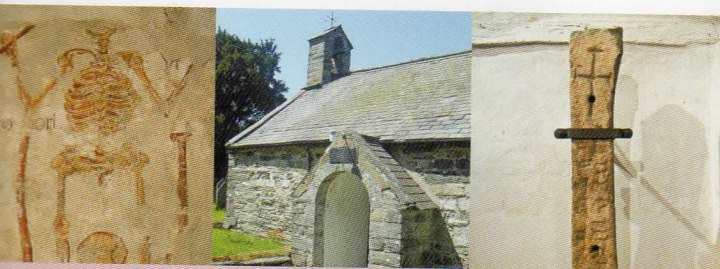


South Merioneth

CHURCH TRAIL



Welcome to the wonderful churches of South Merioneth, the area between the rivers Mawddach and Dovey.

We have churches with dramatic sea views, churches in rural seclusion a little hard to find but so worth the effort, churches of great historic importance and others of simple charm in quiet places.

Many of the churches have leaflets for visitors; do sign the visitors' book and record what you enjoyed about your visit.

We hope this booklet has given you interest and will encourage you to visit these churches. Almost all of them are open to visitors in daytime though some may occasionally have to be locked.

We have not mentioned the many Nonconformist chapels of distinction in the area. These often have interesting interiors but are invariably locked outside service times. You may see them open for cleaning or preparation; if so, do look inside and you will be made welcome.

This guide has been prepared by the Tourism Committee of the Diocese of Bangor (Anglican -The Church in Wales) based on initial work done by the late Revd David Bryant, former incumbent of several parishes in the area. The booklet is dedicated to his memory.

Help towards publication from the Isla Johnston Trust is gratefully acknowledged.

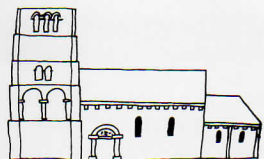
More information is available at:

www.churchinwales.org/bangor/tourism/smtrail



If your interest is in church architecture and fittings we have a feast for you; if you want simply to find somewhere to be quiet and meditate in beautiful surroundings your time will be well spent. Most of the churches described here are regularly open to visitors and the distances between them are convenient for you to devise your own church trails. **Whichever you visit, feel welcome, say a prayer, light a candle in some and know God's peace.**

"How old is this church?" is a question often asked.



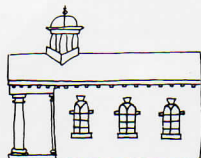
Some of the earliest stone churches we have are of the Romanesque or Norman style from the 12th century-round arches on stout piers.



Then came the Early English style of the 13th century; narrow lancet windows, tall and thin.



Windows became larger and masonry took height in the Decorated and Perpendicular styles of the late Middle Ages (15th and 16th centuries).



18th century Georgian churches are plainer: rectangular design with large windows and slender columns.



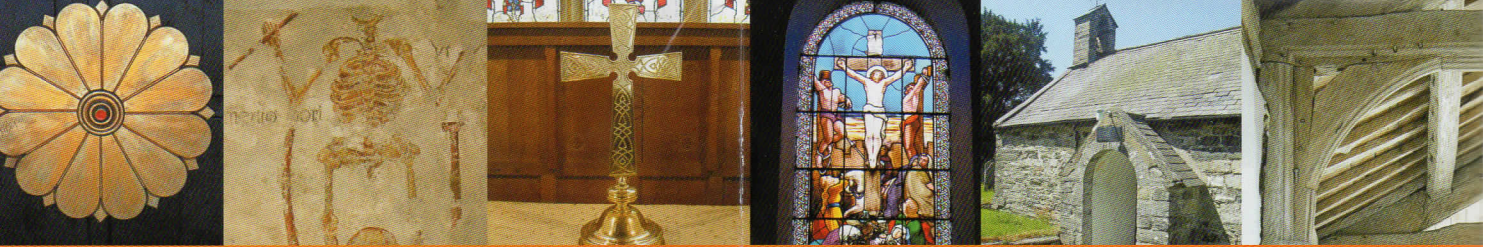
The late Victorian age often produced quirky and independent designs: in St Philip's, Caerdeon, and St Mark's, Brithdir, are two of the most original church buildings to be seen anywhere in Britain.

Time to explore!

Photography by David Bryant, David Longley and Yvonne Fairlamb.

Designed by Martin Japheth

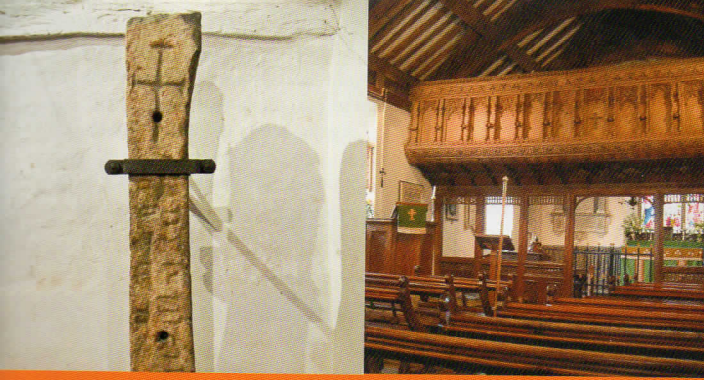
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MAP of the South Merioneth Church Trail

1. Llanaber (*St. Bodfan and St. Mary*)
2. Barmouth (*St. John's*)
3. Barmouth Harbour (*St. David's*)
4. Caerdeon (*St. Phillip's*)
5. Llanelltyd (*St. Illtyd's*)
6. Ruins of Cymer Abbey
7. Dolgellau (*St. Mary's*)
8. Llanfachreth (*St. Machreth's*)
9. Bryncoedifor (*St. Paul's*)
10. Brithdir (*St. Mark's*)
11. Arthog (*St. Catherine's*)
12. Fairbourne (*St. Cynon's*)
13. Llwyngwriil (*St. Celynnin*)
14. Llangelynnin (*St. Celynnin's*)
15. Llanegryn (*St. Mary's & St. Egryn*)
16. Dysynni Valley (*St. Michael's*)
17. Tyn- y-Ddôl
18. Abergynolwyn (*St. David's*)
19. Corris (*Holy Trinity*)
20. Tywyn (*St. Cadfan's*)
21. Aberdovey (*St. Peter's*)
22. Pennal (*St. Peter Ad Vincula*)
23. Machynlleth (*St. Peter's*)
24. Mallwyd (*St. Tydecho's*) - Head North on the A489 from Machynlleth



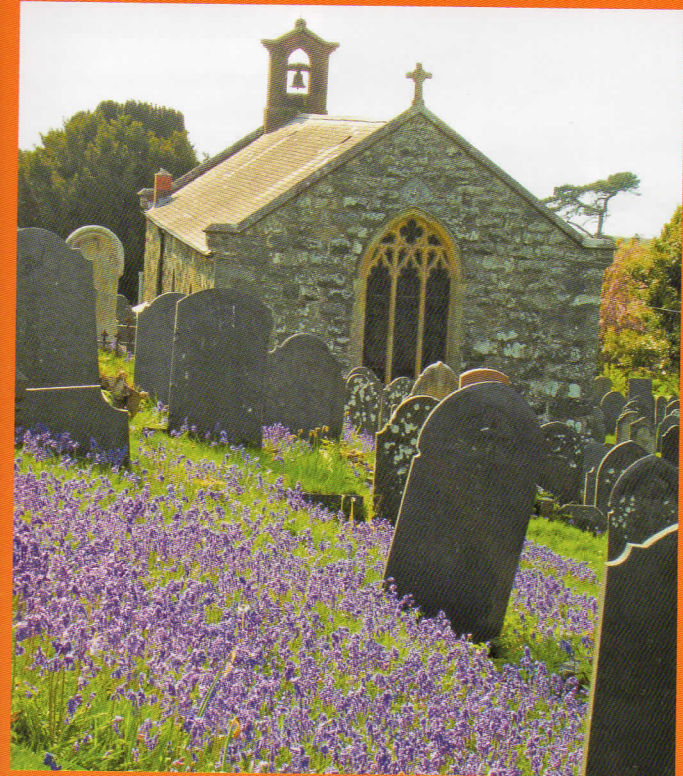


Above Left: St. Cadfan's Stone, Tywyn

Above Right: St. Mary's Church - Llanegryn

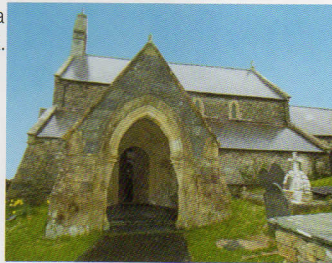
Most of the churches described here are open to visitors every day. Those that are not should have visitor access information posted on the notice-board. Churches may sometimes have to be closed temporarily for a variety of reasons and we hope you will be understanding but you should have many more rewards than disappointments!

Below: St. Celynnin's Church - Llwyngwril



1. LLANABER - St. Bodfan and St. Mary's

The ancient parish of Barmouth and a dramatic position overlooking the sea. Park in the lay-by and walk through the graveyard. From the outside it may seem ordinary Victorian and plain but this is a shell that contains a medieval treasure. When you reach the south door you will realise there is something special: four columns of three shafts each with fleur-de-lys and leaf capitals. Inside is the best Early English style of parish church in



North Wales, from the 13th century, and in a lovely warm golden sandstone. There are arcades with five bays and five different patterns to the capitals. The raised chancel with its lancet windows has a 16th century oak barrel roof and an Arts and Crafts reredos. Each face of the 14th century octagonal font is carved-gargoyle face, plant design, rose, trefoil and shields. (599180)

2. BARMOUTH - St. John's Church

The imposing parish church of St John in Victorian perpendicular dates from the 1890s and is known as the Worcestershire Sauce church, paid for by Mrs Perrins, widow of the firm (she paid twice as the first tower collapsed in 1891).



Red sandstone and grey granite blend well against the steep headland. Interesting and superbly crafted roofs by the architect John Douglas and a font with a marble angel holding a shell, copying a Danish original. (614159)

3. By the harbour is St. David's Church

A chapel of ease for summer visitors built in 1830 (615156). The Catholic church of St Tudwal on the main road climbing up to Llanaber, dates from 1905 and has a saddleback tower and elaborate Austrian oak fittings. (612162)

4. CAERDEON - St. Philip's Church

To find this wonderful church you need to look carefully for a sharp left turn on a bend on the road from Barmouth to Bont-ddu; the lane has a sign but the church is hidden above the road. It was designed in 1861 by one clergyman, J.L.Petit, for another



clergyman, his brother-in-law W.E.Jelf; Petit had travelled in Italy and the Pyrenees and wanted a unique design to complement the rocky scene. Hence rough stone blocks and a unique saddleback bell tower (walk round to see how the four carillon bells would have been rung). The whole effect is Alpine, not inappropriately. (652182)

5. LLANELLYD - St. Illtyd's Church

A mixture of medieval (north door, pulpit panels, six-bay roof) and Victorian (north porch, leaded windows) (718196).

6. The evocative ruins of CYMER ABBEY

A Cistercian (white monks) foundation from the early 13th century. (723195)



7. DOLGELLAU - St. Mary's Church

Is an early 18th century Georgian church, unusual for Wales, with large arched windows and an apse.

The interior is very wide, light and spacious with a barrel-shaped roof. Note that the eight piers are timber made from whole tree trunks carted ten miles by oxen from Dinas Mawddwy, hewn octagonally at the base and cylindrically higher up. There are some fine examples of early Victorian stained-glass. Note the enamelled slate plaques, a local product. (727178)



The Catholic Church of Our Lady, built in the early 1960s, has a Romanesque nave and apse in green and grey stone from local quarries, very atmospheric. (728177)

8. LLANFACHRETH - St. Machreth's Church

is a steep drive from Dolgellau, passing the start of the dramatic Precipice Walk (highly recommended). The spired Church of St Machreth, rebuilt c1820, in this secluded village has a splendid monument to Anne Nanney, 1729. (755225)

9. BRYNCOEDIFOR - St. Paul's Church

Just off the Bala road. St Paul's, built 1850, in a Gothic style has early 20th century fittings including an elaborate screen and mosaic floor and a particularly lovely and elaborate lych-gate. (796207)

10. BRITHDIR - St. Mark's Church

St Mark's Church is now in the care of Friends of Friendless Churches (tel 020 7236 3934 in advance for information on access). It is one of the most individual churches you will ever see. Turn left for Brithdir village on a twisting bend as the A470 climbs above Dolgellau and the church is up a drive on the right. The church was built in 1895-98 by Henry Wilson of the Arts And Crafts movement; it was paid for by the widow of Revd Charles Tooth who, like Wilson, knew and loved the churches of Tuscan Italy. The exterior is a plain design in local granite with steep roofs and a stone cross in relief under a gable arch at the west. The interior amazes with its two bands of colour- blue and orange-red earth. The east end is a Byzantine collection of recesses and apses with panels of beaten copper on the altar frontal and pulpit, the Annunciation to Mary the scene on the former. Kingfisher, dolphins and other creatures are carved on the choir stalls. The font is lead. Note the mother of pearl and abalone on the doors. You will never see another church like this-are you not glad you came? (764184)

11. ARTHOG - St. Catherine's Church

Coming from Dolgellau drive past the church (on the right on a sharp bend) and park up the lane on the left by a disused chapel; the main road is busy.

St Catherine's is early 19th century with a simple gallery; look up to the text "I lift up mine eyes unto the hills" along the south wall and you are looking up in the direction to Cadair Idris. Close to the church is the old railway line which ran through Dolgellau to Barmouth; it now makes a grand walk in either direction as a public footpath. (646146)

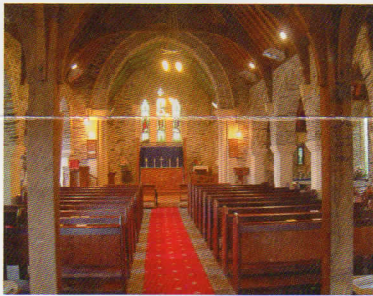


12. FAIRBOURNE - St. Cynon's Church

Built in 1926 on a rocky outcrop; the dune land below of Fairbourne village was created as a holiday settlement for the workers of McDougalls Flour.

The church has an Arts and Crafts feel with thickly pointed rough unplastered stone, quarried on the spot, and an unusual bell-tower and gallery.

(617127)



13. LLWYNGWRIL - St. Celynnin Church

An early Victorian church for the growing village to replace the next church, further along south on the main road for about a mile.

(592094)

14. LLANGELYNIN - St. Celynnin Church

Park in the lay-by and walk down to one of the most evocative and isolated churches you will ever see, also dedicated to St Celynnin-LLANGELYNIN. A church of the simplest rectangular design with a bellcote to the south porch. A single Norman window at the west end may indicate a date of c1200 but there were later additions notably the Tudor early 16th century roof. There is a rare full set of 18th century benches still with the names of farms and owners. There is Ten Commandment board from 1796 in Welsh. Also 18th century is a rare double horse bier for bringing coffins from the surrounding hillsides for burial. There are fragments of wall text paintings and in 2003, found beneath the plaster, a remarkable skeleton figure of Death with scythe and spade, inscribed Memento Mori, perhaps 17th century. Excellent information and guide literature. Just outside the porch is the grave (1799) of Abram Wood, King of the gypsies. A wonderfully luminous, peaceful place! (572072)

15. LLANEGRYN – St. Mary's and St. Egryn's

Less than two miles away is another gem, one of the glories of wood carving in Gwynedd, the screen at St Mary and St Egryn, LLANEGRYN. Turn left off the main road at the Llanegryn sign and immediately left again for a winding lane that will take you to the church. Step inside and the glory of the screen is breathtaking. How, in such a remote place, could such craftsmanship have been found?

Between the ornamented borders are 17 loft panels. It is early 16th century and may there is no proof-have come from Cymer Abbey. The leaf, tendril and vine carving is amazing; even more intricate, astoundingly, is the east side of the screen. See how many animals you can find. Don't miss the Norman font and the memorials to the family at Peniarth. (597058)



16. DYSYNNI VALLEY – St. Michael's Church

Go down the Dysynni Valley past Craig yr Aderyn (Bird Rock) and take the turn to Castell-y-bere, a native Welsh castle. Just past the castle is LLANFIHANGEL-Y-PENNANT, a blessed spot in a glorious valley. St Michael's Church is in an oval churchyard. Details from many periods eg the 16th century roof. In the north transept is an exhibition area including the life of Mary Jones who walked 27 miles in 1800 from her home near here. (672088)

17. TYN-Y-DDÔL

The ruins of Tyn-y-Ddôl, her home, are just further along the lane. She walked to Bala to buy a copy of the Welsh Bible from Thomas Charles; this was the inspiration for the creation of the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1804. She is buried next to the chapel in Brynchrug, on the way to Tywyn.

(674095)

Sadly some churches in this area have closed-Rhoslefain, Brynchrug and, a great loss, Tal-y-llyn by the beautiful lake-and there is now no access.



18. ABERGYNOLWYN St. David's Church

Is still open at the end of a yew-lined path: a church built in 1879 above the village for the workers of the slate quarries nearby. (677078)

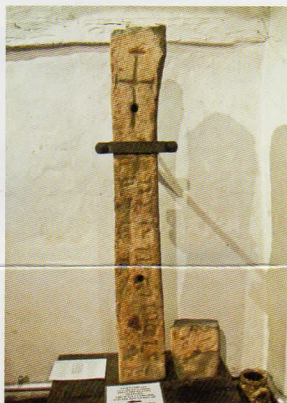
19. CORRIS - Holy Trinity Church

Just below the A470, a church built for the slate quarry workers - late 19th century. (754077)

20. TYWYN - St Cadfan's Church

St Cadfan's is a church within a church. The outer shell, the tower, the chancel and the transepts are all 19th century. The nave is the 12th century heart-simple, pure Romanesque with three short massive pillars and low round arches on each side as plain as the whitewashed walls and aisle roof timbers. Four small windows are cut through on both sides. Medieval tombs on the north side of the chancel-one of a knight weeps when the weather is wet. In the north aisle is one of Wales's greatest treasures, a tall slim stone incised with a cross and two 8th century funeral inscriptions, the oldest surviving piece of writing in the Welsh language.

(587009)



21. ABERDOVEY - St. Peter's Church

A compact early 19th century rectangular box church with a later chancel. (615959)

22. PENNAL - St. Peter Ad Vincula



A few miles further along is PENNAL where St Peter ad Vincula (St Peter in Chains) is a broad single-spaced mid-18th century church with interesting fittings including late 17th century Dutch carved oak roundels. The churchyard has an original stone garden of statuary and sculpture to celebrate heroes of Welsh culture and independence.

The church has a fascinating website (www.glyndwrchapelroyal.co.uk) which explains the parish's links with Owain Glyndwr and the Welsh church's independence from Canterbury. (699004)

23. MACHYNLLETH - St. Peter's Church

If you continue on to MACHYNLLETH you will cross the Dovey briefly to finish your journey in this attractive market town. St Peter's Church is a mixture of 15th and 19th century building; the tower is the oldest part.

(745009)

There are yet further churches to explore. Beyond Machynlleth is the Upper Dovey valley which would give a very scenic drive back to Dolgellau and include the churches of LLANWRIN, PENEGOES, CEMMAES and MALLWYD .

24. MALLWYD - St Tydecho's Church

St Tydecho's, Mallwyd, is particularly interesting: an unusual stepped west end inside, a 1641 date above the entrance porch with two whale bones or tusks unearthed locally. Dr John Davies, a Bible translator, lived here in the early 17th century as Rector. (863123)