

west end of the Church, may be part of his tombstone. It was discovered in the graveyard.

**The Bishop's Palace**, to the East of the Church, first became the residence of the Bishops of St. Davids in 1555, when Bishop Barlow transferred his palace to Abergwili. It was almost completely rebuilt in 1903 following a disastrous fire. It contains the Chapel originally added by Archbishop Laud in 1625 when he was Bishop of St. Davids.

In 1974 the Palace was purchased by the County Council for use as a Museum and the Bishop's new residence, "Llys Esgob", was built in part of the grounds together with Diocesan Offices, so continuing a connection with Abergwili now over 400 years old.

**The Churchyard** contains numerous gravestones among which there is a rugged standing stone that once marked the boundary of the churchyard. It has been suggested that markings resembling an early Ogham inscription and cross can be discerned on the north side. The large yew trees are probably many hundreds of years old.

#### **The Church of Llanfihangel-uwch-Gwili.**

About five miles from Abergwili stands the sister church of Llanfihangel-uwch-Gwili, dedicated to St. Michael and All Angels. There is no recorded history of this church which was extensively restored in 1898 but it is undoubtedly an ancient foundation and may have originated as a monastic cell (or chapel). An adjoining farmhouse is called Tir Capel (chapel land). A distinguishing feature of the building, which has a small tower, is its "weeping chancel"—so called because it is slightly angled from the main axis of the nave. The Communion Chalice and Paten, dated 1568, are the second oldest surviving in the diocese.

#### **VICARS OF ABERGWILI**

(As recorded in the Transactions of the Carmarthenshire Antiquarian Society)

1404 Bernard Tyler, George Vachan	1796 William Morgan
1486 William Wright	1832 John Jones
1487 David ap Rees	1837 Joshua Hughes
1628 Thomas Price	1846 Enoch Pugh
1634 Adrian Hawkins	1856 Isaac Rowlands
1637-38 John Blenkow	1861 William Evan James
1661, 1662-65 Rees Williams	1896 Thomas Thomas
1668 George Lewis	1925 David Jenkins
1709 David Havard	1941 Tudor E. Davies
1757 Thomas Eynon	1971 J. H. Vivian Hughes
1763 John Rogers	

These Notes have been taken from "Abergwili and its Parish Church of St. David's", by the late Rev. Canon David Jenkins, a former Vicar, and the "Inventory of Ancient Monuments of Carmarthenshire".

J.E. 1974

# **THE PARISH CHURCH OF ST. DAVID ABERGWILI Nr. Carmarthen**



## **NOTES FOR VISITORS**

**Vicar: The Rev. J. H. V. Hughes, B.A., L.Th.**

### Historical Summary.

The present Church, which consists of a nave and chancel with a western spire and north porch, was rebuilt on the foundations of a much earlier church by the Rev. Joshua Hughes, Vicar of Abergwili, in 1841 at a cost of £1,400. It was consecrated by Bishop Connop Thirlwall on 8th December 1843. Its spacious interior and extensive churchyard indicate the importance of the church being in close proximity to the County town and the residence of the Bishop of St. Davids.

The old Church was described by Samuel Lewis in his topographical "Dictionary of Wales," 1833, as "a neat plain building, consisting of two aisles, without either tower or steeple, having a small belfry placed over the west end for the reception of two bells; it was divided internally by a range of pointed arches, and massive octagonal columns." There was also a Gallery in the west end where the Choir was placed with their instruments and there was a three-decker pulpit. There were stocks at the head of the lane leading down to the church, mounting steps near the gate, a sun-dial near the entrance, and a lime-house, since a great deal of lime was used for white-washing the church and also for burials.

The dedication to St. David, a British Saint and the Patron Saint of Wales suggests a pre-Norman, Celtic foundation, possibly dating back to the seventh century, for it was in this locality that the teaching of St. David took such firm root, and several other churches in the neighbourhood are similarly dedicated. Very little is known of the early history of the Church, but in 1269 it is recorded that the Prior and Canons of St. John's Priory, Carmarthen, had to provide the Vicar of Abergwili with a stipend and pay the cost of the services.

In 1395 the Church was termed "ecclesia Sancti David de Abergwily".

After the foundation of a College of Priests near the church in 1283 by Bishop Beck, there are many references in the Episcopal Registers to the collation of canons to the "Collegiate" Church of Abergwili.

### Interior of the Present Church.

**The Chancel.** One great feature of the present church is its wide and open Chancel. This is the work of Bishop Basil Jones who, in 1890, altered the Chancel in such a way as to make it more convenient for the ordination of Deacons and Priests. The beautiful brass **Lectern** was also given by him.

**The Pulpit** was erected in memory of Bishop Connop Thirlwall, who lived in the Bishop's Palace, Abergwili, from 1840—1874. A remarkably gifted man, regarded as a giant in intellect and speech and renowned for his philanthropy as well as his scholarship, he is buried in Westminster Abbey.

Bishop Thirlwall gave the **Window** in the West end of the Church. This window has a Welsh scripture reading on it, as well as Hebrew characters representing the First Person in the Holy Trinity, a Lamb representing the Second Person and a Dove representing the Third Person.

**The Mural Tablet in the Sanctuary** in memory of Bishop Richard Davies who was buried in the Sanctuary in 1581 was given by Bishop Thirlwall. Richard Davies is remembered for translating portions of the Bible into Welsh and for his translation of the Prayer Book into Welsh in 1567, while he was residing at the Bishop's Palace, Abergwili.

**Old Communion Cup.** The Old Communion Cup with Paten are still in good condition and bear the inscription "Poculum ecclesiae de Abergwily, 1574".

**The Church Registers,** dating back to 1661, show that countless numbers of people have been baptised, married and buried on this same spot down the centuries.

There are many Memorials lining the walls which are of great interest, as are the Windows and other furnishings, most of which have been given in memory of faithful parishioners.

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**The Spire.** It is said that Bishop Thirlwall was responsible for placing at the top of the Church Spire the Stone which supported the Cross that once stood in Lamma Street, Carmarthen, and which, according to tradition, had previously supported the stake at which Bishop Ferrar of St. Davids was burnt as a Protestant Martyr in 1555 in Carmarthen's old Market Place (now Nott Square).

**The College of Priests.** In 1283 Bishop Beck founded a College of Priests at Abergwili, and supported it by the Tithes of twenty-three parishes for its twenty-one Prebends. The foundation of the walls of this College were discovered right in front of the Bishop's Palace, on the South-East side, in 1935 by Bishop Prosser. In 1542 the College was transferred by Henry VIII to Brecon where it was called Christ's College. The existence of the College in this beautiful spot on the river Towy probably led to the building of the Palace in 1555, and the stones of the old College were no doubt utilised in the building of the Bishop's residence.

**Bishop Beck** died in 1293 and it is thought that the broken sepulchral slab, of the period c.1300, lying near the Font at the