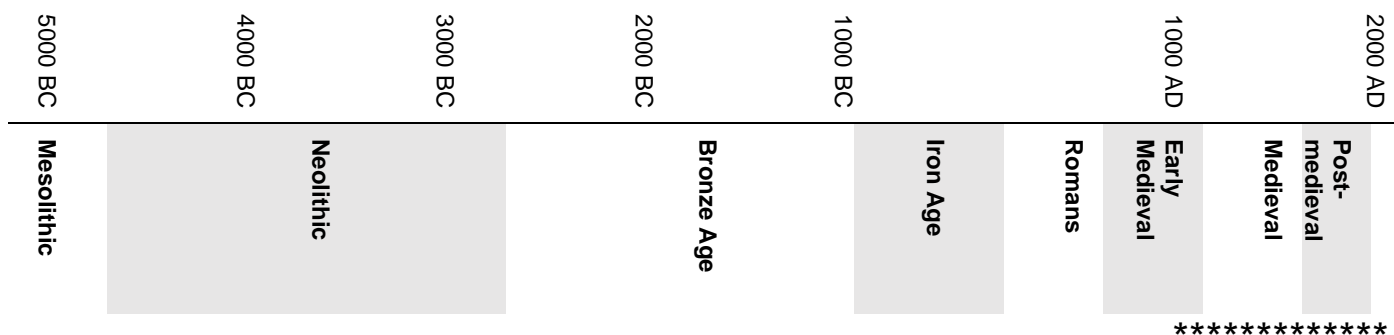
and the choir. Parts of the west front were rebuilt in the late 15th century, including the north-west tower, said to have been funded by Jasper Tudor, Henry VII's uncle who was lord of Glamorgan at the end of the 15th century.

The following centuries were difficult for the cathedral: Llandaff was one of the poorest dioceses in England and Wales, and found it difficult to afford the expense of major repairs. The fact that the bishops lived at Mathern near Chepstow on the eastern edge of the diocese did nothing to help the situation. It was indeed suggested at the beginning of the 18th century that the cathedral at Llandaff should be abandoned in favour of Cardiff. However, a decade or so later the funds were found for a major programme of building work with classical-inspired architecture that completely transformed its appearance. Nothing now remains of this phase of the cathedral's history, which was completely swept away in the 19th century when this style went completely out of favour.

The cathedral as we see it now is mainly the result of the 19th century campaign of building which restored much of the building to how it would have looked at the end of the Middle Ages, carefully reproducing the medieval architectural detail. One major addition was the south-west tower, balancing the Jasper Tower at the other side with a taller, slimmer tower crowned by a steeple. The interior of the cathedral was also completely refitted with the help of some of the leading artists and craftsmen of the day. The only major change since has been the insertion of arch between the nave and choir as part of the restoration after the cathedral was badly damaged by a landmine explosion during the Second World War.

Llandaff Cathedral is in Cathedral Close, Llandaff (CF5 2ED). There is some on-street parking in Cathedral Green. The nearest railway station is Fairwater, on the line between Cardiff Central and Radyr. Maps: OS Landranger Series sheet 171, Explorer Series sheet 151.

Timeline (the asterisks indicate the time-span)



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