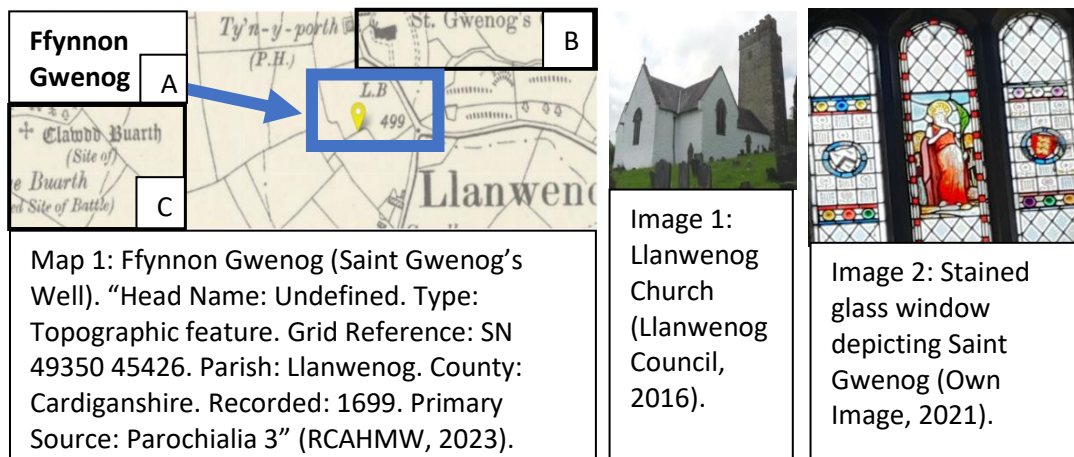
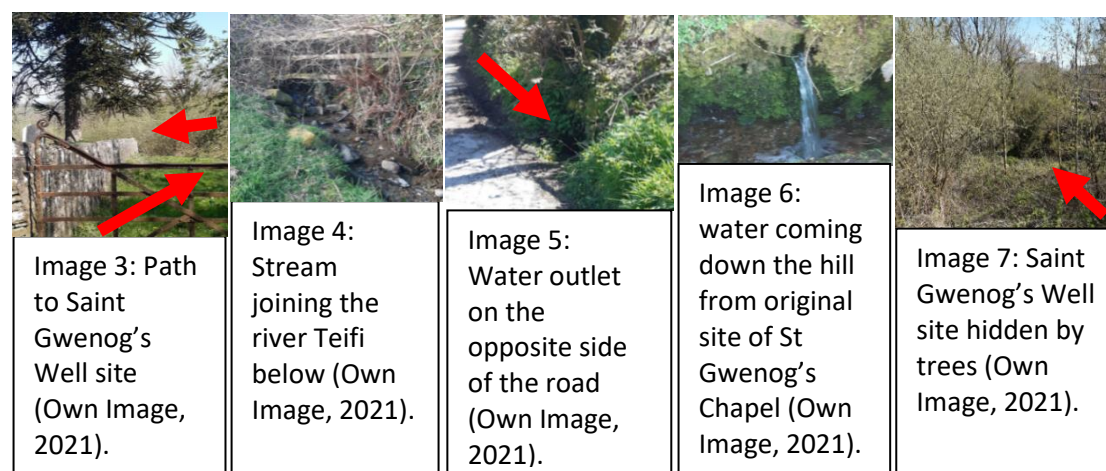


The Holy Well of Saint Gwenog (also known as Saint Wenog). Medicine and Miracles, HPHI5019
Jones, J., 2007994.



The Holy Well of Saint Gwenog's Church (Image 1) was the only one dedicated to this female Saint (Image 2). The well (Map 1a), possibly swallowed up by the redirection of the river and waterlogged land, was situated below the graveyard of Saint Gwenog's Church, Llanwenog, Ceredigion, SA40 9UT, in West Wales¹ (Images 3 - 9). Saint Gwenog's Church is approximately 6 miles from the nearest town of Lampeter,² 2 ½ miles from the village of Llanybydder,³ 13.5 miles from Llanddewi-Brefi and 3 miles from the village of Llanwnnen.⁴ Formerly called Capel Mair (Mary's Chapel) it was also known as



¹ Lewis Samuel "Llanwenog" A Topographical Dictionary of Wales, London, S., (1833).

² AA Route Planner, Llanwenog to Lampeter, (2019) <<https://www.theaa.com/route-planner/route?from=Llanwenog%20Church,%20Llanwenog,%20Llanybydder,%20UK&to=Lampeter,%20UK>> (Accessed 11-04-2023).

³ AA Route Planner, Llanwenog to Llanybydder, (2019) <<https://www.theaa.com/route-planner/route?from=Llanwenog%20Church,%20Llanwenog,%20Llanybydder,%20UK&to=Llanybydder,%20UK>> (Accessed 11-04-2023).

⁴ AA, Route Planner Llanwnnen, (2019) <<https://www.theaa.com/route-planner/route?from=Llanwenog,%20Llanybydder%20SA40%209UT,%20UK&to=Llanwnnen,%20Lampeter,%20UK>> (Accessed 11-04-2023).

a 'Lady Chapel,'⁵ dedicated to the Virgin Mary and nicknamed Eglwys fach (little Church) by the locals.⁶

It might not be the most famous Well in Wales, but it is probably one of the most mysterious. Local accounts join a folk-law tale, passed down through the generations of a nun, possibly called Gwen, who used the healing waters of the well to perform her miracles by curing children's back disorders.⁷ Wells such as Saint Gwenog's, with healing properties, became known as Holy Wells when the worshipped water sites of the Pagans close to the Christian churches were walled up and affiliated to a Saint.⁸ The well would have played an important part in society, with the Saint's feast day being celebrated around it. Saint Gwenog's feast day was on the third of January,⁹ with the 'Ffair Wenog' (Llanwenog fair) happening approximately eleven days later.¹⁰ The fair brought in people from miles around who would have bought or sold goods and animals to raise money to pay the tithes, first to the King and later to the church on behalf of the King.¹¹ From the Eighth Century on It was also said to be when pilgrims would go to the well to be restored to health by Saint Gwenog,¹² however, no



Image 8: Path to well site on left, and water running down the hill on the right (Own Image, 2021).



Image 9: Well sight now too dangerous to access due to waterlogged field (Own Image, 2021).



Image 10: Pre-Norman font with the 12 apostles carved around the outside (Own Image, 2021).



Image 11: 14 - 15th Century Medieval Font (Own Image, 2021).

⁵ The National Library of Wales, "Ffynnon Wenog" "Traditions handed down by old inhabitants", Cardiganshire Antiquarian Society, (2023), 40, <https://journals.library.wales/view/1177372/1178863/41#?xywh=-589%2C351%2C3778%2C2422> (Accessed 04-04-2023).

⁶ Llanwenog Council, "Llanwenog Church," pdf., (2016), http://cyngorllanwenogcouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Llanwenog-Church_2016_English.pdf (Accessed 24-4-2023).

⁷ Davies, J. C., 2017. Folk-Lore of West and Mid-Wales: Chap. XI Folklore of fountains Lakes and Caves, The Holy Well of St Gwenog (2017), 315-335, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/53915/53915-h/53915-h.htm> (Accessed 29-03-2023).

⁸ Rattue, The living stream: holy wells in historical context. Boydell Press, (1995), 1.

⁹ Jones, F., "St Gwenog's Church Llanwenog", "The Holy Wells of Wales", Coflein, (1992), 159, <https://coflein.gov.uk/en/site/220?term=St%20Gwenog%27s%20Well> (Accessed 11-04-2023).

¹⁰ Find My Past, Newspaper Archive Limited, Llansawel "Baner Ac Amserau Cymru" Wednesday 16 February 1881 (In) British Newspaper Archive, (2023), <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000037/18810216/027/0010> (Accesses 10-04-2023).

¹¹ Catholic Online, "St. Wenog", (2023), <https://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint_id=2098> (Accessed 31-03-2023).

¹² Llanwenog Council, "Llanwenog Church," pdf., (2016), <http://cyngorllanwenogcouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Llanwenog-Church_2016_English.pdf> (Accessed 24-4-2023).

first-hand evidence of this has been found.

Unlike today the water was not piped into every home. People would get their water from rivers such as the Teifi, which runs through Llanwenog, Rhyddlan and the parklands of Highmead, or the Cledlyn which is split into two streams at Cwrtnewydd, flows through the village of Drefach, past Croesgwenllian farm, Ty-Cam and Cryg-y-whil,¹³ (map 3) or fresh spring water which had been naturally filtered through the mineral-enriched soils, occasionally rising to the surface as if from nowhere, and used for the church and all its needs. Many pre-Christian well sites were presumed to be Pagan, with some considering them to be Celtic or Scandinavian, however, most wells lost their Celtic names in the fifth or sixth century after the Anglo-Saxon Invasion and retreat of the Romans.¹⁴ The church has both a Pre-Norman (Image 10) and a fourteenth or fifteenth-century Medieval font (Image 11).¹⁵ Traditionally the water was needed for baptisms, blessings, repelling evil and cleaning the Church. The water would have been retrieved from the Holy Well and placed into the fonts. The Medieval font (Image 11), which had been missing for many years, was found to have been used by a local blacksmith to cool his hot Irons and was returned to its original place within the Church.¹⁶ The Pre-Norman font (Image 10), which dates approximately to the eleventh century, is no longer in its original setting and has twelve simply carved faces with a fish above one.¹⁷ The fish symbol may represent the earlier Christian faith and its link between the different worlds¹⁸ or that it is Saint Peter represented below it.¹⁹ The development of Catholicism started when Jesus set Peter apart from the other disciples in approximately 30 AD. Peter became the first pope of the Roman Catholic Church in what was to become the formation of the papacy.²⁰ By 90 AD most of the native Welsh tribes had been destroyed in England, and most of Wales was under Roman rule.²¹ The Roman roads

¹³ The National Library of Wales, "Rhuddlan Teifi," Cardiganshire Antiquarian Society, (2023), 35, <https://journals.library.wales/view/1177372/1178863/41#?xywh=-589%2C351%2C3778%2C2422> (Accessed 04-04-2023).

¹⁴ Pearson, M. J., In, British History Online, "Archdeacons: Carmarthen", "Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae 1066-1300" Vol. 9, the Welsh Cathedrals (Bangor, Llandaff, St Asaph, St Davids), (London, 2003), 58-59. British History Online <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/fasti-ecclesiae/1066-1300/vol9/pp58-59> (Accessed 26 April 2023).

¹⁵ Llanwenog Council, Llanwenog Church Guide, UWTSD, (2016), http://cyngorllanwenogcouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Llanwenog-Church_2016_English.pdf (Accessed 27-03-2023).

¹⁶ Llanwenog Council, Llanwenog Church Guide, UWTSD, (2016).

¹⁷ Llanwenog Council, Llanwenog Church Guide, UWTSD, (2016).

¹⁸ Morval Parish Website, "St Wenna's Church, Morval", Morval Widgates, (2023), <https://morvalwidgates.weebly.com/st-wennas-church.html> (Accessed 04-04-2023).

¹⁹ Llanwenog Council, Llanwenog Church Guide. Published by UWTSD, 2016, http://cyngorllanwenogcouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Llanwenog-Church_2016_English.pdf (Accessed 27-03-2023).

²⁰ Catholic World Mission, Timeline of the Catholic Church, (2023), <<https://catholicworldmission.org/catholic-church-timeline/>> (Accessed 29-03-2023).

²¹ Johnson, Ben, "Timeline of Roman Britain", (2015), <<https://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofWales/The-Romans-in-Wales/>> (Accessed 11-04-2023).

had been completed in Wales by 100 AD,²² with travellers along them needing water for drinking, cooking, washing, illness, or injuries, and as described by Carmichael below especially important for women and the process of giving birth.

“Though art well compassion
Though art is the root of consolation
Thou art the living stream of the virgins
And of them who bear children.”²³

There is a brief mention of St Gwenog asking for her help, written on a side margin of a page in the Laws of Hywel Dda (Hywel the Good), a thirteenth-century book containing Welsh laws that took six weeks to write,²⁴ as well as a record of an inquiry into two priests being paid for the same area when there should have only been one.²⁵ and Samuel Meyrick (1783 – 1848), in the *‘History and Antiquities of the County of Cardigan’* states that the church was dedicated to Saint Gwynnog, a son of Gildas.²⁶ To understand who Saint Gwenog was, the importance of her well and how she miraculously changed from a male Saint to a female Saint, an understanding of what was going on at



Map 2: Map of the Island of Britain AD 450-600 displaying Ceredigion, Demetia, Dyfed and Brycheiniog (Kessler, 2019).

the time is needed.²⁷ During the Middle Ages, many wells were often renamed after the landowner or their use. The land that Saint Gwenog church is situated on was given to Gwynnog a six or seventh-century Saint by his father Gildas,

²²Johnson, Ben, “Timeline of Roman Britain”, 2015, <https://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofWales/The-Romans-in-Wales/> (Accessed 11-04-2023).

²³ Carmichael, 1958, In, Lloyd, J. E., (Vol 1 pp. 4 - 271) “A History of Wales from the Earliest Times to the Edwardian Conquest” *National Library of Wales*, (1911), Vol 1, 179, <https://www.library.wales/discover-learn/digital-exhibitions/europeana-rise-of-literacy/history-books/a-history-of-wales-from-the-earliest-times-to-the-edwardian-conquest#c=&m=&s=&cv=244&xywh=-338%2C0%2C3169%2C3787> (Accesses 03-04-2023).

²⁴ The National Library of Wales, “Laws of Hywel Dda”, Peniarth MS 28, (2023), <https://www.library.wales/discover-learn/digital-exhibitions/manuscripts/the-middle-ages/laws-of-hywel-dda/> (Accessed 06-05-2023).

²⁵ Shaw, Entry Book: April 1693, 11-20 British History Online, University Of London, 2019, (1935), <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-treasury-books/vol10/pp152-164> (Accessed 10-07-2023).

²⁶ Davies, W. Ll., “Meyrick, Sir Samuel Rush” (1783 – 1848), antiquary. Dictionary of Welsh Biography, (1959), <https://biography.wales/article/s-MEYR-RUS-1783> (Accessed 29-03-2023).

²⁷ Llanwenog Council, “Llanwenog Church,” pdf., (2016).

who was an early Irish-Breton King said to be a wise man and historian who studied in Wales under Saint Illtud²⁸ and had preached to Non before the birth of her son, Dewi (David, the Patron Saint of Wales).²⁹ Gwynnog or Gwynog left Wales around the time of the Yellow Plague in 664 - 684 A.D. and took refuge in Brittany.³⁰

During the Late Middle Ages, women in the clergy had been restricted to the nunnery,³¹ however, the rights of women grew with the popularity of the cult of the Virgin Mary.³² The Holy Well may have been visited in the eighth century or even earlier in connection to a chapel situated between Capel Mair, now Saint Gwenog's church and what was supposedly a wooden Castle structure of Castell Dol Wolf (Dol Wllf Castle).³³ Built on a stone ruin that may at one time have been named Castell Santesau (Saintes Castle) near the village of Llanybydder (Map 3).³⁴ Brychan Brycheiniog was born in Ireland and moved to Wales after his father Anlach's death. Raised by Nobles, his success was supposedly predicted by a wise man called Drichan, and he ruled his Kingdom of Brycheiniog from Talgarth³⁵ (Map 2). He had over twenty children, many becoming Saints, such as Gwynnen, Gwynnws, Gwladys, Gwen, Wenna, Nennocha and Gwennan.³⁶ Not all were from the same mother, and some may have been stepchildren or even adopted, becoming known as one of the "Holy Families of Britain".³⁷ There were said to be fierce battles in Wales with the life-giving waters of the Teifi, at times being filled with bodies of the Saxons, Britons, Mercians, Norsemen, Vikings, Danes known as Pagans³⁸ and the warriors, priests, and villagers who fought back to protect their lands, county, and kings and Prince's. Capel Santesau may have been destroyed in one of the battles in the

²⁸ Bowen, E. G., Illtud (c. 475 - c. 525) A Celtic saint and one of the founders of monachism in Britain. Dictionary of Welsh Biography, (1959) <<https://biography.wales/article/s-ILLT-UD0-0475>> (Accessed 13-06-2023).

²⁹ Vermaat, R., "Who was Gildas?" Vortigern Studies, (1999), <http://www.vortigernstudies.org.uk/artsou/gildas.htm> (Accesses 24-06-2023).

³⁰ Creighton, Charles, "The plague of 664-648", Vol I, 42686-h.htm, Gutenberg, (2013), 4 - 9 https://www.gutenberg.org/files/42686/42686-h/42686-h.htm#Page_4 (Accessed 24-05-2023).

³¹ Mark, Joshua J., "Women in the Middle Ages", World History Encyclopaedia, (2019) <https://www.worldhistory.org/article/1345/women-in-the-middle-ages/> (Accessed 04-04-2023).

³² BBC, "Religions – Christianity: Mary", (2011).

³³ Genealogy, Genealogy Report: "Ancestors of Peter John Everard Davies Davies", Generation, (2023), <https://www.genealogy.com/ftm/d/a/v/Peter-J-Davies-BC/GENE2-0005.html> (Accessed 31-03-2023).

³⁴ Lewis Samuel "Llanwenog", (1833).

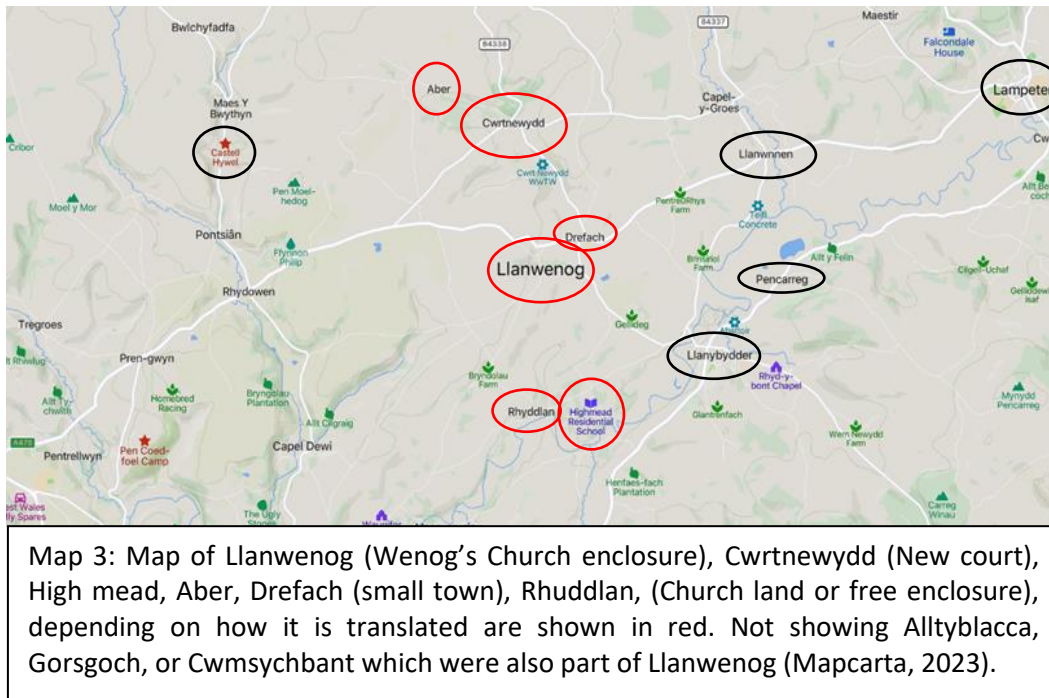
³⁵ Ford, D., "Brychan Brycheiniog, King of Brycheiniog", (2001), <http://www.earlybritishkingdoms.com/bios/brychbbg.html> (Accessed 10-04-2023).

³⁶ Ford, David, Nash, "Children of Brychan", 2001, <http://www.earlybritishkingdoms.com/articles/brychild.html> (Accessed 18-06-2023).

³⁷ Ford, D., "Brychan Brycheiniog, King of Brycheiniog", (2001),

³⁸ The National Library of Wales, "Llanwenog", (2023), 35, <https://journals.library.wales/view/1177372/1178863/41#?xywh=-589%2C351%2C3778%2C2422> (Accessed 04-04-2023).

area such as the one thought to have taken place on Ty-cam's field known as Caer Vaes³⁹ (Battlefield) against Godfrid and the Danes in c.981 AD⁴⁰ (Map 1c).



Whilst the Kings were fighting over land the Abbots were gaining it. Whitland or the Holy Cross Abbey was founded in 1151 by the Cistercian Monks from Clairvaux, Talyllychau or Talley Abbey as it is known, was founded by Rhys ap Gruffudd the last Prince of Wales in c.1165, It was independent of the Norman-founded Abbeys in Whitland (The Mother Church) and England received papal approbation from Pope Honorius II in 1185.⁴¹ Llanwenog Chapel was owned by (Talley) Abbey in the Middle Ages by the Bishops of Saint David's from the Llandaff diocese, attached to Llandewi Brefi.⁴² Monks from Whitland Abbey, known as Cistercians or White Monks expelled the monks of Talley, who were later reinstated by the Archbishop of Canterbury. Whitland received the grange Rhyddlan (Ruthelan, Buthelan)⁴³ between Llanwenog and Llanybydder (Map 3) and any other dwellings and land connected as compensation,⁴⁴ such as the fulling and corn mills, allt's, covered in large forests

³⁹ RCAHMW, "The Inventory of Historic Battlefields in Wales", (2023) <https://rcahmw.gov.uk/the-inventory-of-historic-battlefields-in-wales-2/> (Accessed 10-07-2023).

⁴⁰ Coflein, Llanwenog, supposed site of Battle, (2021), <https://coflein.gov.uk/en/site/404457?term=Llanwenog> (Accessed 11-04-2023).

⁴¹ Davies, J. "A History of Wales", Penguin, (1994), <https://archive.org/details/historyofwales0000davi/page/n7/mode/1up> (Accessed 23-06-2023).

⁴² Medieval Heritage, "Ancient and medieval architecture: Llanwenog, St Gwenog's Church History," (2017), <https://medievalheritage.eu/en/main-page/heritage/wales/llanwenog-st-gwenogs-church/> (Accesses 29-03-2023).

⁴³ Lewis Samuel "Llanwenog", (1833).

⁴⁴ The National Library of Wales, "Ffynnon Wenog" "Traditions handed down by old inhabitants", Cardiganshire Antiquarian Society, (2023), 36,

followers lasted centuries. Dominated first, by Anglo-Norman Cistercians, then by Welsh Kings and Princes. For Gwen to be recognised as a Saint, all the community needed was a Saint's Day, a hall for the collection of tithes, and places for the king, his family and his entourage to stay when and if they visited, which could have been built reasonably quickly and easily out of the Oaks from the surrounding forests in preparation for any Royal visits. Changing the original male Saint Gwynnog, who in their eyes abandoned them in their greatest time of need, alongside no appearance of any worthy miracles, to Gwen or Saint Gwenog, the true definition of a saint. Someone who helped keep a service in Welsh going. Possibly teaching the local children to read, some of which may have been orphaned or children of Kings and Queens hidden for safety. Language, rule, and land areas changed alongside centuries of invasion and integration, making it difficult to know who owned what many generations after the first owner Saint Gwynnog, abandoned his gifted lands and they were officially recorded as Saint Gwenog. The waters that seemed magical to pagans and miraculous to Catholics might not be walled up, but the continuation of equality, religion, language, and care still flowing through the hearts and minds of all who benefited from Saint Gwenog and her elusive, Holy Well.

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