

# A Trail of Gower Churches

## Introduction

Christian worship has taken place on Gower for at least fifteen hundred years, and in many cases churches stand where simpler structures of the Celtic period stood. The oldest are over eight hundred years old, and most newer ones rest on even older foundations. A great number of carved and lettered stones and other remains connect us to their ancient past, and to the faith of those who worshipped there.

The churches contain a wealth of fascinating features of architectural, historical and artistic interest, showing the high regard in which they have been held as focal points of their small communities.

Today they continue to witness to the Christian gospel. In all of them pilgrims and visitors will be welcome, and will find the opportunity to learn more about God, to grow in faith and to continue as Christian disciples.

## Cyflwyniad

Bu addoliad Cristnogol yn digwydd yng Ngŵyr ers o leiaf 1500 o flynyddoedd, ac mewn llawer o achosion, saif eglwysi lle bu strwythurau symlach yn y cyfnod Celtaidd. Mae'r hynaf ohonynt dros wyth ganrif oed, ac mae mwyafrif y rhai mwy newydd ar sylfeini cynharach fyth. Mae llawer iawn o feini cerfiedig sy'n dwyn llythrennau ac olion eraill yn ein cysylltu â'u gorffennol hynafol, ac â ffydd y rhai a fu'n addoli yno.

Mae'r eglwysi'n cynnwys cyfoeth o nodweddion pensaernïol, hanesyddol ac artistig diddorol dros ben, sy'n tystio i'r parch mawr a roddwyd iddynt fel canolbwyntiau yn eu cymunedau bychain.

Heddiw maent yn dal i dystio i'r efengyl Gristnogol. Bydd croeso ym mhob un ohonynt i bererinion ac ymwelwyr, a gajff gyfle yno i ddysgu mwy am Dduw, i feithrin eu ffydd ac i barhau â'u disgyblaeth Gristnogol.

All of the churches listed on this leaflet are part of the Church in Wales, a province of the Anglican Communion. The Church in Wales was disestablished and became separate from the Church of England in 1920. At this time it was divided into four dioceses; by 1923 two more had been created, one being the Diocese of Swansea and Brecon, of which all the Gower churches are a part.

**A sample short walk** visiting Cheriton and Llanmadoc churches:

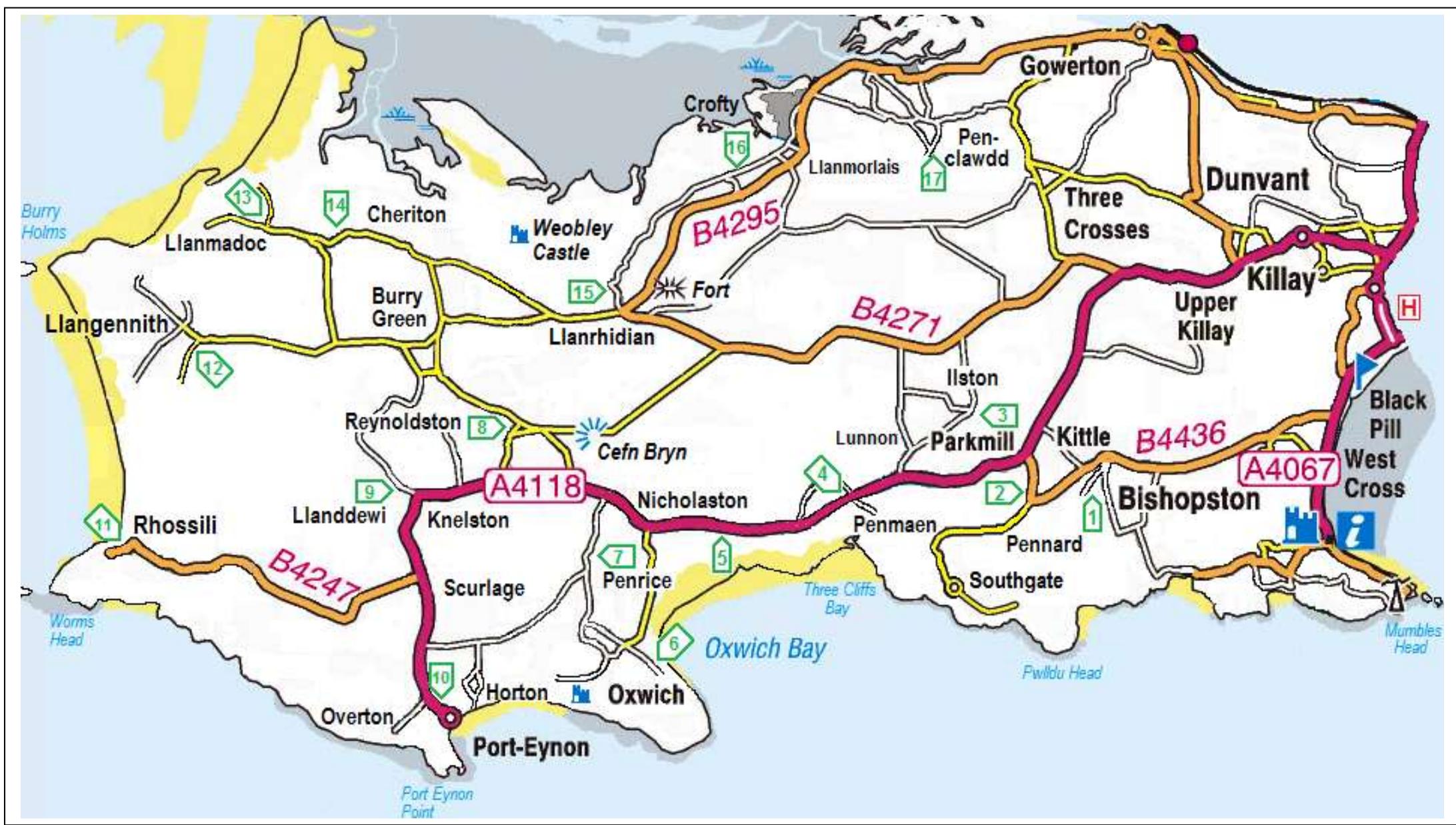
Turn right out of St Cadoc's Church. Just past the Britannia Inn, turn right through Frog Lane, past the cottages and walk towards the salt marshes. Cross the 17<sup>th</sup> century dyke and turn left to Cwm Ivy woods. Bear left at the end of the woods and climb to the hamlet of Cwm Ivy, continue up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

If you walk into the village of Llanmadoc you can walk through the village and back to Cheriton, or detour right up to Llanmadoc Hill to visit the Bulwark (a large Iron Age hill fort).



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1. Bishopston: St Teilo	SA3 3JT	SS 5778 8935
2. Pennard: St Mary	SA3 2EA	SS 5655 8874
3. Ilston: St Illtyd	SA2 7LD	SS 5566 9032
4. Penmaen: St John	SA3 2HQ	SS 5318 8870
5. Nicholaston: St Nicholas	SA3 2HL	SS 5125 8843
6. Oxwich: St Illtyd	SA3 1LS	SS 5042 8612
7. Penrice: St Andrew	SA3 1LN	SS 4930 8794

### Post Codes and Grid References

8. Reynoldston: St George	SA3 1AA	SS 4794 9002
9. Llanddewi: St David	SA3 1AU	SS 4600 8904
10. Port Eynon: St Cattwg	SA3 1NL	SS 4668 8538
11. Rhossilli: St Mary	SA3 1PL	SS 4165 8809
12. Llangennith: St Cenydd	SA3 1HU	SS 4287 9913

13. Llanmadoc: St Madoc	SA3 1DE	SS 4389 9344
14. Cheriton: St Cadoc	SA3 1BY	SS 4505 9319
15. Llanrhidian: St Rhidian & St Illtyd	SA3 1EH	SS 4962 9223
16. Wernffrwd: St David	SA4 3TR	SS 5153 9424
17. Penclawdd: St Gwynour	SA4 3JH	SS 5486 9482

### **1. Bishopston: St Teilo's**

**SA3 3JT**

The site probably dates from 480AD as one of the earliest Christian settlements in Wales. Although physically in the diocese of St David's the church was part of Llandaff diocese for over a thousand years, and sometimes fought over.

It originates from the 12<sup>th</sup> and early 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, the battle-ment tower and battered (inclined) walls being the least altered. The west gallery still exists; the tower clock of 1886 originated in a Swansea brewery, and the bells are dated 1713 and 1714.

The stone font is Norman. During repairs to the roof in 1927 the ceiling was removed revealing a fine 15<sup>th</sup> century oak hammer beam roof. Every stained glass window has 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 bookshop, open 10am – 4pm, Mon – Sat. Groups ring 01792 232012.

### **2. Pennard: St Mary's**

**SA3 2EA**

A church which stood close to Pennard castle and whose remains can still be seen was besanded and finally abandoned in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, so that St Mary's became the parish church. However, the existing church has 13<sup>th</sup> century features such as an external window with dog-tooth mouldings, so which church pre-dates the other is not certain. An ancient water stoup serves as a font, with a carved Jacobean cover, and the pulpit is also Jacobean. Laudian dog-rails protect the sanctuary and the beam supporting the gallery may have been the medieval rood-beam.

A beautiful stained glass window, the work of local artists, was installed to mark the new millennium. A tablet is dedicated to Vernon Watkins and another 20<sup>th</sup> century poet, Harri Webb, is buried in the churchyard.

The church is open daily until dusk, all year.

### **3. Ilston: St Iltyd's**

**SA2 7LD**

The church derives from a 6<sup>th</sup> century monastic cell. The present church was largely built during the 13<sup>th</sup> century incorporating the cell in the base of a massive embattled tower with a saddleback roof. For the millennium celebrations the tower was re-opened into the church and the area restored as a simple but beautiful chapel.

Other notable features include the burial niche in the north sanctuary wall, would have marked the grave of someone of note; possibly even Illtyd himself. Also the bells: two are rung, dating from 1716 and the third, dating from the 15<sup>th</sup> century, now lies inside opposite the entrance. The massive yew tree in the churchyard is believed to be as old as the church itself.

Open from Easter to the end of October. Telephone 01792 232928 or 371275.

### **4. Penmaen: St John the Baptist**

**SA3 2HQ**

The original church was probably on the burrows above Three Cliffs Bay. This was besanded in the early 14<sup>th</sup> century, and probably directly replaced by the present one. From 1230 to 1540 it was owned by the Knights of St John, and restored in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by two clergy, a father and son called James, who held the benefice for 90 years.

There are several memorial tablets of interest in the chancel, the earliest of which is dated 1623: this was under the altar but is now on the north wall.

Ring to arrange viewing: 01792 232928, 371615 or 371334.

### **5. Nicholaston: St Nicholas**

**SA3 2HL**

The earlier church was nearer the sea, and the present one built in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. A medieval tombstone stands in the porch, and the font is probably the original Norman from the first church.

In 1894, the Talbot family had the church rebuilt and refurbished so that it appears almost entirely late Victorian. Much of the decoration is very ornate carved wood and marble, and the alabaster reredos is particularly attractive.

Ring to arrange viewing: 01792 232928, 371615 or 371334.

### **6. Oxwich: St Iltyd's**

**SA3 1LS**

The chancel of this church marks the original 6<sup>th</sup> century cell, and retains its Norman arch. The nave was later lengthened, probably at the same time as the tower was added, in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The east window and the figures of a knight and his lady in a niche in the north wall are from the same period.

Legend suggests that St Illtyd himself brought the Sutton Stone font to Oxwich. The decoration of the chancel was instigated by Leslie Young, artistic director of Sadler's Wells in 1931, who used to holiday nearby.

For opening times in August see the notice board in the porch.

### **7. Penrice: St Andrew's**

**SA3 1LN**

The church is cruciform in shape, with an embattled western tower, and the nave and chancel from the early 12<sup>th</sup> century. The tower, north transept and south porch were probably added in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and the massive oak timbers surrounding the south door are of this date too.

The porch is unusually large and is thought to have been used for transacting civil business in mediaeval times when Penrice village held as many as four annual fairs and twice weekly markets. It was also used as a school in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Various restorations were carried out in the 19<sup>th</sup> century including the removal of the gallery, insertion of large windows, renewal of the roof, new flooring and pews, and the division of the nave by a step and low wall.

Not normally open except for services.

**8. Reynoldston: St George's****SA3 1AA**

The dedication to St George is a reminder of the Anglo/Norman influence in this part of Gower: the figure of St George slaying the dragon is carved in relief on the stone pulpit.

A church has stood on this site since the early 13th century. The present building dates from the mid-1860s, and is a fine example of Victorian Gothic architecture.

There is a wealth of stained glass, including the three-light west window designed by Nathaniel Westlake in 1905. The transept contains many tombstones and memorial plaques from the old church, mostly to members of the Lucas family.

Standing near the chancel arch is a pillar cross, one of the earliest Christian monuments in Gower, being probably 9<sup>th</sup> century. The Norman font is carved from a single block of stalagmite.

Church open daily in August: telephone 391436, 390180, 390070.

**9. Llanddewi: St David's****SA3 1AU**

The church is said to have been built by Henry de Gower, a 14<sup>th</sup> century Bishop of St David's. The chancel is not in line with the nave but inclined to the south; there is a theory that this is a 'weeping chancel', deliberately built as a reminder to worshippers that when Christ was crucified, he leant his head to one side; or may simply mean that the chancel and the sanctuary were built at different times.

The windows of plain glass allow fine views. The memorial slabs are of interest, the oldest being to the vicar, Rev Silvanus Prosser, who died in 1737. The tower has a saddle-back roof and houses a single large bell. Restoration work was carried out in 1876 and 1905, when the squire's seat, in the form of a west-end gallery, was removed from the nave.

Registers date from 1718. Open daily from Easter to the end of October.

**10. Port Eynon: St Cattwg's****SA3 1NL**

The 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 probably sixteenth century, and the holy water stoup 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. During alterations in 1861 the gallery in the nave was removed and the west end enlarged to accommodate the parish's growing population. The stained glass windows are by Celtic Studios and Glantawe Studios, two leading Welsh firms of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. There are other memorials of interest to discover in the church and churchyard.

Registers date from 1750. Open daily from Easter to the end of October.

**11. Rhossili: St Mary's****SA3 1PL**

The church was built by Anglo-Norman settlers around the year 1200, and has a saddleback tower. The doorway surround is a fine example of late Norman work, rare in Wales and unique in Gower. Being obviously altered at the apex, it is thought to have come from the original church in the sand dunes below the village, excavated in 1980 and covered over again. A scratch dial sundial can be seen on the left side of the arch.

The nave contains several stained glass windows and memorials, including one to Petty Officer Edgar Evans, a Rhossili man who died with Capt Scott in the Antarctic in 1912. The chancel has a low side or lepers' window, and the churchyard has graves with inscriptions going back to 1784.

Open throughout the year.

**12. Llangennith: St Cenydd's****SA3 1HU**

This 12<sup>th</sup> century church is on the site of a 6<sup>th</sup> century *llan*, or churchyard, which retains the original circular footprint. The floor was raised and the interior subjected to careful Victorian remodelling. In the south wall are the remains of a medieval doorway to the cloisters of the adjoining monastery/priory, and in the rear of the chancel arch is evidence of a rood-stair.

There is a knight's effigy said to be of the de la Mere family, known as 'the Dolly Mare'. On the chancel arch has been placed a 9<sup>th</sup> century grave-slab with intricate knotwork carvings, believed to have marked the grave of St Cenydd who founded the llan, and the associated cell on nearby Burry Holms.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century lych gate, font lid, frontals chest and other items of church furniture have interesting carvings by local craftsman William Melling. In the graveyard are buried celebrated Gower folksinger Phil Tanner, and Battle of Britain hero Wing Cdr Tony Eyre.

Open daily throughout the year.

**13. Llanmadoc: St Madoc's****SA3 1DE**

St Madoc is reputed to have founded a church here in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, and the present building is 13<sup>th</sup> century. Set in one windowsill is a lettered stone dating from the 6<sup>th</sup> century which was discovered in 1861 in the walls of the old parsonage house, and commemorates '*Advenctus son of Guanus*'. In the west wall is a crude pillar cross and a boundary marker dating from the 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> centuries, whilst the font is probably Norman.

During the 12<sup>th</sup> century the parish was controlled by the Knights Templar, before passing to the Knights Hospitaller of St John of Jerusalem, though no visible evidence now remains of this. The Revd J D Davies, a skilled woodcarver, was Rector here from 1860 to 1911. He carved the oak altar frontal and led the major restoration begun in 1865.

Open daily throughout the year.

**14. Cheriton: St Cadoc's****SA3 1BY**

The tiny 'Cathedral of Gower' was probably built in the early 14<sup>th</sup> century to replace the one at Landimore, abandoned due to the encroachment of the sea. The tower, without transepts, is between the nave and chancel, an uncommon design in South Wales.

The doorway is a fine example from the Decorated period. The Norman font is said to have come from the old church. The old rood loft entrance can be seen above the pulpit. The church was restored in 1874 by the famous Gower historian, Rev J D Davies, who personally carved the choir stalls, altar rails, altar and the embossed wooden ceiling. He is buried close to the south wall in the churchyard, near Ernest Jones, the disciple and biographer of Sigmund Freud.

Open daily throughout the year.

**15. Llanrhidian: St Rhidian & St Illtyd's****SA3 1EH**

The original 'Llan' probably dates back to the 6<sup>th</sup> century, as there was once an inscribed stone (now lost) in the area. The tower and chancel are 13<sup>th</sup> century and the nave was rebuilt in the Victorian era.

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

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

Key from Heron's Way Service Station, open all year.

**16. Wernffrwd: St. David's****SA4 3TR**

This mission chapel was built in 1898 alongside the marsh to serve parishioners when the main road was impassable.

The church is of simple design with a single centre aisle and a Victorian stained glass panel is inserted in each of the east and west windows. The memorial tablets on the west wall commemorate wartime service and came from Penuel Presbyterian Church, Llanmorlais on its closure in 1998.

Ring to arrange viewing: 01792 850524.

**17. Llanyrnewdd, Penclawdd: St. Gwynour's****SA4 3JH**

The church is named after the Breton St Eneour and rebuilt in 1850 in the Gothic revival style, replacing a medieval chapel of ease. It is entered through the west end of the only spired tower on Gower, the lower part of which forms a porch. The predominant feature of the church is the striking east window.

The church possesses a remarkable silver double-beaker chalice, open at both ends. It belongs to the Cromwellian period, bearing the hallmark 1657. It has been referred to as the 'Leper cup of Llanyrnewydd' as it was thought the lepers took communion from one side of it.

Ring to arrange viewing: 01792 850547.