

Great Archaeological Sites in Swansea



5. ST PETER'S WELL AND CHAPEL, CASWELL



We are used to thinking of chapels in Wales mainly as something Victorian – built by nonconformist congregations who wanted to worship in their own way, free from the formality of the established Anglican church, but chapels were also a feature of the medieval landscape. Unlike their later counterparts, medieval chapels were as much a part of the Catholic establishment as were the parish churches. Some of them indeed go back to before the parish system was introduced, perhaps growing up at the site of a hermitage where a devout man (or less often a devout woman) had drawn apart from the world for a life of contemplation, later to be revered as a saint. Others acted as chapels of ease, offering regular services to save the inhabitants of large parishes from having to walk many miles to attend services. But often we do not know when they were founded or why.

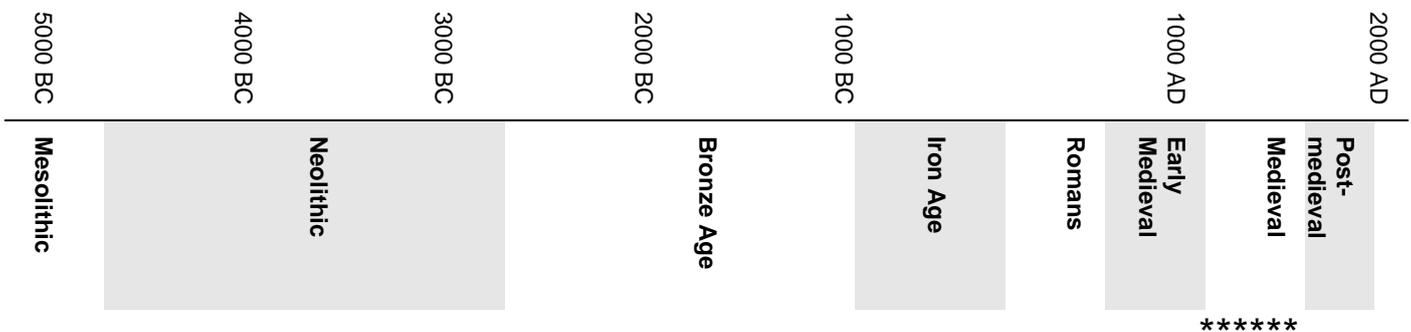
Such a chapel is St Peter's at Caswell (SS 5904 8835). It has a simple rectangular plan, and its walls do not survive much above the foundations on three of its sides. Only the east wall survives to the top of the gable. There is a very large east window which must at one stage have contained tracery, so someone in the Middle Ages

cared enough about it to pay for it to be beautified. A short distance away is St Peter's Well, where people still come for water. It may have been regarded in the past as a healing well: even today people leave strips of cloth hanging in the vegetation after prayer as part of an old ritual of healing. When the chapel and well were excavated in 1895, the well could be seen to have been vaulted over between two abutments, and provided with reservoirs. Nowadays the water trickles out into a stone-lined channel. Between the chapel and the well are the remains of a simple one-roomed structure, the cell for the priest or hermit who lived at St Peter's.



St Peter's chapel and well stand in Bishops Wood Nature Reserve. Take the main footpath up the valley from the Caswell Bay car park (SA3 4RH) to Murton; a path leads off to the right (north-east) near the top of the valley. Maps: OS Landranger Series sheet 159, Explorer Series sheet 164.

Timeline (the asterisks indicate the possible 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. St Peter's well and chapel have the PRNs (Primary Record Numbers) 00318w – 00319w, 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 our Christian sites at http://www.ggat.org.uk/cadw/historic_christian/pages/index.html