

# Llanddwyn Church Newborough, Anglesey

Archaeological report to aid  
digital reconstruction and interpretation





## St Dwywnwen's church, Llanddwyn

### Location

The church is located on Ynys Llanddwyn, a small rocky peninsula off the west coast of Anglesey, lying between the western approaches of Menai Strait and the estuary of the Afon Cefni. Antiquarian sources suggest the peninsula was once an island, and that a sand ridge established a link with the mainland. Access was improved in the 19th century by the construction of a stone causeway – this is now largely demolished, but scattered stone records its alignment. The site lies at NGR SH386627 within the parish of Newborough.

### History

The township of Llanddwyn is listed in the Extent of the Bishop of Bangor taken in 1306. Seven individuals (including two pairs of brothers) owned eight messuages sine terra (without land). Perhaps a reference to the encroachment of sand. The township boundary was probably co-terminous with the parish boundary.

The early history of the church is obscure. It is not mentioned in either the Norwich taxation of 1284 or in the taxation of 1291 (*Taxatio Ecclesiastica Angliae et Walliae Auctoritate Papae Nicholai IV*), though the use of the name 'Llanddwyn' in 1306 implies its presence.

Though the church was held by the Bishop of Bangor in 1348 the prince appointed the Rector to the church, arguing in 1370 that as the See was at that time vacant he was correct in doing so (Carr 2011).

It was a wealthy church by the 14th century – in 1379 the rector contributed ten shillings to the clerical poll-tax, the same sum as the archdeacon, the provost of Caergybi and the prior of Penmon. The wealth came almost entirely from contributions from pilgrims and visitors.

In 1385 Howel ap Ath' Grwn, parson of Llanelugrad and the chapel of Llanallgo, was presented to the church of 'St Dwywnwen', on an exchange with the King's clerk, Nicholas Slake (this must be to replace the prince's appointment of 1348).

Dafydd ap Gwilym, writing in the mid-14th century, in a Prayer to St Dwywnwen (*Galw ar Ddwywnwen*) refers to the church choir filled with candles, and the church as a place of pilgrimage. Some 150 years later a cywydd to Dwywnwen was written by Sir Dafydd Trefor c. 1500 *Cywydd moliant I Ddwywnwen ferch Brychan Brycheiniawg santes yn Llanddwyn yn Sir Fon*, in which he mentions her church, her statue and the holy well which lay close-by. He emphasises the importance of the site as a place of pilgrimage.

The site was sufficiently important for William Worcester, writing in 1478, to say of Llanddwyn that Dwywnwen was buried in her chapel two miles from Newborough, and that there were only two cottages in the township (quoted in Carr, 1982, 19). The term 'cottages' may refer to the remains of the messuages listed in 1306.

Richard Kyffin, dean of Bangor (c. 1480-1502) held the Rectory of Llanddwynwen. He is reputed to have supported Henry VII in his bid for the throne, and to have been rewarded for his help. It is said he used fishing boats to carry messages to South Wales and France prior to the invasion by Henry. Dean Kyffin donated two stained glass windows to Bangor Cathedral, one to St Catherine and one to St Dwywnwen (both now gone). He also founded a chantry to St Catherine in the south transept of the Cathedral, and contributed towards the rebuilding of the cathedral at this time. According to Browne-Willis, who wrote a history of the cathedral in 1721, it was possible to see the ruins of Dean Kyffin's house at Llanddwyn: 'He was also Rector of Llanddwyn Co. Anglesey where are still to be seen the ruins of his house, known to this day by the name of Dean Kyffin's House; all the rest of the parish except that, and some part of the walls of the church, and a warren house, being swallow'd up by the sea'. Several poems to Kyffin survive, including examples by Guto'r Glyn and Tudur Aled, which provide rich details of his life (Williams 1976, 321-2).

In 1535 the church of Llanddwyn is recorded in the Valor Ecclesiasticus of Henry VIII as being worth 20 marks (£13 6sh 8d). Dr Hugh Rolant was the Rector. A breakdown of the tithes shows how financially significant the pilgrimages were to the church. Corn, milk and lambs contributed a total of 13sh 7d whereas the 'offerings of charitable people to the Saynt in tymes past' amounted to £12 6sh 8d.

Leland, writing in 1536-9 refers to the 'church of St Dunwen. He says the 'isle is very fertile of cunnies' (i.e. rabbits) though does not comment on the state of the church.

Angharad Llwyd states, without giving her source, that 'soon after the Reformation (i.e. mid-16th century) it was

despoiled of all the timber and lead, which the neighbouring families converted to domestic uses'. Bingley says that an accident to the Abermenai ferry in 1664, when seventy-eight people were drowned, was attributed by local people to a visitation of heaven, because the boat was built of timber taken from Llanddwyn. William Williams tells a story in which ploughing oxen took fright and ran over the cliff during ploughing at Bodeon on April 25. This occurred 'about 150 years ago' from when Williams was writing, which puts the event around 1650. April 25 was St Mark's day, which should have been a holy day and so 'to prevent such accidents for the future, the proprietor of the farm ordered that the festival of St Mark should be for the future invariably kept a holy day; and that two wax candles should be annually on that day burned in the church porch of Llanddwyn, which was the only part of the building that was covered in'. The practice was discontinued about 80 years ago (about 1720). Williams goes on to say that the south porch 'was kept in repair by the proprietor of Bodeon, and of almost all this parish, for the purpose of placing the candles therein'. The earliest illustration of the church (Buck's print of 1742) appears to show the south porch roofed, though the remainder of the church is unroofed.

A series of illustrations and photographs show a slow decline in the condition of the remaining masonry, in particular the collapse (and removal?) of the nave walls and the collapse of the north chancel window arch followed by the east window arch, leaving the church in the condition it is today. Stabilisation works to the remaining masonry were undertaken in the 1990's, including the rebuilding of the south jamb of the east chancel window.

### **Description of present remains**

The church lies on flat ground to the south-east of a rocky ridge which rises above the church, and separates it from the coast edge to the north. A low bank encircles the church, enclosing an area some 36m across. The enclosure has been partly removed and overlain by a later (19th century) field bank on the north side.

The present church is ruinous. Part of the chancel walls remain to eaves height, and small lengths of the remainder, particularly the south transept and part of the south wall of the nave stand over a metre high. The remaining walls survive as low banks only, but the remains allow the plan of the church to be clearly identified as a cruciform church with large chancel, north and south transepts and nave of comparable size to the chancel. Three large window openings pierce the east, north and south walls of the chancel. All the dressings from the north window have been removed. The casement-moulded jambs remain in the east opening, but the arch has fallen, apart from the lowest course on each side. The south window is smaller than the east, but has similar jambs and the arch remains intact. Two worn projections from the arch indicate the former presence of window tracery. A circular structure in the angle between the chancel and north transept is the remains of a stair tower to reach the rood loft.

### **Antiquarian views**

Two 18th century views, one by Samuel and Nathaniel Buck (1742), and one by Moses Griffith (c. 1780) show the church in relatively early stages of collapse. The Buck view is from the south-east. All walls survive to eaves height (the north nave wall is not visible, but this wall may have fallen), but the roofs, with the exception of the south porch, are missing. Clearly visible, in addition to the south transept, is the south porch, a bell-cote on the west wall, and the north circular stair which projects above the level of the roof of the chancel. The chancel roof had a very shallow pitch, whereas the south transept and nave rooflines are shown with a much steeper pitch. A line of pronounced quoins on the south-west corner, where the chancel joins the south transept, suggests the chancel was built separately to the transept. A round-headed doorway is shown through the south wall of the chancel alongside the transept. The large east window of the transept, possibly four-centred, has lost all its tracery, though a hood-moulding remains. The smaller north and south windows of the chancel, with two-centred arches, are shown with some tracery remaining in the head of the window. The drawn remains suggest windows of three-lights with cusped tracery. The east window of the south transept is shown in a square frame, with bits of tracery to suggest three lights, as also is the south window of the transept, though here the top of the window is shown with a slight segmental arch. The west side of the porch is shown with an open window with slight remains of tracery. A broken cross lies in the churchyard outside the south chancel door. A stone structure lies immediately adjacent to the churchyard wall on the south-east side. It looks too close and too small to be the remains of Richard Kyffyn's house, though it may be representative of that building.

The view by Moses Griffith is from the north-east. It shows a similar building to that drawn by the Buck Brothers, though the north transept and north wall of the nave have collapsed. The circular stair is shown standing to full height. The bell cote on the west gable has collapsed. The three chancel windows are shown, though with less detail regarding the tracery.

A view of the church drawn in 1844, and reproduced in *Archaeologia Cambrensis* 1846, is from the north-east. The north window of the chancel has fallen, and the top of the chancel wall has partly fallen. The west end and the transepts

appear to be ruinous. The east window of the chancel is drawn with a hood mould with upturned ends.

### **Suggested reconstruction**

The church in its final phase of use was of cruciform plan, with a nave and south porch, north and south transepts and large chancel, with a stair tower in the angle between the north transept and chancel. A single bell-cote surmounted the west gable. The hollow casement mouldings of the east and south windows of the chancel suggest the chancel was built c. 1500. This would complement a wide programme of rebuilding of churches at this time, much of it influenced by the rebuilding work at Bangor Cathedral and at Clynnog church. Both these churches record similar mason's marks, suggesting the work was undertaken by the same craftsmen. Dean Kyffin was heavily involved with the Bangor rebuilding, and it is likely that the same craftsmen worked at Llanddwyn also. Very similar work was being undertaken at Holyhead, Llaneilian and Beaumaris at this time. The flattened roof of the chancel suggests the covering was lead, and it is likely that the wall was surmounted by a crenelated parapet, as seen at comparable churches (see especially Bangor Cathedral and Clynnog). The steeper roofs of the nave and transepts (as shown on the Buck drawing) indicate slate roofs, though the Griffith sketch shows a shallower nave roof, so this could have been lead also, though I would suggest slate roofs for the nave and transepts are the more likely. This leaves a slight problem for the junction between the nave, crossing and chancel roofs. There is a north-west Wales tradition for the crossing roof to run right through from north to south, whereas elsewhere it would be more usual for the transept roofs to butt up to the east-west roof. As the nave roof seems to be of a different pitch to that of the chancel, I suggest this should stop at the crossing, and that the crossing roof runs right through. This means the chancel west wall will rise above the eaves of the crossing roof, which would look a little strange, but possible.

The window tracery is problematic. The Buck drawing suggests trefoil headed cusped tracery to three-light windows, but this would be unusual - cusped trefoil heads are associated with an earlier style of window, such as the 14th century nave windows at Bangor. The casement mouldings would be typical of c. 1500, and this would fit in with a rebuilding at the time of Dean Kyffin. There are possible comparative examples of trefoil tracery at Holyhead, but Buck's view of Holyhead drawn prior to the 19th century restoration works suggests these are either of 19th century date, or at least rebuilt in the 19th century. If at Llanddwyn the Buck Brothers drawing employs an element of artistic license, and the trefoil headed tracery is not accurately depicted, or at least is difficult to interpret, then one would expect tracery similar to that found at Clynnog or Bangor. Both contain examples of cusped and un-cusped tracery, however given the evidence from the Buck brothers drawing, cusped tracery is the more likely. The arch of the east window was four-centred, and from its width was of five lights. The north and south chancel windows had two centred arches, with three lights each. Initially I would recommend window tracery similar to that at Bangor Cathedral east window for the reconstruction.

Square headed windows appear to have lit the south transept, and the north transept is likely to have been similar. Each of the lights appear to have had simple chamfered round heads. The north nave wall is not depicted anywhere. A north door into the nave is possible but unlikely. A late medieval square-headed window in the north nave wall would not be out of place. There is no evidence for a window in the west wall – the Moses Griffith painting would suggest there was no opening in this wall.

The walls of the church are of local pre-cambrian schist, and the dressings of sandstone. There is evidence that medieval churches were painted white, particularly if used as sea marks. There is no evidence of this for Llanddwyn, and in preference the walls should be depicted as stone.

### **Principal references**

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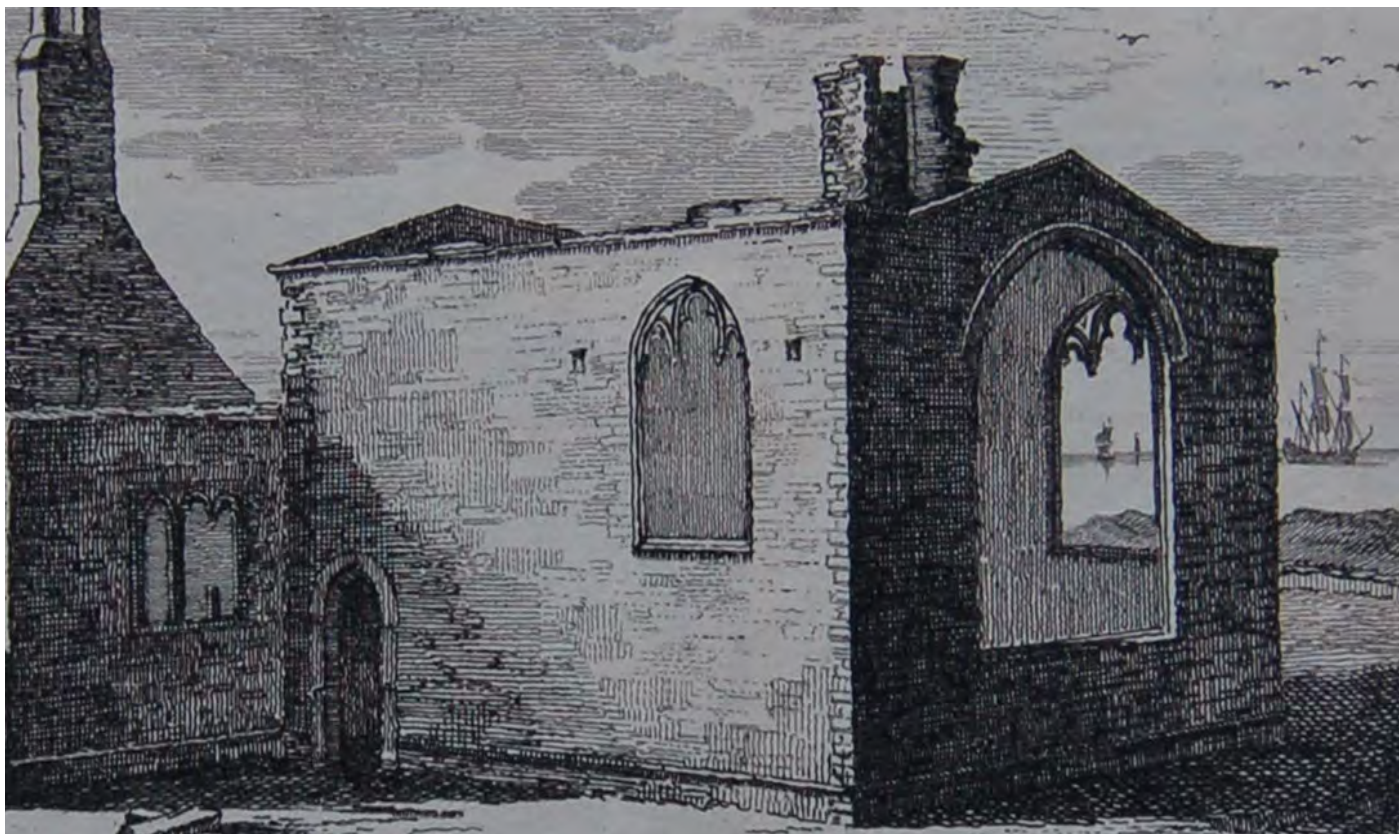


Fig 2. Buck Brothers view of Llanddwyn - close up view of chancel. Compare the roofline of the chancel with that of Clynnog. Window tracery appears to be of three trefoil headed lights, but this would be unusual for the period

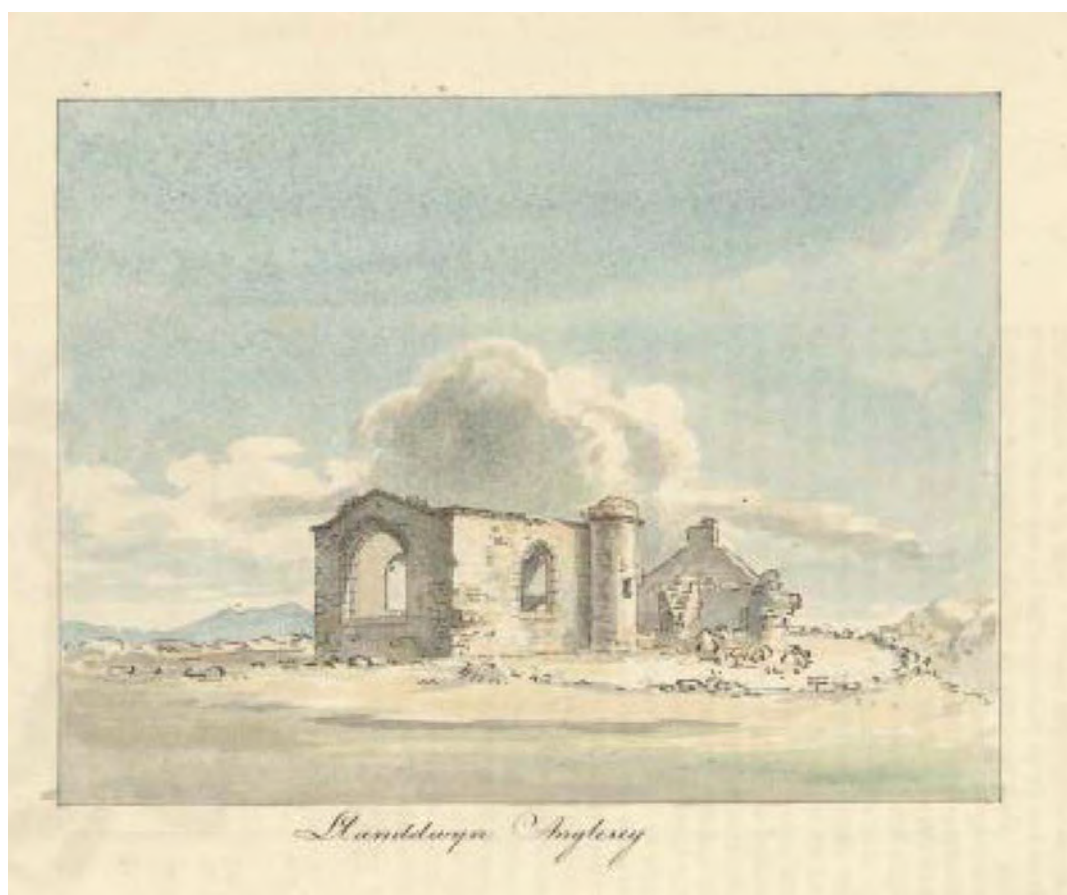


Fig 3. Llanddwyn church from north-east by Moses Griffith (NLW Pennant 'Tours in Wales' extra-illustrated edition v. 4 p. 225). Note shallower roof line of nave compared to the Buck Brothers illustration,



Fig 4. View of church in 1844 from north-east (*Archaeologia Cambrensis* 1846, 126). The north chancel window dressings have been removed. The four-centred hood mould is clearly represented over the east window.

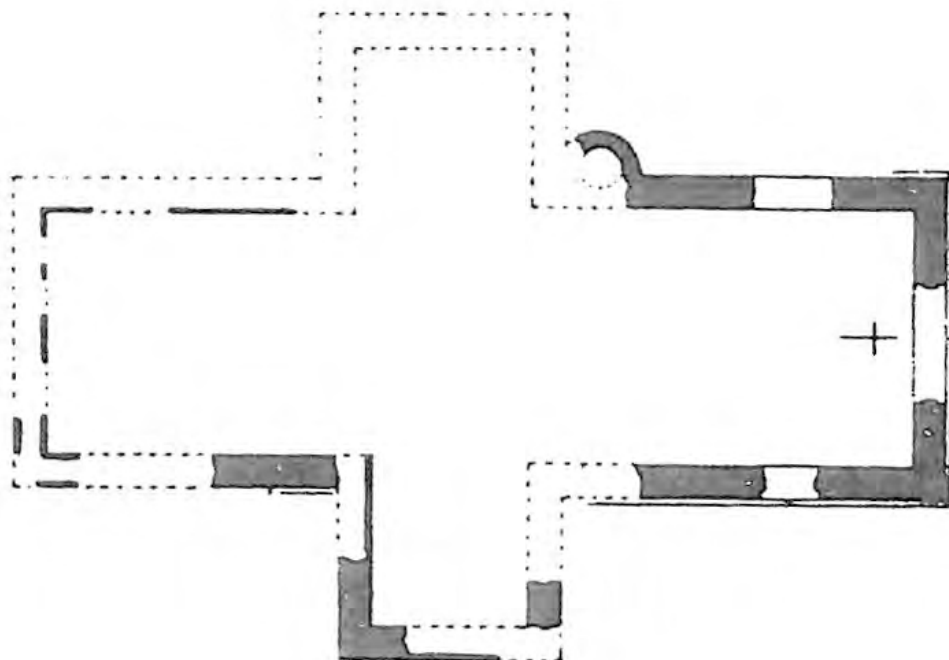


Fig 5. Plan of church (*RCAHMW* 1937, *An Inventory of the Ancient Monuments in Anglesey*, 119)











Fig 8. Bangor Cathedral east window with cusped tracery under two-centred arch with hood-mould



Fig 9. Bangor Cathedral south chancel window with uncusped tracery under two-centred arch with hood-mould





Fig 10. Clynnog church showing chancel from north. Cusped tracery in four-centred arch with crenelated parapet and stair tower in angle with south transept.



Fig 11. Clynnog church from east. Large cusped east window with casement moulding and crenelated parapet above.







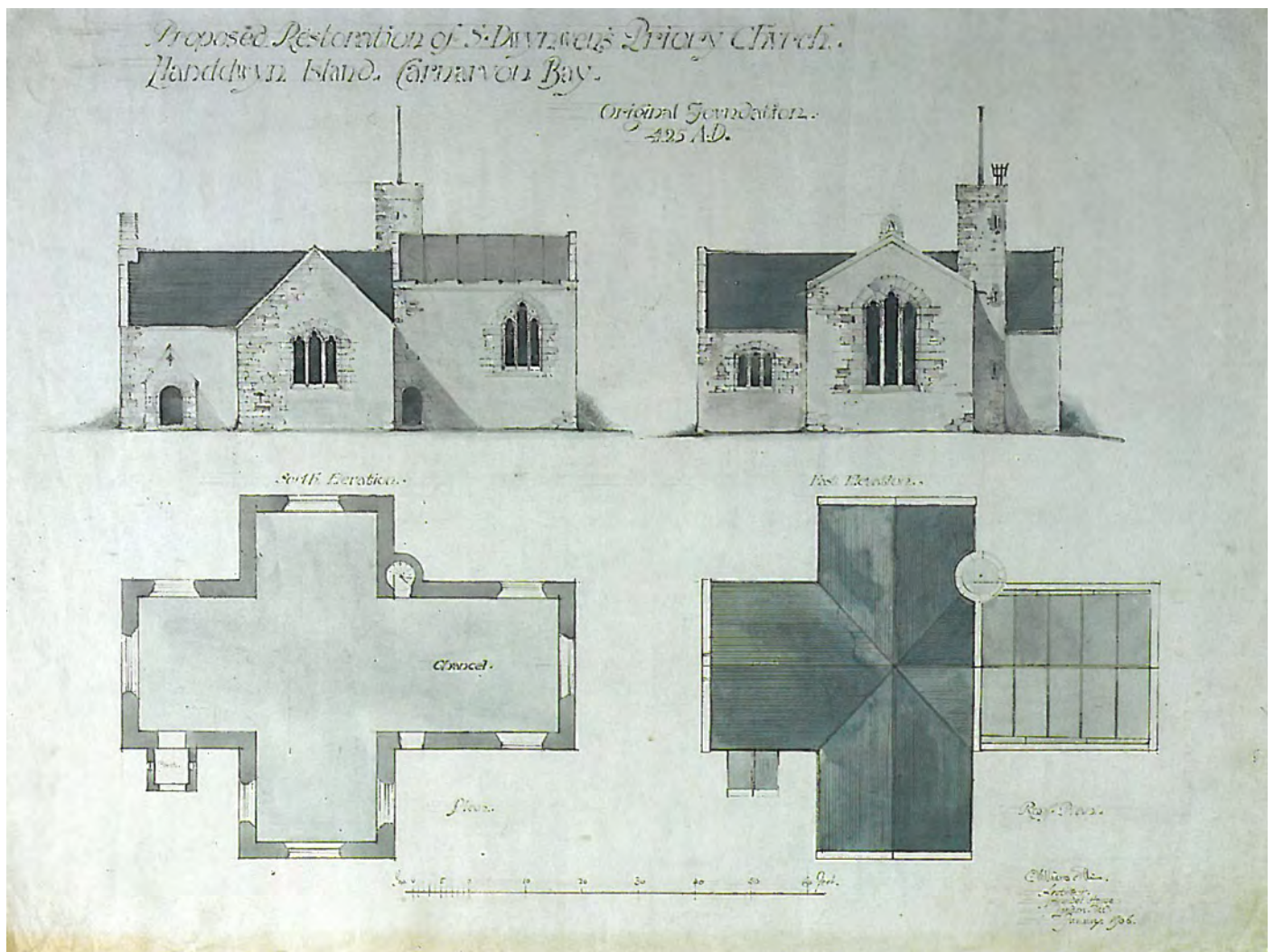


Fig 14: Reconstruction by Clough Williams Ellis in anticipation of rebuilding church for Frederick Wynne. The roofline is interesting, and fits the evidence. The porch looks too small for the Buck view, and the windows have been simplified.