

**Site Name:** CHURCH OF ST DAVID.

**Site File Ref. No.:** BRID/CHUR

**Site Type:** Church

**N. G. Ref:** SN 17661 42072

**Period:** Medieval; Post-Medieval; Modern

**History:**

An early Christian inscribed stone stands in the churchyard. It is a Preseli porphyritic greenstone with a tapering shape. The incised Ogam inscription is believed to be possibly as early as the 5<sup>th</sup> Century, and suggests that a very early church enclosure was situated here. Part of the cemetery boundary has a pronounced curve that adds further weight to the theory. The fact that the equal-armed cross on the stone has been suggested as an addition of the 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> Century might equally suggest that there was long-term religious activity on the site pre-dating the Norman invasion. In 1123 approval was given to the Cult of St David by Pope Calixtus II from which time two pilgrimages to St David's in Pembrokeshire equalled one to Rome. It seems likely that St David received his religious education from St. Meugan, who may have kept a monastic house in the parish. The font in the church is probably of 12<sup>th</sup> Century date, which further strengthens the suggestion of a long-term and probably continual use of the site for Christian worship before the earliest documentary references to the building. On May 23<sup>rd</sup> 1208 the Pope banned church services, including marriages and consecrated burials, in England's territories in retaliation for King John's seizing of church revenue. John then confiscated all church property in retaliation. Discontent was surprisingly limited, and the situation was later resolved.

Between 1357 and 1370 Philip Seys was the Rector of Bridell – the earliest incumbent to be named in the surviving references. In 1398 a petition was sent to the Chancellor by the Rector of Bridell, Richard ap Gwilym, requesting confirmation of his position at Bridell. On May 24<sup>th</sup> 1399 the same Richard, who was also known as Rhys ap Gwilym, was ordained as a deacon. He was also granted a dispensation and letters dismissary by the Bishop on June 1<sup>st</sup> 1399 in order to study letters. On June 3<sup>rd</sup> 1400 he was granted a further dispensation from the Bishop which allowed him to study at Oxford, and received the same dispensation again in March 1404. He may have been the same Rice ap Gwilym who became the Proctor of St. Dogmaels on December 11<sup>th</sup> 1404. In February 1413 Richard ap Gwilym (or "Cauntton"), the Rector, received a dispensation from Pope John himself to hold other benefices in addition to Bridell, as the Church here was impoverished by the effects of the Glyndwr war. In the course of a year the Rector had received no more than 5 marks, (£3. 6 s. 8d) whereas before the war the value of Bridell Church had not exceeded £12.

In December 1429 John ap Rys, B. C. L., was the Rector of Bridell. The value of the Church that year did not exceed 10 marks (£6. 13s. 4d.). In 1513 the Church was exempted from payment of the King's Tithes, probably due to its impoverished condition. In 1534 Griffin William was the Rector of Bridell. On November 17<sup>th</sup> that year the Act of Supremacy was passed and King Henry VIII became the Head of the Anglican Church. In 1535 the Church was valued together with that of Cilgerran at £9 per annum. In 1539 the Six Articles affirmed surviving Catholic dogma in English and Welsh churches. The Great Bible was distributed to English and Welsh churches that year. In 1540 the church services at Bridell were altered to reflect the practices of the new Church of England. In 1546 the same Griffin Williams was granted a license permitting pluralism. In 1547 when Edward VI became the King, the Six Articles were repealed and English replaced Latin in English church services. On January 15<sup>th</sup> 1549 the First Act of Uniformity made the Catholic Mass illegal. The first Book of Common Prayer was published in June that year. In January 1550 Parliament encouraged iconoclasm – the destruction of Catholic icons, and the persecution of Catholics and heretics. In January 1552 the Second Act of Uniformity and Second Book of Common Prayer were introduced. In 1553 Mary became Queen and in September of that year Protestant Bishops were arrested and Catholic replacements appointed. On November 30<sup>th</sup> 1554 Parliament supported a return to Roman Catholicism and the Heresy Acts were revived. Many Anglicans and Protestants were burned for

heresy the following year. On January 23<sup>rd</sup> 1559, after Elizabeth had become the Queen, the Third Act of Uniformity and the Act of Supremacy settled the religious question. In 1563 the Anglican Church was officially founded. An Act of Parliament that year sought that all Welsh churches should be provided with a Welsh Bible and a Book of Common Prayer by March 1<sup>st</sup> 1567.

On December 23<sup>rd</sup> 1565, following the death of rector Roger Owens, William Revell was presented with the incumbency of Bridell Church by his mother, Anne Jenkins, who was the widow of both John Revell and Dr. Thomas Phaer of Forest in the parish of Cilgerran. On October 2<sup>nd</sup> 1595 Jevan David, the “...*clerk, parson of Bridell*...”, was bequeathed a wether by the will of William David ap John of Bridell. On January 15<sup>th</sup> 1603, in another will, Philip Symmons was described as being the “...*parson of Bridell*...” From at least October 15<sup>th</sup> 1608 until at least September 30<sup>th</sup> 1628 William Myles was the Rector of the parish.

In a will, dated June 1<sup>st</sup> 1631, John Vaughan, the son of John Vaughan, was the Rector of Bridell. In February 1632 Lewis Gwyn was named as the Rector of Bridell. In 1644 Christmas Day was a fast day enforced by Parliament. On January 3<sup>rd</sup> 1645 the Directory for Public Worship replaced the Book of Common Prayer. It omitted Christmas and on December 25<sup>th</sup> that year Christmas was not observed. In October 1646 the Anglican episcopacy was abolished. In June 1647 the celebration of Easter, Whitsun and Christmas was banned. In 1650 the church was stripped of its decorations following an Act of Parliament favouring Puritanism. On October 13<sup>th</sup> 1654 Lewis Gwyn executed his will, which describing him as “...*parish of Bridell, clerk*...” In 1662 he was ejected from his post after at least 30 years loyal service, for being a Nonconformist, and he had died by November 15<sup>th</sup> 1664. His removal was due to the rejection of Puritanism by the restored monarchy. The new Book of Common Prayer appeared that year, and Easter, Whitsun and Christmas were restored as holidays.

On May 17<sup>th</sup> 1662 Edward Provand was presented with the incumbency of the Church by the King. On October 5<sup>th</sup> 1669, following the death of Edward Provand, Thomas Lloyd was presented with the rectorship of the parish by the freeholders. In 1671 David Davies became the Curate of Bridell. On May 28<sup>th</sup> 1672 David Davies was presented with the Church by the freeholders of the parish and became the new Rector. From 1672 until 1686 David Davies was the Rector of Bridell. On April 19<sup>th</sup> 1673 David Davies was granted a license for non-residence for four months in order to study at Oxford University. On September 1<sup>st</sup> 1674 David Davies was licensed to read services at Bridell as the curate. On December 31<sup>st</sup> 1674 David Davies, the curate of Bridell, also became the curate of Cilgerran. On July 31<sup>st</sup> 1684 it was noted that there was no chalice at the Church, and that one William James had been excommunicated at that time for being schismatic. David Davies was then the Rector and William Howell and John Alban Thomas were the Church wardens. On August 6<sup>th</sup> 1686 Rev. David Davies of Bridell wrote his will, probate of which was made on July 24<sup>th</sup> 1687.

On August 6<sup>th</sup> 1687 John Evans was the new Rector of Bridell, and still lived at Rhyd Morgie in the parish in 1703. A new silver chalice was acquired for the church in 1687 (though it is hallmarked 1655, so was “second-hand”). In May 1688 the Declaration of Indulgence was read out in the church, permitting Nonconformity. On August 6<sup>th</sup> 1688 David Jenkins, clerk, the Curate of Bridell, was granted permission by the Bishop, to act as the master of the Cardigan Free Grammar School. In 1692 John Evans was the Rector and David Jenkins was the Curate. In 1714 John Evans was still the Rector and remained so until his death in 1719. On May 21<sup>st</sup> 1719 the freeholders of the parish granted the position of Rector to David Parry B A, a former keeper of the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford. On August 13<sup>th</sup> 1720, following the death of David Parry at the age of about 30 years, George Phillips, B A, received the position of Rector from the freeholders of the parish. In 1722 Richard Morris was the Curate here. After George Phillips’ resignation, William Probert became the Rector on September 1<sup>st</sup> 1735, and remained so for the next 45 years.

On October 23<sup>rd</sup> 1780 James Lloyd Harries became the Rector of Bridell, following the death of William Probert. In 1784 Joseph Evans may have been succeeded as the Curate here by John Evans, who was still the Curate here in 1795. On April 23<sup>rd</sup> 1812 Thomas Morgan became the Rector, following the death of James Lloyd Harries. The Church was largely rebuilt that year. On July 2<sup>nd</sup> 1813 Rev. Thomas Morgan, the Rector of Bridell, the curate of St. Mary’s Church at Cardigan and also the Master of the Cardigan Free Grammar School, died aged 34 years. On October 4<sup>th</sup> 1813 Rev. Thomas Morgan’s

successor, Rev. Sampson Owen, who was formerly the Vicar of Tremain and Llechryd, took the post here. In 1829-30 Rev. James Owen was the Curate. Rev. Sampson Owen's wife, Sarah Owen, died on February 15<sup>th</sup> 1833 aged 57 years. Rev. Sampson Owen died on March 24<sup>th</sup> 1833 aged 62 years and was buried at Capel Colman Church. On July 15<sup>th</sup> 1833 the freeholders of the parish presented John Picton George, the Curate of Lanbister in Radnorshire, with the position here and he was the vicar until 1879. He may have been a distant relative of the George family who resided for many years at Ffynnoncoronau in the same parish. The Bridell Tithe Map of 1838 appears to show an oval churchyard suggestive of an early Celtic Church site. It has since been extended. In 1844 Samuel Lewis said of the site:

*"...The church, dedicated to St. David, is a small ancient structure, beautifully situated, and embosomed among trees, whose luxuriant foliage almost conceals it from the view; it contains twelve or thirteen pews, with several benches for the poor. In the churchyard stands an ancient cross, of the kind called St. Catherine's, supported on a plain shaft about nine feet high, but the inscription has been obliterated by time..."*

Rev. John Picton George had nearby Maesyfelin built in 1850 as his new home. There were 30 regular attendees at Bridell Church in 1851. On August 18<sup>th</sup> 1859 the Cambrian Archaeological Association visited the site in order to inspect the Ogham stone. It was noted that the stone bears the longest Ogam inscription in Wales. An illustration of the stone appeared in "*Archaeologia Cambrensis*" in 1860. The same year it was stated in that publication that:

*"...In a field adjoining the churchyard to the west, there were uncovered some years ago a considerable number of internments, each in a kind of cistfaen; and this would indicate that the precincts of the yard extended much further than is now the case..."*

The Church had a 13<sup>th</sup> Century font, and the building at that time was said to be "...not older than the fifteenth century, when it probably replaced an older building..." The Church was restored in 1866. In 1872 the following was written:

*"...The church is ancient, in tolerable condition; and a St. Catherine's cross is in the churchyard..."*

In 1877 Rev. William Lewis became the Curate of the parish. The Church was refurbished again in 1878 at a cost of £717, affording 77 sittings. In September 1879 Rev. Alban Alban became the curate of Bridell. Rev. John Picton George died on December 17<sup>th</sup> 1879. On 10<sup>th</sup> January 1880 the following notice appeared in the '*Cardigan Observer*':

**"...PARISH OF BRIDELL IN THE COUNTY OF PEMBROKE.**

*NOTICE is hereby given that a MEETING of the freeholders of the Parish of Bridell in the County of Pembroke, will be held in the Parish Church if Bridell aforesaid, on THURSDAY, the 22<sup>nd</sup> day of JANUARY instant, at the hour of 12 o'clock at noon, for the purpose of nominating, electing and presenting a fit and proper person to be Rector of the said Parish of Bridell in the room of the Rev. JOHN PICTON GEORGE, Clerk, deceased. Dated the 8<sup>th</sup> day of January 1880. DAVID DAVIES, Churchwarden..."*

On February 16<sup>th</sup> 1880 Rev. Alban Alban, the Curate, became the new Rector – a position he held until 1909. On June 8<sup>th</sup> 1884 he retired from his other position as the curate of Llangoedmor. On September 1<sup>st</sup> 1885 Rev. Alban Alban, the Rector, married Alice Bowen, a daughter of the late Captain George Bowen of Plas Newydd, St. Dogmaels, where he took up residence. He donated £1 towards the rebuilding of Blaenwaun Baptist Chapel, St. Dogmaels. Many Anglican Rectors would not have been quite so charitable towards other denominations. On June 4<sup>th</sup> 1886 the following item appeared in the '*Cambrian News*':

**"...THE RESTORATION OF BRIDELL CHURCH.**

*The dilapidated little parish church of Bridell, near Cardigan, is about being completely restored. Through exertions of the rector (Rev A. Alban, B.A.), and family of Mr J. W. Bowen, Q.C., of Plasbridell, a*

*considerable sum of money has been realised towards that object, and the work will be commenced forthwith. Tenders were recently invited, and the contract has just been given to the firm of Messrs Griffiths and Thomas, builders, Cilgerran. Bridell Church is the last remaining of the ancient sacred fabrics in Pembrokeshire..."*

In 1886 Messrs. Griffiths & Thomas of Cilgerran rebuilt the Church, to plans by Mr. Henry Prothero, the architect. The building of the north porch in 1887 completed the new church building. On August 18<sup>th</sup> 1887 a piece of ground added to the cemetery was consecrated, together with the new church building, by the Bishop of St David's. In 1899 the inscription on the Ogam stone was read as "NETTASAGRU MAQUI MUCOI TRECF". In August 1904 the Cambrian Archaeological Association visited the church in order to inspect the Ogam Stone. On January 29<sup>th</sup> 1909 Rev. Alban Alban died aged 63 years.

Rev. Daniel Williams, the curate of St. Dogmaels, became the new Rector of Bridell on May 15<sup>th</sup> 1909. On 24<sup>th</sup> June 1909 the following item appeared in the 'West Wales Gazette':

*"...Induction Service. The little church at Bridell was attended by large congregations on Thursday, when the Rev. Daniel Williams was inducted vicar of the parish. The ceremony was performed by the rural dean of Kemaes. In the evening the Rev. Myfenydd Morgan delivered a sermon..."*

On May 28<sup>th</sup> 1915 Rev. Daniel Williams' only son, Nicholas William Bray Williams, died aged 17 years. On May 25<sup>th</sup> 1923 tenders were sought for building a Rectory in the parish. Rev. Daniel Williams died on November 12<sup>th</sup> 1926 aged 69 years. On April 26<sup>th</sup> 1927 Rev. Thomas Twynog Davies became the new Rector of Bridell. At Christmas 1927 Mr & Mrs W J Griffiths of Treleddyn Isaf in the parish donated a brass altar cross to the church and Mr & Mrs W George of Penralltddu in the parish of Llantood donated two brass candlesticks and Mr D L Griffiths of Cnwcsiencyn, donated a brass missal stand. On August 3<sup>rd</sup> 1928 tenders were requested for building a Church Hall at Bridell. The new Church Hall opened on October 23<sup>rd</sup> 1929. On January 24<sup>th</sup> 1933 Rev. T Twynog Davies married Miss A. J. Evans of Derry Ormond, who was the Matron of Cardigan Hospital. On October 19<sup>th</sup> 1934 Rev. T. Twynog Davies announced his intention to leave Bridell, and departed for Mathry in November of that year.

In 1935 Rev. Jenkin Richards became the Rector of Bridell and Llantood until 1951. On May 12<sup>th</sup> 1936 a memorial to the late Father Joseph Higgins, the Chaplain of the Bridell Carmelite Monastery, was unveiled here. At Easter 1939 there were 27 communicants at the church. The Church is marked on the 1951 O. S. map and others. In March 1951 Rev. Jenkin Richards announced his retirement from the position of Rector. He died on January 14<sup>th</sup> 1970.

In 1951 Rev. William Thomas Gravell became the Rector of Bridell and Llantood. Lyn Davies became the church treasurer that year. In 1952 the Church became a Grade II listed building. On October 31<sup>st</sup> 1960 Rev. William Thomas Gravell, the priest-in-charge, died aged 49 years. It is likely that Rev. Jenkin Richards then became the Rector of Bridell with Llantood. Rev. D. J. Lloyd may have become the Rector of Bridell in 1961. Between 1972 and 1980 Rev. D. J. Lloyd was the Rector. The position of Rector is now shared with Cilgerran, Manordeifi and Llantood parishes. From 1984 until 2012 Rev. Canon Euros L. Thomas was the Rector of Bridell. In 2005 Lyn Davies was presented with a cut glass vase in recognition of his 54 years service as the church treasurer. In late 2012 Rev. Euros Thomas retired due to ill-health and died soon afterwards. On April 26<sup>th</sup> 2015 Rev. Peter Radcliffe became the new Rector of Bridell and was the Rector of Bridell from 2015 until 2021. The church was closed temporarily in March 2020 owing to the COVID-19 outbreak

### **Description:**

In 1994 the Church was described by CADW as follows: -

*“...EXTERIOR – Mediaeval origins, rebuilt 1812 and again 1886-7 by H. Prothero of Middleton, Prothero and Philott, of Cheltenham. Small and low, in rubble stone with Doultong stone dressings and slate roofs. Nave and chancel with bellcote and 1887 N porch and N vestry. Coped shouldered gables. W end big centre buttress with 1887 moulded plinth and coping, and gabled bellcote with two arched openings. N porch with copied gable, Tudor arched entry and 1887 plaque. One nave 3-light flat-headed Perpendicular style window. Nave S has two similar 4-light windows, and chancel S one similar 3-light. Chancel has 2-light E window, flat-headed with ornate reticulated tracery, and N vestry. Two slate plaques inset into the S walls, one of 1815, the other of 1808.*

*INTERIOR – C20 roughcast cladding, plain chancel arch. Plain wishbone-truss roofs, reused from previous church. Fittings all of 1887 including pews, panelled oak pulpit, tiled floors with encaustic tiles in chancel, two high-backed chancel stalls given by the architect, H. Prothero, and lectern. Medieval square font with bead moulding to angles, the lower corners slightly rounded. Circular short shaft. No stained glass.*

*The church before restoration had 2 pointed Georgian sashes on S side, the big W buttress and the bellcote, and was said to have been rebuilt only 80 years before. The restoration plan proposed retaining the walls, W front, base of the buttress externally, the base of the chancel arch, and the font, and re-using the roof trusses. The contractors were Griffiths and Thomas of Cilgerran. [The 1886 plans are held at the National Library of Wales.]*

*In the churchyard, standing stone (Scheduled Ancient Monument) with small incised quatrefoil or round-armed cross set in a circle, and Ogham inscription interpreted as ‘NEQA SAGROM MAQI MUCOI NECI’ ...”*

Additional – There were said to be two bells here in 1926 and the church contained 77 sittings.

#### **Sources:**

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