

## INTRODUCTION

Southern Wales has a rich religious and cultural heritage dating from pre-Roman times. Christianity was introduced by Roman traders and soldiers and, unlike England, it continued into the Dark Ages and beyond. This was the result of the work of the Celtic Saints, itinerant preachers who used the western seaways to link Wales with Brittany, Cornwall, Ireland, the Isle of Man and Western Scotland.

Thus a visitor to this part of Wales will find churches founded by, or in the name of, Celtic Saints such as Dyfrig, Illtud, Teilo, Cadoc, and many others. But time does not stand still, and these churches were often rebuilt and extended by the Normans in medieval times. The five churches featured in this brochure are outstanding in their history and architecture, and represent centuries of devoted Christian worship.

The Celtic Church did not have a structure of dioceses and parishes; these were imposed by the Normans after about 1093. The Celtic foundation at Llandaff (Llandaf) was elevated to cathedral status, while those at Margam and Ewenny became the centres of worship of a Cistercian Abbey and Benedictine Priory respectively.

Llanilltud Fawr (Llantwit Major) was one of the earliest and largest monasteries in Wales, and St. Illtud's Church remains as one of the most historically important parish churches in the country.

With the Industrial Revolution in Wales, there was a rapid expansion of industry and trade, a rise in population and the growth of towns, the largest being Cardiff. The demands for worship resulted in a myriad of churches and chapels. The parish church of St. John the Baptist is a focal point of worship in the city centre.

## THE MODERN PILGRIM

These five churches are all within easy reach of each other by car or public transport. They are open every day, usually until dusk, and entry to every church in Wales is free.

Each one is also a convenient centre to visit neighbouring churches, often close enough to walk or cycle. The Cardiff city centre church, St. John's, is linked to the Cathedral by the Taff Trail, which is well signposted. Information on it can be found in any local tourist office.

Close to all these "Beacon Churches" are villages - Kenfig, Merthyr Mawr, St. Donats, Llanmihangel, and many more - which contain smaller and attractive churches well worth visiting. Each church is an education in itself, and school groups are always welcome.

The modern pilgrim can see everywhere the work of craftsmen and artists who have served Christ through their skill devotion and care through the centuries. These holy places illustrate, through their history and architecture, the Christian spirit which is still alive and well in the welcome these churches offer.



## CELTIC DISCOVERY TRAIL

A visitor to South East Wales will discover churches which date back to the very beginnings of Celtic Christianity, pre-dating the return of the faith to England by about a hundred years. Christianity was brought here by the Romans, and when they left the Gospel was preached by itinerant priests (the Celtic Saints) travelling over lands linked by the western seas.

The Cardiff city centre church, St. John's, and Llandaff Cathedral, are linked by the Taff Trail along the banks of the River Taff. St. Illtud's Church at Llantwit Major and the Cistercian foundation of Margam Abbey both have fine collections of Celtic stones, while Ewenny Priory is the finest Norman church in Wales.

## THINGS TO DO



Ewenny Pottery



Cardiff Castle

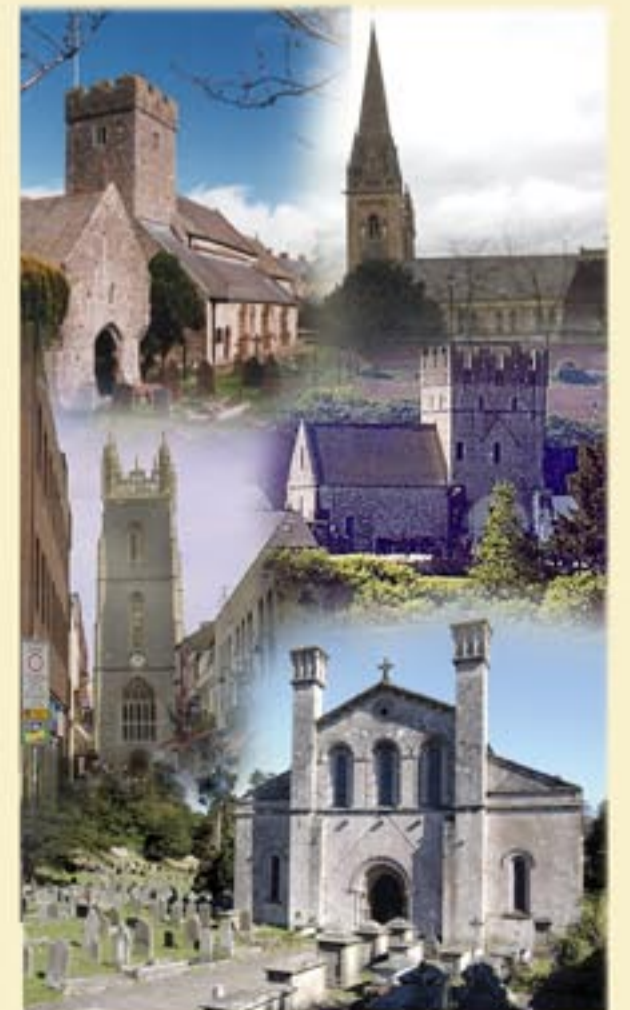
## USEFUL NUMBERS

St John's City Centre Cardiff	029 2022 3075
Llandaff Cathedral Office	029 2056 4554
St Illtud's Llantwit Major office	01446 795551
Margam Abbey office	01639 871184
Ewenny Priory	01656 880108
Heritage Coast Centre	01656 672928
Bridgend CBC Tourism Dept	01656 642677
Ewenny Pottery	01656 653020
Cardiff Airport	01446 711111
Swansea Cork ferries	01792 456116
Stena line	08705 707070
National Rail Network	0845 7484950
Traveline Wales	0870 6082608
First Cymru Bus	01792 582233
Vale of Glamorgan Tourism	01446 709328
Barry/Penarth Tourist Information Centres	01446 747171
Wales Tourist Board	029 2049 9909
Churches Tourism Network Wales	029 2071 0014

Project developed by Churches Tourism Network Wales



## "BEACON" CHURCHES IN SOUTH EAST WALES



## EWENNY PRIORY CHURCH

Eweny Priory Church is one of the most important historical buildings in the area, being as it is one of the finest examples of a pure Norman fortified monastery to be found in Europe.

The Church comprises two main sections, the part used by the parish for Sunday worship continuously since the early 12th century, and the 'monastic end' which was the exclusive preserve of the Benedictine monks who lived and worked at the Priory until the Dissolution under King Henry VIII.

Although the monastic end is now in private hands, during daylight hours there is public access to it through the parish church. It contains the tombs of the founders of the Priory, the de Londres family. The visitor to the Priory Church is rewarded with a number of interesting artifacts. These include:

- a pre-Norman font
- mediaeval altar mensa
- reproduction of the watercolour of the church painted by JPW Turner
- seven-arch arcade

But perhaps most memorable is the sense of tranquility and peace that is experienced here. The Church is open every day.

It is also frequently used as a venue for concerts.



## MARGAM ABBEY

Margam Abbey Church lies in a place of peace and tranquillity which captures the history of Celtic Christianity and speaks of the presence of God. Visitors can approach the Abbey from Junction 38 of the M4 motorway or the A48 between Pyle and Port Talbot.

The Abbey was founded in 1147 by Cistercian monks sent by St. Bernard of Clairveaux. After the Abbey was dissolved in 1536, the land, together with all the monastic buildings, passed into the hands of Sir Rice Mansel. Their elaborate carved alabaster tombs with accompanying weepers in the south aisle of the Abbey are well worth seeing.

Since 1542 the Abbey Church has served as the Parish Church of Margam.

Beside the Abbey stands the Stones Museum which contains a unique group of monuments whose existence bears witness to the claim that there was probably a monastic community founded by the Celtic Church on or near the site of the present Abbey. The Stones Museum is run by CADW.

Opposite the Stones Museum stands the Parish Hall which now houses the Abbot's Kitchen Restaurant. Visitors are welcomed here and refreshments are served. However, it is advisable to check on opening hours. (01639 871184)



## ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST CITY CENTRE, CARDIFF

St John's is a large parish church in the centre of the city of Cardiff, the second oldest building in the City after the castle.

As a result of the 19th Century expansion, the stone exterior presents a pleasing Victorian appearance that belies the true age of the building - founded about 1180. The nave dates from 1475 "The Tower" with a ring of 10 bells is a gem of the perpendicular period, with a marvellous riot of tracery and pinnacles at the top. Inside, of special interest is the Herbert Chapel and Tomb, with the reclining figures of two brothers. The carved stone reredos behind the high altar depicts biblical figures associated with the communion sacrament. There is a particularly good collection of stained glass, Victorian and more recent.

The south aisle houses the chapel of the Order of St John (Priory for Wales) and has a fine reredos. Set as it is in the heart of the bustling city, the church provides a haven of tranquillity for rest, prayer and contemplation.

St Johns is also at the centre of the Christian Ministry to City Centre business and institutions.

Tea and light snacks are served in the south upper vestry Wed-Sat, 10.30am - 3.00pm.



## LLANDAFF CATHEDRAL

This great mother church of the diocese stands close to a fording point of the River Taff where, in the 6th century, St. Dyfrig established a small religious community and humble church. The present cathedral church was founded as a replacement by the Normans in 1107.

Until the time of the Reformation (16 C), the cathedral grew and prospered, supported by land dues, rents and the gifts of pilgrims visiting the tomb of S Teilo (6 C). Following the banning of pilgrimages by Henry VIII, however, the revenues and upkeep of the cathedral declined over the next 200 years to a point of near ruin, with further suffering at the hands of Oliver Cromwell's Army.

Limited restoration took place in the 18th century under the hand of John Wood the Elder, of Bath, but his surprising classical design was replaced a hundred years later by a major rebuild, in the original Gothic style, by John Pritchard, a local architect. The accompanying refurbishment of the cathedral by J.P. Seddon introduced the now highly acclaimed work of several PreRaphaelite artists, including "The Seed of David", by Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

In 1941 the cathedral was severely damaged in a wartime raid, but was lovingly and carefully restored by George Pace. The restored building includes a new chapel dedicated to men of the former Welch Regiment: also Sir Jacob Epstein's compelling masterpiece 'Christ in Majesty' and other work of modern design. There is much to explore in Llandaff Cathedral. Come and visit and see for yourself.



## ST. ILLTUD'S LLANTWIT MAJOR

The church, which was described in 1777 by John Wesley as "the most beautiful as well as the most spacious parish church in Wales" stands on the site of the church built here by St Illtud about the year 500, so that Christ has been worshipped here without a break for over 1500 years. To the school here came pupils from all over the country, from here went priests, such as St Paul Aurelian, Gildas, Malo and others, preaching the Gospel.

When the Normans took over Llantwit Major, they rebuilt the Celtic church in stone and in the 13th century added the larger East Church.

The importance of the church in the Celtic period is shown by the collection of carved stones in the west church. They name Saints Illtud and Samson, later abbots and two local kings, and suggest a school of masons here. The East Church is notable for its wall paintings, a remarkable Jesse Niche in stone, a 15th century reredos and a medieval mensa.

Services are held every day. The church has an active team of bell ringers.

