

## Introduction

Christian worship has taken place in Gower over a period of fifteen hundred years. Many of our churches, some of which are seven hundred years old, probably stand where earlier, simpler structures of the Celtic period existed. The dedication of churches to Celtic saints and the existence of sculptured and lettered stones of great antiquity reinforce evidence in the Book of Llandaff, where places in Gower, mentioned in sixth century records, can still be identified.

For centuries, these Gower churches were the focal point of small rural communities. Today, too few people appreciate their beauty. Whether your interest is in architecture, history, woodcarving, stained glass, war memorials, graves of the famous or of ordinary people, please come and see our churches for yourself. Children are welcome and wherever possible, activities will be offered for them.

## Cyflwyniad

Bu addoliad Cristnogol yng Ngwyr dros gyfnod o bymtheg canrif. Saif lawer o'n heglwysi ers dros saith canrif, yn y man lle bu adeiladau syml Celtaidd o'u blaen. Cysegrwyd lawer o'n heglwysi yng Ngwyr i'r seintiau Celtaidd, ac fe gyfeirir yn Llyfr Llandaf, at hen gerrig cerfiedig o'r chweched ganrif a welir yma yn ein heglwysi.

Am ganrifoedd bu'r eglwysi hyn yn fan cyfarfod i'r pentrefi bychain, ond heddiw mae eu harddwch yn anghof i lawer. Os oes gennych ddiddordeb mewn adeiladau, hanes, cerflunio, gwydr lliw, cofebau rhyfel, beddau'r enwog neu'r werin, dewch yma i fwynhau ein heglwysi. Bydd croeso i blant, gweithgareddau i'w diddori pan yn bosibl.

The trail of numbered churches, marked on the map in green, offers a walking challenge of about forty miles. As it is circular you can of course start at any church. Many shorter trails involving fewer churches can be undertaken by bicycle, car or on foot (see example below).

Grateful acknowledgements to the following for their generosity:- Swansea C & C S.D.F. Fund for this additional run of the leaflet and our old friends, The Gower Society, J.T.Morgan Trust, Archdeacon Bevan's Fund, Awards for all Wales, A.O.N.B. Environment Fund, Cadw, The Austin Bailey Foundation and local Community Councils.

## Information

Map references :- O.S. Explorer 164 Gower/Gwyr or Landranger Sheet 159

Local amenities and walks :- the Churches

Bus services :- Swansea bus station and local bus stops

Accommodation :- Swansea or Mumbles Tourist Information Centres

## A SAMPLE SHORT WALK VISITING CHERITON AND LLANMADOC CHURCHES

**Route**, exiting from St. Cadoc's turn right. Just past the Britannia Inn, turn right through Frog Lane, past the attractive cottages and walk towards the salt marshes. Cross the 17th century dyke and turn left to Cwm Ivy woods. Bear left at the end of the woods and climb to the hamlet of Cwm Ivy, continue up the hill, St. Madoc's Church is on your right.

If you walk into the village of Llanmadoc you can:

1. Walk through the village and back to Cheriton OR
2. Detour right up to Llanmadoc Hill to visit the Bulwark (large Iron Age hill fort).

This pamphlet prepared by Ryan Griffiths, Phil & Anne King

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# In the Steps of the Saints

[www.hillhouseellanrhidian.co.uk](http://www.hillhouseellanrhidian.co.uk)

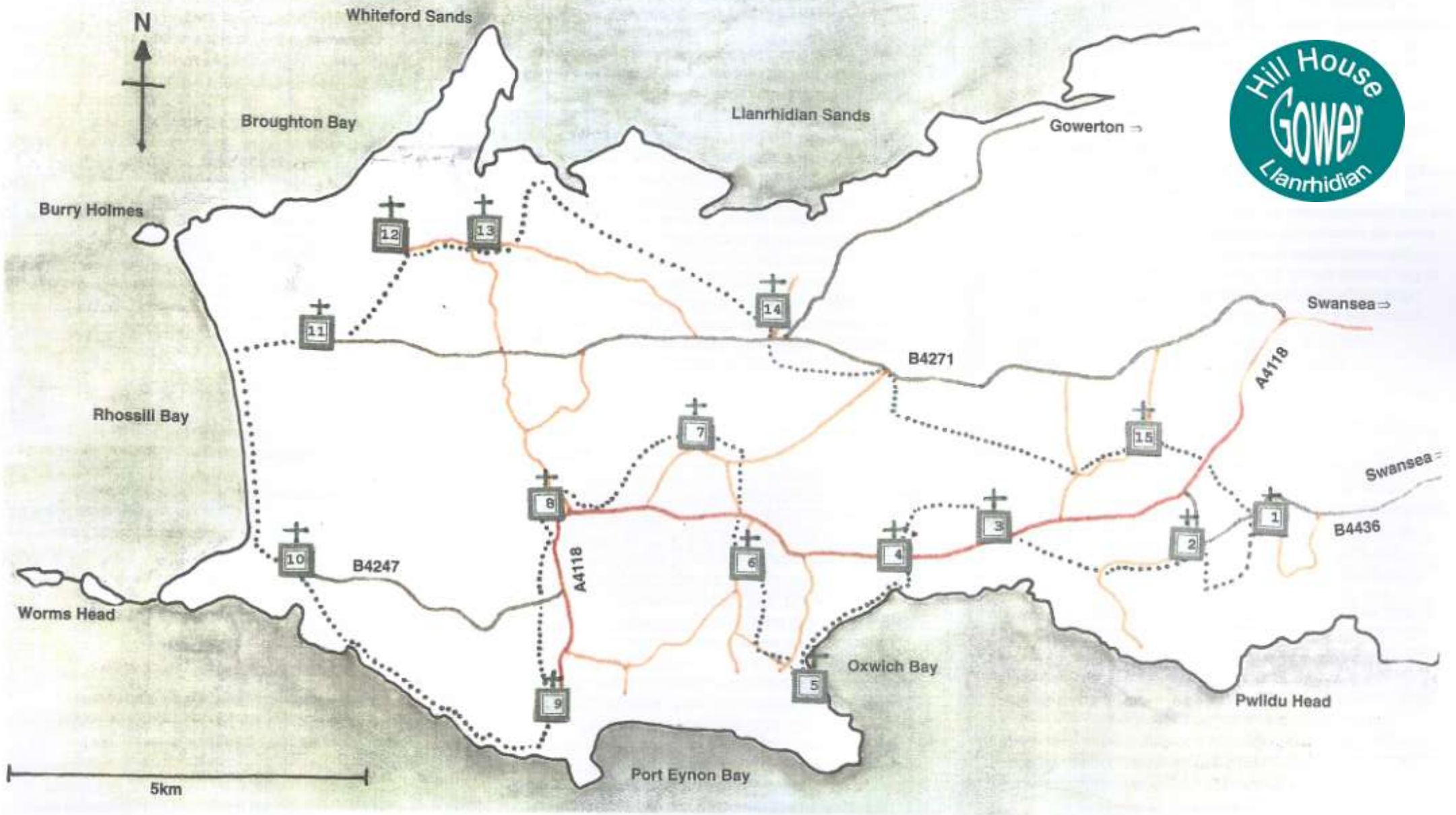


A TRAIL OF GOWER CHURCHES





# A TRAIL OF GOWER CHURCHES



1

**Bishopston, St. Teilo's Church**

GR578894

The site probably dates from 480 AD in one of the earliest Christian settlements in Wales. In those days a simple thatched chapel probably stood in a 'Llan' (a fenced enclosure).

The stone building originates from the 12th & early 13th centuries, the battlement tower being the least altered. However, in recent years a doorway was cut through the massive wall, from the organ loft, to give access to the tower room. The tower clock originated in a Swansea brewery (1886), and the bells are dated 1713 & 1714.

The stone font is 12th century. During repairs to the roof in 1927 the ceiling was removed revealing a fine oak, hammer beam roof built in the 15th century. Every stained glass window has a story and interesting features; St. Teilo's stag is one, a mouse another. The Millennium window illustrates various places of worship in the village.

**Key from The Lamplighter, all year. Groups ring 232140**

2

**Pennard, St. Mary's Church**

GR566887

A church which stood close to Pennard castle and whose remains can still be seen was besanded and finally abandoned at a later date, in the early sixteenth century. However, the existing church has its origins in the thirteenth century so which church pre-dates the other remains a mystery.

An ancient water stoup serves as a font, with a carved Jacobean cover. Laudian dog-rails protect the sanctuary and an external window has early 13th century dog-tooth mouldings.

A beautiful stained glass window, the work of local artists, was installed to mark the new Millennium. A tablet in the Church is dedicated to Vernon Watkins and another twentieth century poet, Harri Webb, is buried in the churchyard.

**The Church is open daily until dusk, all year.**

3

**Penmaen, St. John the Baptist Church**

GR532887

The original church probably stood on Church Hill. From 1230 to 1540 the Knights of St. John owned this church, which was restored in the 19th century by two clergy, a father and son called James, who held the benefice for 90 years.

**Accompanied viewing only. Ring 232140**

8

**Llanddewi, St. David's Church**

GR460891

In its farmyard setting, this ancient church dedicated to St. David is said to have been built by Henry de Gower, Bishop of St. David's, 1328-1347.

The chancel is not in line with the nave but inclined to the south as a reminder to worshippers that when Jesus Christ was crucified, he leant his head to one side. The windows of plain glass allow fine countryside views. Memorial slabs are of interest, the oldest to the Rev. Silvanus Prosser, vicar of Llanddewi who died in 1737. The tower at the west end, with its saddle-back roof, houses a single bell said to be the largest and loudest in Gower. After restoration in 1876 and again in 1905 the building re-opened for divine service. Registers date from 1718.

**The church is open from Easter to the end of October.**

9

**Port Eynon, St. Cattwg's Church**

GR467854

This seaside village church was founded during the 6th century by St. Cattwg's missionary to Gower, St. Cennydd. The present building dates from the 12th century and was given to the Knights of St. John by Robert de la Mare around 1165. The doorway is Norman, and the stoup for holy water in the porch is said to have been given by a Spanish sea captain in gratitude to his rescuers.

In the south wall of the chancel is a blocked up leper's window which can be clearly seen from outside the church. In 1861 a gallery in the nave was removed and the west end enlarged to accommodate the growing population of the parish. There are several stained glass windows and memorial items of interest to discover in the church and churchyard. Registers date from 1750.

**The church is open from Easter to the end of October.**



12

**Llanmadoc, St. Madoc's Church**

GR439934

Dedicated to Madoc, a Celtic saint, who is reputed to have founded a church in the 6th century. The 13th century building was restored in 1865.

Set in the window-sill of the first window is the Advectus Stone, dated from the 6th century. Discovered in 1861 in the walls of the old parsonage, it reads in Latin - VECTI FILIUS GVANUS HIC IACTIT. Vectus son of Guanus, he lies here.

In the west wall is a crude pillar cross and a boundary marker dating from the 7th - 9th centuries, whilst the present font is probably Norman.

Revd. J D Davies, the famous Gower historian, who was a skilled wood-carver, was Rector of Llanmadoc and Cheriton 1860 - 1911. He carved the oak altar frontal and led the major restoration begun in 1865.

He also built the Old Rectory across the road from the church.

**Open Easter to end of October. Telephone: 386391**

13

**Cheriton, St. Cadoc's Church.**

GR451932

The 'Cathedral of Gower' was probably built around the opening of the 14th century to replace the one at Landimore, which had been affected by the encroachment of the sea on low-lying land. The two churches of Landimore and Cheriton are never mentioned together in an authentic document, both being dedicated to St. Cadoc.

The entrance to the church is a fine example of a doorway from the 'Decorated' period and the Norman Font, is said to have come from the extinct church of Landimore. In the arch at the end of the nave can be seen the old rood loft entrance, which was approached up steps set in the wall of the choir.

The church was restored in 1874 by Rev. J.D. Davies who personally carved the choir stalls, altar rails, altar and embossed wooden ceiling. He was buried in front of the south porch of the church. Also buried there is Ernest Jones, the disciple and biographer of Sigmund Freud.

**Key at Bridge Pottery when open, opposite the church.**

**Otherwise ring 386391**

4

**Nicholaston, St. Nicholas Church**

GR513884

The earliest church was nearer the sea. Later, a small church was built on the present site. A medieval tombstone stands in the porch.

In 1894, the Talbot family had the church rebuilt and refurbished so it is almost entirely late Victorian.

**Accompanied veiwng only. Ring 232140**

5

**Oxwich, St. Illtyd's Church**

GR504861

The chancel of this church, which stands in woods, overlooking Oxwich Bay, marks the original sixth century Celtic cell. Entry to the church is through the west door, in the tower.

In a niche in the north wall lie the figures of a knight and his lady.

Legend suggests that St Illtyd, himself, brought the Sutton Stone font to Oxwich.

**For times open in August see notice board in the Church porch.**

6

**Penrice, St Andrew's Church**

GR493879

This 12th century Church is cruciform in shape with an embattled western tower. The large porch, thought to be pre-Reformation has been used for transacting civil business and affixing public notices and was possibly used as a school room in the 17th century.

**Not normally open except for services.**

7

**Reynoldston, St. George's Church**

GR479900

The Patronal dedication name of Reynoldston's Church, St. George, reminds us of the Norman and English influence which predominated in this part of Wales for much of the last Millennium.

For many centuries a church has stood on the site now occupied by the current building which dates from the mid-1860's and is a fine example of Victorian Gothic architecture and includes many examples of 20th century stained glass, including a three-light east window designed by Nathaniel Westlake.

One of the early Christian monuments in Gower is a pillar cross standing near the chancel arch and another feature of the church is the Norman font that is carved from a single block of stalagmite

**Church open daily in August  
telephone: 391436; 391073; 391310.**

10

**Rhossili, St. Mary's Church**

GR417881

This attractive Church is dedicated to St. Mary the Virgin, and was built by Anglo-Norman settlers around the year 1200. It overlooks the wonderful four-mile sweep of Rhossili Bay and the famous Worm's Head.

The church is simple in style. The doorway is a fine example of work of the late Norman period, rare in Wales and unique in Gower. A scratch dial sundial is on the side of the doorway, showing that at some time it must have been open to the sky, and may support the theory that it came from the older church in the sand dunes below the village, which was excavated in 1980. The nave contains several stained glass windows, and memorials including one to Petty Officer Edgar Evans, who died with Captain Scott in the Antarctic in 1912, and was a Rhossili man. The chancel has a low side or 'lepers' window, and the churchyard has graves with inscriptions going back to 1784.

**The church is open Easter to the end of October.**

**Adjacent car park.**

11

**Llangennith, St. Cenydd's Church**

GR429914

St Cenydd was the original Gower boy who made good. Legend has it he was born in the sixth century with a withered leg, cast adrift in a basket on the Loughor estuary, rescued by gulls and reared by angels. Our local boy grew up to found St. Cenydd's Priory which accounts for the present building being the largest parish church in Gower.

The Danes burnt it, but our church survives, dominated by its massive 13th century stone tower with saddleback roof. Now wall-mounted inside, a carved slab is reputed to have marked the grave of the saint. Also see the effigy of a De Le Mare knight ('the Dolly Mare'). Folk singer Phil Tanner lies in the churchyard.

On a nice day visit Burry Holms at the north end of Rhossili Bay where we commemorate St. Cenydd's day each summer on the site of a wooden Celtic church oratory, the only one found in Wales.

**Key at P.J. Surf shop all year.**

**Otherwise telephone: 386391.**

14

**Llanrhidian, St. Rhidian & St. Illtyd Church**

GR497923

The original "Llan" probably dates back to the 6th century, as there was once an inscribed stone (lost) in the area. Rhidian is probably a corruption of 'Tryrulhid', who was St. Illtyd's wife. The tower and chancel of the church are 13th/14th century and the nave was rebuilt in the Victorian era.

A large stone block named 'the Parson's Bed' tops the massive west tower. This structure was originally a fire beacon to give warning of enemies approaching by land or sea.

In the porch is the mysterious 'leper-stone' bearing representations of human and animal figures. This was discovered near the tower and is dated back to the 9th or 10th century. It might have Viking origins and could possibly be a hog-back tomb-stone. On the green outside are the remains of an 11th century wheel cross known as the 'Pillory' (or whipping) Stone.

**Key from Heron's Way Service Station all year.**

15

**Ilston, St. Illtyd's Church**

GR557903

St Illtyd's church probably derives from a 6th century monastic cell. The present church was largely built during the 13th century incorporating the 6th century cell in the base of a massive embattled tower with a transverse saddleback roof. For the Millennium celebrations the tower was reopened into the church and the area restored as a simple, but beautiful chapel.

Other notable features include the bells. Two are rung, dating from 1716. The third, dating from the 15th century, now lies opposite the entrance. The massive yew tree in the churchyard is believed to be as old as the church itself.

A walk down the valley from the Church brings you to the ruins of the first Baptist chapel in Wales, used after the Restoration in 1660 by John Miles. When dissenting assemblies became illegal, he and his flock emigrated to America in 1663 and founded Swansea in Massachusetts.

**Open from Easter to the end of October.**