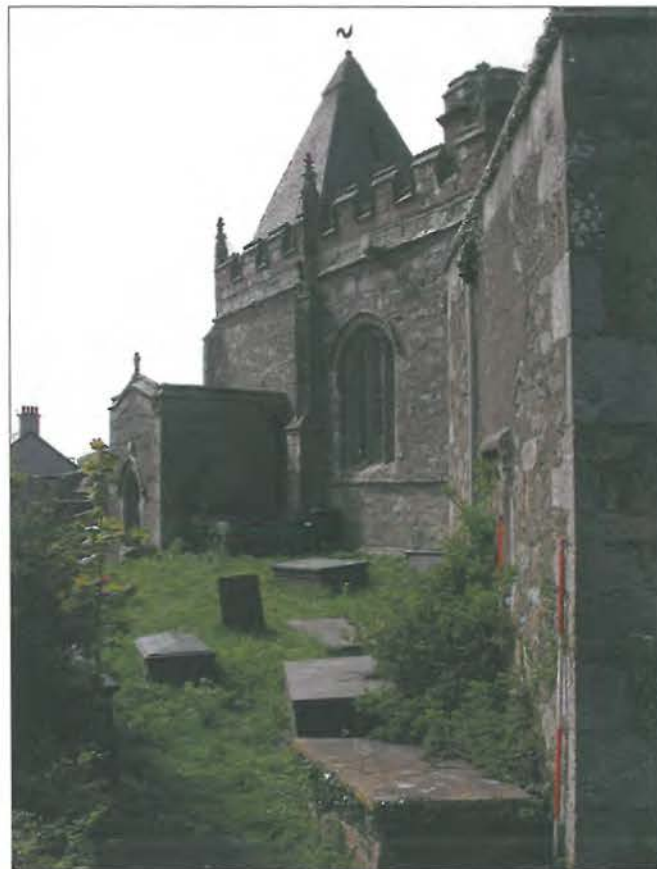


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# St Eilian's Church Llaneilian

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St Eilian's Church  
Llaneilian  
Archaeological Recording

Event PRN 54784

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(revised 2005)

Prepared for Roy Ashworth, St Eilian's Church  
and  
Adam and Frances Voelcker, Architects

by

David Longley

Conservation work supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund and Cadw was undertaken at St Eilian's Church, Llaneilian, Gwynedd, during the Summer of 2002. This report represents an account of the archaeological recording carried out during the course of that work and includes a discussion of the historical background to the foundation and subsequent development of the church.

Many thanks are due to Roy Ashworth for his enthusiastic support of Gwynedd Archaeological Trust's participation in this project and to Margaret Bradbury for discussing aspects of her own research on Llaneilian.



*Old houses and the Parsonage, Llaneilian, in the time of Elizabeth I*

Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd  
Gwynedd Archaeological Trust  
Craig Beuno, Ffordd y Garth, Bangor, Gwynedd LL57 2RT  
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## Summary and introduction

Llaneilian is a parish in the north-east corner of the island of Anglesey, extending over an area of around 2000 acres. St. Eilian's church stands in the north-eastern quarter of the parish, on rising, rough ground, between the former bog of Cors Eilian immediately to the south and the rocky, indented coastline to the north.

The boundary of the ecclesiastical parish and former Medieval township is defined to north and east by this coastline and to the south by the prominent hill of Mynydd Eilian rising to 200m at its summit, and its south eastern spur Mynydd Engan. The large parish of Amlwch lies to the west, Llanwenllwyfo (and medieval Llysduelas) to the south.

Llaneilian is an ancient church founded in the early Middle Ages. The basis of its foundation and early development is that of a clas community, best described as a quasi-monastic institution governed by an abbot, whereby clerical and lay members of the clas, linked by kinship, retained hereditary rights in the landed endowment or *abadaeth* of the church. Llaneilian was a sufficiently wealthy and prestigious institution to have, or attract, the resources to build an architecturally impressive stone church with western tower of three storeys in the twelfth century. By the thirteenth century pressure for the reform of religious institutions

was sufficiently strong for the abbot of Llaneilian to relinquish his, and his heirs, rights in the *abadaeth* in favour of the rector of the church. This action signalled the transformation of St. Eilian's church into a parish church within a diocesan structure. The former *claswyr*, however, will have retained many rights and privileges in their hereditary properties and continued to occupy their patrimonial *gwely* lands within the township of Llaneilian.

St. Eilian's church continued to prosper. It was one of the wealthiest on Anglesey, not least on account of the popularity of its patron saint. St. Eilian's church, the *myfyr* or *memoria* of Eilian and holy well attracted devotees and donations. In the 1490s, on the eve of the Reformation, Llaneilian once again embarked on a major programme of rebuilding which largely characterises the structure which stands today.

Major conservation work in 2002 allowed the opportunity to examine the original masonry of the twelfth-century tower and examine other aspects of the structure and fabric of the church in detail. This report provides a description of the historical background and development of Llaneilian and presents the results of the record made during the conservation work.



Fig. 1 The church from the west, conservation work in progress

## The administrative geography of Medieval Anglesey

The administrative geography of Anglesey acquired a tightly structured form during the twelfth century, at about the time the church of St. Eilian was rebuilt with an imposing 'Romanesque' western tower. The two events are not entirely without connection. During the first quarter of the twelfth century Gruffydd ap Cynan, now well established as king of Gwynedd began, with diplomacy, following his military success in turning back the Norman tide, to lay the foundations for administrative reform and expansion which were to characterise the reign of his son Owain.

*Every kind of good increased in Gwynedd and the people began to build churches in every part therein, sow woods and plant them, cultivate orchards and gardens and surround them with fences and ditches, construct walled buildings, and live on the fruits of the earth after the fashion of the men of Rome. Gruffydd also built large churches in his own major courts, and ... Gwynedd then glittered with lime-washed churches like the firmament with stars.'*

*'Pa beth hefyd, echtywynygu a wnei Wynedd yna o eglwysseu kalcheit, fal y ffurfalen o'r syr'*  
(trans. Of a thirteenth-century Welsh text after a Latin original composed a generation after Gruffydd's death. (D. Simon Evans 1990, 81-2;50)

The churches of Anglesey during the twelfth century, were embellished with significantly more decoration and architectural detail in the Romanesque style than any other region of the kingdom. Penmon provides the exemplar, but there are others, at Aberffraw, for example. Towers of this period were built at Penmon and Ynys Seiriol.

The self-confidence and energy of this dynasty led to reforms in the royal administration of the kingdom, creating an ordered structure for the efficient collection and management of renders, dues and services owed to the king by his tenants. The shape of this framework can best be seen in the detailed assessments or extents compiled by surveyors on behalf of the English Crown following the conquest of Gwynedd by Edward I in 1283 (Carr, 1972; Rec. Caern. for 14th century Crown surveys). The creation of the framework, however, and the fossilisation of what, to some extent had been an organically evolving pattern of settlement and relationships, would seem to have been achieved during the twelfth century. The administrative geography of Gwynedd during the Age of the Princes, and reflected in a very schematic form in the lawbooks of Welsh jurists, looked something like this:

### Regional subdivisions

The kingdom as a whole was divided and then subdivided into regions. The largest and most ancient

divisions were those of cantrefi, perhaps reflecting territorial distinctions of considerable antiquity. On Anglesey there were three cantrefi: Cemais, across the northern part of the island from the estuary of the Alaw in the west to Moelfre in the east; Aberffraw along the western coastline from the Alaw to Malltraeth Marsh; and Rhosyr in the south from Llanddwyn to Red Wharf Bay and Penmon. Each of these cantrefi were further divided into commotes, two in each commote on Anglesey, six in total across the island. The creation of commotes may have been a device of the twelfth century, establishing manageable units for royal administration and taxation during this period, leaving the cantref a redundant archaism. Cantref Cemais comprised the two commotes of Talybolion (in the north-west) and Twrcelyn (in the north-east).

### Royal administration

Each commote had an administrative focus, a royal estate centre or *llys*, run along manorial lines with a tied bond tenant population of estate workers on the demesne lands. The king and his entourage would travel through the regions of his kingdom, spending a greater or lesser amount of time at each, depending on what business needed to be done and who needed to see or be seen by the king. In the king's absence the *llys*, the royal estate and the infrastructure of the commote would be attended to and managed by stewards and agents of the king. One of these, the '*maer*', gave his name to the estate complex as a whole, the '*maerdref*', or steward's township. One of the primary functions of the *maerdref* was to provide a centre for the collection of food renders (later, money payments) and the organisation of labour services owed by freemen and hereditary tenants distributed more widely across the commote. These rents and taxes provided for the upkeep and support of the *llys* and contributed to the king's resources. The *maerdref* of Twrcelyn was at Penrhos Llugwy. Other, non-regal lords, or *uchelwyr*, might equally have their own estate centres and their own tied and hereditary tenants but the detail of their existence is more difficult to grasp because the surviving documentation, having been generated by the process of government, is almost invariably only interested in that which is owed to the king (Rec. Caern.). However, as we shall see, the tenurial pattern of two major secular estates, Bodafon and Llysduelas, is capable of a degree of reconstruction.

A particularly influential lord with far reaching interests for which documentation survives was the Bishop of Bangor. The Bishop also had tenants in Twrcelyn.

Finally, there are monastic tenancies, where land is held exempt from royal obligations. The township of Llanelilian falls within this category where the chief lord is not the king but the saint, represented by the saint's



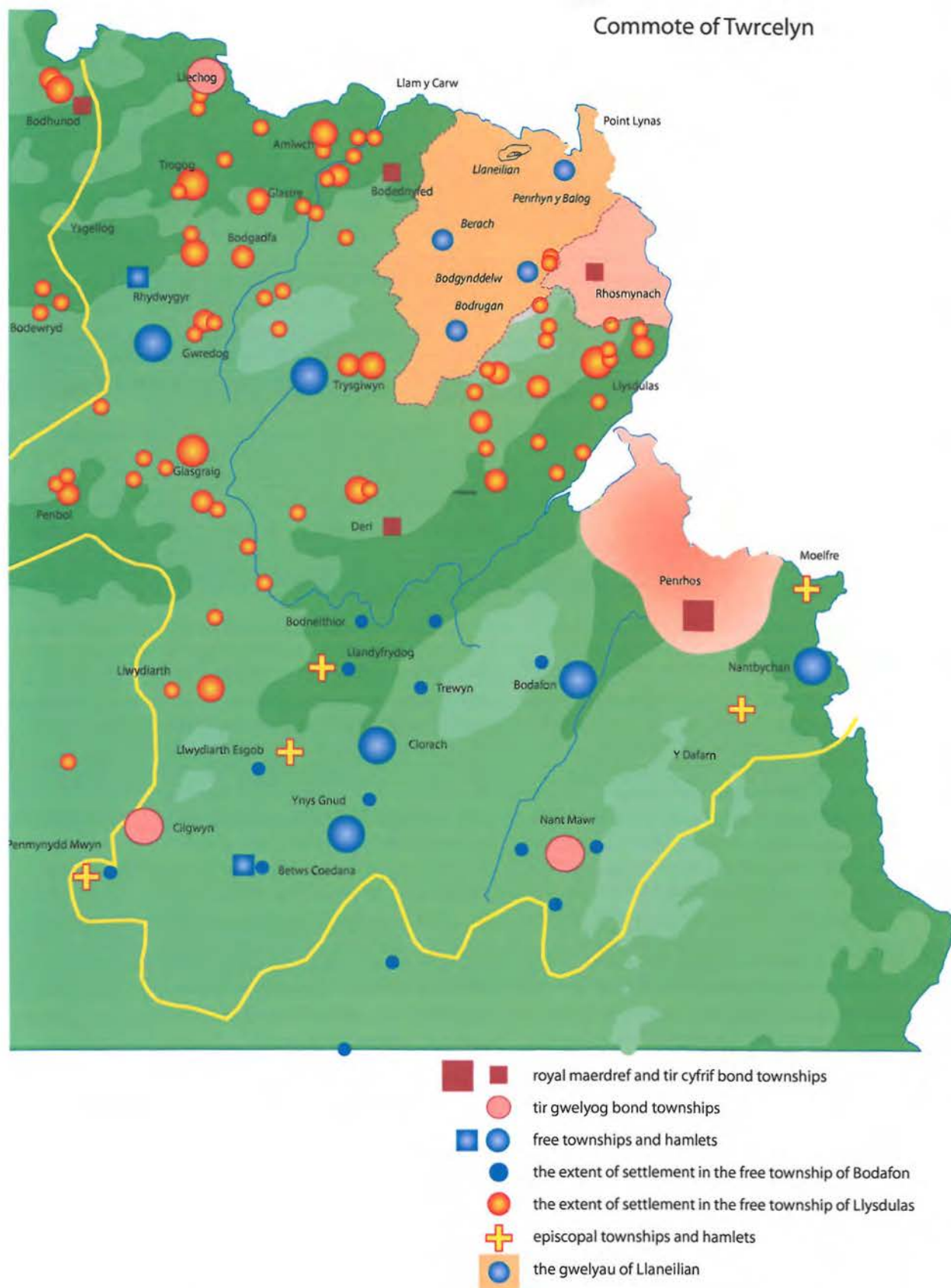


Fig.2 The commote of Twrcelyn

church. Llanelian was a clas community, distinct, for example, from the regular order of Cistercian monks at Aberconwy who held land in Penmynydd but similar to the community at Llangadwaladr in the commote of Malltraeth and similar too, perhaps, to the community at Penmon before it was regularised as a community of Augustinian canons in the thirteenth century. The origins and character of the clas community are considered in more detail in below.

### Townships and gwelyau

In each commote, communities existed within the confines of a township, a secular concept, similar in some respects to the ecclesiastical parish. The Welsh term is *tref* and is more precise. Originally a *tref* simply described a place or location where one lived as, for example, in the case of the farmstead of a freeholding farmer. Welsh customary land law, however, required that on the death of a freeholding head of a family, the patrimonial land should be divided among the male heirs. In times of population increase this inevitably produced a fragmentation of holdings and the creation of new *treffi*, with new names, as *treffi* often took the name of the head of family occupying the farm. At some point (a twelfth century reorganisation under Owain Gwynedd provides a possible context) this process was halted. Patrimonial land continued to be subdivided among heirs but the land so partitioned remained terminologically within the same township or *tref* boundary. The new settlements created by partition were identified by a name conceptually related to the *tref*. This concept was the *gwely* (or *bed* = matrimonial bed). In other words the '*tref*' became the locational indicator of a patrimonial territory while the *gwely* became the kinship indicator of the settlements within that territory. In time *gwelyau* themselves came to be subdivided among several heirs.

The nature of partition was such that arable land was dispersed in units across the township lands or *gwely* lands to ensure equality of division. This could mean that the individual quilllets of the ploughland of one *gwely* could be interspersed among the quilllets of one or more other *gwelyau*. Where the settlements, farmhouses or tenements of individual families were grouped together in some degree of nucleation, the place came to be regarded as a hamlet or village. The communities of tied bond tenants (of the king or great lords), whose tenure was more restrictive than freemen or tenants occupying hereditary land, were often to be found in hamlets.

Beyond the arable ploughlands of communities there would be rough ground, waste and/or common pastures. In the mountainous regions of mainland Gwynedd, extensive tracts of upland provided pasture for cattle during the summer months. On Anglesey it would seem that, in addition to areas of *rhosydd* or moorland, wetland *corsydd* or marsh could serve the same purpose.

### Patterns of settlement

By the twelfth and thirteenth centuries then, the pattern of settlement within the commote of Twrcelyn had acquired the following characteristics. The king's interests were focussed at Penrhos Llugwy where the *maerdref* lay. The king had tied bond tenants in the townships of Bodhunod (on the north coast, between Llechog and the commotal boundary), Rhosmynach, Deri and Bodednyfed (at the western edge of Llanelian and to the east of Amlwch). Some of these tenants may have performed specialised functions and it may be wondered whether the township of Deri represents an Anglicisation - 'dairy', denoting a cattle ranch, equivalent perhaps to 'Llaethdy' near Amlwch. Part of the bond township of Bodednyfed was described, in 1354, as 'demesne', although at some distance from the king's manorial centre at Penrhosllugwy. It may be suggested that, perhaps, Bodednyfed was once the lordship centre of an *uchelwr* of northern Twrcelyn which at some time escheated (that is, forfeited) to the king.

The Bishop of Bangor held land across most of Anglesey although his main interests on the island were in the commote of Dindaethwy where he maintained a manorial centre at Treffos. The Bishop's lands in Twrcelyn were all in the south of the commote at Llandyfyrdog and Trewyn (27 tenants in 1308), Llwydiarth Esgob (11 tenants), Moelfre (23 tenants), Y Dafarn (10 tenants) and Tal y Llyn (6 tenants).

The non-regal secular settlements of Twrcelyn, south of Dulas, were located within the townships of Bodafon, Nant Mawr, Nant Bychan, Clorach and Ynys Gnod and the hamlets of Betws Coedana, Bodneathior and Cilgwyn. North of Dulas lay the townships of Llysdulas, Trysglwyn, Gwredog, Penbol and Llechog and the hamlets of Ysgello (a part of Trysglwyn) and Amlwch, Bodsartho, Garddwr, Glasgraig or Glasgrug, Glastre, Rhydwygyr and settlements in Llechog (all part of Llysdulas).

In the north-east corner of Twrcelyn lay the *clas* community and township of Llanelian.

Placenames distributed across the map cannot do justice to the complexity of settlement. Each township comprised one or more, sometimes several *gwelyau*. By the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries most of these *gwelyau* had themselves been subdivided, through the process of partible inheritance, among a number of heirs.

Within this complexity it may be possible to discern the pattern of settlement and lordship of an earlier period - extending back to the earlier Middle Ages.

### Bodafon and Llysdulas

By the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the major townships in the commote of Twrcelyn were Bodafon in the south and Llysdulas in the north. In 1354 a major Crown survey was undertaken under the authority of the Black Prince. Bodafon is described as comprising three *gwelyau*, each further divided into

the settlements of the heirs to those *gwelyau*. Llysdulas is described, in the same document, as having eight *gwelyau*, similarly subdivided with interests in at least seven hamlets. At Llysdulas the process of splitting is evident in the toponyms of the *gwelyau*. Gwely Tegeyrn ap Carwed, Hywel ap Carwed and Dolffin ap Carwed indicate the partition of an original larger patrimony in the hands of Carwed, who lived during the later twelfth century. The *gwelyau* Dwynwal ap Griffri, Bleddrws ap Griffri, Adda ap Griffri and Brochwel ap Griffri indicate a similar partition. Carwed and Griffri may have been brothers or close relatives, sharing the extensive township of Llysdulas. All seven *gwelyau* mentioned, held by freeholders related by kinship, had a foothold in the township nucleus of Llysdulas, the original patrimonial estate-centre as the name suggests (Jones Pierce, 1941). The eighth *gwely*, Twrllachiad, was bond land and would seem to have been restricted to the margins of the demesne of Llysdulas itself. A portion of Twrllachiad lay in 'Porth Dulas y Glaslyn', described as such in 1549 and again in 1606.

The 1352 survey identified a small part of Twrllachiad as escheat to the Crown on account, it would seem of the felony of a former tenant. The Tithe Survey for Llanwenllwyfo identifies a holding close to the northern shore and at the west end of Traeth Dulas by the name 'Stent'. Stent refers back to the escheat land in this area in the 'Extent' of Anglesey in 1352 and almost certainly confirms the location of Porth Dulas and, perhaps, the specialised function of certain of the bond tenants of Twrllachiad as longshoremen.

The importance of both Bodafon and Llysdulas is apparent from the fourteenth century Crown survey. However, the remarkable and rare survival of a series of Elizabethan and early Jacobean rentals for these townships allows us to go significantly beyond the outline provided by the fourteenth-century survey to map the individual components of each *gwely* in considerable detail. Two particularly full rentals, one dated 1549 (Jones Pierce, 1941), the other 1606, contain

around 140 entries (and therefore 140 originally separate holdings) each, for the township of Llysdulas. Both rentals are written in Welsh.

We are told, for example, that in 1549 Thomas Lloyd was accountable for *Tir y rhwydwr* (the netmaker) in Glantraeth Dulas, near Nant Sandde within the *gwely* of Adda ap Griffri. In 1611 the heirs of David Lloyd accounted for the same land. In the *gwely* of Brochwel ap Griffri, in 1549, Thomas ap Richard ap William held a hamlet of land between Tir y Gwystl and Twrllachiad land. Rees Thomas of Bodafon held the same land sixty years later. In the *gwely* of Dolffin ap Carwed, Thomas Lloyd and, later, the heirs of David Lloyd, Llysdulas, held the land of Iorwerth ap Tudur in Llanwenllwyfo, north of the chapel.

From such detail we can see the extensive reach of the Llysdulas dynasty over the whole of northern Twrcelyn. There are, however, concentrations of settlement in certain areas, corresponding broadly to the pattern of hamlets identified in the 1352 survey. Not surprisingly there is a cluster of holdings around Llysdulas itself, extending to the area of Gwlybycoed and Llaneuddog and a dense concentration of holdings in the north-west of the commote around Amlwch, Trogog, Hafod Onnen and Lastra and from Trysglwyn south-west to the low ridge of Rhos y bol. Although Llysdulas communities had a foothold at Trysglwyn Hywel, this central area south of Mynydd Parys was occupied by the free township of Trysglwyn Ednyfed and north-east of Parys by the royal township of Bodednyfed. Although each of the seven free *gwelyau* of Llysdulas had widely dispersed outliers, each has its own particular characteristic. The *gwelyau* Dwynwal, Dolffin, Hywel (focussed on Trysglwyn Hywel) and Adda (in Dyfryn Adda, Trysglwyn and Graigwen) show a generally sparse and dispersed pattern of settlement. The Gwely Brochwel has a concentration of holdings close to Llysdulas, while the settlements of Gwely Bleddrws extend in a more or less continuous band south along Dyfryn Adda to Rhos y Bol and Gorslwyd.

## A possible origin for Llaneilian

The church of St. Eilian is central to the history and development of the Medieval community of Llaneilian which takes its name from the church. Both church and community were inextricably linked within a framework that came to be known as the '*clas*'. The term *clas*, from the Latin root, in its basic meaning, identifies a body of people – a community. But, just as the word '*llan*' in its simplest sense means enclosure, so with time, it came to be widely used for, and associated with, the enclosure round a church. *Llan* came to be synonymous with church and similarly *clas* became synonymous with the community of a church and is often thought of as a quasi-monastic community.

The characteristics of a *clas* in this sense are as follows. Many, if not all, of the members of the *clas* would be related by kinship and would have an

inheritable interest, to some degree in the church and its proceeds. The land would, in practice, be treated as kindred land and divisible by inheritance. The members of the *clas* might even have their own bondmen.

There would be at least one priest in this community although it should not be assumed that all members would be in clerical orders (Pryce, 1993). The leader of the community would be styled 'abbot' although he, too, could, towards the end of the Middle Ages, be a lay person. One, perhaps jaundiced, view of the structure of the *clas* is presented by Giraldus Cambrensis, writing about his own personal experiences in the 1180s. He describes how 'powerful men in a parish' could be:

*appointed by clergy as stewards or patrons and defenders of churches. Later they usurped all rights for*



*themselves, appropriating lands and outlying property, leaving to the clergy only tithes and offerings, even assigning these to their sons and kinsmen who were clerics ... and called themselves abbots'.*

Bede, four centuries earlier, in an Anglo-Saxon context, made a similar complaint that :

*no life of monastic rule was being practised [in certain monasteries] often headed by reeves, thegns or royal servants who had simply declared themselves to be abbots ... and in addition cause hereditary rights to be ascribed to them by royal edicts.*

The landed endowments of clas churches are described as 'abadaeth' and in one of the law books, at least, as 'abati' abbot land (Pryce 1993, 186, 214). Elsewhere, the lands of claswyr, could be described as clasdir – clas lands. The former term refers to the rights and endowment, the latter to the landed territory. The evidence for Llanelian having been a clas is strong. In the thirteenth century reference is made to the abadaeth of Llanelian (Carr, 1982, NLW Bodewryd (Sotheby) MS 187). In 1352 there is a reference to a former abbot of the township. In the same document the township is said to be held of St. Eilian, owning nothing to the Lord Prince. Transfers and mortgages of the fifteenth century refer to free tenants of St. Eilian or, alternatively, to St. Hilary. In the early eighteenth century Henry Rowlands refers to this situation as follows:

*There were in Anglesey and in other countries certain tenures and lands which were held of neither Prince nor Lord but of certain Saints or Patrons or churches, where we find, as appears in the Prince's Extent book, the tenants of those lands call themselves Abbots, of which saints or church patrons there were seven in Anglesey that were intitled, in capite, to several Tenures viz. St. Beuno, St. Cybi, St. Cadwaladr, St. Peirio, St. Cyngar, St. Machutus or Mechell and St. Eilian; the last of these, viz. St. Eilian having had a great deal of lands bestowed on him and his church forever by Caswallon Law-Hir, sometime Prince of these countries, as appears by an ancient charter under the name of Caswallon, but how authentic I cannot say. ... Most of these saints, as I observed in an ancient manuscript, had in ancient times, their Nawddfau or sanctuaries established in them (Rowlands 1723, 131). He later adds that these many lands and franchises, about that church, are held in St. Eilian's name, by the freeholders of them, to this day (Rowlands 1723, 156).*

### Legendary origins

The legendary origin of Llanelian, referred to by Rowlands, concerns events and characters thought to have taken place during the late fifth and early-sixth centuries AD. This is a period when historically documented fact and folk tale are inextricably entwined.

During the late-sixth century Cadwallon Law-hir (often spelled Caswallon in tales centred on Twrcelyn) was the chief Lord in Anglesey. He was the son of Einion Yrth and grandson of Cunedda and father of the great king of Gwynedd, Maelgwn. Cunedda, his sons and their war bands are reputed to have migrated from north Britain, near the head of the Firth of Forth, establishing their dynasties across much of western Wales, expelling and repelling would-be Irish settlement in the process. Cadwallon is credited with a great victory over Serigi Wyddel, the Irishman, in battle at Cerrig y Gwyddyl, so consolidating his control of Anglesey. Eilian (or Elian in the earliest records) was born, according to the genealogies, in the early-sixth century, a generation or so younger than Cadwallon. His ancestry is recorded as follows:

'Eilian Ceimiad son of Alltu Redegog son of Carcludwys ap Cyngu ap Ysgwys ap Cadrod Calch fynydd; his mother was Tegno (or Tenafo or Cenef) daughter of Tewdwr Mawr son of Madog fab Hywel son of Ynyr Llydaw' (Bartrum 1966, 61, 70 and ByS, 46, 47).

Tegfan, another Anglesey saint, was Elian's uncle. The names and the ancestry, as with Cadwallon, have strong north British associations. Elian's epithet, Keimyat (ByS, 47) or Keinyat (a variant) is rendered into modern Welsh by Bartrum as Geimiad, Ceimiad might be better. Henry Rowlands in the early eighteenth century knew the name as Elian Cannaid, 'that is, "the Bright"', so called Hilarius by Latin writers and 'mistaken by many for St. Hilary, Bishop of Poitiers' (Rowland 1723, 143). We may dismiss the association with St. Hilary, perhaps suggested or compounded by a general similarity between, on the one hand, the assumed meaning of Elian's epithet, 'bright', 'white' and the Latin Hilarius, 'cheerful', 'merry' and, on the other hand, the correspondence of the two saint's feast days on the 13th January.

If Cannaid (=bright) is the name then it would conform to a number of similar epithets applied to Celtic divinities who are known to us in semi-mythological guise. Examples would include Lleu and Gronw Peifr from the fourth branch of the Mabinogi or Branwen and Dwywnwen, where gwen means not simply white but blessed. It would not be entirely fanciful to assume an original association between a holy well and a pagan cult site. An instance may be postulated at Dwywnwen's well at Llanddwyn, where the cult association is Christianised. Llanelian may have witnessed a similar transformation. Alternatively, if Ceimiad is the name, then 'hero' or 'champion' may be implied or, perhaps more fancifully, 'runner' if the epithet is a nickname referring jocularly back to Elian's father's epithet 'Redegog'.

The association between Elian and Cadwallon occurred through a confrontational incident which was resolved by Cadwallon granting land to Elian. The extent of the land grant was to be defined by the route taken by a deer belonging to Elian, chased by

### Topographic setting of Llaneilian

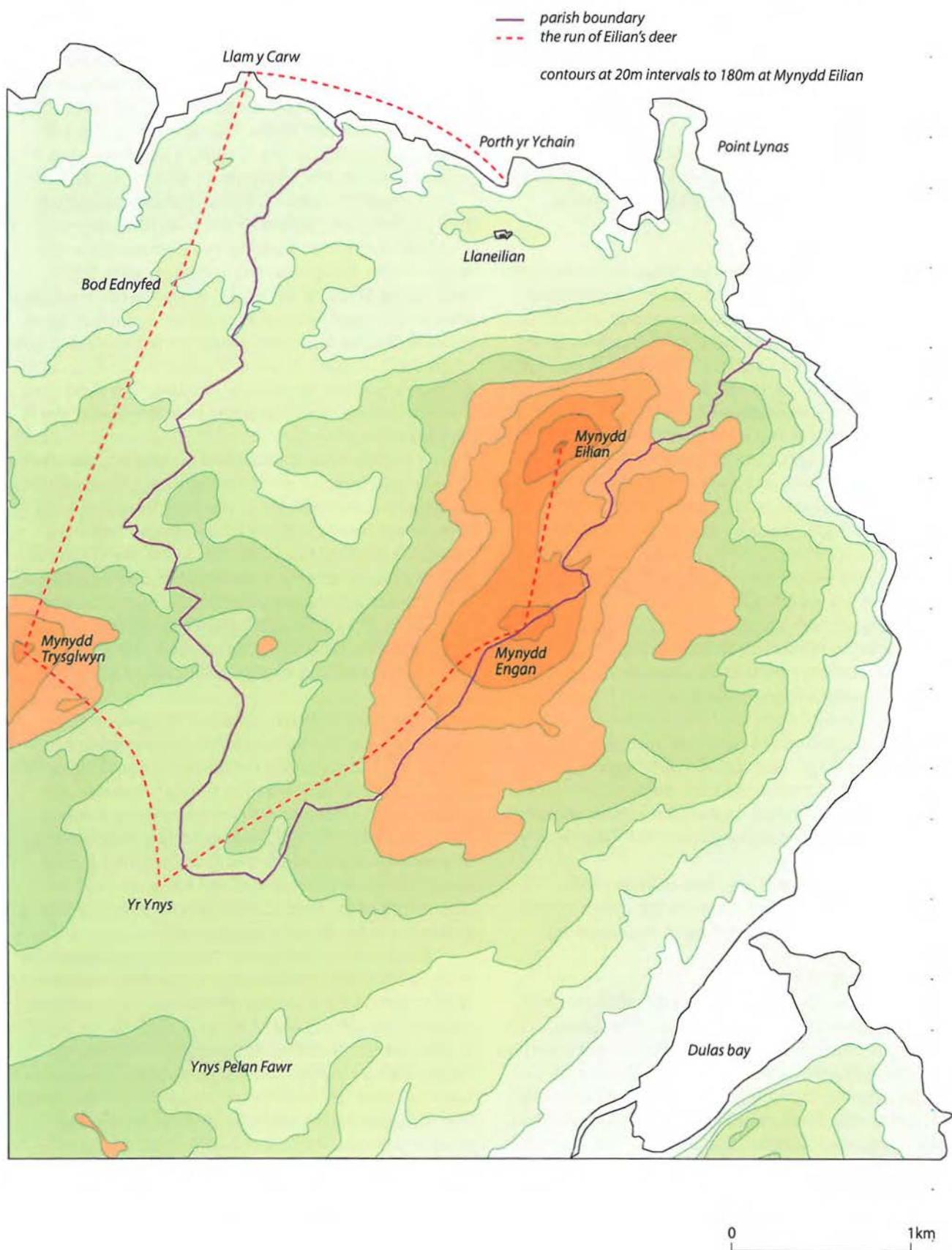


Fig.3 The topographic setting of Llaneilian



Cadwallon's hounds. The details are contained in a document of the fifteenth century (Cambrian Journal 1863, 31a). The deer's run took it from Dulas, Eilian's hill, to Gorsedd Reigitt, through the 'Nunnes Isle' to the hill of Trysglwyn, on to Bodneney and from there to Llam y Carw. The deer leapt into the sea, regaining the land at Porth Ychen.

*And then Kyswallon gave the land, men, woodlands, waters and fields within those meres and bounds above named to Hillarie in whatsoever freedom liberty or franchise he would.*

An attempt to trace the deer's journey is presented in the figure. Eilian's hill is presumably Mynydd Eilian. Gorsedd Reigitt is the property recorded up until 1760 as Gorsedd Neigir or Neigr, becoming Rhose Neigir by 1768 but not traceable beyond 1772. The original name may derive from or be related to Yneigr, one of the three cousins of Cadwallon who are traditionally said to have supported him at the battle of Cerrig y Gwyddyl. This stage of the deer's journey may have taken it over Mynydd Engan (Mynydd Engey in 1471, Mynydd Ynge in 1549, Mynydd Ynga in 1639). The Nunnes Isle may have been in Cors Goch. There are ynys place names at Ynys Pelan Fawr and Yr Ynys. The hill of Trysglwyn is Mynydd Parys. Bodneney is the Medieval Bodednyfed. The deer entered the sea at Llam y Carw, the deer's leap, the rocky headland which still bears this name on the east side of the entrance to Amlwch Port. Porth Ychen, Porthrychen or Porth yr Ychain is the inlet on the coastline directly north of Llanelian church. There remain certain problems of identification but it is noticeable that the boundaries so defined approximate tolerably well to the ecclesiastical parish boundary. The authenticity of the document as a reflection of an original sixth-century charter has not been demonstrated, however, and, with Henry Rowlands, we must retain a certain degree of scepticism.

Nevertheless, there are other documented examples of the way in which monastic communities embodying a *clas* structure could come into being.

### Procedure and motivation

Examples may be sought in certain charters, from Britain and the continent which purport to describe the foundation of religious houses. Seebohm cites examples whereby, in Roman and Germanic Law, the donation of land by freemen, to a church, was permitted provided that certain conditions were met (Seebohm, 1895). Most importantly, consideration should be given to the rights of other parties who might have an inheritable interest in the land to be donated. The king or chief lord's interests would also have to be satisfied. An important option, in the donation of land, open to the donor, would be to remain on the land, paying a food rent, or equivalent, to the church and taking the usufruct (the

produce of the land) for himself. The food rent would be the equivalent of the dues otherwise owed by a freeholder to his lord.

In Wales several charters have survived in a later, collated form, in the Book of Llandaff, appended to the Life of Saint Cadog and in other texts, which describe the donation of land to a church. Very nearly all of them originate from South Wales. The date of a number of details is disputed but the essential elements would appear to derive from early Medieval documents.

A straightforward example describes a donation by King Peibio of Gwent to God, Dyfrig (the bishop of Llandaff) and Iunabwy a clergyman, who was also the king's cousin. The gift involved Maenor Garth Benni 'with wood, field and water' and fishing rights in the Wye. Maenor (the equivalent of a north Welsh *maenol*) Garth Benni is likely to have been a sizeable territorial unit with tenant communities in place. The intention would be to provide a suitable benefice for Iunabwy. The food rents which ordinarily would be paid to the king were now to be paid to the church.

A slightly more complicated transfer required that a freeholder, Guorcin, should compensate several parties who had a vested interest in 'villa Rita', including king Meurig and Gwengarth, the king's procurator, before being in a position to donate the land to the church of St. Cadog in the person of Jacob, abbot of Llancarfan. Before being able to complete the donation, however, another heir to the land identified himself and was also duly compensated. Villa, in this context is the equivalent of the Welsh *tref* or township and therefore a sizeable territory.

In another instance Spois and his sons, having made provision for the transfer of their holding of Conguoret to Conig, abbot of St. Cadog remained on the land and paid a food rent to St. Cadog's. The rent, the equivalent of a freeholder's hospitality dues to a lord, comprised nine *modii* of beer, bread, meat and honey. The transfer was concluded with abbot Conig and his clergy processing the cross of St. Cadog around the boundaries of the land, scattering earth from the Saint's shrine, in confirmation of possession.

A final clear indication of the continuing presence of an existing aristocratic community on their hereditary land following the donation of that land to the church concerns the gift of Pencarno by Gwallwir to St. Cadog's. In this process Gwallwir transferred the property to his son Idno so that he and his heirs might serve the community of St. Cadog out of the surplus of their lands. The annual food rent was nine *modii* of beer, bread, meat and honey. However, whenever the clergy of St. Cadog required hospitality in Bassaleg or Pencarno Idno would supply it. This service refers to the very distinctive obligation of providing hospitality or *gwestfa* to a lord. In this case the lord is 'St Cadog' and the provision of *gwestfa* is a mark of status on the part of the provider and also of the significance of the land donated. The few references we have to the nature of the tenure

at Llanelian bear comparison with these donations. These include the beating of the bounds in definition of the limits of Llanelian, the king's presence and involvement or acquiescence in the transfer of land and the description of the nature of the tenure as owing no earthly services because they are tenants of the saint.

A significant difference between these transfers referred to and Llanelian is that the charters refer to the donation of land to a mother church with the land being held as a component of that mother church's estates. At Llanelian the church and the community appear to be self contained and not part of a larger ecclesiastical territory.

The question now to be addressed, then is, 'What was the impetus to build a church in this location and what was the motivation for a secular community to place themselves in the service of the church and to transfer their land to the church at the same time'?

There are several contexts within which a church might be built in the early Middle Ages, although it must be stressed that, in north-west Wales, the total number of churches, during the early centuries of Christianity would be few. The great age of church building in Anglo-Saxon England and in Wales would come later, during the tenth to twelfth centuries. Among the more important contexts for church building we may list:

- Churches at old established monasteries and their daughter houses
- Within established community cemeteries, where shrines and subsequently churches, might be built at the location of the graves of locally revered individuals – 'saints' or ancestors.
- As private or mortuary chapels, built under the auspices of a local lord on his estate and perhaps attended by a private priest.

In respect of Llanelian, the second or third scenarios would both seem to be possible, particularly so as the presence of an '*Eglwys y Bedd*', a mortuary chapel or shrine, would seem to reflect the presence of an earlier structure which has good claim to be one of the earliest features on the site. The *Eglwys y Bedd*, St.

Eilian's chapel or '*Myfyr Eilian*' (the *memoria* or grave of Eilian) is a masonry building of the fourteenth century as it now stands and was, until the early seventeenth century, detached from the main body of the church. The chapel is on a different alignment to the fifteenth-century church and was also on a different alignment to the twelfth-century church tower, represented by the western tower, which survives, and its accompanying nave, which was replaced in the fifteenth century. This is a good indication of the former presence of an earlier Medieval church, either on the site of the chapel itself or adjacent and there is a reasonable presumption that this putative early church had its origins in the known or believed site of the grave of the saint. The shrine or chapel stood relatively near the site of a holy well that bears the name of the saint. The well has recuperative powers and such magical properties are often assumed to have an earlier, pre-Christian association. Morris has suggested a possible conceptual link between the sites of early churches and pre-existing Pagan holy places, particularly where it might be assumed that a local or regional lord might undertake responsibility for providing and presiding over access to religious sites, whether in a pre-Christian or Christian period (Morris, 75).

The growing prestige of the shrine that was established at Llanelian might have provided the necessary impetus for the donation of the hereditary lands of the community to the service of St. Eilian if the donation had not already been made at the outset at, perhaps, the occasion of the 'discovery' of Eilian's grave. On the continent, in the sixth century, the cult of relics grasped the imagination. It was possible for the graves or supposed graves of long-deceased but revered and saintly individuals and martyrs to be discovered in the extra-mural burial grounds of cities. Churches were built on the spot and relics were recovered to be re-housed in shrines in existing churches. From the seventh and eighth centuries in Western Britain, it would seem, old established burial grounds were gradually abandoned as communities buried their dead in grave yards close to reliquary churches, seeking sanctity through contiguity '*ad Sanctos*' – in the presence of the saints. This period would provide an appropriate chronological context for the emergence of an ecclesiastical complex at Llanelian and the clas community, which supported it.

## The historical and social geography of Llaneilian

Having set the scene we may now consider the social geography of Llaneilian.

### Llaneilian becomes a parish church

The earliest documentary reference is contained in a charter and quitclaim of the thirteenth century whereby Hwfa ap Madog ap Dafydd, with the agreement of his brothers and co-heirs, transferred his hereditary rights in the *abadaeth* of Llaneilian to the rector of the church.

*Know that I, Hwfa ap Madog ap Dafydd, cleric, with the consent and agreement of my brothers Meredudd ap Madog, Meilir ap Madog and Hywel ap Madog, by grant of this my charter, confirm on behalf of my heirs and assigns, to Henry, cleric, rector of the church of Llaneilian [Thlannelen] all my rights and claims ...in the abadaeth of the aforesaid township of Llaneilian... which indeed pertained to me by right of the abadaeth, with all liberties, easements and contingent holdings of the above mentioned abadaeth...to dom. Henry, his heirs and assigns in free, quiet, complete and absolute occupation (Carr, 1982, 275; NLW Bodewryd (Sotheby MS, 187).*

This is an important landmark in Llaneilian history.

During the twelfth and particularly the thirteenth century in north Wales, there was great pressure to regularise religious houses and this deed witnesses the transformation of a church intimately associated with a *clas* community into a parish church. Henceforth the *clas* as a quasi-monastic institution ceased to exist. Llaneilian was not alone in Gwynedd in succumbing to an inexorable process of change. Aberdaron, being replaced by St. Mary's Abbey on Enlli, Beddgelert and Penmon all became communities of Augustinian canons. Clynog and Caergybi were reorganised as collegiate churches. Llaneilian similarly became a parish church. These were not voluntary actions. The pressure came from the top. In the case of Aberdaron, around AD 1200, the hand of none other than Llywelyn ap Iorwerth may be detected in the 'modernisation' (Jones Pierce, 1963). The pre-existing *clas* community, with a considerable vested interest, might expect to be compensated, and for certain of their hereditary rights to be recognised and protected. At Aberdaron, for example, the former *claswyr* retained control of elements of their former property. The *abadaeth* of Aberdaron *claswyr* had extended beyond the original core of hamlets occupying a square mile or so in the immediate vicinity of Aberdaron church to include the hamlets of their bond tenants throughout the two townships of Uwch Sely and Is Sely. With the transfer of the *abadaeth* to the Augustinian community on Enlli, the freeholding *claswyr* retained their inheritable personal and property rights.

The bond tenants of the *claswyr* in outlying hamlets, however, were emancipated, as freemen, paying rents to St. Mary's Enlli (Jones Pierce, 1963). Something similar may have happened at Llaneilian. Could this, perhaps, explain why there are so many later references to the 'free tenants of St Hilary' in Llaneilian. At Aberdaron additional royal land was subsequently granted to Enlli to supplement the loss to the new church community of dues now retained by the *claswyr*. There is no evidence for this at Llaneilian, but the need, as a parish church, would have been less.

### Taxation and Valuations

The next reference to the church of Llaneilian is contained in the 'Valuation of Norwich', a taxation of churches undertaken in 1254. Llaneilian had, by this date, been integrated into the regular network of diocese and rural deanery. Llaneilian (Llanellen in the text of the document) is assessed at a value of two marks (26s. 8d.) and the tax due at 2s. 8d. Seventy-two churches are recorded on Anglesey. Nine churches were assessed at a higher value, eight were assessed with Llaneilian at two marks, the remaining 55 were assessed at a lesser sum. The assessments for the commote of Twrcelyn (and the Deanery of Dindaethwy and Twrcelyn) were as follows:

Amlwch was valued at £4. 0s. 0d.,  
Llanerchymedd at £1. 15s. 6d.,  
Nantmawr at 17s. 10d.,  
Llandyfrydog at 17s. 4d.,  
Llanallgo at 8s. 10d.,  
Llanfihangel Tre'r Beirdd at 8s. 10d.,  
Coedana at 8s. 10d.,  
Tallylyn and Bodewryd at 2s. 5d.  
Ysgellog at 3s.

In 1291 a Papal taxation excluded the poorer churches but included Llaneilian, described as a rectory, now valued at £4. 6s. 8d.

Three years later, a secular assessment was undertaken by Crown surveyors to establish what rents and dues were now owed to the new administration following the conquest of Gwynedd in 1283 and which had previously been paid to Llywelyn ap Gruffydd. In 1352, however, a second great survey was undertaken, in the wake of the Black Death. This survey was more detailed than that of 1294 and describes, not simply the money payments owed to the English Crown but also the origin of these payments as customary renders of hospitality and labour services. The survey also describes the tenurial basis of settlement, both bond and free and although the detail portrays a social order in transition, traditional patterns survive to a sufficient degree to throw light on the Age of the Princes.

The township of Llaneilian is mentioned under



## Topographic setting of Llaneilian

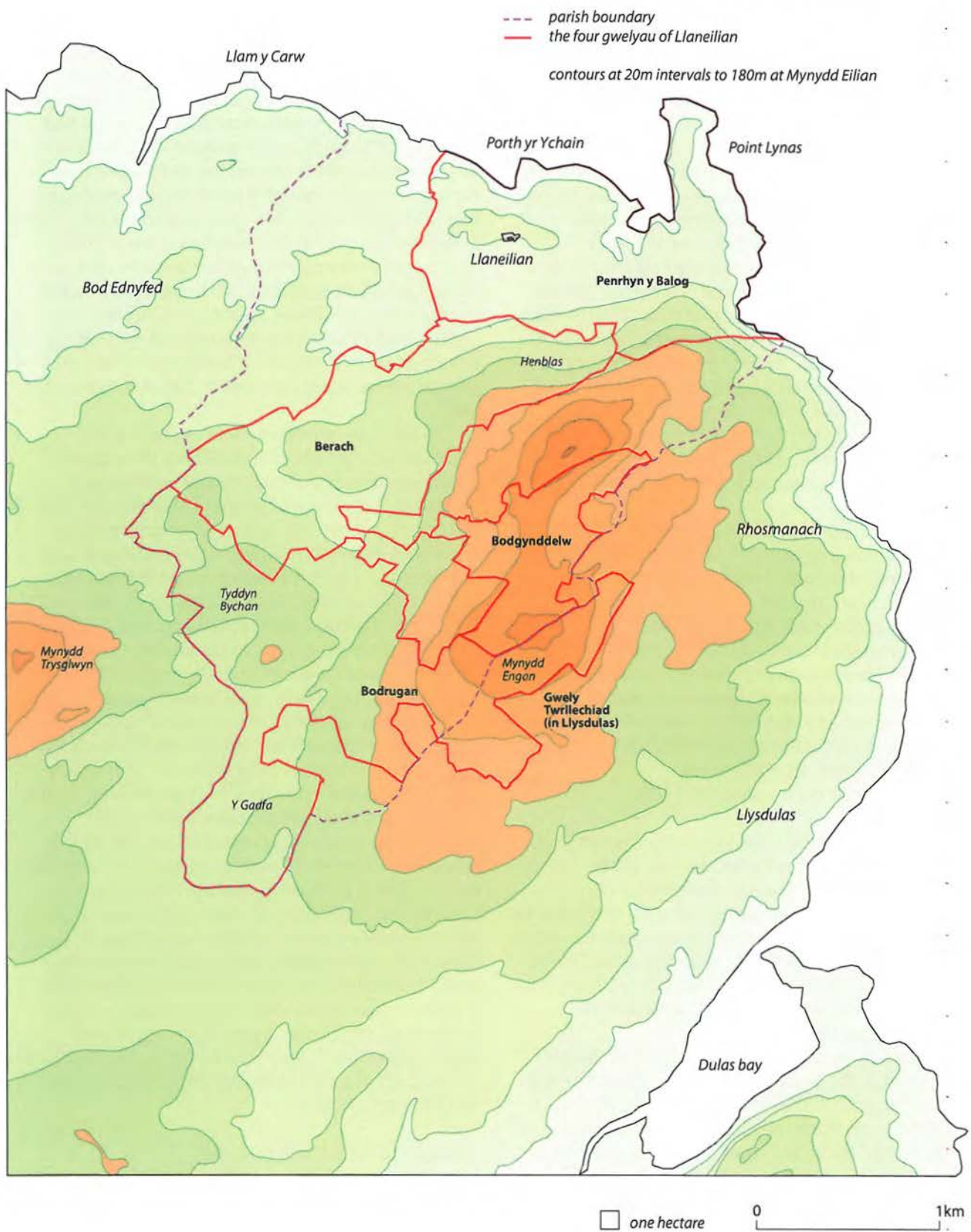


Fig. 4 The topographic setting of Llaneilian, the gwelyau

the marginal heading *Llanelen cum hameletta de Bodkendalo* – Llanelian with the hamlet of Bodcynddelw. The text of the survey is in abbreviated Latin and names are frequently misunderstood or badly transcribed or transliterated. Llanelian is treated in less detail than most because the Crown interests in this township are few. Nevertheless, the relevant entry is worth quoting in full:

*In this township and hamlet there are four gwelyau viz. Gwely Penryn [Penrhyn]; Gwely Barragh [Berach]; Gwely Bodrugan and Gwely Botkendalo [Bodgynddelw]. And none of these four gwelyau owe any annual renders to the lord, because they are held of Saint Elena [Eilian] except that the bondmen of these four gwelyau present themselves before the sheriff which, for the time being, was twice a year at the two great circuits of the very same sheriff and without any other service to the lord Prince; except that if one of them was summoned to be in the presence of the sheriff in the court of the commote or hundred at the suit of a plaintiff's request that he should at that time be present; and if he was to be amerced, then the lord Prince would have this amercement.*  
*And in the aforementioned gwely of Gwely Penrhyn there is a certain render of 6 1/2d. per annum, to be paid to the lord Prince at the Feasts of Easter and St. Michael, which once was Iorwerth ap Gruffudd ap Cynddelw's, an abbot of this township, who forfeited it.*  
*And there are, in the aforementioned gwely of Gwely Bodgynddelw, two bovates of escheat land which was Madog ap Ieuan Foel of Rhosmynach's. And it lies in the lord's hands through lack of tenants. And it used to render each year, at the aforesaid two feasts of Easter and St. Michael, 3s. 9d. of increment.*  
*Annual Total [for the township] 4s. 3 1/2d.*

The Llanelian entry for 1352 identifies two important features (Rec. Caern. and Carr 1972)

Firstly, the township was organised in, or comprised, a pattern of gwelyau, like most of the secular townships of Anglesey and like the other *clas* townships on Anglesey which attract the attention of the Crown surveyors such as Eglwys Ail, or Llangadwaladr in Malltraeth, and Alaw'r Beirdd and Llanfechell in Talybolion (Carr 1972, 208-9).

Secondly, apart from land which had escheated or forfeited to the Crown, the township owed no regal dues or services. Rather, the community held its land 'from the Saint'. Furthermore a certain Iorwerth ap Gryffudd ap Cynddelw is described as a former abbot of the township. As mentioned above, the *abadaeth* of Llanelian is referred to a century earlier and there were, by 1352, no longer any 'abbots' in Llanelian. Nevertheless, taken together these characteristics confirm the identity of Llanelian as once having been a *clas* community.

## Population growth and landscape change

The later thirteenth century on Anglesey, as elsewhere, experienced population growth. The fourteenth century tells a different story. A deteriorating climate, crop failure, disease within the livestock, famine and the Black Death from 1348, bred social unrest which became a catalyst for social change. The survey of 1352 recognises many bond hamlets as waste and uncultivated 'through lack of tenants'. Depopulation was a serious problem and famine and disease were part of the cause although it has to be acknowledged that some tenants used the cover of plague and unrest to flee their tenancies. One solution to the problem of untenanted or under-tenanted lands was to ease many of the restrictions applied to tied bond tenancies, and to offer better conditions. A labour market was thus created, land values had been pushed down and 'the deserted bond vills became a battleground for rival gentry families hungry for land' (K. Williams-Jones, 1976, lvii).

In Welsh law, free land could not be legally alienated through sale or transfer from the present and future heirs to that land, notwithstanding the exceptional conditions of grants to churches with the consent of all those who had an inheritable interest in the land. However, legal loopholes could be found and were applied, increasingly during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, until transactions in the property market became a regular occurrence. The particular character of the *clas* community at Llanelian was extinguished in the thirteenth century with the transfer of the hereditary rights of the *abadaeth* to the rector of Llanelian. Nevertheless, as the 1352 survey shows, the integrity of the *gwelyau* and its hereditary principle would seem to have survived. So, we might ask, what changed? We might suppose that rights and privileges of the *abadaeth* included the *gwestfa*, or hospitality dues, and other rents and services which even a freeholder might owe to a greater lord. In most cases this greater lord would be the king but in the case of a *clas* community it would be the 'saint' and his representative on earth, the abbot as leader of the *clas*. These dues, or their equivalent, might now become payable directly to the church as an institution within a diocesan framework. The freeholders of Llanelian, however, no longer *claswyr*, could still rely on the services and rents of their tenants, unless, as would seem to have been the case at Aberdaron, some bond tenants had been emancipated.

## Transactions in the Property Market

One of the earliest recorded property transactions in Llanelian involves Corwas land, mortgaged by David ap y Corwas (all his lands in Llanelian) to Grono ap David Lloyd of Dindaethwy in 1392. The transaction was confirmed to David Lloyd's widow Efa the following year. A nephew or close relative of David ap y Corwas, David ap Grono of Penrhyn Balog transferred land in Penrhyn



Balog, Tyddyn y Mabchwyll and Ty'n y Mynydd to Ieuan ap Grono and Ieuan ap Iorwerth in 1445. Twenty years later this same David ap Grono is seen to have mortgaged 'all his lands in Llanelian' to William Bulkeley. By 1494, however, Tyddyn y Mabchwyll was back in Corwas hands.

In 1467 Dafydd ap Ieuan ap Dafydd Ofydd mortgaged land described as a tenement of St. Eilian to Llywelyn ap Tudur ap Dafydd of Llanelugrad for four years. At the end of four years Dafydd ap Ieuan's lands and tenements in Llanelian, together with lands in Bodrugan known as Y Gadfa and 'Mynydd Engey' were granted to William Bulkeley junior. The following year William Bulkeley was required to obtain a pardon for trespass on these lands and in 1472 the grant was confirmed by Jonet, Dafydd ap Ieuan's mother and wife of Ieuan ap Dafydd Ofydd. One hundred and seventy years later, Y Gadfa was still remembered as having been part of Tyddyn Dafydd Ofydd.

In 1470 Hywel ap Ieuan ap Philip, described as a 'free tenant of St. Eilian in the township of St. Eilian' mortgaged six tenements to John Moel of Trefadog. These included Tyddyn Oche, Tyddyn Kosse, Tyddyn Ty Bach, Tyddyn Merch Ieuan Wyn, Tyddyn Ty Newydd and Tyddyn Philip ap Ieuan. In 1499, Gwenllian, daughter of Hywel ap Ieuan, a 'free tenant of St. Hilary in Llanelian', having previously mortgaged her lands in Llanelian to Hywel ap Robert of Isgwyrfa, now granted those tenements (the six properties including Tyddyn Oche and Tyddyn Philip ap Ieuan) to Richard Bulkeley, son of William Bulkeley. She was joined in this grant by Dafydd ap Madog ap Began, Hywel ap Dafydd ap Madog, Rhys ap Dafydd and Robert ap Dafydd ap Madog, a total of 80 bovates in all, amounting to over 300 acres of arable ploughland.

In 1494 Gwilym ap Ieuan ap Eignion, Mallt, wife of Ieuan ap Eignion, Thomas ap Gryffudd and Mallt verch Dafydd, daughter of Thomas, granted all their lands and messuages in Llanelian to Rowland Bulkeley. All these transactions were taking place while the new nave at Llanelian was being built.

Within little more than a generation, the church in England had severed links with Rome and the process of suppression of religious houses was underway. In 1535 a great survey to assess the value of all religious houses in England and Wales was undertaken. Llanelian, described as a rectory with dependent chapels at Rhosbeirio and Coedanna, was valued at an income of £15.0s.2d

Some time before 1544, John ap Meredudd ap Gwilym bought seven virgates of Bryn Moelyn, which lay within Gwely'r Balog, from Hywel ap Dafydd ap Ieuan. In 1544 Thomas, son of John ap Meredudd, sold the land to Sir Richard Bulkeley. By 1565 the Bulkeley family, in the person of Richard Bulkeley, had extended their properties in Llanelian with the inclusion of Waun Dovon yr Ednyfed, Y Cae yng nglan y Gors (at the western end of Cors Eilian and abutting the eastern

side of Berach), Erw Fawr Morfudd and other properties acquired from John ap Rhys ap Dafydd ap Gwilym and were in possession of the western part of the tenement (and former gwely) of Berach.

By the second half of the sixteenth century the Bulkeley family had a foothold in at least three of the four original gwelyau of Llanelian, - Penrhyn y Balog, Bodrugan and Berach. It is probable that much of Berach was in Bulkeley hands. During the second quarter of the 17th century, properties in Lletroed and Ffald y Mynydd had been added to the Bodrugan, Gadfa and Mynydd Engan lands in the south-western part of the township. The process continued into the seventeenth century. The holding of Ty yn y Llwyn, later known as Taldwrws and later still as Tyddyn y Telyniwr, an extensive property in the west of the township extending from Gelfinhir to Rhos Bach and south to the boundary with Berach was surveyed in 1639 in Bulkeley hands. Other large composite tenements in the Bulkeley holding were surveyed at about the same time and included Tyddyn Taldavynidd [Tal dau fynydd?] in Pen y Sarn and Lletroed, Berach, and Y Gadfa (glossed as Tyddyn Dafydd Ofydd) in the south-west of the township. Taldafynydd and Gadfa included properties in the former gwely land of Bodrugan granted to William Bulkeley junior by the descendants of Dafydd Ofydd in 1471. By the late seventeenth century if not before, Corn Ellyll had been added, to the north of St. Eilian's church, from Porth Eilian to Ffynnon Eilian. Tir Deg Ceiniog, also in Bulkeley hands by the eighteenth century, lay immediately to the west.

Another prominent Anglesey family with considerable interests at the other end of the island, in Beaumaris, were the Godfreys (Carr 1982, 253). They held offices as bailiff and as priors of Penmon. From the beginning of the fifteenth century the Godfreys began to acquire land in Llanelian. In 1407 land and tenements in Berach were mortgaged to Thomas Godfrey by the sons and daughters of Gronw ap Philip and Einion who got them from Nest, wife of Philip ap Meilir Du. We may later identify this land as Henblas. In 1416, Murddun Du and Murddun Dafydd Ofydd (later identifiable as Y Gadfa) were granted to Thomas Godfrey by Dafydd Saer. In 1460 another Thomas Godfrey had acquired the tenement of Hywel ap Llywelyn Vycar (Cae Vicar?) and the tenement of the wife of John Godfrey. The lands in Berach which were in Thomas Godfrey's hands in 1407 were released to Rhys ap Llywelyn ap Griffith of Llechcynfarwy in 1497, confirmed in 1500 and again in 1504 whereby the names of the properties can be identified as Coed Stockyn or Tyddyn y Stockyn, Tyddyn y Cirriog and Tyddyn Cynan Ddu. These passed to Rhys' son Dafydd in 1532 and a year later they formed part of a marriage settlement between Hugh (son of the aforementioned Dafydd ap Rhys) and Elen, daughter of Hugh Conwy. In 1548, this block of land in Llanelian was leased to Henry, uncle of Hugh ap Dafydd, where it is described as Tir Philip ap Meilir, alias Henblas, Tir y

Cirriog, Cloddiau Meirian, Coed Ystockyn and Buarth-Poeth, confirming these Henblas lands as those same properties transferred to Thomas Godfrey in 1407 and also confirming that Henblas once formed part of Gwely Berach on the eastern side. It is of incidental interest that Nicholas ab Elis, rector of Llanelilian, whose elegy was sung by Tudur Aled, held the mortgage of Tyddyn y Cirriog in 1448.

These transactions illustrate a process replicated across the whole of Gwynedd, to a greater or lesser degree, during the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, whereby increasingly fragmented but very numerous freeholds could be acquired by major landowners intent on estate building. The six tenements mortgaged to John Moel in 1470, all individual tyddynod, had already been brought together into the holding of Hywel ap Ieuan ap Philip before they were granted to Richard Bulkeley in 1499 along with the parcelled lands of four other landowners. Sub-tenants might be given occupation and tenure of blocks of land which, while having a corporate identity, so to speak, had in the thirteenth century, nevertheless, comprised several individual tenements. The legacy of the dispersal and partition of holdings through partible inheritance, before the process of amalgamation began, may be seen in at least one instance at Y Fagwyr, Llanelilian. Between 1560 and 1573, three closes of three acres each and a fourth close containing three virgates were assigned for maintaining a light in the presence of the image of the rood and 'St. Hilary' at the saint's church. The several tenants of the three acre closes were Rhys ap Ieuan, Gruffydd ap John and Dafydd ap Gruffydd. The fourth close was next to the rectory and in the occupation of Hugh Price, cleric. The donor of this and, perhaps, the

other plots too, was Llywelyn ap Hywel ap Iorwerth ap Grono, with a total annual value of 3s. 4d. A document of 1594 summarises Crown enquiries into concealed lands in the commote of Twrcelyn. Among these were parcels of four acres, one acre and another one acre in 'teer gwennor vagwyr' [tir gwaun y fagwyr?] occupied respectively by three separate tenants. In mitigation it was argued that the lands had been given to maintain and sustain a light at St. Hilary's ('commonly called Llanelilian'). Y Fagwyr is a tenement immediately to the south east of St. Eilian's and these properties must surely be the ones in question. In addition to the significance of the grant for the benefit of the church, the case highlights the amalgamation of properties at one level and the historic fragmentation through partible inheritance of their component parts.

It is of incidental interest that another of the alleged concealed lands involved five acres of arable land called 'carregg weynlley' in the occupation of Margaret, widow, daughter of Tudur. The land is probably Carreg Winllan, north of Pen y Sarn.

Intermingled among these lands lay the properties of other interests including those of the Llysdulas estate. Alongside Bulkeley, the major landowners in Llanelilian in the late eighteenth century were:

Margaret Lewis, north-east of Gelfinhir and south-west of Pensarn; William Hughes, west of Rhos Bach and south-east of Taldrws; the Trefor estate, between Berach and Taldafynydd; Sir John Stanley, north-east of Berach and south-east of Tir Deg Ceiniog and Corn Ellyll; Sir Nicholas Bayley, west of Taldafynydd and Lord Boston in the vicinity of Tir Deg Ceiniog and Corn Ellyll.

During the nineteenth century the pattern was to change again.

## **The location of the four gwelyau and core settlements of Medieval Llanelilian**

The names of the four gwelyau of Llanelilian provided by the Crown survey of 1352 may be rendered in modern Welsh as Berach, Penrhyn, Bodrugan and Bodgynddelw and are of interest. Of all the recorded gwely names on Anglesey the great majority (90 per cent) have personal or ancestral signifiers as, for example, in the Gwely Dwywal ap Griffri in Llysdulas, or Gwely Wyrion Sandde (the grandchildren of Sandde) in Bodafon. The prefix 'Bod' meaning a place of settlement is rare in gwely names, even when linked to a personal identifier, yet two of Llanelilian gwelyau have this prefix. 'Bod-' is, however, common in township names and Bodgynddelw in Llanelilian is glossed as a hamlet in the Record of Caernarfon suggesting, perhaps, an element of settlement nucleation in this gwely. The remaining two gwelyau, Penrhyn and Berach would appear to be descriptive or geographical indicators. Again, these are rare (7 per cent) as gwely names but occur more commonly as the names of townships (18 per cent).

It may be assumed that Medieval settlement and its ploughlands was associated with one or other of the identified gwelyau. The freemen of these gwelyau may well have had their own bond tenants and some expansion of settlement onto the waste at the margins of settlement is entirely possible. Some settlement units, on the periphery of the township, may indeed represent the emancipated settlements of former bond tenants on the analogy of the 13th century history of Aberdaron. In a later period, a new kind of proprietorship would certainly lead to the intake of moorland and marsh and effect permanent settlements on seasonal and common pasture land.

The division of each gwely through partible inheritance, in a period of population growth, would inevitably lead to smaller individual holdings. To achieve equity in the division, the open field of the arable ploughlands would be shared so that any particular tyddyn might have strips or quilleys dispersed and



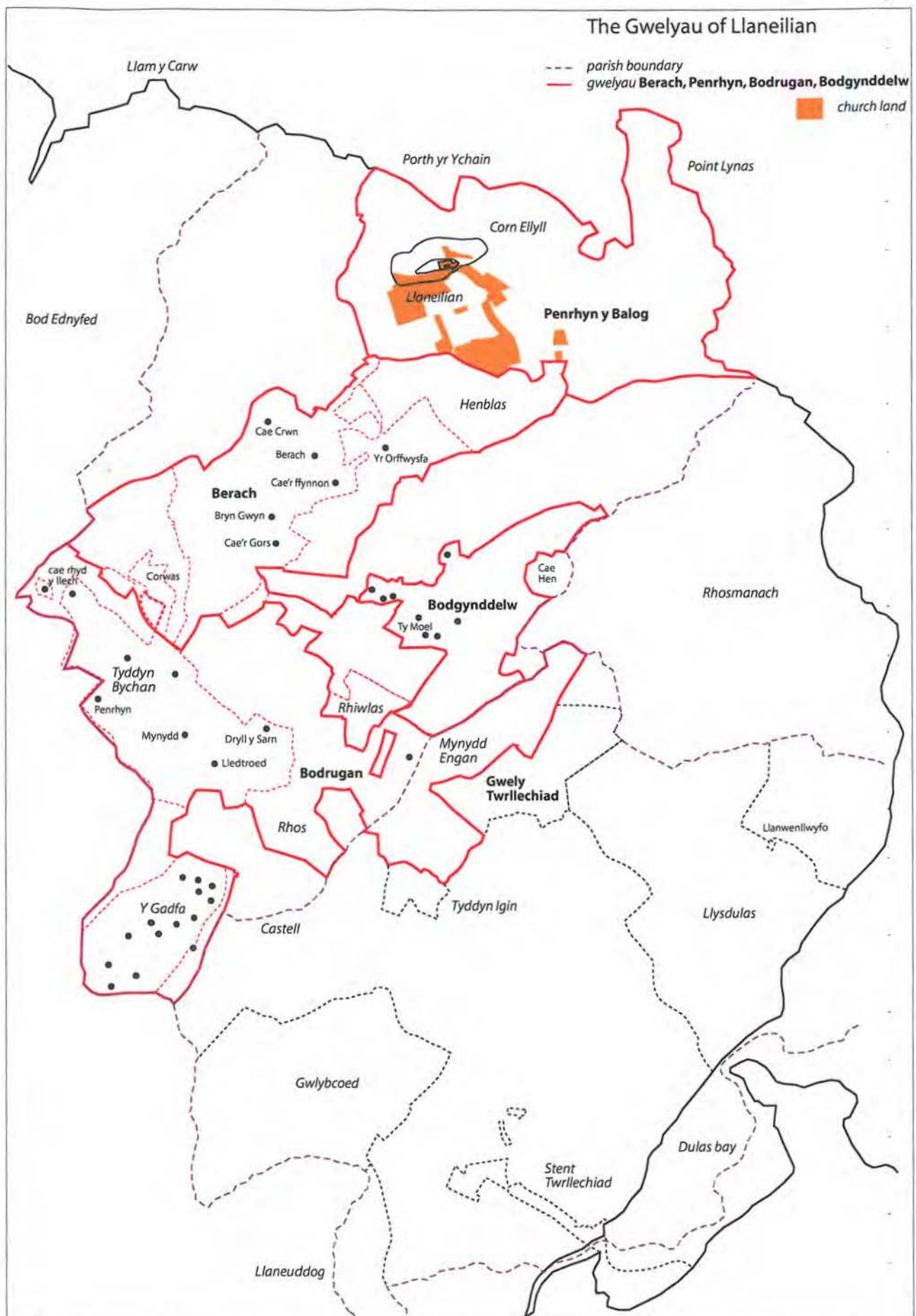


Fig.5 The gwelyau: detail



intermingled with the strips of their neighbours. The same logic would have applied, of course, to the division of the patrimonial township into its component gwelyau and gwely lands might display a similarly fragmented pattern across the township. However, it may still be possible to identify the core area of each gwely.

### **Gwely Berach**

This property has survived to be represented on the modern map as Abererch. The ancient name is Barach or Berach. Aberach, presumably a corruption of Y Berach is used alternatively in a land tax assessment of 1756 and again in the 1770s. From 1842 Aberach becomes common and, only recently, Abererch. The name is obscure, unless it is related in some way to the Irish 'bearach' = heifer. The earliest occurrence is Barrach, in 1352. In 1407 it is referred to as the hamlet of Barrech, once in the hands of Nest verch Iorwerth ap Madog, the widow of Philip ap Meilir du, and then mortgaged by the sons and daughters of Gronw ap Philip ap Einion, who describe themselves as tenants of St. Hilary in the township of Llaneilian. In 1439 certain lands in the hamlet of 'Barroch' are again mortgaged, this time by David ap Meurig, rector of St. Hilary's, to Cwnna ap Ieuan. A property Cwna or Cowna is recorded south west of the church in the early nineteenth century. In 1497 the properties mortgaged ninety years earlier were transferred to Rhys ap Llywelyn ap Gruffydd of Llechcynfarwy, confirmed in 1500 and 1504.

Meanwhile, during the second half of the fifteenth century, the Bulkeley family began to acquire land in Llaneilian. In 1465 William Bulkeley acquired all Dafydd ap Gronw ap Ieuan y Corwas' lands in Llaneilian by mortgage. Dafydd ap Gronw is described as 'of Penrhyn Balog' but two generations earlier the family held the tenement of 'Korwas' on the south western edge of Barrach near the western boundary of Llaneilian at Cerrig Man. It may be that William Bulkeley acquired part of 'Barrach' at this time. By the 1560s a large part of Barrach was in Richard Bulkeley's hands and remained with the Bulkeley family until 1793 when all the Bulkeley estate in Amlwch and Llaneilian was sold to Lord Uxbridge.

In the early thirteenth century Hwfa ap Madoc ap Dafydd, whom we may take to have been the abbot of Llaneilian, transferred his rights in the abbadaeth to Henry, rector of Llaneilian with consent of Hwfa's several brothers. One of these brothers was Meilir ap Madoc. Seventy or eighty years later another Meilir ap Madoc, styled Meilir Du, received a grant of a tenement called Tyddyn Ithel Sais, with three and a half acres near the hill called Mynydd Caswallawn. In 1497 a transfer of lands in the 'hamlet of Barragh' was made to Rhys ap Llywelyn ap Gruffydd (mentioned above). These lands were those once in the possession of Philip, son of Meilir Du and Philip's wife, Nest and confirmed in 1548 as 'Tir Philip ap Meilir, otherwise Henblas' – the old mansion house, and which can now be seen to have been within Berach.

From these transfers it is possible to define the extent of the hamlet and gwely of Barach. This was a large area running from the edge of Cerrig Man at the western limit of Llaneilian, swinging north and east through modern Abererch, along the southern flank of Cors Eilian to Henblas and its eastern boundary with Penrhyn Balog. The southern boundary was defined by the former common land on the northern slopes of Mynydd Eilian between Bryn Deisi, Pengorffwysfa and Caswallon. It will be remembered that one of Meilir Du's properties in 1317 was on the slopes of 'Mynydd Caswallawn'.

### **Gwely Penrhyn**

The name of this gwely is topographically descriptive, referring to the great headland promontory now known as Point Lynas or Trwyn Eilian. The earliest recorded occurrence of the name is in 1352. In 1445, however, Dafydd ap Gronw ap y Corwas is described as 'of Penrhyn y Balog' and Balog remains the most commonly used identifier for this component of the township of Llaneilian. In 1494 Gwenhwyfar, great-grand-daughter of Hywel ap Iocyn Hir, free tenant of St. Eilian, granted land to a nephew of hers in 'Gwely y Falog' [Gwely yvaloc]. The portion of land was called tir Yokys [?tir Iocyn] and adjoined Cors y Llan. In 1544 seven virgates of Bryn Moylyn land 'in Gwely'r Balok' came into the hands of Richard Bulkeley. A certain Einion ap y Moylyn had witnessed the grant of Tyddyn Ithel, with three and a half acres near Mynydd Caswallawn, to Meilir Du in 1317. In 1352, the Crown survey of Anglesey had identified a payment owed to the Prince in respect of land in Gwely Penrhyn which a former abbot of Llaneilian, Iorwerth ap Gruffydd ap Cynddelw, had forfeited. The payment was worth 6 1/2d. In 1549, and in a comparable document of 1611, Gwely Penrhyn y Balog' was included in a short list of escheat (i.e. forfeited) lands appended to a rental of the free tenants of Twrcelyn. The payment still stood at 6 1/2d. The relatively small payment attached to Penrhyn y Balog suggests that only a small portion of the gwely is being referred to.

Balog occurs several times in documents of the eighteenth century. The promontory is mapped as Balog by Lewis Morris in 1737 and, in 1753 both Balog and Tyddyn Balog are entered as separate properties in Land Tax assessments. In the 1770s Corn Ellyll was mapped in Bulkeley ownership and one detached quillet is shown 'in Balog land'. As a detached portion it is unclear how precise the mapped location is intended to be. However, it would appear to be east of Cors Eilian and south-east of the church. By the 1820s the property, Balog, can be identified on the Ordnance Survey Manuscript map at 2" to the mile scale and in 1842 the contemporary boundaries of Balog are shown on the tithe apportionment map.

Balog remained a large undivided property into the nineteenth century. The original extent of Gwely

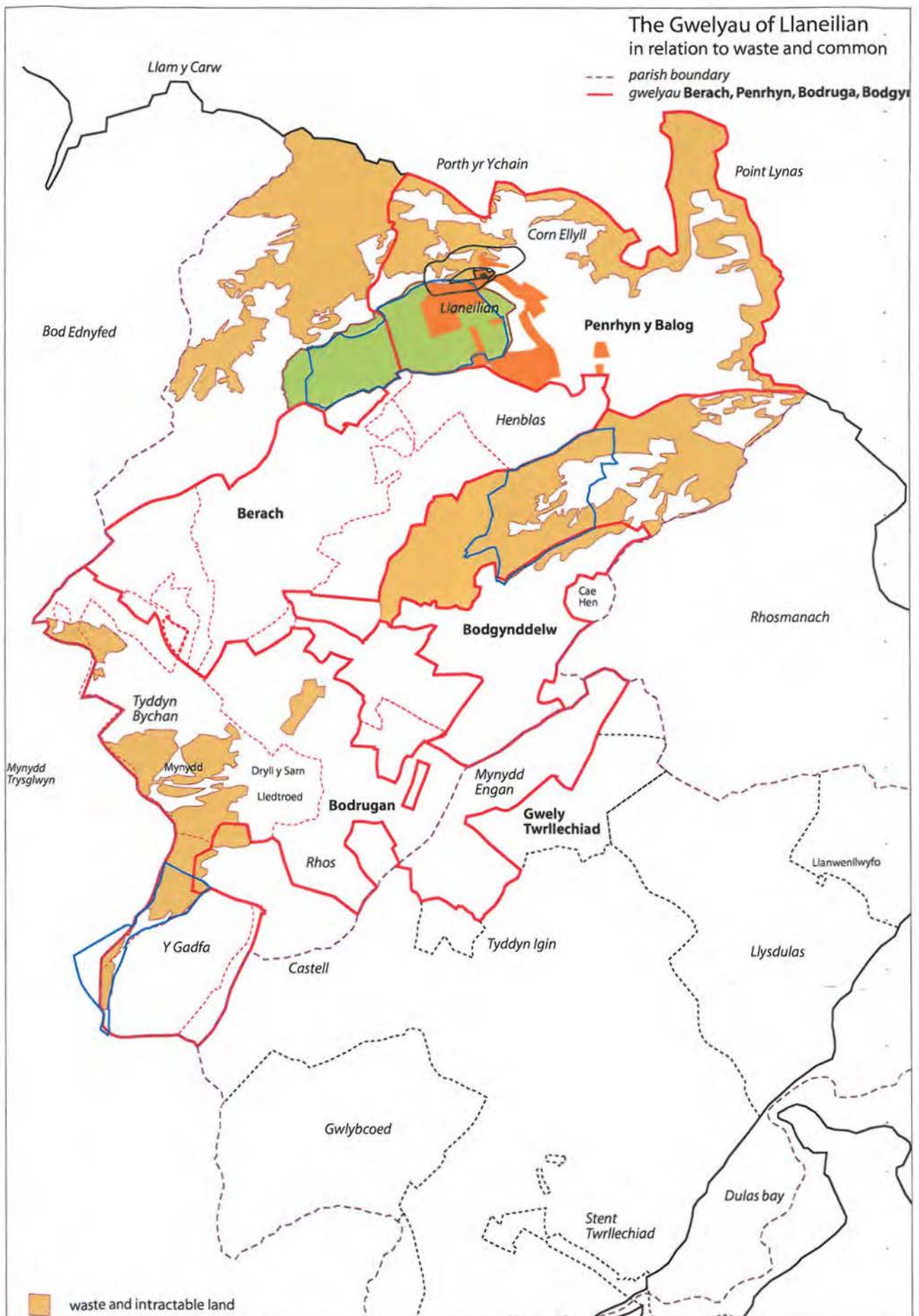


Fig.6 The gwelyau: relationship to good agricultural land



Penrhyn y Balog is likely to have run from Corn Ellyll north of the church, with the sea on one side, Cors Eilian and Henblas on the south and west and the north-western boundary of Rhosmynach on the south-east. The northern slopes of Mynydd Eilian at Tros y Mynydd are likely to have been rough common ground, a continuation of the area of common enclosed to the east of Pengorffwysfa in the 1820s.

### Gwely Bodruga

Bodruga and Bodcynndelw are not well documented. Bodruga is identified in the 1352 Crown survey of Anglesey. It is mentioned again in the 1470s in a succession of documents which see the transfer of land and tenements of 'Bodregan' with two houses built on land called Y Gadfa and Mynydd Engey (that is, Mynydd Engan) to William Bulkeley (junior). The initial grant, in 1471 with a release and quitclaim from Jonet grand-daughter of Dafydd Ofydd. In 1639 Y Gadfa, in the tenure of William Humffrey Nant, is glossed as part of 'Tyddyn Dafydd Ofydd'.

In the same year, the tenement of Tald dy Fynydd (glossed as Gallt Fynydd), was surveyed. The property runs from Rhyd y Llech near Cerrig Man in the north to Pen y Sarn (Dryll y Sarn in 1639, Rhos Sarn 'r Offeiriad du in 1770) and Lledtroed, in the south-east. The tenement includes Mynydd Ynga (Mynydd Engan) and the rough ground of Taldyfynydd and extends to the south into Gadfa. Taldyfynydd was, in Bedwyr Lewis Jones' opinion, a corruption of Tal dau fynydd, the end of the two ridges where Mynydd Parys and Mynydd Engan meet (Jones, 1980). The present name is Yr Hald. Pretty much the same property was mapped, in Bulkeley ownership in the 1770s, under the name Tyddyn Bychan.

The extent of Gadfa is identifiable by the several individual properties recorded in the Tithe Apportionment Survey of 1847, occupying the far south-western corner of Llaneilian. In fact, Gadfa, as a territory, extends south beyond the present parish boundary. The gwely of Bodruga, therefore, would seem to have occupied at least part of the later named properties of Tyddyn Bychan and Y Gadfa, defined on the western side by the township boundary and flanked by Y Gors Goch, Mynydd Parys and the township of Trysglwyn and extending eastward onto Mynydd Engan. Berach lay to the north.

### Gwely Bodgynndelw

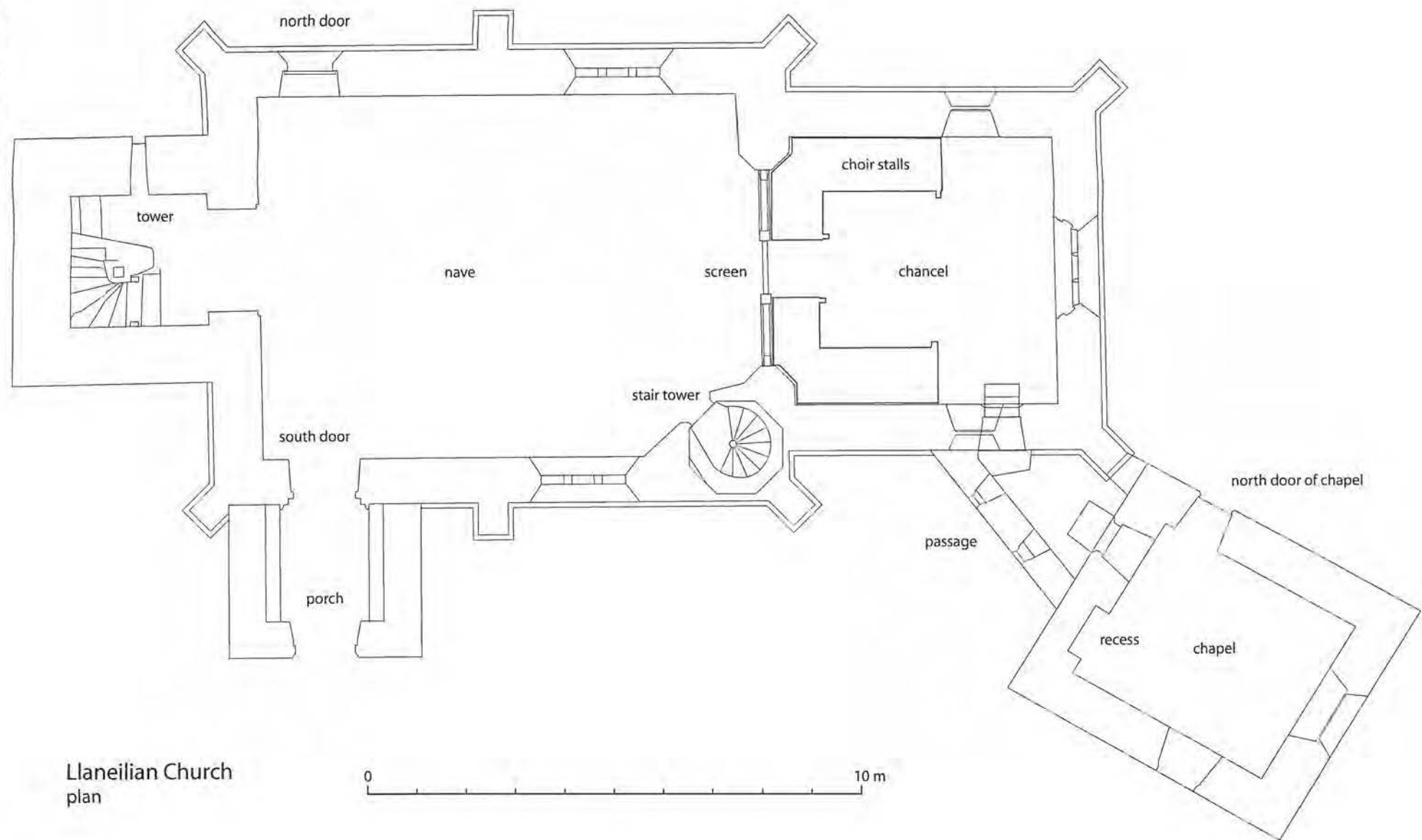
In 1352, in the gwely of Bodgynndelw, there were two bovates of escheat land which were formerly in the hands of Madog ap Ieuan Foel of Rhosmynach. At this time, this land was empty for lack of tenants. In 1549 the Crown rental or 'extent', referred to above, records this land as 'tir stent Madoc ap Ieuan Voel in Rhosmanach and Bod[gyn]ddel.' In a comparable document of 1606 the same property is named but only Rhosmanach [Rhosmynach] is mentioned. 'Tir Stent' is a relatively common usage in documents of this period for identifying escheat land referred to in 'the extent book of North Wales (that is, the 1352 Crown survey). It is interesting to note both the survival of names and the stability of rents due from land such as this over two hundred and fifty years. In 1352 the escheat land, formerly of Madog ap Ieuan Foel, was assessed at an incremented payment of 3s. 9d. In 1606 the same rent was being asked of the same land. The land of Madog ap Ieuan Foel lay within the township of Rhosmynach, as identified in a separate entry in the surveys of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. However, in 1352, the escheat portion was taxed in the township of Llaneilian. In other words, Madog's lands lay spread across the two townships and a parcel of these lands lay within Gwely Bodgynndelw.

In 1753 the property Gwely Bodgunda (a corruption of Bodgynndelw) is recorded in the hands of Robert Griffith. In 1756 the name of the property, in the same ownership, was entered as Gwely Bodgyda in the Land Tax assessment for that year. In the Window Tax assessment for 1754 Gwely Bodgunda is entered in a list which runs from William Broadhead's property to Balog to Gwely Bodgunda to Maen y Dryw and Berach. By 1760 Bodgunda had dropped from view and the sequence ran: Mrs Broadhead, Caeagwnion, Balog, Ty Canol, Mayn y Dru, Aberech. The same Robert Griffith, who accounted for Bodgyda in 1756, is assessed at Ty Canol in 1760. One possible explanation is that Ty Canol, which does not appear in the Land Tax and Window Tax lists before 1756, is a new name for Gwely Bodgunda or a new house on the property. Ty Canol is a large property, hard against the Rhosmynach/Llysdulas border, near the summit of Mynydd Eilian. Ty Moel lies adjacent to the west and may reflect the memory of Madog ap Ieuan Foel's land in Gwely Bodgynndelw.



Fig. 7 Porth yr Ychain, Corn Ellyll and Penrhyn Balog

Fig. 8 The Church: ground plan



Llaneilian Church  
plan



## A description of the church

### The graveyard

The graveyard is elongated on a west-east axis. The present shape of the graveyard reflects what would appear to be several modifications over a long period of time. At the eastern end, occupying an area of 3400 sq. m or 0.84 acres, is a relatively recent addition to the cemetery. The southern boundary is an old one. Its shape is an irregular curve, bordering the properties of Tan y Fynwent, Tyn yr Odyn and Bryn Glas. The northern boundary is a straight west-east wall dividing what had been a larger field during the twentieth century. During the eighteenth century, however, the northern part of this field was part of Corn Ellyll, in the hands of Lord Bulkeley, while the southern portion, including the new cemetery area, was church land. The field immediately to the east was also known as Cae'r Llan.

St. Eilian's church stands in the older part of the cemetery. This area is just over three quarters of an acre in extent, with a maximum west-east dimension of 93m and 41m north-south. The church stands in the southern part of this area, with a centre about 25m from the northern cemetery wall, 15m from the southern boundary, 38m from the western wall and 55m from the eastern limit. Even this area has seen modification. The boundary to the south-east of the church is curvilinear and may continue an early line represented by the present south boundary wall and the old entry to the churchyard on the south side. The situation is not entirely clear as there would seem to have been some encroachment by the cottages of Tan y Fynwent and Tyn yr Odyn. Furthermore, there may be a second, concentric, curvilinear boundary, at about 17m south of the current one, which continues westward, 40m south of the present road. (I am grateful to Margaret Bradbury for drawing my attention to this putative boundary). Part of the land between the road west of the church and this possible boundary was glebe land in the early nineteenth century, on the northern edge of the newly enclosed Cors Eilian. By 1847 this property, Tan y Terfyn (that is, below the boundary) had become incorporated in the property of the rector, as incumbent of the parish.

Both the western and the northern boundaries of the older part of the present churchyard are straight stone walls which meet at a right angle. These are boundaries which appear to have been in place by at least the late eighteenth century. Nevertheless, there are anomalies, for example, in the straight-walled exclusion of a rocky piece of ground at the north-east corner of this part of the cemetery. There is also a hint of an earlier curvilinear boundary on the northern side of Plas Eilian farmyard. Plas Eilian had not come into being much before the end of the eighteenth century and it is possible that Plas Eilian and Tyn y Llan lands to the west of the church had been, in the Middle Ages, church land. It is possible, therefore, that a pattern of concentric enclosures may once have existed around the nucleus

of Llanellian church. This possibility corresponds not only to evidence in the landscape around other early Medieval monastic communities but, also, to the theoretical and schematised evidence of Welsh law books of the Middle Ages. The concept is that of 'corflan'. The Iorwerth Redaction of the Welsh Laws contains the following statement:

'whoever takes sanctuary, it is right for him to go about in the churchyard and the enclosure without relics on him, while his livestock go with the livestock of the clas and the abbots as far as the farthest point to which they go while able to return to their cattle pen .... The measure of a corflan is a legal acre in length, with its end at the churchyard and surrounding the churchyard' (Jenkins, 1986, 82; Pryce 1993, 193).

The implication of this statement is that a theoretical corflan should extend around the churchyard in a zone 120yds wide (120yds being the length of a legal acre). The hypothetical outer enclosure, around the graveyard at Llanellian extends from about 50 to 100m from the graveyard.

### Graveyard features

The present entrance to the churchyard is through a simple arched gate in the western wall. The former entrance was approached, via a flight of steps, through the southern churchyard wall, directly opposite the south porch of the church. The wall is low here but rises in stages to create an arched entrance now closed by an openwork wooden gate. The structure is of undressed mortared shaley rock and is surmounted by a simple cross of coarse-grained stone. The arms of the cross are slightly but distinctively upturned.



Fig. 9 The south entrance

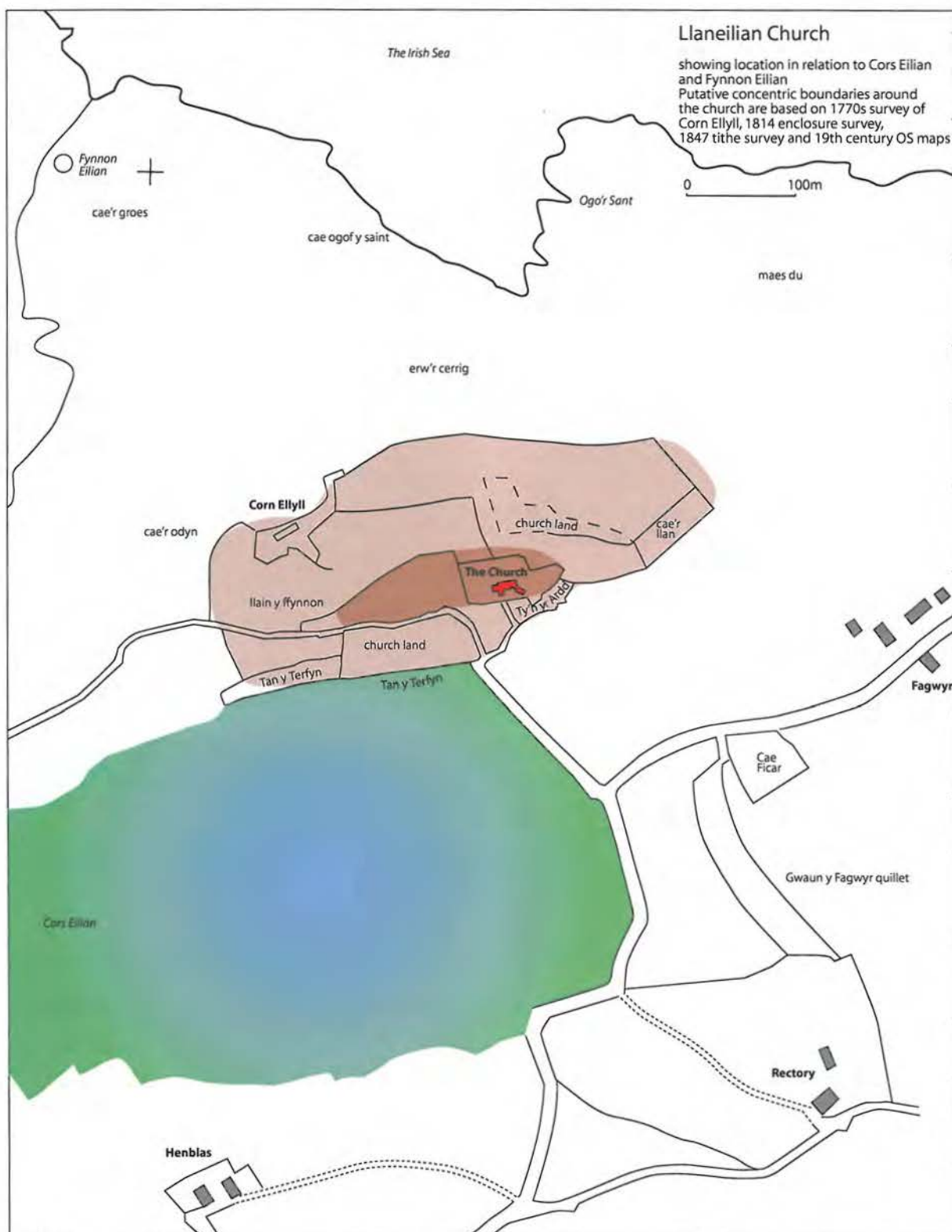


Fig. 10 The Church in its local context



A free-standing cross-shaft stands in the churchyard, immediately to the south west of the church porch. The shaft has chamfered edges above a squared basal end which is set into a socket in a square base. The head of the cross is missing. The shaft and its base stand on a stepped platform of three tiers, calvary-style.

A sundial once stood on the south wall of the churchyard. This comprised a brass dial mounted on a short cylindrical fluted stone column. The column survives but the dial was removed in 1972. The sundial was the gift of Hugh Davies, son of Dafydd ap Huw of Berach, Llaneilian and an inscription on the dial commemorated his birth in the parish. Hugh Davies, a correspondent of the Morris brothers, was a successful shoemaker in London before returning to settle at Trecastell in 1752. He donated the dial to the church in 1753. By 1758, however William Morris was already reporting that the dial had been damaged. When Hugh Davies died in 1771, he remembered Llaneilian in his will (BL Jones, 1973).

Dafydd ap Huw died in 1696, four years after Hugh's birth, and was buried in the floor of St. Eilian's chapel where his tombstone may still be seen. An elegy composed on the occasion of his death includes the lines:

*'Er bod ei gorff gwiwlwys yn gorffwys tan gudd  
Ym Myfyr Llaneilian heb chwimiad....*

Although his perfect body lies still within the grave, in Myfyr Llaneilian ... his great and virtuous soul will, one day, be in the company of saints, angels and the Gracious Trinity'.

### The Tower

The tower stands at the western end of the present church. It is the oldest surviving visible structural element of the church and was built during the twelfth century, perhaps towards the middle of that century. There would have been a contemporary nave attached to the tower on its eastern side although later building here has removed all evidence of it. However, taking as a comparison the broadly contemporary building programme at Penmon, it is possible to suggest that the twelfth-century nave at Llaneilian would have been as long as, but considerably narrower than, the nave which stands today.

Llaneilian's tower is very nearly square, 5.06m west-east, 5.0m north-south; the angles, however, are slightly skewed and the alignment of the nave is not precisely square to the tower. The walls are 1.16m thick at the base, narrowing to around 95cm at the roof level. The tower rises from a plinth at ground level, in three stages, to a conical roof, 8.84m above the plinth course. The intersection of each stage is defined by a dressed-stone chamfered offset. The conical roof takes the total height of the structure to 15.06m (excluding the decorative ball which terminates the cone). Within recorded memory the external walls of the tower have been covered with some form of protective coating. The Reverend Skinner



Fig. 11 The churchyard cross



Fig. 12 The sundial

Llaneilian Church  
West elevation

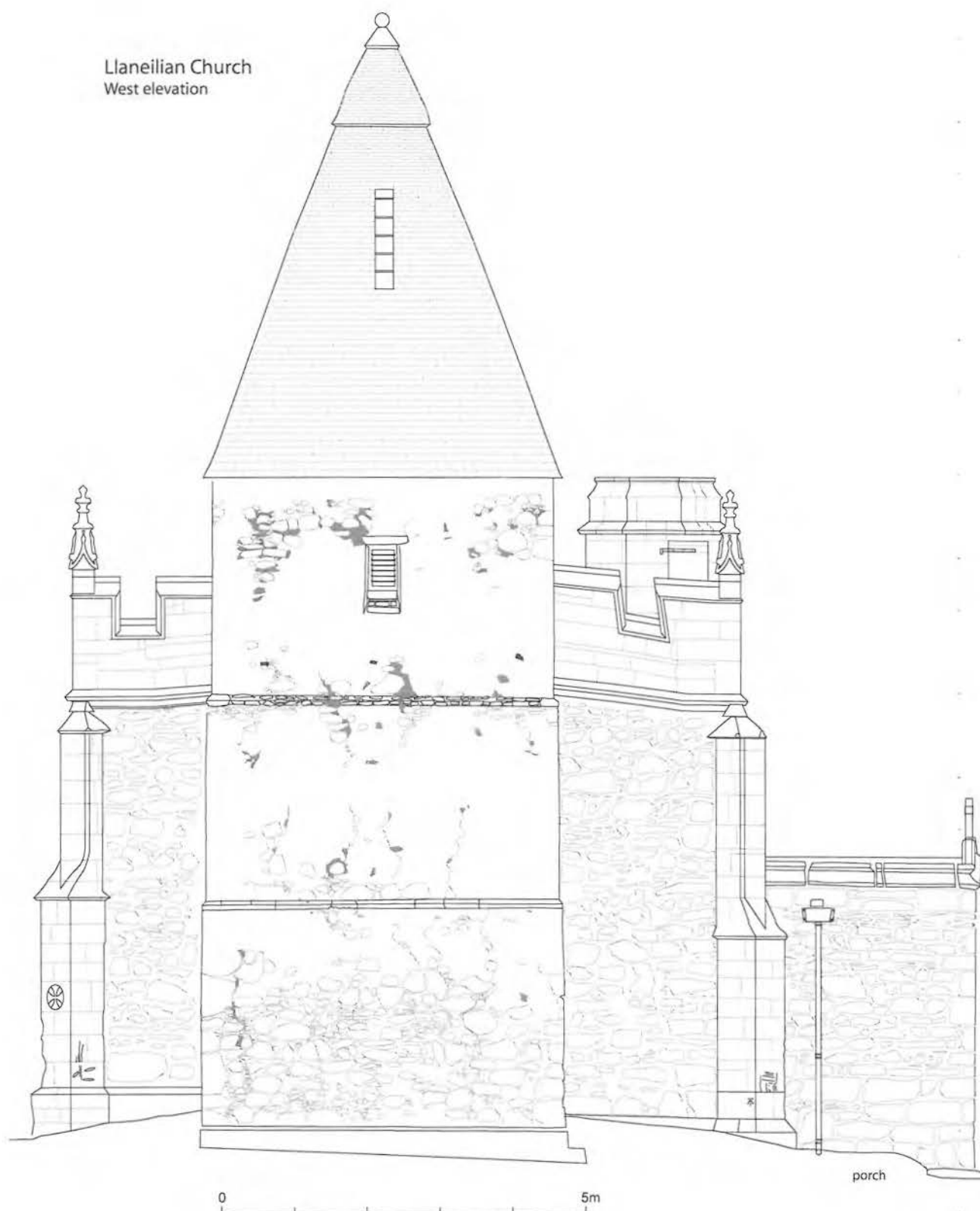


Fig. 13 The Church, west elevation





Fig. 14 Fig. 15 The Church, west elevation before and after conservation



visited the church in 1802 and described it then as 'coated all the way up with small slate'. His account is accompanied by a small but quite accurate sketch of the church and certain of the fittings (Skinner, 1802, 59).

The tower retained this cladding into the twentieth century but more recently the coating was pebbledash. When this pebbledash was removed during the recent programme of works, an opportunity arose to record the original masonry. The core of the structure is undressed random or roughly-coursed local stone. The chamfered offsets, however, employ a fine-grained sandstone, possibly from the Bodorgan area. The quoins, some of which are sandstone, are roughly dressed. The masonry is not pointed and it is probable that the walls were always intended to be rendered. The present treatment,

replacing the twentieth-century pebbledash, is a 1:2.5 lime:sand mortar painted with five coats of pigmented limewash.

#### **Tower windows**

There is one window in the first stage, that is at ground floor level. This window pierces the north wall and would seem to be a relatively recent addition. At the external face the window is framed with slate slabs, including one Victorian memorial, in use as a lintel. The frame measures 715mm by 273mm and is chocked in place by fragments of brick. The window is splayed internally from side to side and downward giving internal dimensions of 1030mm by 400mm.

*Figs 16 to 21 Windows in the tower, clockwise from top left: first stage (ground floor) north side; third stage (top) north side; third stage south side; third stage east side internal; third stage east side external; second stage north side.*



# Llaneilian Church Western Tower

Twelfth century tower, showing external and internal elevations of the north wall, window openings in the north wall, the stone stairs to first floor level and the present internal floor levels.

Dotted lines show the height of a postulated romanesque opening from the nave. The internal and external heights of the nave roof are also shown

The small cavities picked out in red on the outer face are later scaffolding holes

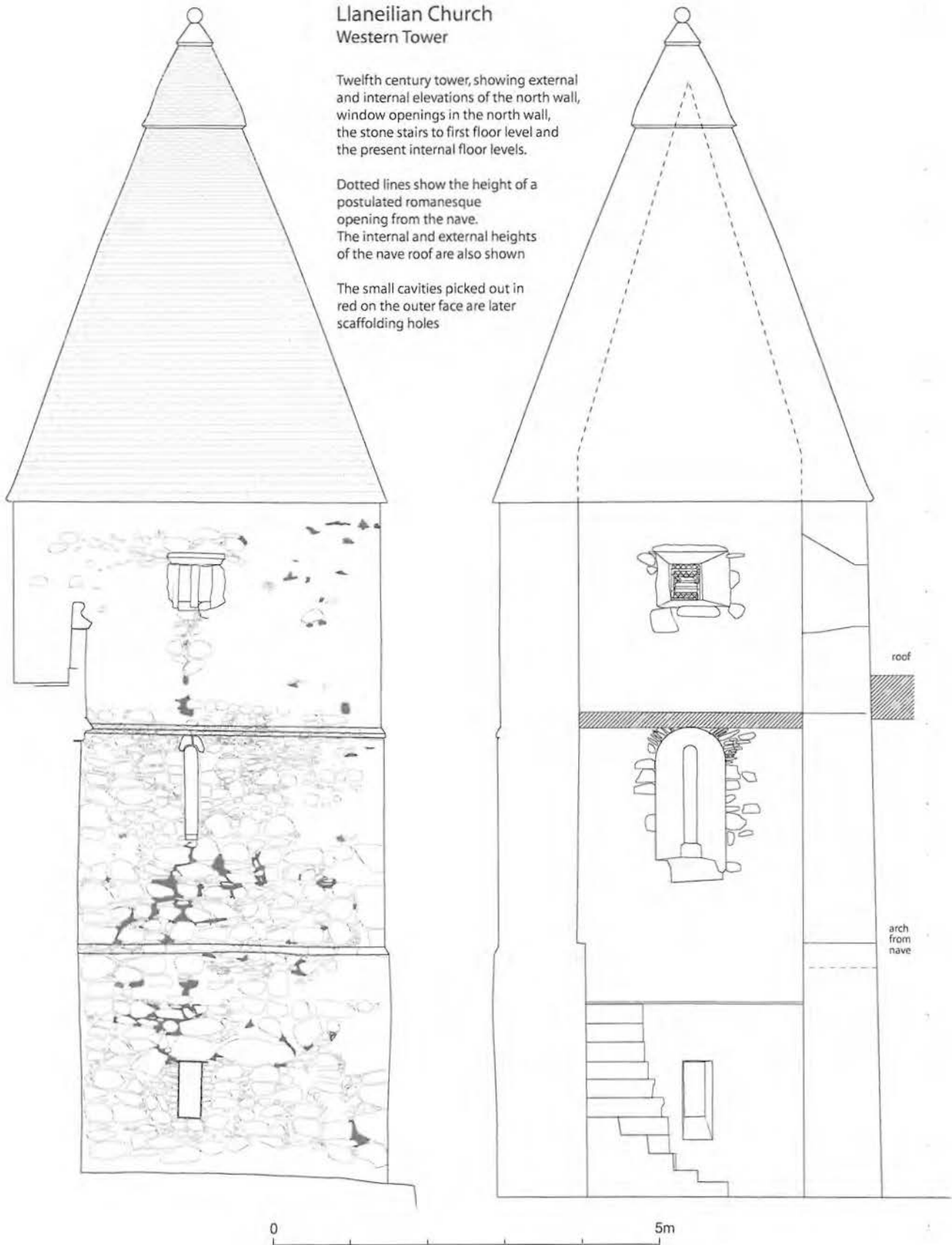


Fig.22 Tower elevations, north side, showing windows



There is one window in the second stage. This is an original twelfth century window. When the Royal Commission surveyed the church in the 1930s this window was obscured by render and was thought to have been provided with a modern frame. In fact, it has retained its original frame of large stone blocks and round head. At the external face the window measures 1180mm by 158mm. The window retains its arched head internally and is splayed to a width of 908mm and a height of 1740mm.

There is a ledge in the interior wall on the west side which corresponds to the division between the first and second stage on the external wall. This ledge presumably supported a floor at 1.10m below the arched-headed window. The present boarded floor is set at the top of a flight of stone steps 757mm below the ledge and 1.86m below the window.

The third stage of the tower is provided with four windows, one in each face. The windows on the south, west and north faces are rectangular with horizontal lintels. The southern and western windows, however, have internal arched heads and splayed reveals. The north window has a horizontal stone lintel which carries across the internal splay but there are indications of repair work and re-pointing about the lintel and this may also have had an original arched head. The Royal Commission survey of the 1930s suggested that all the upper stage windows had internal round heads.

The south and west windows have stone splayed jambs externally and the respective dimensions of their frames are 680mm by 360mm and 760mm by 400mm. These may represent original windows with some repair and modification. For example, the western window has, as its lintel, an inserted, re-used architectural fragment with moulding present. The northern window is wider and more squat externally, of two lights with a sandstone mullion and gritstone jambs. The lintel is an architectural fragment, re-used and inserted. There is no indication of the date of these insertions other than that they predate the pebbledash coat.

The fourth, east, window in the upper stage of the tower has retained its original twelfth century appearance both internally and externally. This window looks out over the roof of the nave. The window is narrow, externally, with a rounded head formed from a single stone. The stone jambs are splayed. The dimensions are 780mm by 210mm. Internally the window has a rounded head with splayed reveals of broadly the same dimensions as the other windows of the upper stage.

#### **Tower floors**

The present floors inside the tower reflect modifications made at different periods in providing access to the upper storeys of the structure. Firstly there is a flight of eleven stone steps against the south and



*Fig. 23 Tower stair, showing re-used mouldings*

west walls of the tower. From the spine of these steps a timber post provides central support for a flight of wooden (pitch-pine) stairs to the topmost stage. The lower, boarded, floor is supported at the level of the topmost stone step. The stone steps are old but not original to the tower as they incorporate at least two architectural fragments, dressed, one with chamfered moulding, which may derive from one of a possible sequence of stone churches on the site predating the late fifteenth century construction. The top of these steps and the present floor between the first and second stages of the tower is 750mm below a ledge in the west wall which marks the position of the original floor. The wooded stairs and timber floors are relatively modern, much of this work being done in 1896.

#### **Tower roof**

The roof is now slated externally although the substructure is of stone and original and is visible from the topmost floor. The apex of the roof was strengthened and ventilation slots cut into the sides of the spire during the restoration work of the 1890s (RCAHMW).





Fig. 25 The tower and east window rising above the nave roof



Fig. 24 The bells

There are three bells, of seventeenth-century date, which hang in the roof space.

#### **The opening from the nave to the tower**

The fifteenth-century nave abuts the twelfth-century tower at the eastern wall of the tower, replacing one or more earlier naves in this position. Access between the two structures is achieved through a large pointed arch of perhaps fourteenth-century date. The Royal Commission have suggested that the imposts from which this arch springs are of twelfth-century date and therefore contemporary with the tower itself. The gap is larger than the plain Romanesque arches in the tower on Ynys Seiriol, but not out of proportion to the width of this smaller contemporary tower. At 2.15m the arch would not be significantly larger than the Romanesque arches at Penmon, another contemporary tower. The Ynys Seiriol and Penmon towers, however, both stand at the junction of the nave and chancel, whereas the Llaneilian tower stood at the west end of the nave. The gap in the east wall of the tower, therefore, may, in its lower portion, represent the original access from the twelfth-century nave to the tower, with a modified pointed arch superimposed in the fourteenth century. An alternate and, perhaps less likely, possibility may be that an original twelfth-century Romanesque chancel arch was removed and reset at the west end in, say, the thirteenth century following the transfer of the abadaeth from the clas to the rector, to accommodate a change in liturgical requirements. The arch in the west wall of Aberffraw church, for example, is thought to have originally been the chancel arch of the twelfth-century church, later removed and reset. There were building works at Llaneilian in the late-fourteenth or early-fifteenth centuries and this may have been the occasion for the superimposition of a pointed arch at the west end if this work had not already been achieved earlier.

One further, but not conclusive, piece of evidence was revealed during the recent restoration work. A narrow trench was dug, perpendicular to the east wall of the tower, into the nave to accommodate a heating duct. The trench, between 300mm and 400mm wide



Fig. 26 The arch between the nave and chancel

# Llaneilian Church west end, interior

West end of nave, showing roof construction and  
arched access to the tower

Dotted lines show the extent of the tower,  
the projected arch of a postulated romanesque  
opening, the original first floor level in the  
tower and the present second floor level

The 12th century window in the tower  
opens onto the early 16th century roof

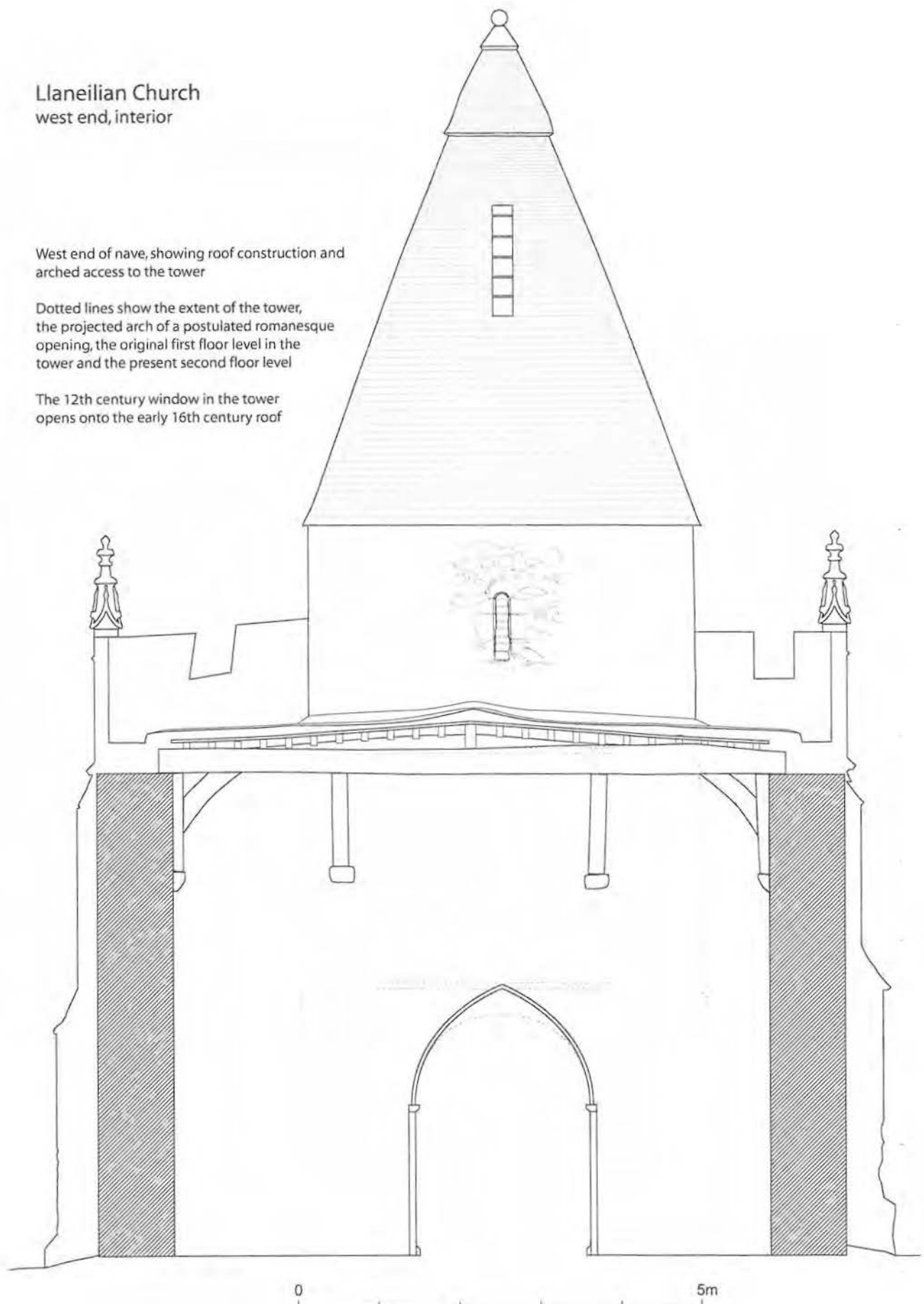


Fig. 27 The west end of the nave



ran alongside the north jamb of the arch, for a distance of 3.14m into the nave. The floor had previously been disturbed here by the insertion of electricity cabling. A brown soil was encountered beneath the tiles and mortar bedding which comprised the floor of the nave. Fragments of human bone were identified in this brown soil. Elongated schist slabs, about 450mm by 160mm, were recorded at a depth of around 150mm below the nave floor. These slabs continued the line of the east face of the tower wall southward as far as the restricted area of the heating duct trench permitted observation. The slabs represent the footings of the original tower which were carried across at least part of the gap which provided access to and from the tower. A possible implication that might be drawn is that the gap in this position was once narrower than the surviving arch. It is alternatively possible, however, that these footings were only constructed to foundation level at this point.

### **The nave**

The nave was built during the last decade of the fifteenth century, attested by two building inscriptions (see below). The nave is rectangular, 9.75m long and 7.37m wide internally. The external faces are of random or roughly coursed rubble above a chamfered plinth course and below a moulded string course at roof height. Above this string course there rises a battlemented ashlar wall (predominantly sandstone) with moulded copings. The battlements are surmounted at each corner and at the centre of each long side by crocketed pinnacles. During the renovation work of 2002, two of these pinnacles, on the north side were replaced with new copies in Cove stone from Dumfries.



*Fig. 28 The nave roof*

There are rectangular ashlar buttresses at each corner and at the centre of the long sides, corresponding to the position of the pinnacles but reaching only to the string course.



*Fig. 29 Old pinnacle, centre, north side*



*Fig. 30 New pinnacle, centre, north side*



There are opposing doors in the north and south walls at the west end of the nave. The south door has a pointed arch with wide and shallow recessed moulding at the jambs and a moulded label. The north door has similar moulding but is less elaborate.

### Windows

There are two large windows in the eastern half of the nave, in the north and south walls. The north window is disposed centrally between the mid-point of the interior of the nave and the returning wall at the east end. The southern window is disposed a little further west to accommodate a stair turret in the south-east corner. Both windows are of three lights with cinque-foiled cusped heads under a four-centred arch with a moulded label. The jambs have shallow recessed 'casement' moulding. Both windows are of the same width at 2.23m (including frames). The southern window is taller (3.43m from label to sill) than the north window (2.91m) to take account of the sloping ground and the difference in external ground level.

### Stair tower

At the south-east corner of the nave there is a stair tower which leads, via a spiral stone staircase to a rood loft and upward to an octagonal turret on the roof of the nave. A chamfered latin cross stands on a corbel about 1.5m above the door to the stair, slightly off-set.

The turret is of dressed sandstone with a chamfer-moulded string course above the door and moulded coping around the top of the wall. There are two small slit windows in the tower which light the staircase through the south wall.



Fig. 31 The south window of the nave

### The nave roof

The nave roof is a timber camber and cranked-beam construction, supported by wall-pieces and braces which spring from corbels in the north and south walls and also in the west and east walls. There are, attached to the second and third wall-pieces from the west end, at the level of the corbels, figural representations of clerics and angels, either praying or holding books. They are believed to be contemporary with the construction of the nave in the late-fifteenth century.

Fig. 32 The stair turret





Llaneilian Church  
South elevation

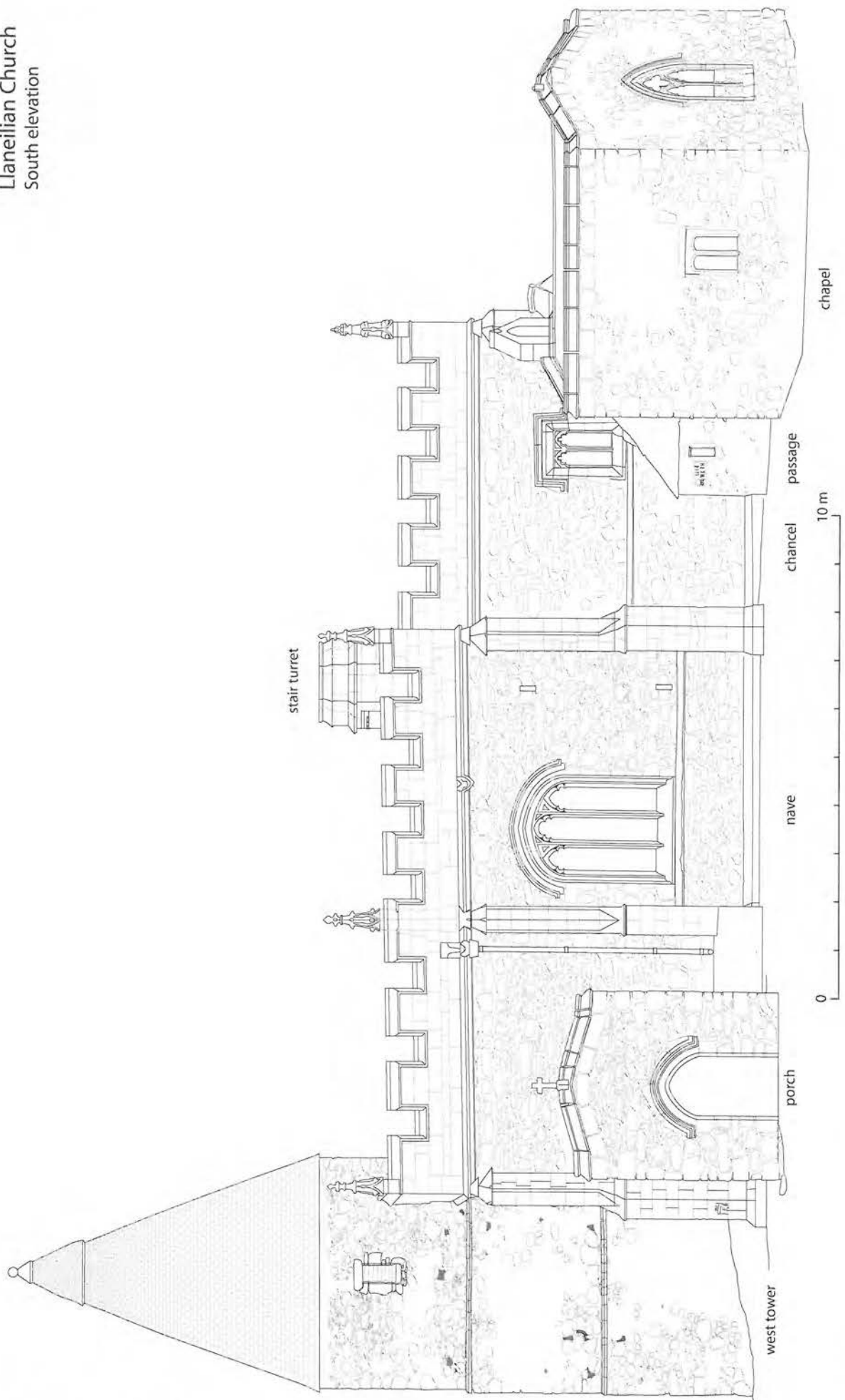


Fig.33 The Church: south elevation

Llaneilian Church  
North elevation

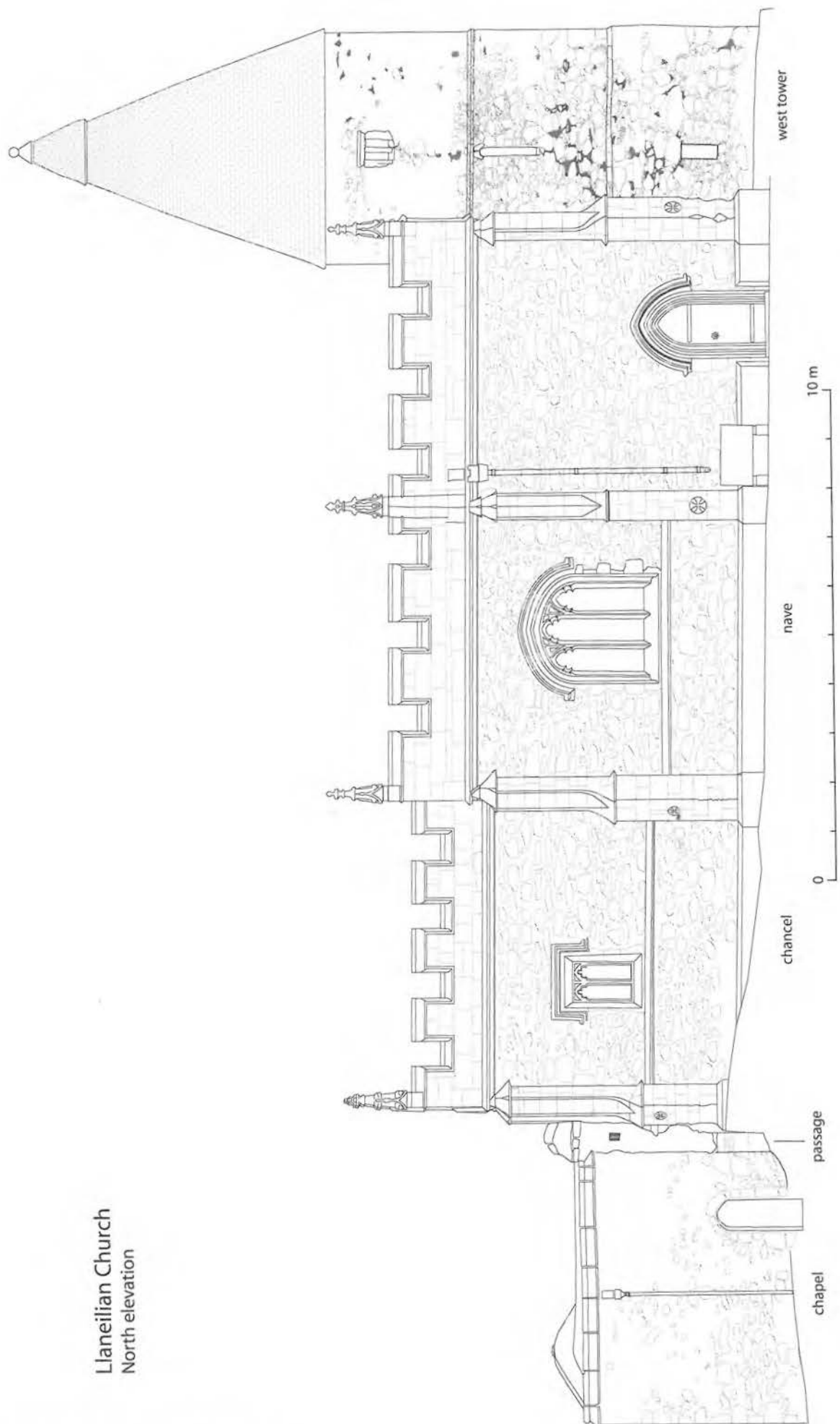


Fig. 34 The Church: north elevation



They are brightly painted as they were in 1802 when Skinner described them, rather scathingly, as 'ridiculous ... in black coats, yellow waistcoats and white wigs'.

This type of roof uses horizontal transverse beams, higher through an increased thickness (camber beams) or slightly inclined upward towards the centre from each end (cranked) to achieve a flatish roof with a degree of slope from the ridge. The horizontal rafters are then boarded and, in the case of Llaneilian, leaded. When Skinner visited Llaneilian in 1802 he ascended the spiral stair to the roof and observed then 'how nicely leaded' the roof was.

The figure against the central beam on the north wall has his hands placed together in an attitude of prayer, while at the same time clasping a pulley wheel which, it has been suggested, communicated with other wheels in lifting a curtain before the chancel or, perhaps, for use in the ceremonies focussed on Easter. The support for one other wheel survives on the ridge plate in a position adjacent to the cranked beam closest to the screen.

*Figs 35 to 38 Figures in the nave: clockwise from top left  
south wall central beam  
north wall central beam  
north wall, central beam, profile  
south wall, central and western beams*







Fig. 39 The church from the north-west before the repairs of 2000

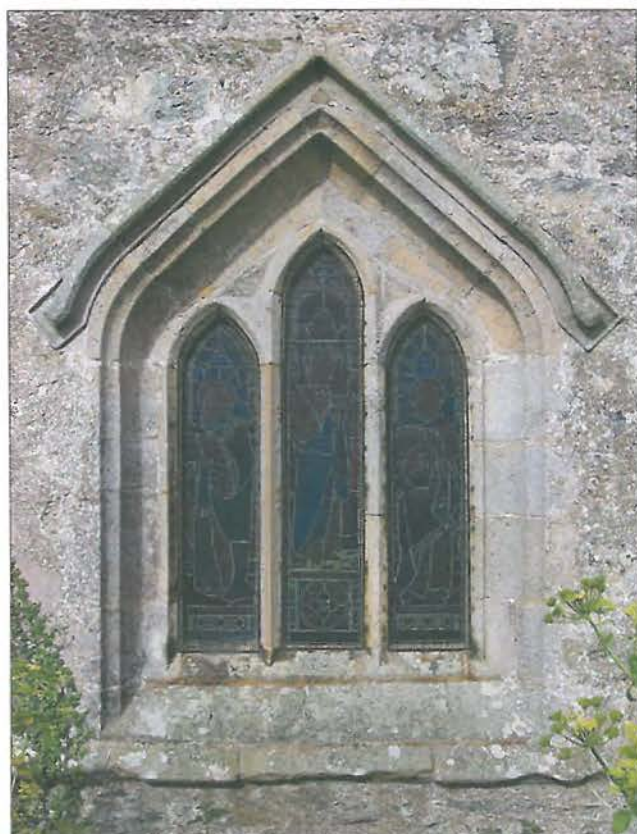


Fig. 40 The chancel east window



Fig. 41 The chancel south window



### The Chancel Arch and the Chancel

Access to the chancel is through a wide (4m) and tall pointed arch of two chamfered orders. There is now a step up into the chancel and three further steps up to the altar. However, the present arrangement does not necessarily reflect the original level. During the recent restoration work a small excavation was undertaken to examine the condition of the sill beam of the rood screen now inserted between the jambs of the chancel arch. The base of the beam was set 620mm below the present level of the step and the tiles of the chancel floor. The top of the sill was 360mm below the present surface. The choir stalls in the chancel are bedded 50mm below the present tiles. If, during the later centuries of the church's use there had been a step up to the chancel then the sill beam of the rood screen itself is likely to have fronted that change of level.

The chancel is contemporary with the late-fifteenth-century nave. As with the nave, the external walls are of random or roughly coursed rubble, of local stone, above a chamfered plinth course and below a moulded string course at roof level. There is a second moulded string course at the level of the chancel windows, as there is in the eastern half of the nave. A battlemented ashlar wall rises above the upper string

course. The north-east and south-east corners are surmounted by crocketed pinnacles. The battlements rise to an apex at the centre of the east gable. The central crenellation once supported a cross. Rectangular buttresses of ashlar are fixed at 45 degrees to the north-east and south-east corners of the chancel.

There are three windows. There are two windows directly opposite each other towards the eastern end of the chancel, in the north and south walls. These windows are relatively small (total width of frame, 1.1m), of two cinque-foil lights in a rectangular frame, surmounted by a rectilinear moulded label. Both north and south windows are identical and set in corresponding positions in their respective walls.

The third window is larger (total width of frame 2.1m), set in the eastern wall, lighting the altar. This is a late-fifteenth-century window (albeit repaired) of three tall pointed lights of lancet style framed by shallow recessed moulding and surmounted by a straight-sided, pointed, moulded label.

### The Screen

This oak screen is the most complete on Anglesey. The date of its erection is uncertain, some have suggested fifteenth-century (Crossley, 1944, 70-72) or



Fig. 42 The chancel arch and screen

Fig. 43 The chancel arch, screen and stair tower





possible early sixteenth-century (RCAHMW, 60). There is, in addition, a mention by Glyn in 1849 of woodwork which may have been associated with a western galley (now removed) carrying a dated inscription of 1533.

The present screen occupies the space between the jambs of the chancel arch (4m) and carried above it a loft which overlooks both the nave and the chancel. There is a balustrade with a heavy top rail on both sides. On the western side the loft extends from the north wall of the nave to the point where it meets the wall of the spiral staircase at an oblique angle, a length of 6.5m.

The screen itself comprises three elements. In the centre is a double door between two jambs 1.06m apart. The lower part of each door is solid. The upper part is pierced by four, pointed, arched holes disposed in a regular paired arrangement of two-above-two. Flanking the doors on each side are two frames each containing a solid lower panel, decorated with horizontal moulding across the top part. Above these solid panels the frames are open but each is divided into four sections by three vertical moulded mullions. Above the screen on the west side a coved soffit is jettied out between the top of the screen and the floor of the loft. This space is boarded with horizontal planking separated into eleven sections by vertical muntins. The effect is one of a shallow canopy. The panel immediately above the door carries a pointed image of a skeleton gesturing towards a scroll which reads 'colyn angeu yw pechod' - the sting of death is sin (1 Corinthians xv, 55). The image is a *memento mori*, a reminder of human mortality and a not unfamiliar representation in churches during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The image of the skeleton may not have been the first or the only representative on these panels. All these boards look as though they have been scrubbed but faint images may be discerned, in particular, on the two panels to the left of the skeleton. The second on the left appears to show the head and shoulders of a bearded male figure, perhaps crowned.

The coved soffit is framed by horizontal zones of richly carved foliated decoration. At the base of the balustrade there are two horizontal zones, one above the other, separated by a roll moulding, filled with continuous waves of vine leaves punctuated by schematized bunches of grapes. Above the screen at the base of the coving there is another horizontal zone of very similar vine scroll decoration. This is surmounted by a frieze of trefoils springing from a continuous cusped stalk. There are clear parallels for the arrangement of this design, but not in its execution, at Llanengan on the Llyn peninsula.

It is unlikely that the skeleton was painted before the closing decade of the sixteenth century. Until the Reformation, the only Bible available to parish churches was the Latin Vulgate. In 1539 an English Bible was authorised and widely circulated and a decree issued that the English Bible and Book of Common Prayer were to be used in every church. During the 1560s, Parliament



Figs 44 to 46 The *memento mori* and details of the screen decoration



assented to the translation of the Bible into Welsh and William Salesbury produced a Welsh New Testament in 1567. However, it was William Morgan's Bible of 1588 which really made an impact on Welsh parish churches. The legend above the skeleton on the rood screen faithfully reproduces the text of 1. Corinthians XV, 56 as it appears in William Morgan's translation.

An Elizabethan Crown survey identified four closes of land which had been assigned for the maintenance of a light in the presence of the image of the rood and St. Hilary, in the parish of St. Hilary. The date of this document has been taken to be 1577 on the strength of a comment on the concealment of the Llanelian parcels, signed by Sir Robert Mutton. One of the closes, three virgates in extent, is described as in the tenure of Hugh Price, *clericus*, (that is, the incumbent). Hugh Price (or Hugh ap Rees, clerk, recorded in Rowlands 1723, 367) was rector from 1560 until his death in 1573. This suggests that the screen, with iconography, was in place at least fifteen years before the circulation of Bishop Morgan's bible and possibly longer. An 18th century account, repeated by Angharad Llwyd, records that 'the church ... was adorned with paintings of the twelve apostles, somewhat injured by time and accidents'. A half-length portrait of St. Eilian and another of St. Paul was said to hang in the chancel. (Miss Llwyd's informant would appear to have been John Lloyd, rector of Caerwys, friend of Thomas Pennant and father of Angharad herself. John Lloyd was a friend of the otherwise anonymous author, John Thomas of Beaumaris; - H Ramage, 1987, 263-4)

In 1597 a summary of concealed lands in Twrcelyn identified certain of these closes or parcels as being in Gwaun y Fagwyr, south-east of the church. The earlier document identified Hugh Price's tenement appropriately as 'next to the rectory'. In the Llanelian Tithe survey of the 1840s, a plot of Fagwyr land could still be identified adjacent to the rectory.

In 1802 Skinner found the interior of the church 'still retaining its catholic collection of saints and apostles'. In 1833 Angharad Llwyd comments on the screen 'ornamented with a portrait of St. Eilian', but much defaced with paint.

In 1915 Fred Crossley visited Llanelian. His description clearly indicates that modifications had been made to the screen. The wear and tear on the upper and lower rails of the balustrade had been masked by recent planking. The coving between the loft and the screen 'had been daubed with brown paint'. His photograph appears to indicate that the skeleton had been covered over and his description suggests that, although aware of its existence, it was not visible at the time of his visit: 'In earlier days, paintings were visible in each section, the centre panel had a skeleton with a curled motto ribbon placed behind its head' (Crossley, 1945, 70-72).

The screen and loft were repaired and restored in the 1930s. The Victorian planking and paint were removed and the *memento mori* became visible

once again (entries in church terrier, 1934, ex info. R Ashworth). A memorial plaque on the south side of the chancel records the work.

### The choir stalls

The choir stalls occupy a little over half of the western part of the chancel, ranged against the north and south walls and the screen, either side of the double door. They are described as 'primitive' by Crossley but are, in fact richly carved and attractive examples of vernacular carpentry. The stalls are of oak, thick and heavy. The outer faces give the impression of muntin and plank construction with five panels in each of the long (north and south) faces and three panels in each of the two shorter returns (against the screen). In fact the boarding continues behind the panel dividers as is clear from the stalls against the south wall where one of the dividers is missing. The dividers moulded with three vertical beads, are superimposed upon the face of the boarding. The boards are plain in their lower part; decorated with recessed arcading in the upper quarter. The end panels of the stalls, both the seats against the walls and the desks in front, are heavily ornamented, but not uniformly so. The desk ends on the north side are decorated with two tiers of arcading surmounted by crosses filled with chip-carved rosette crosses and, at the east end, a central marigold. The seat-ends are plain in their lower part but equally elaborately decorated above. The decoration on the southern stalls is similar but with an emphasis, in addition to filled crosses, on the Tudor Rose. There are parallels for the arcading in stalls at Beaumaris and Llanbedrgoch. The Royal Commission have suggested a date in the late fifteenth century.



Fig. 47 Decoration on the stall ends





*Fig. 48 and Fig. 49 Decoration on the fronts of the stalls*





### The roof

The chancel roof is of cranked beam construction in two bays. The beams are supported by arched braces springing from corbels. The braces are moulded and carry vine leaf decoration in the angles. The beams carry moulding on the underside. Furring, the addition of suitably shaped pieces of timber to the upper side of the beams, is employed to raise the centre line of the roof. Even the rafters are decorated with hollow chamfering. The central transverse beam carries a Tudor Rose boss. A wrought iron chandelier dated 1763 hangs from the beam at this point. A vine leaf boss is affixed centrally to the moulded ridge purlin within the eastern bay and a missing boss in a corresponding position in the western bay was replaced in 2002 with a modern plaque by Llywelyn Tudur of the Faenol School of Restoration. There is a moulded soffit below the wall-plate on the north side.

Three dimensional wooded figures of musicians, in comparable style to those in the nave, are attached to the base of four of the arched braces. There are two bagpipers facing each other on the axis of the central beam and two players with conical pipes facing each other at the east end. Bagpipes are not well documented in Wales but there are sufficient references in the literary record, from the fourteenth century to the nineteenth century, to attest their use. A Flintshire sketch of 1610, showing the hierarchy of bards illustrates two sorts of bagpipes alongside the harp and the *crwth*. The bagpipes represented at Llanelian are both droneless instruments, the one on the north side having a single conical bone chanter, the other on the south side has two chanters ([www.pibydd.fsnet.co.uk](http://www.pibydd.fsnet.co.uk)).

*Figs 50, 51, 52:  
The chancel roof  
Arch-braces supporting roof beams  
Purlins and rafters of the chancel roof*



*Figs 53, 54: A piper and a bagpiper at the corbelled supports of the arch-braces in the chancel*





It can only be supposed that the representation of musicians in the chancel reflects the presence of the choir there, in this part of the church, and the proximity to the rood loft which may have accommodated musicians. The Royal Commission suggest a late-fifteenth-century date for the figures.

### The chapel

St. Eilian's chapel is a very important structure. It is traditionally thought to be the resting place of the saint, a tradition supported by an alternative, and perhaps ancient name, *Myfyr Eilian*. *Myfyr Llaneilian* is recorded in the *marwnad* or lamentation on the death of Dafydd ap Huw of Berach in 1696. In origin the word is a borrowing from Latin *memoria* with the meaning of a shrine or memorial on the place where the relics of the saint might be housed, rather than a grave as such. However, *memoria/myfyr* came to mean 'grave' and the term is used as early as the sixth century on the funerary memorial of Vortipor of Dyfed with the implication that the stone marked his grave. The word *myfyr*, with the meaning 'grave' is documented as early as the thirteenth century where, in the Black Book of Carmarthen *Y glas fyfyr*, 'the green graves, the blood beneath men's feet', are taken as a metaphor or symbol of territorial possession of sense of place through ancestral proprietorship.

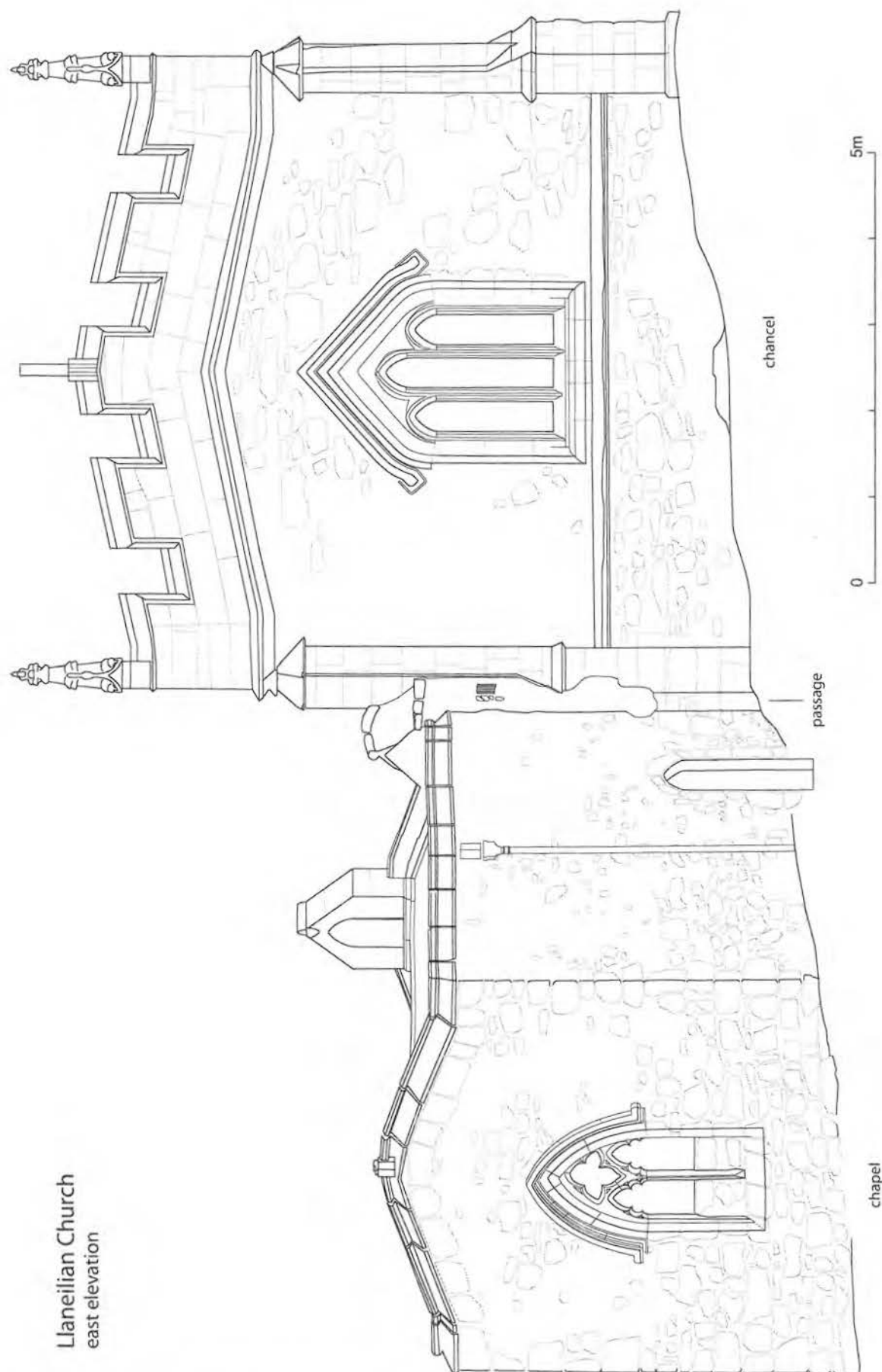
The origin of St. Eilian's chapel, therefore, may have been as an *eglwys by bedd* - a mortuary chapel on the reputed site of the saint. In this respect it is comparable

to Llan y Gwyddel, otherwise known as *Eglwys y Bedd*, freestanding within the graveyard of St. Cybi's church, Caergybi and St. Beuno's Chapel at Clynnog.

St. Beuno's Chapel is also known as *Eglwys y Bedd* and was, also, originally a free-standing structure adjacent to the church. Excavations in 1913 at Clynnog recorded a sequence of structures and a sequence of burials earlier than the present sixteenth-century building. The present chapel at Clynnog measures 12.8 by 7.4m internally. An earlier structure on the same site measured 5.5 by 3m internally. In similar fashion to St. Eilian's chapel, the chapel of St. Beuno is on a different alignment to the present church which stands next to it. Both St. Beuno's and St. Eilian's chapels have a claim to have origins earlier than the surviving churches on the site as, perhaps, by analogy, does the *Eglwys y Bedd* at Caergybi. All three were religious '*clas*' communities. At Clynnog and at Llaneilian the chapels are directly associated with the grave of the founding or patron saint who is traditionally reputed to have lived in the sixth or seventh century. In this context 'saint' would mean a locally venerated individual. The known or identifiable grave of such an individual, perhaps in an ancestral community cemetery or in a grave or mausoleum associated with a local dynasty or estate, could provide the stimulus for the enhancement and embellishment of such a grave. The appeal of the cult of relics began to take hold in Britain and Ireland during the seventh century and the impetus for the



Fig. 55 St Eilian's chapel and communicating passage

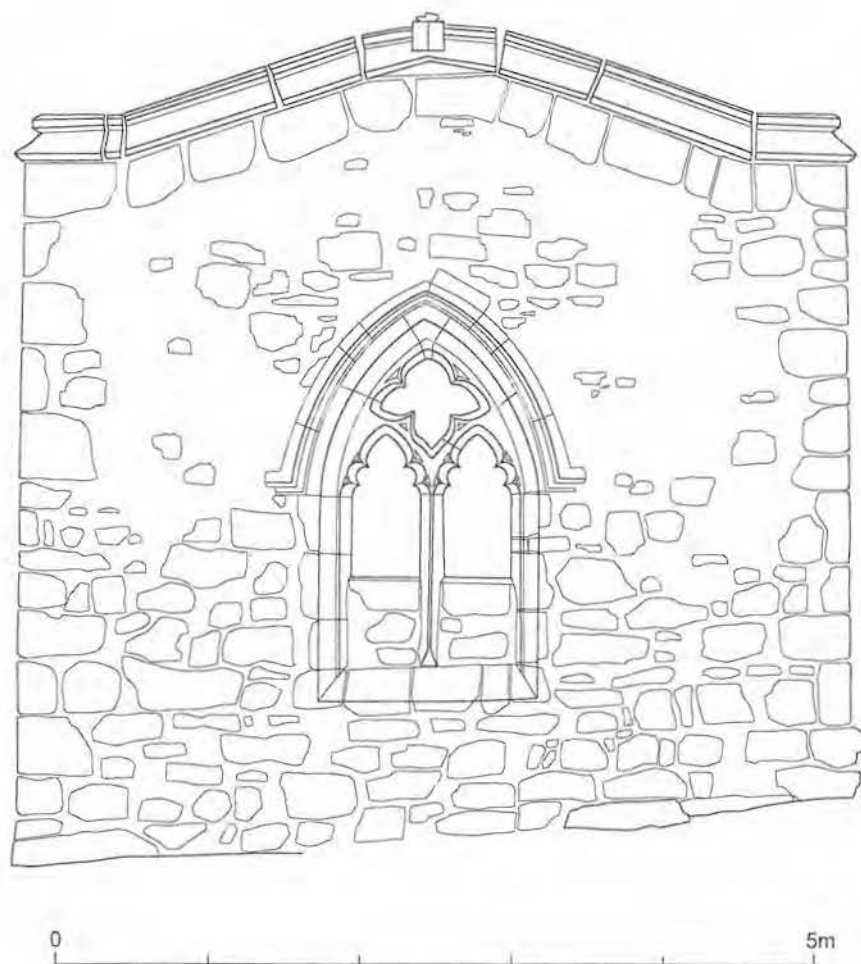


Llaneilian Church  
east elevation

Fig. 56 The chancel and St Eilian's chapel: east elevation



Llaneilian Church  
Chapel east elevation



*Fig. 57 St Eilian's chapel: east elevation*

development of a cult site would come from the patronage of wealthy patrons or as an adjunct of an existing church rather than through popular devotion, although the powerful attraction of a 'saint's' protection at a shrine so established, would encourage further burials to be made at the site, *ad sanctos* 'with the saint'.

The chapel is a rectangular building, 6.34m by 5.41m externally, 4.41 by 3.59m internally. The walls are random or roughly-coursed rubble with dressed quoins of gritstone. The moulded copings are an addition of the late-fifteen or early sixteenth century, contemporary with the work on the main body of the church and porch. There has been a cross at the apex of the east gable and a small bell-cote survives at the apex of the west gable. The east window dates the core of the building to the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century.

In or around 1894 Harold Hughes, accompanied by the rector, Morris Lloyd, identified and examined a large stone which projected from the external face of the east wall at its base. This proved to be a grave, containing a skeleton. The grave lay under the east wall through its entire thickness and, it must be assumed, predates the early-fifteenth-century construction of the chapel (Hughes 1894, 296).

### Doors and windows in the chapel

The east window is of two cinquefoil lights surmounted by a third quatrefoil light at the apex of a pointed (or two-centred) head frame with a moulded label. The lower parts of the two cinquefoil lights are blocked and were so in the 1930s. At this time a modern rectangular window, hinged at the base, had been set into the northern light above the blocking. This has now been partially restored. Skinner's sketch of 1802 would appear to show the window intact.

There is an original door with two-centred slightly pointed, head in the west wall, offset to the north of the centre of the wall. This door would have provided external access to the chapel when the chapel was free-standing detached from the body of the church. The door has, since 1614, communicated with a passage which leads to a door in the south wall of the chancel. There is a second door in the north wall near the north-west corner. This is dated by the Royal Commission to the sixteenth century but may not have been inserted until the construction of the covered passage from the chancel required a new external access to the chapel after 1614. The position of this door, tight between the north wall of the chapel and the rising contour of the ground is not particularly convenient.

There is a second window, in the south wall, of two lights with rounded heads under a rectangular label. This is of seventeenth-century date.



Fig. 58 St Eilian's chapel and the chancel from the east



### The passage

The passage was made in 1614 to provide a covered route from the chancel of the church to St. Eilian's chapel. The south wall of the chancel was breached near the south-east corner and a door inserted. The opening on the south side of the wall is widely splayed and there are five steps down to the floor of the passage, including one wide step entirely within the passage itself. The passage floor is stone-flagged, sloping towards the chapel and there are a further two shallow steps in front of the chapel door down to the level of the floor. The length of the passage from the outside of the chancel wall to the door of the chapel is 2.9m. The height difference between the floor of the chancel and the floor of the chapel is 90cm.

The back wall of the passage utilises the south-eastern buttress of the chancel and the connecting wall to the chapel is very short. The front wall is 4m long with two rectangular single light windows within chamfered stone frames. The pent roof rises to the back wall of the passage and is slated. The ridge has a hog-back moulded coping. The roof timbers were replaced in 1897. Inside the chapel, against the west wall, there is a shallow recess, 1.65m high by 1.08m wide and 130mm off the surface of the chapel floor.

### The 'shrine' within the chapel

At the east end is a carpentry structure, often considered to be a shrine, measuring almost 1m across by about 560mm in height, now supported off the ground by two modern wooden battens. The structure is flat across the back and bowed in front. The back and sides are plain. The front is panelled, the five panels separated by vertical moulded muntins set in a chamfered bottom rail and in the moulded overhang of the table-like top. There are six holes in the top which the Royal Commission believed to have supported a superstructure, now lost. There are short slots, at the top of the back face of the uprights occupying slightly less than a third of their total length. These would appear to have held smaller decorative panels, perhaps tracery, against the upper part of the main panels. Skinner illustrated such a panel in his account of his visit in 1802.

It has been suggested that the 'shrine' may have been part of an Easter Sepulchre (Owenna Orme *pers. comm.*). An Easter Sepulchre formed part of the liturgies of Easter in the following way. On Good Friday a cross, representing the crucified Christ, and the consecrated vessels and elements of Holy Communion would be placed within the Sepulchre and shut away. On the morning of Easter the objects would be removed and the host placed on the altar with great rejoicing. Ceremonies and ritual attended this procedure. For example, on Good Friday, parishioners might approach the cross on their knees and kiss it. The sacramental objects might be wrapped carefully before being 'entombed'. Lights would be maintained at the Sepulchre and a vigil kept from the evening of



Fig. 59 St Eilian's chapel: west door and entrance to the passage



Fig. 60 St Eilian's chapel: the shrine or possible Easter sepulchre



Good Friday until Easter Morning. The Sepulchre itself could be a wooden chest or in elaborate examples, a sculptured stone setting perhaps in the form of a tomb. Wooden examples were often portable and set on flat surfaces or an existing tomb suitable for the purpose. In some instances a framework or superstructure might be erected to support curtains or candles over the chest which contained the sacramental objects. The normal position for an Easter Sepulchre was against the north wall of the chancel, near the altar.

With the Reformation, the ritual ceased, or was caused to cease and although there was a brief revival in the 1550s, the practice had died out by the end of the sixteenth century in the Anglican church.

As early as the end of the seventeenth century we learn of debased practices concerning the shrine or sepulchre. Llwyd notes that at St. Eilian's, on Anglesey, 'there is a cupboard where foolish people used to thrust their heads and their bodies where, if they can turn, they hold it a good omen' (Fenton, quoting Llwyd c.1696). One hundred years later, Skinner was able to elaborate: 'there is a kind of semicircular chest or cabinet made of oak into which whoever can enter and turn himself round is sure, in the opinion of the vulgar, to live out the year but if he fails it will prove fatal to him. People from all parts come at stated periods to try their destiny in this absurd way'. Angharad Llwyd in 1833 describes, in the Myfyr, an oaken box fixed to the wall, an old relic of superstition (Llwyd 1833, 246).

The argument in support of the 'oaken box' being part of a former Easter Sepulchre is plausible. If correct the chest itself might represent the 'tomb-like' receptacle for the liturgical objects with the possibility of some form of superstructure for drapes or candles. From its later use it would seem to have had a removable panel with space inside. Alternatively the box could have been the base on which the actual, and now lost, sepulchre was placed. A superstructure or framework corresponding to the holes in the top would be no less relevant.

A small square recess is set low down in the east wall at the south-east corner of the chapel.

### The roof

The roof is of cranked-beam rather than cambered-beam construction, in two bays. The pitch of the roof is raised along the ridge line by the addition of additional wedge-shaped pieces increasing in height towards the centre. The transverse beams are supported by solid moulded arch braces which spring from corbels on the north and south walls. The arch braces against the east wall and those which support the central beam are filled with vine leaf and tendril decoration. The transverse beams are moulded; that against the south wall carries a wave of foliated tendril decoration, picked out against a red background on the lower part of the moulding. Each transverse beam carries a square vine-leaf boss at its centre. The purlins, including the heavier ridge



Fig. 61 St Eilian's chapel: the decorated roof



purlin, are moulded. The rafters are embellished with hollow chamfering. There has been some repair, the wall plates are new and the purlins are supported by modern strengthening plates. Harold Hughes' detailed sketch of the roof in 1894 shows original moulded panels against the wall plates (Hughes, 1894, 295) which no longer survive. Hughes considered the roof to be of mid-sixteenth-century date. The roof of the chapel was mended, under Hughes' direction, in 1913. One phase of leading had occurred in 1675; it was re-leaded during the 1913 works and again in 2002.

### The porch

The porch is added to the west end of the south wall of the nave, giving protection to the south door. It was built in the early sixteenth century, not much later than the nave. The walls are of local rubble with dressed gritstone quoins, ashlar parapet and moulded copings. The roof rises to a low apex over the entrance to the porch and is surmounted there by a plain cross. The entrance doorway has chamfered jambs, above which rises a two-centred (pointed) head with a chamfered, moulded label. Inside the porch there are stone benches against the west and east walls. There is a stoup in the angle of the nave wall and the east wall of the porch. The roof is carried on transverse beams supported by arch braces springing from corbels. The corbels are in the form of human heads which the Royal Commission regard as modern although this may not certainly be the case. The figures on the east side are said to be those of St Eilian and a shepherd boy and those on the west side to represent Caswallon and a member of his entourage. (ex info. R Ashworth).

### Cyff Eilian

This trunk is described by the Royal Commission as an oak dug-out chest with a solid coped lid, bound with iron straps and heavily studded with nails (RCAHM, 60). The date 1667 is picked out in nail heads on the lid. Skinner adds that, through a small slit in the lid, 'the country people are said to drop a piece of money, uttering their maledictions against their enemies. The black gentleman is thus fed to work evil against the offender. This uncharitable and unchristian custom, if true, seems almost too bad even for monkish times, much worse to be continued now' (Skinner 1802, 60-61). Angharad Llwyd, thirty years later, places a more charitable emphasis on the use of the 'cyff'. She tells us that St. Eilian's shrine was, in her time, much resorted to and that St. Eilian himself was reputed to perform surprising cures on his devotees. These adherents of the cult, after bathing in a well sacred to him (Fynnon Eilian), placed offerings in the trunk to the extent that the parishioners were able to purchase three tenements for the aggrandisement of the benefice (Llwyd 1833, 246). Nevertheless, it is of interest that Miss Llwyd was the acquaintance of a bed-ridden woman who believed she had been cursed by a vengeful neighbour who had



Fig. 62 The South Porch

made an offering at the well of St. Eilian at Llaneilian yn Rhos. The woman speedily recovered after her husband had countered the curse by 'taking her name out of the well, at the expense of 2s. 6d.' (Llwyd 1833, 245n.). Cyff Eilian is still housed within the church.

### Inscriptions and graffiti

#### Consecration crosses

There are consecration crosses on each of the buttresses on the north side of the church. These take the form of an inscribed cross of arcs within a circle.

These are located at: the fourth course of ashlar above the plinth on the outward facing side of the north-west buttress of the nave; on the third course, outward-facing, of the central buttress of the nave; on the fifth course, outward-facing, of the north-east buttress of the nave and on the fifth course, outward-facing side of the north east buttress of the chancel. The cross on the central buttress has a recessed field within the circle and raised circular pellets between each arm.



There are also consecration crosses on the sill of the east window of the chancel and on the south-central and south-eastern buttresses of the nave. These are now heavily abraded and difficult to see without the aid of particularly good lighting conditions. The cross on the south-central buttress of the nave is located on the outward facing stone of the buttress, level with the moulded string course below the nave window. The cross at the south-east corner of the nave is on the fifth course of the outward facing side of the buttress, but this stone is very heavily weather-beaten and the presence of the cross is difficult to confirm.



*Fig. 66 Consecration cross, n.e. buttress of chancel*



*Fig. 63 Consecration cross, n. central buttress of nave*



*Fig. 67 Consecration cross, s.e. buttress of chancel*



*Fig. 64 Consecration cross and date, n.e. buttress of nave*



*Fig. 68 Consecration cross and date, s. central buttress of nave*



*Fig. 65 Consecration cross, n.w. buttress of nave*



*Fig. 69 Consecration cross and gaffitti, chancel, east window*



### *Building inscriptions*

There are two building inscriptions on the outer face of the church. One is on the south central buttress of the nave, the other is on the north-east buttress of the nave. Both are disposed either side of consecration crosses (see above). The inscriptions are dislocated to incorporate the central presence of the cross and are now difficult to read. Skinner sketched the inscriptions in 1802. The Royal Commission provided transcriptions in 1937.

The northern buttress inscription reads:

ANO DNI MCCCCLXXX, with contraction marks over the first two elements, giving Anno Domini - in the year of the Lord 1480.

The southern inscription reads:

MO CCCC LXO XXXI, giving the date as 1491. Mo is an abbreviation for millesimo - 'in the thousandth year', CCC LXO for quadingentesimo sexagesimo - in the four hundred and sixtieth year.

### *Graffiti and other marks*

There are arrow sharpening grooves on the north-west and south-west buttresses of the nave. That is, conveniently close to the two doors of the church. The south west buttress also carries an Ordnance Survey bench mark, levelled at 138.6 ft above sea level.

There is a date and two sets of initials carved on the sill stone of the east chancel window, immediately to the right of the consecration cross. These read 1594 WR TH.

### *Craftsmens' marks*

There are embossed legends on lead panels marking the repair and recasting of the lead roof of both the nave and the chancel in 1913 and fragments marking earlier leadings of the roof in 1675 and 1776. These are now housed in the chapel. They read:

OW MMO 1675;

WW ME WT PLUMBERS 1776;

AAS FC RECAST 1913

At the eastern end of the nave roof, on the southern side, there survive the initials, marked in pencil on the boards beneath the lead, of men who worked on the roof in 1913, G.B.E., T.C.W., G.A.R AND W.R, plumbers and another workman of Anglesey, not decipherable. The identity of three of these workmen was revealed when papers relating to the leading of the roof in 1913 were found during removal of the old lead in 2002. One sheet provides estimates for the 1913 work - £211, 16s. in total for the timberwork and lead - another lists the plumbers on the job as GB Elton, TC Wesley, GA Robinson and JE Harrington.

There were, also, casual graffiti, scratched into the lead marking the presence there of May Williams and Alma Clarke at some unspecified date.

There was, on the north face of the tower, at 350 mm above the lead roof, a concrete plaque with a roughly inscribed record of the work of Cecil and Ken during May 1975.



Fig. 70 Date stone on s.w. wall of passage

The construction of the passage between the chancel and chapel is marked by two stones built into the external wall. One carries the inscription RPR, the other has a date of 1614 and the initials WK RH.

Work on the pitch pine stair in the tower is recorded by a chiselled date, 1896, on the central beam of the stair. Work on the roof timbers of the passage between chancel and chapel is recorded by a scratched date of 1897 on one of the rafters.

### *Dates on furniture and fittings*

There is a fragment of cusped panelling framing vine leaf decoration which carries a date of 1533 in latin numerals (m iiii xxxiii). Angharad Llwyd records this as being within the chancel and associates it with the choir stalls. Glynne, on the other hand, in 1849, tells us that the west gallery exhibits 'some wood screen work' bearing this same date. The fragment in question now stands (upside down) on a case attached to the wall at the west end of the church.



Fig. 71 Sixteenth century panel fragment

Two benches with round-topped ends are recorded with initials and dates. One is a single bench, now in the nave, against the southern part of the screen. The terminal roundels are decorated with a thistle motif and carry the date: July 1690. The other bench is in the north-east corner of the chancel. It is a double bench, that is, the bench is separated by a divider. The terminal roundels of the bench ends and separator are decorated



with crosses and leaf patterns and carry the initials RM and GH with WBI added. The date 1673 has been punched on the rim of one of the terminals.

An oak communion table has, on the left and right sides, a central panel of interlocking arcading with schematised vine leaves in the arcades. A cusping border of foliage and 'poppyheads' runs along the base of the table. The front of the table carries, in two lines against a recessed field, the black letter text:

Non Nobis Domine, Non Nobis,  
sed Nomini Tuo

and, on the third line, the date 1634. The text is from the beginning of Psalm 115: 'Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy and for thy truth's sake'. Above the text are the letters IHS, being the Greek monogram of Jesus. A cross is placed above the letter H and three nails below, an arrangement met with elsewhere.

A wrought iron chandelier hanging from the central beam of the chancel roof carries the initials EO and a date of 1768.

A cupboard door of relatively recent construction, in the vestry on the ground floor of the tower, was discovered by the churchwarden, Roy Ashworth, to have incorporated older panels. These timbers were covered with graffiti. They included a number of personal initials and, more interestingly, several depictions of 18th or 19th century sailing vessels - mostly, sloops, a topsail schooner and, possibly, a ketch. The door is now on display in the chapel.



*Fig. 72 Graffiti and boats on door panel*



*Fig. 73 Seventeenth century bench ends*



*Fig. 74 Communion table, 1634*





*Llaneilian Church in the time of Elizabeth I*

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(listed here in date order and property)

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1404, Corwas?  
1445, Penrhyn y Balog, Tyddyn y Mabchwyll, Ty'n y Mynydd,  
1465, Land in Llanelian  
1467, Tenement of St. Eilian  
1470, Tyddyn Oche Tyddyn Kosse Tyddyn y Ty Bach Tyddyn ferch Ieuan Wynn Tyddyn Ty Newydd Tyddyn Phillip and Ieuan  
1471, Lands in Bodrugan Y Gadfa Mynydd Engan  
1471, Lands in Llanelian  
1472, Lands in Bodrugan Y Gadfa Mynydd Engan  
1492-3, Lands in Llanelian  
1494, Lands and messuages in Llanelian  
1494, Tyddyn y Mabchwyll  
1499, 80 bovates of land in Llanelian  
1502, messuages Llanelian  
1508-9, 6 parcels Llanelian  
1520, 1 tenement Llanelian  
1544, Bryn Moylyn, Gwely'r Balog  
1564, Waun Dovon yr Ednyfed Y Cae yng nglan y Gors Gwyddel Erw Fawr Mordydd.,  
1565, Berach  
1634, Ffald y Mynydd (Taldafynydd)  
1639-40, ref.1349, Ty Mawr,  
1639-40, ref.1350, Ty'n y Llwyn  
1639-40, ref.1351, Tyddyn Taldafynydd  
1639-40, ref.1352, Y Gadfa, Tyddyn Dafydd Ofydd  
1639-40, ref.1353, Berach  
1639-40, ref.1354, Bwlch Lladron and Gadfa  
1639-40, ref.1355, Bwlch Lladron and Gadfa  
1657-8, Lletroed Fald y Mynydd  
1675, Nant Ynys Goch  
1687, Corn Ellyll  
1696, Tyddyn Ithel Fawr  
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1416, 21, Murddun Du and the Murddun which Dd. Ofydd formerly held  
1426, 24, lands in Llanelian.

1439, 36, hamlet of Berach.,  
 1448, 39, Tyddyn y Ciriog.,  
 1460, 51, tenements in Llanelian (Hywel ap Llywelyn Vycar and Gwenllian late wife of John Godfray).  
 1470, 183, property in Llanelian.  
 1494, 65, Tir locys adjoining Cors y Llan within Gwely yvalog.  
 1497, 68, Berach.  
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 1500, 181, Tyddyn y Ciriog, Tyddyn y Stocyn and Tyddyn Cynan Ddu.  
 1504, 74, Tyddyn Cynan Ddu, Coed stocyn, and Tyddyn y Ciriog.  
 1533, 127, Tyddyn Henblas, Tyddyn y Ciriog.  
 1541/2, 147, Cae y Ty, y Cae bach, and Cae y Bryn Du.  
 1542, 155, land of David ap Rhys ap Llywelyn ap Gruffydd.  
 1548/9, 169, Henblas, tir y Ciriog, Cloddiau Meirian, Coed Ystocyn and y Buarth Poeth.  
 1557, 188, lands in Llanelian.  
 1584, 281, Tyddyn yr Henblas, tir y Ciriog, Cloddiau Meirian, Coed Ystocyn, Buarth Poeth.  
 1587, 292, messuages in Llanelian.  
 1590, 311, Ty Cynan Ddu.  
 1590, 306, Tyddyn yr Henblas, tir y Ciriog, Cloddiau Meirian, Coed y Stocyn, Buarth Poeth.  
 1592, 315, Carreg y Winllan and tir y Corwas.  
 1596, 333, tenement in Llanelian.  
 1599, 35, messuages in Llanelian.  
 1617, 430, messuages in Llanelian and elsewhere.  
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 1618/9, 269, Tyddyn y Ty hen.  
 1621, 454, Tyddyn y Ty Hen.  
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