

St. Cynog's Parish Church
Ystradgynlais



The History of the Building
of the present Church
1861 - 1961

by

Rev. H. M. Hughes
(Rector of Ystradgynlais)

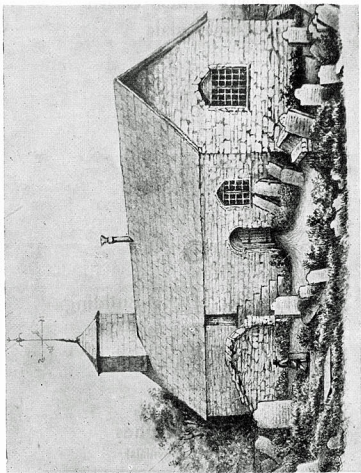
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The old Parish Church, Ystradgynlais

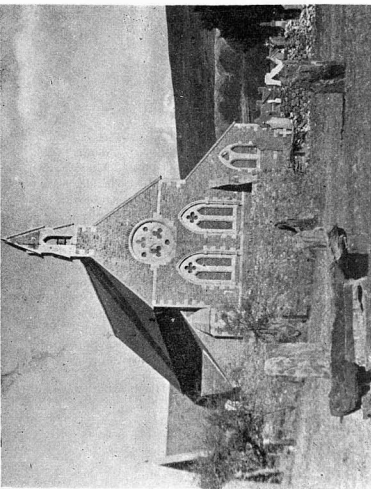
PREFACE

THIS brief account of the building of the present parish church is an attempt to put on record information that has been collected from different sources. Most of the contents of this booklet are taken from the records that have been kept in the register and minute books of the parish.

I am greatly indebted to the Rev. J. W. Thomas, Vicar of Merthyr Cynog for valuable information about St. Cynog, to Miss Audrey Freeman for her notes on the parish churches of Llangiwc, Ystradgynlais and Callwen, and to "*The Cambrian*" for extracts from the reports of the opening of the Church. The celebration of the centenary of the parish church seemed to be a splendid opportunity to publish this booklet.

NOVEMBER, 1961.

H. M. HUGHES



The present Parish Church, Ystradgynlais

St. Cynog's Parish Church Ystradgynlais. 1861-1961

THE ECCLESIASTICAL PARISH OF YSTRADGYNLAIS at one time coincided with the boundaries of the present civil parish and extended from Ystalyfera to a point beyond Craignos and included the villages of Abercrave, Cwmtwrch and Coelbren. Ystradgynlais is one of the more ancient parishes in the locality and shares this distinction with the neighbour-parishes of Defynnog, Llangiwc and Cadoxton.

The origin of the name Ystradgynlais is uncertain, and many attempts have been made to explain it. The late Professor Thomas Levi, who once lived here, maintained that in his youth people used to call the place Ystradgyrlais and not Ystradgynlais. Ystrad - Gyrlais — The Vale of Gyrlais: from the name of the stream that still flows through part of the village. Another suggestion proposed by Dr. Stephen J. Williams, until recently Professor of Welsh at Swansea University College and a native of Ystradgynlais, was that the name was made up of three words — Ystrad - cwn - glais — "the vale of water dogs or otters."

Another theory is that it takes its name from Cynllinus, son of Caractacus. Furthermore the name has been explained by a legendary story about Gladys the daughter of Brychan Brycheiniog who had fallen in love with Cynlais, a prince who ruled over the territory between the Usk and the Rhymney Valleys. At first Brychan was unwilling for the match but after Cynlais had shown great bravery and resourcefulness he consented to the marriage. As a dowry Brychan gave the newly-wed couple a large tract of land on the south-eastern border of his territory which became known as Ystrad Gynlais. The name of Gladys has been perpetuated in the part of the village known as Hendreladis which is obviously a contraction for "Hendre" and "Gladys."

Recently with the re-numbering of the houses in the top-most part of Brecon Road there is a danger that the name Hendreladis Terrace will in due course fall into disuse and a valuable link with the distant past will be severed.

THE PATRON SAINT.

It is generally believed that there has been a church in Ystradgynlais since the 5th or 6th century. Naturally, there are no remains left of this church and in the course of time it was rebuilt and renovated over and over again. However there are remains still to be observed of the foundations of an old church which certainly dated from the 13th or 14th century and a drawing of it is reproduced on page 2. The site on which it stood is marked by a memorial stone denoting the place of the chancel which is enclosed by a railing. The inscription on the stone reads as follows:

"This column is erected on the site of the chancel of the former church of Ystradgynlais in which the remains of several of the Fortreys and Aubreys and those of the Revd. James Gough Aubrey were interred."

The chronicler Ecton states that this old church was dedicated to St. Mary. Theophilus Jones in his History of Breconshire disproves this but then goes on to claim with no apparent authority that the patron saint of the church was Gwnlen or Gunlais. In latter years as a result of research done by the late Professor W. H. Harris of Lampeter, a former curate of the parish, it has been established that the original dedication of the old church was to St. Cynog. This confusion is explained thus:— It often happened in the Norman period that the original Welsh dedication was displaced and a church was rededicated to a saint whose name was found in the Roman Calendar. In this case the original dedication was superseded by St. Mary, the Blessed Virgin. This in time was forgotten and only in comparatively recent years has the original dedication been brought back into common usage.

SAINT CYNOG.

Cynog was the eldest child of Brychan Brycheiniog's large family. He was regarded with great veneration by the inhabitants of Breconshire for his saintliness. There are at least seven churches in the area that are dedicated to his memory, viz., Merthyr Cynog, where he is reputed to be buried; Defynog; Penderyn; Battle, near Brecon; Llangynog, near Builth Wells; Boughrood and Ystradgynlais.

Little is really known of his life and what records are available are taken from the Harleian M.S. 4181. This information was collected by Hugh Thomas in 1702 who claimed to have been told about Cynog by the "poor ignorant country people" of the district. There are many

legends associated with St. Cynog. One tells how in his youthful days he forsook the world, and retired from his father's Court at the Gaer, outside Brecon, to a hermitage in the nearby village of Battle He travelled up and down in a poor miserable habit and made himself a torque or ring of iron which he wore on his head instead of the princely crown of gold to impress on his own memory the crown of thorns worn by his Lord and Saviour and to oblige him always to cast his eyes to the ground in humility.

In those days the district around Brecon was overrun by a savage and reprobate people who were called Ormests. They were given this name because they oppressed the poor and widows (gormes — oppression). The only person they feared was Cynog who was the champion of the poor. A story is told how a poor woman pleaded with Cynog to protect her and her family from them. The holy man waited with her in her cottage and spent the night in prayer. Early in the morning the Ormests attacked and Cynog threw his torque at them. It struck the ring-leader and he instantly fell down dead.

Cynog spent the remainder of his days in the company of a group of hermits who travelled about preaching and teaching the Christian faith to the people of the district. They had their primitive monastic settlement on top of the Fan. His companions became jealous of his miraculous powers and they slew him by cutting off his head and buried him in Merthyr Cynog on the site where, subsequently, the church of Merthyr Cynog was built as a memorial to the great Saint (see Baring Gould and Fisher "Lives of the Saints").

We find references to Saint Cynog in the Welsh poetry of the 15th and 16th century. For example:— Kywydd i Nychdod by Huw Lllyn, 1570 - 1600, and also there is a "cywydd" to Cynog Sant by Howel Dafydd ab Ieuan ab Rhys written about the same time.

A supposed saying of St. Cynog is recorded among "The Sayings of the Wise":

"Deuparth addysg ym mhenglog"

("Two-thirds of one's education is already in the head.")

Undoubtedly Cynog was a wise and saintly man whose example and teaching made a lasting impression on the people of Breconshire and whose reputation for holiness is perpetuated in the Christian Communities which he established in various parts of the county where churches were subsequently built and dedicated to his memory.

THE DEVELOPMENT AND GROWTH OF THE PARISH.

The following extract is taken from "The Cambrian" newspaper dated June 28th, 1861.

"Ystradgynlais is a very large and extensive parish situated in the County of Brecon and the Diocese of St. David. In bygone days it was a purely agricultural parish, being about 12,000 acres in extent and inhabited by a few small tenant farmers and mountain shepherds. From returns made it is alleged that the whole population did not exceed 150 persons some 180 or 190 years ago. In the year 1821 the population had increased to 1181 and at the census of the present year (i.e. 1861) amounted to 4346. Although in consequence of the great depression of trade and the partial suspension of the Yniscledwyn Iron Works many hundreds of people had left the parish to seek employment elsewhere.

"The Swansea Valley in which Ystradgynlais is situated presents many attractions to tourists. Without exception it is one of the prettiest valleys in South Wales. Its charming scenery, its lofty hills, its magnificent waterfalls, its precipitous rocks and its receding caves all tend to make it a favourable place of public resort especially now that sulphurous mineral and other springs of considerable medicinal properties have been discovered of late years at Gellionen and at Cwmtwrch and Penrhos, added to which is the great facility of a railway travelling up and down the Valley by the Swansea Vale Railway . . ."

From the above description it is obvious that Ystradgynlais attracted large numbers of people who would find employment in the iron and coal industries and at the same time live in pleasant surroundings.

The old parish Church proved inadequate to serve the increasing population. The Rev. Thomas Walters was the Rector and he was instituted to the living at the beginning of 1856. He was a native of Trallong near Brecon and served the parish first as a curate before becoming the incumbent. He was a man of great energy and foresight and during his ministry in the parish not only built the new parish church but also provided for the more distant hamlets by erecting a Chapel of Ease at Cwmtwrch and by establishing day schools and Sunday services both at Cwmtwrch and Abercrave National School.

Mr. Walters directed his efforts towards the providing of a church that would both be adequate for and worthy of the

parish. The old church was small and unsightly. It was only 63ft. long and 23ft. wide and a gallery was placed across the middle of the nave. A flat ceiling extended from the gallery to the west end and this had a headroom of only 10 feet the ceiling to the floor. The space within the communion rail was extremely restricted being only 6ft. long by 4ft. 6in. wide. Furthermore the whole building was dark, oppressive and damp.

Theophilus Jones in his "History of Breconshire" writing about the old church said:

"It is low, dark and too small for the parish and consists of, a nave and a chancel only, not ceiled, but tolerably flagged and regularly seated. The porch entrance at the west side seems to have been built since the church, and has a school-room with a fireplace over it. Near it is a turret, or rather a small shed containing one bell. Across the middle of the aisle is a small gallery, an inscription on it says it was erected in 1734 in the time when Mr. Portrey and Mr. Howel Powel were churchwardens."

The necessity of doing something about improving the old church was urgently felt. Mr. Whittington, the County Surveyor, proposed plans and specifications for the removal of the gallery and for altering the pulpit, reading desk and communion rails. But for some reason or other these were not carried into effect.

The matter was brought up at the Easter Vestry in 1857 but those present failed to agree on the improvements. However the matter was further pursued at a meeting held on October 15th the same year and a committee of twenty-one persons composed of farmers and others from the Lower Division of the parish was formed at the Yniscledwyn Arms to carry out the alterations.

The following night a similar meeting was held in Penycae and a committee of twenty-six persons were elected for the same purpose. At both these meetings plans were formulated for the collection of money to begin the work. Collecting cards were issued to each member and two treasurers were appointed. As far as can be ascertained no money was contributed nor were the collecting cards returned.

At the Easter Vestry the following year the majority of those present were in favour of pulling down the old church and building a new church on the same site. They decided to apply for a faculty to enable them to do this, but in due course this scheme was abandoned.

By the Easter Vestry 1859 an alternative suggestion of building a completely new church near the site of the old

one received the general support of the church people. It was resolved at that meeting "that the portion of the Burial Ground on the south side of the church as now staked out containing 5,700 square feet be appropriated as the site of the proposed new church. It was further resolved that it is expedient that the building of the new church should be commenced as soon as possible."

The minutes of this meeting were signed by the Rector, the Rev. Thomas Walters; Daniel Jones, Postmaster; Morgan Morgans, Churchwarden; William Morgan, Churchwarden; John Jones, Ystradgynlais; John Williams, Dyfnant; David Lewis; William Daniel; Roger Prosser; John Watkins; Richard Lewis; Thos. Thomas; Evan Morgan; Enoch Morgan; Evan Evans; Thomas Watkins.

As a result of this decision arrangements were made to draw up a specification of the proposed new church. This was done by Benjamin Ferrey of Trinity Place, Charing Cross, in the City of Westminster. This document is still available together with the legal contract. It states that as the Architect, Mr. Ferrey was to "superintend the building and prepare the drawings and designs and specifications of all the works to be done and materials to be used."

The contract was given to John Gabe of Merthyr Tydfil and the Articles of Agreement were drawn up and signed on August 15th, 1859. It was agreed that the church should be completed by June 24th, 1860, and the contract price was £1,340.

On December 1st, 1859, a meeting was called of all the Inhabitants and Occupiers assessed to the relief of the poor of the parish. The purpose of the meeting is recorded for us in the minutes of the Vestry:—"to take into consideration and determine upon the sum of money requisite for defraying part of the expense of Rebuilding, Enlarging and otherwise extending of Ystradgynlais Church upon a new site and which is now in course of erection—And also to take into consideration and determine upon the propriety of directing and consenting that the Churchwardens and Overseers of the Poor of the said Parish should make application to the Commissioners authorised and empowered to make advances for Public Works . . . for a loan of all or any part of the sum of money requisite for the purpose aforesaid . . ."

The meeting was called for 11 a.m. and was held in Church. It appears from reading the old records that although the meetings were begun in Church it was the general custom to adjourn them to one of the local inns. In this instance it was adjourned by general consent to the Ynisedwyn Arms.

A discussion took place as to how much money ought to be borrowed and it was suggested that application should be made to the Commissioners for a loan of £1,000. However, there was strong opposition to the application for this loan. This was voiced by the Revd. Thomas Levi who asked the vestry to refuse to sanction the application. A vote was then taken and the resolution was carried by 35 votes.

The people who opposed this application were aware that such a loan would be repaid by the levy of a rate on the land owners and occupiers in the parish. At this time the Established Church (as it then was in Wales) benefited from a Compulsory Church Rate. This was subsequently abolished in 1868.

Having received the approval of the Inhabitants and Occupiers the Rector then sought the consent of the Bishop of the Diocese, the Rt. Rev. Connop Thirlwall, for the application for the loan. Indeed he must have travelled the very next day to see the Bishop for a letter giving his approval was signed on December 2nd.

The Rev. Thomas Levi and his supporters demanded that a Poll be held to decide this issue. Consequently the Revd. Thomas Walters made application to the Queen's Bench for a Mandamus. (A mandamus is "a writ directed by a Judge of the High Court to any inferior Court or to any individual person ordering such a person to perform any public duty he may be liable to perform"). Both sides of the case were heard and on Tuesday May 8th "in the twenty third year of the Reign of Queen Victoria" the writ was issued "directed to the Revd. Thomas Walters . . . commanding him to . . . proceed with a poll of the inhabitants and parishioners with reference to an application for a loan . . . In this case a Mr. Prideaux appeared for the Prosecutors and a Mr. Coleridge for the Defendants.

After several other meetings in the parish it was finally arranged that the poll be held at the Lamb and Flag on Thursday and Friday 26th and 27th July, 1860. The result was declared outside the Ynisedwyn Arms on the following Monday. Those who voted for the resolution numbered 83 and those against 55.

Several people disputed the result of the Poll because some of the occupiers of small tenements had been prevented from registering their votes. An explanation for this refusal was sought. It was explained that under a statute passed with regard to the collection of Rates it was the Owners of Cottages with a yearly rateable value which did not exceed £6 that were rated and assessed for the relief of the poor



Memorial Stone marking the site of the original Church

and not the occupiers of the tenements. Consequently those occupiers were not eligible to vote.

The controversy concerning the loan was so bitter that the Revd. Thomas Walters had to abandon the scheme and appeal to the public for their support to finance the building of the church.

The building of the Church took nearly one year to complete and an advertisement was placed in "The Cambrian" newspaper dated 7th June, 1861 :—

YSTRADGYNLAIS NEW PARISH CHURCH.

"The above church will be open for Divine Service on Wednesday and Thursday, June 12th and 13th, 1861.

"On Wednesday, June 12th Divine Service will commence at 6 p.m., when the Rev. D. H. Griffiths, M.A., Vicar of Cadoxton juxta Neath will preach in English and the Rev. T. Davies, Vicar of Devynnock, will preach in Welsh.

On Thursday, June 13th, Divine Service will commence at 11 a.m., when the Rt. Rev. Lord Bishop of St. David's will preside in English and the Rev. Dr. James, Panteg, near Newport, in Welsh.

"In the afternoon, the service will begin at 3 o'clock when the Ven. R. W. P. Davies, M.A., Archdeacon of Brecon, will preach in English and the Rev. J. Hughes, R.D., Vicar of Llandovery in Welsh.

"In the evening at 6 o'clock the Rev. Canon Jenkins, M.A., Rector of Dowlais, will preach in English, and the Rev. David Parry, R.D., Vicar of Llywel in Welsh.

"Collections will be made at the close of each service.

"1st and 2nd Class Return Tickets at a single fare for the double journey will be issued at all stations on the Swansea Vale Railway by the 8.15 and 12.43 up trains to Ynysgeinon from whence there will be omnibuses for the conveyance of passengers to Ystradgynlais."

From a report of the services printed a fortnight later in the same paper we learn that the Bishop preached from Mt. 12 : 6, "But I say unto you that in this place is one greater than the Temple," and the Rev. Dr. James preached in Welsh on the text, "Duw cariad yw." The following is a further extract from the same report :—

"The last evening not only was every sitting in church occupied but the forms and benches that could be borrowed were procured and placed in different aisles. Notwithstanding all this, a great number of people failed to procure admission into the church at all.

"Mr. Parry of Llywel—considered to be one of the best and most popular preachers in Wales—nearly 80 years of age—highly gifted and eloquent (doniol, as the Welsh would say), preached for one hour and a quarter.

"Collections were made after each service upward of £40, independent of the promise of £25 made by B. Botfield, Esq., M.P. for Ludlow, and owner of Ystrad Mawr who has before so liberally made up the deficiency of between £300-£400 necessary to complete the building."

Although the church was open for service in June, for reasons that are not known it was not consecrated by the Bishop of St. David's, Dr. Connop Thirlwall, until December 18th, 1861.

DESCRIPTION OF THE NEW CHURCH.

The present church is a building of fine proportions and spaciousness. A new feature in its architecture was the use of short cast iron pillars supporting the arcading along the side aisles. It is very probable that these pillars were made locally at the Ynyscedwyn Iron Works. The object of using them was to enable every one to have an uninterrupted view of the clergyman.

According to the original specification drawn up by Benjamin Ferrey, Esq., the Architect, dated 22nd March, 1858, provision was made for the erection of a Tower on the north west side of the church. That is why there is still to be seen in the porch a doorway which was to lead up through a spiral staircase to the Tower. In all probability the Tower was to contain a peal of Bells. Besides there was to have been included a Gallery at the west end of the church, and the door in the porch would also be the entrance to this. However, neither of these were built. It is said that Madam Patti, who was a parishioner and a friend of the Rector, promised to be responsible for at least half the cost of the Tower and Bells. But at the time there was a quarrel between her and the Rector; she withdrew her offer and thus the plans had to be amended accordingly.

The Specification also instructs the builder to take down and remove all materials of the old church, carting away whatever is not required to be used in the new church . . . the materials of every kind which are sound and fit may with the consent of the architect be employed again in the new building." Furthermore it stated that the additional stone to be used should be obtained either at Graigarw or Ynysmeudwy quarries.

The roof was to be covered "with the best purple Bangor Countess slates intermixed with slates of a greenish tint nailed with copper nails . . . The whole of the timber of the roofs to be of sound Memel timber of the best quality."

It seems that the present block floor in the Nave was not part of the original construction. The specification instructs that the floor was to be laid with yellow 6in. batten boards, and the joists were to be five inches by two and a half, not more than twelve inches apart. The seats were to be of yellow pine also.

It was not until the end of 1861 or the beginning of 1862 that a heating system was installed. The plan for the hot water apparatus was drawn up by Richard James and the cost of its installation was not to exceed £35.

THE CHURCH PLATE

At the end of 1860 probably to mark the completion of the Church the Communion Plate was presented by members of the Gough family of Ynyscedwyn House. This is the Communion Plate that is in use today. It consisted of a pair of Chalices, two Patens, a Credence Paten and a Wine Flagon. They are of magnificent solid silver and bear and Exeter hall mark of 1860, with the makers' mark J.W. & J.W. in a four lobed stamp. On bowl of each Chalice is inscribed :

"Ystradgynlais Church by R. D. and C. G. Gough, 1860."

"The chalices are decorated with the sacred monogram within rays; the knopped stems at the bases of each are hexagonal. The two patens which have moulded rims are similarly inscribed and decorated. The credence Paten is also decorated and inscribed in the same way. The Tankard Flagon has a six-sided drum, spout handle and cover surmounted by a cross ornament and is decorated with the sacred monogram within rays.

THE MEMORIALS IN STONE AND GLASS.

There are few historical remains left from the old church, except for the memorial tablets which have been transferred from it. On the north wall of the church there are the monuments to the Ynyscedwyn family of Goughs, Aubreys and Portreys. The oldest memorial is that in memory of Morgan Aubrey who was interred the 19th June, 1648. Other memorials are found on the north and south walls.

There are some very fine stained glass windows in the Church. Undoubtedly the east window is a splendid work of

art. It is a five-light window in memory of Fleming Richard Dansey Aubrey Gough of Ynyscedwyn (1855-1933) and his wife Cecil Clare (1853-1936). It is worth noting in detail the symbolism of the window:—

The three central lights depict Christ in Glory in the centre, with Saint Michael, and St. Gabriel, the Archangels in the inner side-lights. Above and beneath these figures are the four six-winged creatures mentioned in the Book of Revelation and accepted as the symbols of the four Evangelists — The Angel for St. Matthew; the Lion for St. Mark; the Ox for St. Luke, and the Eagle for St. John. The oval rays surrounding Our Lord represents the fact that He has risen and reigns in Glory. A few rays are shown around each Archangel to signify that they are Sons of Light. St. Michael holds his Shield and also a Cross to denote his Spiritual Victory over the Evil One. The Scroll held by St. Gabriel has painted on it the words: "I am Gabriel that stand in the presence of God." In his right hand is the Lily of the Annunciation. Beneath the Archangels are two angels with censers in their hands.

In the outer side lights are the figures of St. Cynog and St. Clare. The patron saint is shown on the dexter side next to St. Michael who is Patron Saint and Prince of the Church Militant. It is of interest to note too that Cynog, although a prince and son of King Brychan, has discarded his earthly crown and it is seen placed at his feet. As he was canonized he is shown holding the Scriptures and a staff. St. Clare being a pupil and disciple of St. Francis, is shown in a brown habit, holding a Pastoral Staff as an Abbess and her emblem — the Lily. At the base of these outer lights are introduced the coats of arms of the Dioceses of St. David's and Swansea and Brecon.

On the south of the Church there are two double lights and one single light in stained glass.

The one double light is in memory of Miss Elizabeth Ann Thomas, Castle Bank, a Churchwarden and benefactress of the church. It depicts the preparation of the Upper Room for the Last Supper. We see portrayed the two disciples, Peter and John, arranging the Table in the Upper Room with the Man carrying the pitcher of water.

The other double light is a memorial to Thomas Watkin of Castle Bank, the uncle of Miss Elizabeth Ann Thomas. He was Churchwarden for 44 years and held in high esteem by the inhabitants of Ystradgynlais. The Churchpeople have erected a memorial tablet to him written in Welsh and it is found on the South wall of the Church. The window to his memory

depicts in one light the Baptism of Our Lord by John His cousin, and in the other the Blessing of the Disciples by Our Lord just before His Ascension.

The other single light window on the South side is a memorial to Ivor Bowen Griffiths, a faithful chorister for many years. Thus, appropriately, the window depicts King David singing the psalms and accompanying himself on the lyre.

On the North side there is a fine Memorial Window presented by the local Branch of the British Legion to remember those who fell in the Great Wars. It depicts Our Lord washing the disciples' feet and above is the figure of the Pelican with blood on its breast to remind us how it feeds its young with its own blood. The whole window thus portraying the qualities of Service and Sacrifice.

The other double light window on the north side is a memorial to David Callaghan who was also a faithful chorister. In the one light we have a portrayal of Our Lord as "The Light of the World" and in the other as the Good Shepherd.

THE INCUMBENTS OF THE LAST HUNDRED YEARS.

During the last hundred years the parish has been served by a succession of faithful and devoted parish priests. The Revd. Thomas Walters served the parish until 1874 when he left to become Vicar of Llansamlet. He was responsible too for the building of the parish church there and the plan of it bears a remarkable similarity to that of Ystradgynlais Church. He succeeded to include a fine Tower in the building of St. Samlet. When he retired he returned to his native Trallong and continued his zeal for church building by being responsible for the providing of a vicarage for the parish of Trallong.

He was succeeded in 1874 as Rector of Ystradgynlais by the Revd. E. L. Davies Glanley. He was incumbent of the parish for 38 years and during that time witnessed the development of Ystradgynlais from a comparatively small village to a small township. The streets opposite the Rectory is named after him. He was no mean scholar and was the author of a book called "Church Reform."

The Revd. James Jones was his successor in 1912 and he is still remembered as a devoted pastor. During the eleven years of his incumbency he did a great deal to deepen the spiritual life of the parish. He left to take a living in Pembrokeshire and remained a faithful parish priest there for many years.



Bishop's Procession at Induction of present Rector : June 24th, 1959

In 1924 the Revd. W. Ilar Edwards became the Rector. Both he and his wife are remembered with affection for the splendid work they did especially during the years of depression. Unfortunately Mr. Edwards was hampered by ill-health and passed away in January, 1930. As a memorial to their beloved and faithful parish priest the parishioners presented the magnificent Cross that is on the High Altar. The parish is proud to claim that the wife of the present Archdeacon of Gower is the daughter of the late Rev. Ilar Edwards and Mrs. Edwards and that she was brought up in the Rectory.

In 1930 the Rev. D. L. Williams, who was then curate of Llanyfelach, was inducted as Rector and served the parish until 1959 when he was forced to retire on account of ill-health. It was during his twenty nine years as incumbent that a great deal of extensive work was done to the fabric of the church. During this time the present vestries were added in 1933, the magnificent Church Hall was presented by the wife of the late Col. Gough in 1935, and the fine organ, Altar and Reredos was given by Miss Thomas Castle Bank in 1954.

The Rev. D. L. Williams was made an Honorary Canon of Brecon Cathedral in 1958, and he was also Rural Dean of East Gower.

In 1959 he was succeeded by the present incumbent who inducted on June 24th of that year at a memorable service when the church was packed to capacity and a sumptuous welcome supper was provided afterwards at the Church Hall.

THE CHURCHYARD.

As has already been mentioned the site of the old church can still be seen and is marked by an Obelisk stone containing an inscription (see page 12). Besides there are some very fine old yew trees that date back many hundreds of years. Unfortunately through the general neglect of the relatives of those buried there, the older part of the Churchyard is very overgrown. There are however, a few gravestones of real interest.

Richard Pendrill was buried here in 1814 and his son, also called Richard who was a surgeon and coroner of Brecknock was buried here in 1831. In 1840 George Crane, the eminent iron manufacturer of Ynyscedwyn was laid to rest here. The celebrated bard, Owain Dafydd, author of a well known poem on the Divinity of Christ, in which the Unitarian Doctrine is condemned, lived the latter part of his life in Gurnos Mill and was buried here in 1813. He was a comparatively poor man and the cost of his funeral was borne

by two of the local gentry, Mr. Gough and Mr. Pendrill. There is also a grave stone, the cost of which was paid for by the people of Ystradgynlais to the memory of the local doctor and surgeon, John Thomas Reese, who who was killed by lightning on the Drum Mountain as he was going to attend to one of his patients.

There is a very fine memorial stone over the grave of the Revd. Dr. Thomas Walters, the builder of the church. He died at Trallong but his body was brought back to be buried in the Churchyard. It is of interest to note that the present Vicar of Pontardawe and Rural Dean of East Gower, the Revd. Canon T. R. Walters James, a native of Ystradgynlais, is a descendant of Dr. Walters.

There are two ancient gravestones taken from the old church and imbedded in the east wall of the present church. Experts date them from the late 5th or early 6th century. Unfortunately it is impossible to know who was buried beneath them as only parts of the stones remain.

One of these stones bears the inscription "HIC IACIT." ("Here lies"). The late Professor Nash Williams writing about the stone, describes it as "the lower portion of a roughly quadrangular pillar stone, 23½ inches in height and 6½ inches wide, the stone bears an incomplete inscription HIC IACIT ('He, or she, lies here') which is in one line, reading vertically downwards, the letters measuring about 2½ inches in height." The age he gives for the stone is the 6th century.

With regard to the second stone, Professor Westwood describes it as:—"a stone four feet long and eight inches wide . . . the letters are large and coarsely cut measuring about 3½ inches in height . . . The inscription in its entire state has, it seem to me been intended to read "ADIUNE" . . . I take it to be a sepulchral slab inscribed with a name terminating not in the genitive I as usual but in E, probably intended for a diphthong Æ and this indicating a female as intended to be commemorated . . . I suppose this inscription to be not much more recent than the 5th or 6th century."

Professor Nash Williams maintained that this stone was the upper portion of a quadrangular pillar stone. He takes the inscription to read "(The stone) of Adiune (who lies here)"

THE REGISTERS.

The Registers are in very good condition and the minutes of the Vestries have been fully reported. The oldest register kept in the church dates from 1721. The first few entries are

interesting. They are written in Latin and they are signed by Johanno Portrey, curate.

Funera 1721.

Thomas John apud Coelbren	Maii 21
Maria uxor Gulielm Bowen	Maii 22
Thomas Powel	Julii 23
Catherina filia Richardi John	Julii 30

The entries are made in English from 1742 onwards.

The marriage entry of the famous Madam Patti, of Craignynos to Count Ernest Nicolini is found in the Registers and is dated June 10th, 1886.

THE RECTORY.

Tradition has it that it was formerly an inn and that it was converted into a Rectory. It is known for certain that the building was enlarged and renovated by the Revd. E. L. D. Glanley in 1880 and that £600 was borrowed from the Governors of Queen Anne's Bounty to pay for the work. A more recent item of interest is that in 1923 there is a minute recorded in the transactions of the Parochial Church Council:—

"Rev. D. Davies pointed out the difficulty in filling the vacant living of Ystradgynlais owing to the bad state of the interior of the Rectory and asked the Council if they were prepared to help in the matter."

The Council willingly agreed to put the house in good order for the Revd. W. Ilar Edwards who was subsequently appointed.

At about this time it was reported to the Council that "when the Commission appointed to deal with the question of joining parishes and creating new ones set to work it was very probable that Ystradgynlais would be joined on to Ystalyfera in the Deanery of East Gower." However, when the new Diocese of Swansea and Brecon was formed in 1925 both parishes kept their separate identity. But a year later Abercrave was carved out of Ystradgynlais and the curate-in-charge was appointed its first incumbent. Capel Coelbren, though originally a part of the parish had been separated and made a parish in its own right many years before.

THE PARISH COFFIN.

Up until 1769 there was a "parish coffin" in use in Ystradgynlais and it was the custom to bury all paupers without a coffin. It appears that this coffin was kept in the

porch of the church and on the death of a pauper it was sent to the house of the deceased person. The body was carried in it to the churchyard. When the funeral service was over the coffin lid was taken off, the corpse lifted out and placed in the grave. The parish coffin was then replaced in the porch until required again.

The following extract is taken from "The Terrier of Ystradgynlais," dated October 14th, 1739 :—

"Clerk's fees :— There is one shilling due to the clerk for digging every grave with coffin, but without there is sixpence."

The parish coffin became decayed in 1769 and by order of the parish authorities it was deposited in the grave of the pauper it contained.

The expense of burying this pauper, as set out in the old Parish Book of the then Overseer was as follows :—

April 1769. Charge towards burying J.J.	
Journey to the house	6d.
Also of digging a grave	1/-
Also for shrouding him	2/-
Also for burying him	1/-
Also Ale for carrying the bier and carrying the corpse to be buried	2/6
Also for pins, candles, thread, cord, etc.	1/-
Also 5½ yards flannel	4/3½
Also to his wife	3
	12/6½

PRESENT PLANS FOR RESTORATION.

In 1960 it was decided that the fabric of the church should be inspected by a qualified architect and a report made to the Parochial Church Council. Three months later Messrs. Cyril Hughes & Sons, of Swansea, reported that, having made a thorough survey, the roof had appeared to have moved eastwards several inches and that the west wall and bell turret needed urgent attention. The church it seems had been built on a water-bed foundation and no tie-beams had been inserted in the roof. Further the dead weight of the bell-turret had been the major cause in the movement in the roof. Plans have been drawn up for the removal of the bell turret and the rebuilding of the west wall and new turret together with the strengthening of the foundations of the west wall. The estimated cost of this project is in the region of £7,000. It

is hoped to spread the cost of the work over a few years and already church people have generously supported two Gift Days the money from which will be used for the restoration.

The Parishioners of Ystradgynlais are very conscious of their wonderful heritage and are determined to hand over to the generations to come a church that is full of "the beauty of holiness" and worthy of the worship of Almighty God.

LIST OF INCUMBENTS.

1490	Thomas, the Bishop's Chaplain.
1493	David ap Gwallter.
1514	Thomas ap Griffith.
1583	Lewis Thomas.
1601	John Llywelyn.
1634	Charles Herbert.
1635	Charles Herbert.
	*Hopkin Thomas.
1666	John Collins.
1687	Richard Portrey.
1714	James Powel.
1739	John Portrey.
1742	John Seys.
1780	James Gough Awbrey.
1790	Fleming Gough.
1835	Timothy Davies.
1846	Walter Jones Williams, B.A.
1856	Dr. Thomas Walters.
1874	E. L. D. Glanley.
1912	James Jones.
1924	W. Ilar Edwards.
1930	Canon D. L. Williams, B.A., R.D.
1959	Hywel M. Hughes, B.A.

* It is uncertain when this man was presented, but he was ousted by the Act for the Propagation of the Gospel in Wales and he was succeeded after 5 or 6 years vacancy by James Jones a Thatcher, who was followed by David Jones, a Ploughman.

THE PARISH OF YSTRADGYNLAIS, 1961.

RECTOR : THE REV. HYWEL M. HUGHES, B.A.

Churchwardens : Mrs. E. B. Williams.
Mr. Edward Cordall.

Parochial Church Council :

Mr. Winston Griffiths.
Miss Betty Davies.
Mr. G. Robbins.
Mr. Teddy Thomas.
Mrs. H. M. Hughes.
Mrs. Dobson.
Mr. Evan Lake.
Mr. Haydn Roderick.
Mr. Arthur Thomas.
Miss Brenda Jones.
Mrs. Flynn.
Mr. Raymond Lewis.
Mr. David Williams.
Mr. Tom Williams.
Miss Margaret Bounds.
Mr. D. J. Phillips.
Miss L. M. Richards.
Mr. Ieuan Jones.
Mr. W. J. Jones.

Secretary: Mrs. Betty Jenkins.

Organist : Mrs. Carrie Walters-Herbert.

Centenary Sub-Committee :

The Rector (Chairman).
Mr. Teddy Morgan.
Mr. Morgan Griffiths.
Mr. Tom Williams.
Mr. W. J. Jones.
Mrs. Hughes.
Miss Betty Davies.
Miss Margaret Bounds.
Mrs. E. B. Williams.
Mr. Cordall.
Mrs. Betty Jenkins (Secretary).