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## 2. The development of the Cult

The powerful portrayal of St Winefride in her two twelfth-century lives provided a physical focus for her veneration. The devout could visit the sacred places associated with her. Prior Robert of Shrewsbury had provided the kind of publicity that was designed to attract pilgrims. The Holywell spring, the Shrewsbury shrine and, to a lesser extent, Winefride's chapel and reliquary at Gwytherin, became part of the pilgrim's itinerary throughout the Middle Ages and beyond.

Control of these sacred places became the concern and responsibility of the Church. The most powerful and widespread religious institutions in post-conquest Norman period were the monasteries which were in a unique position to fulfil the role of institutional guardian of the cult of a saint. They could provide what was necessary for the welfare of all. The honour of the saint was promoted and protected through worship and a liturgical framework was established in the monastery itself and in the places associated with the cult. At Holywell the church above St Winefride's well was ideally situated for essential devotions such as veneration, litany, procession, vigil, mass, exorcism and thanksgiving.

*23. Holywell church.*



Eventually, copies of the lives of the saints began to circulate amongst learned clerics and between monasteries to be read in public worship. There was the possibility of a European dissemination of information through the chapters of the various monastic orders and the interest of the Norman magnates. The monastery possessed the resources and manpower to provide hospitality and almsgiving to pilgrims. The founders of these religious houses were the most powerful men in the land: superstitious, pious and wealthy Norman magnates, usually with the support of bishops and the king himself. In north and mid Wales the princes of Gwynedd and Powys were equally protective and concerned about the holy places that came to them by turn of conquest. The possession by a monastery of a church, tithes and monetary offerings associated with a sacred place became a valuable part of their economy and were jealously safeguarded throughout their existence until dissolved in the late 1530s.

As we have seen from the lives, St Winefride's 'territory', in Tegeingl, in north-east Wales, was subject to political unrest for six or seven hundred years until the Edwardian settlement in 1284. In 1170, after the conquest, the Norman earl Hugh succeeded the Saxon earl Edwin of Mercia, as the dominant political force in Tegeingl. Hugh Lupus, earl of Chester, with the advice of Anselm, re-founded the former Saxon monastery as the Benedictine abbey of St Werburgh in Chester and in 1093 Countess Adeliza was granted Holywell church with St Winefride's well attached. As long as successive Norman earls retained their hold over Tegeingl, St Winefride's 'territory' was under their influence and they could give the well and church above it to whom they pleased and so could the princes of Gwynedd when in turn the well fell into their hands. In this way, control over St Winefride's well changed hands throughout the period from c.1093 to 1240. St Winefride's well, together with Holywell church, passed to the Benedictine monastery of St Werburgh and, when they lost it to Basingwerk Abbey, the newly established religious house in Flintshire founded in c.1131 on the bank of the river Dee below Holywell. The site of this first foundation is uncertain although Hen Blas, at Coleshill, a little further to the east of Basingwerk, has been suggested.<sup>1</sup>

It is obvious from Robert's *Life of Winefride* written in 1138 that it had its origins in the newly-created cultic site at Shrewsbury. Furthermore, that the monks from there were aided by their fellow Benedictines at Chester to whom the cultic sites at St Winifred's well and Holywell church then belonged. What is not clear is where the *Anonymous Life* was written, why and when it was composed and if there are any textual relations between the two lives. These questions have been discussed at length by Fiona Winward<sup>2</sup> who in the course of her study mentions the possibility of the rival cultic centres at Basingwerk or St Werburgh's monasteries as possible places for authorship at various times in the twelfth century. The common source deriving from the lost Latin *Life of Beuno* mentioned above is also discussed as well as Welsh and English influences in the composition of the *Anonymous Life*.

### Summary of main political events affecting the possession of Holywell Church and St Winefride's Well, 1093–1240

- 1093 Hugh Lupus Earl of Chester (d. 1101) gave Holywell Church with St Winefrides Well to his wife Adeliza who gave it to the monks of St Werburgh's, Chester.<sup>3</sup>
- 1119 Charter of Earl Richard (1101–20) confirmed the grant of Burel to the monks of St Werburgh's of 'the church of Holywell with the tithes of his mill and all his substance.'<sup>4</sup>
- 1115 and 1119 pilgrimages of Earl Richard to St Winefride's Well.<sup>5</sup>
- 1131 Earl Ranulph II (1128/9–53) founded a house of Savignac monks at Basingwerk.<sup>6</sup> to whom in 1135 Robert de Pierrepont granted the town and Church of Holywell.<sup>7</sup>
- 1135 the Normans were expelled from Gwynedd. Holywell Church and St Winefride's Well belonged to Basingwerk until c.1153.<sup>8</sup>  
King Stephen (1135–54)  
Owain Gwynedd Prince of Gwynedd (1137–70).
- 1138 Prior Robert translated St Winefride's relics from Gwytherin to Shrewsbury.  
Earl Hugh II (1153–81)  
King Henry II (1154–89).
- 1157 Holywell Church and St Winefride's Well granted by Henry II to St Werburgh's Abbey.<sup>9</sup>
- 1147 Savignac order absorbed by Cistercian's, a daughter house of Combermere 1154., assigned to Buildwas 1156.<sup>10</sup>
- 1157 The 1131 monastery said to have been refounded on a new site at Basingwerk by Henry II.<sup>11</sup>  
King Henry II rebuilt the Castle at Basingwerk said to have been destroyed there in the reign of Stephen.<sup>12</sup> It was razed to the ground in 1167 by Owain Gwynedd.<sup>13</sup>  
Earl Hugh II (1153–81) Henry II (1154–89).
- 1159 Henry II is said to have established a house of Knight's Templar at Basingwerk. This is discounted by David Knowles.<sup>14</sup>
- 1188 Visitation of Archbishop Baldwin of Canterbury to Wales accompanied by Giraldus Cambrensis. They stay at Basingwerk. There is no mention of St Winefride's Well by them.<sup>15</sup>  
Pilgrimage by King Richard I (1189–99) sometime during his brief visit to his English Kingdom when he was attacked by the Welsh.<sup>16</sup>
- c.1196 Llywelyn ap Iorwerth 'the Great' (1197–1240) Holywell Church and St Winefride's Well granted to Basingwerk.<sup>17</sup> 'In the wars with the princes of Wales the monks of St Werburgh's have lost their church at Hallewell which was £100 value.'<sup>18</sup>
- 1209 Earl Ranulph III (1181–1232) built a castle on the hill above Holywell.<sup>19</sup>
- 1240 Confirmation by Dafydd ap Llywelyn (d.1246) of his grants to Basingwerk Abbey including the Church of Holywell.<sup>20</sup>
- 1253 a request was made to the General Chapter of the Cistercian Order for the Feast of St Winefride to be a major feast of twelve lessons at both Buildwas and Basingwerk. Abbeys.<sup>21</sup>

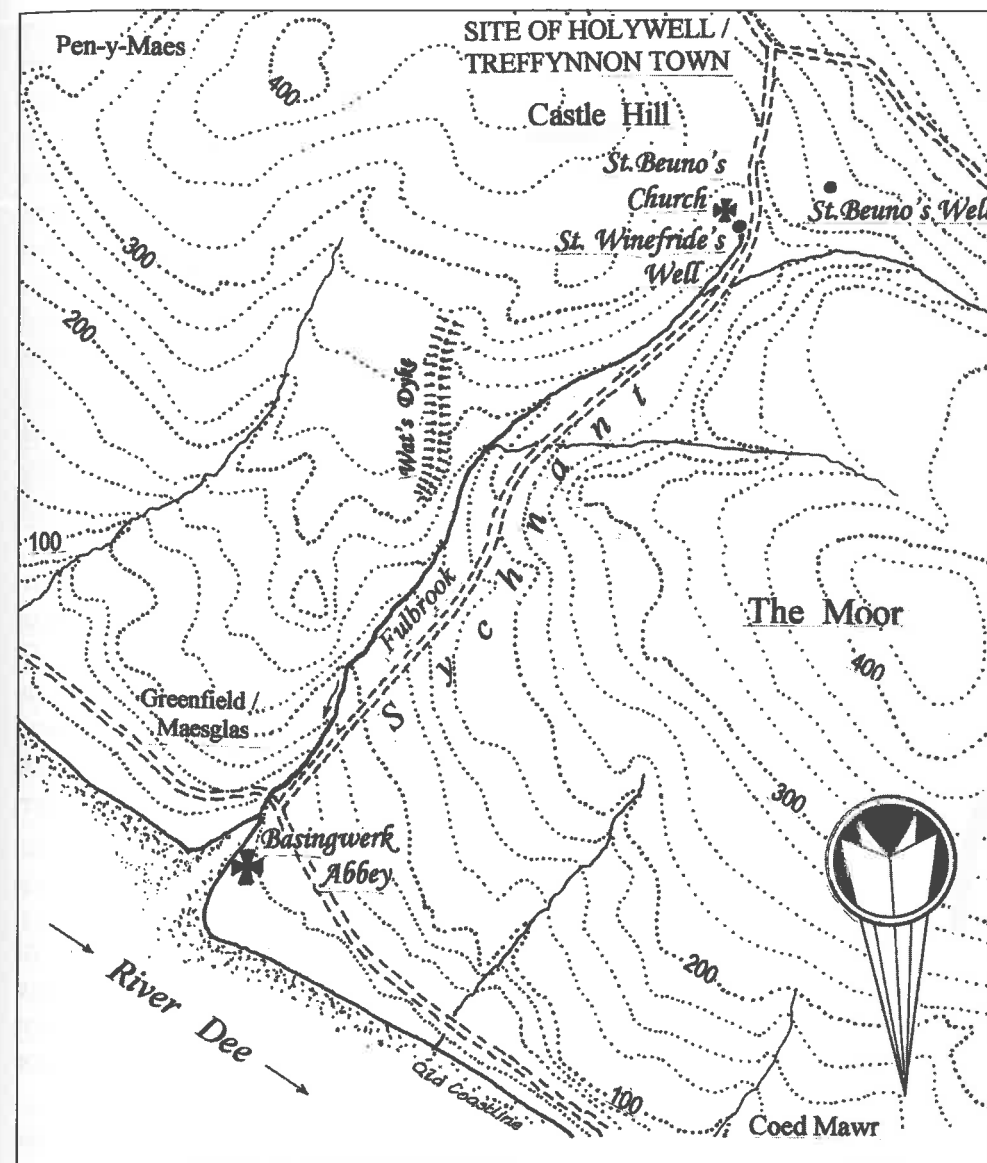
The complexities of the political situation and strife between Welsh princes in their opposition to English kings and earls of Chester and the effect it had on the major cultic centres at Holywell, Basingwerk and St Werburgh's from 1093–1240 is shown on the table of events on page 47.

As far as the fortunes of St Winefride were concerned the decade of the 1130s was the most significant of the twelfth century. The strong Norman king, Henry I, died in 1135, to be succeeded by the weak King Stephen (1135–54). The strong and able military leader Owain Gwynedd gained power in 1137 in the neighbouring Welsh kingdom. Henry II, during his long reign from 1154–89, reasserted Norman power in Tegeingl and is said to have refounded Basingwerk Abbey in 1157. This political uncertainty was to last until 1284 with frequent changes of fortune in Tegeingl. The monastery of Basingwerk was in a crucial and vulnerable position trying to maintain allegiance to, and favour of, whichever power was in the ascendancy during this long period of strife. The small monastery was at the crossroads of power, a valuable place for truce and negotiation. St Winefride's well continued as a place of pilgrimage for those willing to face the trials of travelling in an area too often the scene of conflict.

#### The church by the well

A church is still sited on this spot,<sup>22</sup> very close to the well and just above it to the south-east, within a few yards of the stream that flows to the estuary of the Dee at Greenfield. If the traditions upon which the early lives are based are correct, it was Beuno who was the founder and builder of the first church when he came there at the beginning of the seventh century. In the *Anonymous Life* he is said to have 'built a small church in the ravine called 'Sechnant' (Sychnant, 'dry valley'), in which he celebrated Mass'. In *Robert's Life*, Winefride's father, Tyfid, 'handed over to the blessed man that manor on which to build a church and construct dwellings for the servants of God to stay therein'. Robert's account seems to say a great deal about the church property belonging to Beuno and of Winefride's sending him an annual gift to Clynnog Fawr.

There are the odd references, which suggest an ancient foundation. For example, in *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, the official valuation of the wealth of Basingwerk made to the Crown in 1535, it is stated under 'Temporalities': 'Rent paid to St Bewnon [Beuno], per annum, without the domain of Holywell ... 2 shillings.'<sup>23</sup> Beuno's name occurs on the hill to the west of the church in *Ffynnon Beuno* and *Gerddi Beuno*, an early settlement area of quillies or lynchets. There is another reference in a charter by Llywelyn the Great, granted sometime between 1196 and 1202, which suggests that Holywell church was portionary, that is, it was made up of a body of inherited canons, who shared 'portions' of the revenue from the land attached to the church. If this is proved, there will be no doubt that Holywell was an early Welsh, rather than a Norman, foundation.



24. St Winefride's and St Beuno's Wells and the Holywell stream, alias Sychnant.

Grant in pure and perpetual alms for the relief of the poverty of the monks and for the souls of himself and of his father, mother and ancestors, of the church of Holywell with all its appurtenances, saving the rights which the clerks Absolom, Ivo and Adam have therein as long as they live, so that once vacant each prebend shall revert fully to the monks.<sup>24</sup>

There is significant place-name and archaeological evidence for Saxon settlement in the valley of the stream which runs from St Winefride's well down to the estuary at Basingwerk. The name Halliwell – Holywell; Angles' field; –

Englefield; Basingwerk, deriving from Basing (Basa's people) and werk (*weorc* earthwork fortification), an obvious reference to Wat's Dyke that was constructed before Offa's Dyke which dates from the late eighth century.<sup>25</sup> In 821, Cenwulf king of Mercia, died at the 'fort' of Bassa.

It is a little disconcerting not to find St Winefride's well nor the church above it, mentioned in Domesday Book in 1086, nor is a priest recorded, although there were four in Flintshire. However, the authors failed to record churches and other manorial property which are known to have existed. But there are townships listed such as Fulbrook and Wellstone. However, we have the first written record of the church at Holywell in 1093 seven years after Domesday. In this first Norman recording of the church the pattern is established of it being granted to a monastic foundation. The sequence of the possession of the church was to alternate between the monks of St Werburgh's in Chester and Basingwerk Abbey.

#### **Holywell church in the possession of St Werburgh's abbey in Chester**

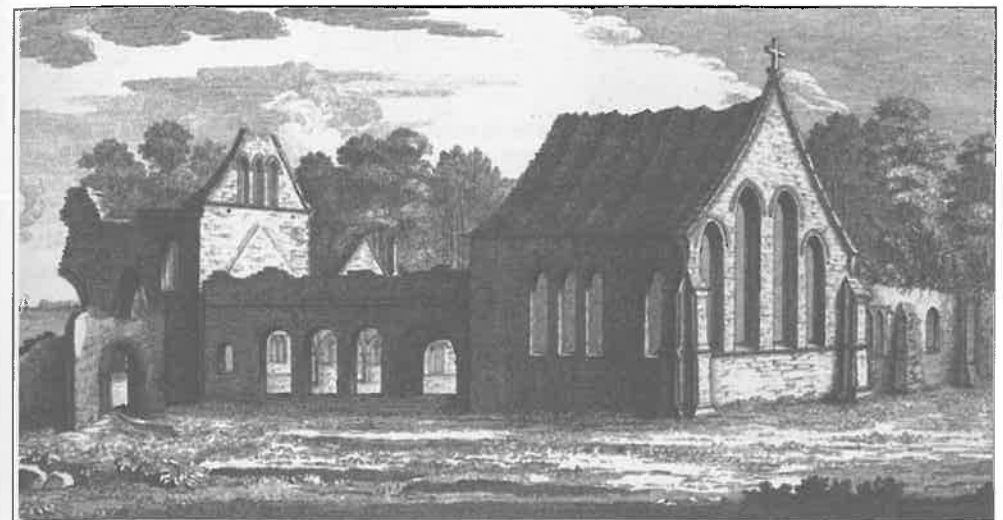
The summary given above shows that St Werburgh's held Holywell church in the early part of the twelfth century, until 1135 when it was lost in the reign of King Stephen and returned to them twenty years later, in the reign of Henry II, by Earl Hugh II (1153–81) who 'gave the church of Holywell with all its appurtenances for the use of the monks, and one dwelling plot of the said town, sixty feet in length.'<sup>26</sup> Towards the end of the twelfth century 'in the wars with the princes of Wales they lost their church' and c.1196 it was granted by Llwelyn ap Iorwerth to Basingwerk Abbey.

#### **The foundation of Basingwerk Abbey**

In 1131–2, Ranulf II, earl of Chester (1129–53), invited monks from the abbey of Savigny in south-west Normandy to settle in Tegeingl, probably somewhere between the present towns of Holywell and Flint, but not where the present abbey ruins stand.<sup>27</sup> Ranulf was generous to the monks giving them the manor of Fulbrook and a silver mine there.

In 1147, the monasteries of the order of Savigny were incorporated into those of the Cistercian order. Ten years later, the newly constituted monastic community at Basingwerk received a charter of confirmation from King Henry II and was placed under the supervision of Buildwas Abbey in Shropshire.

Henry II's charter of 1157 restored the abbey's fortunes. From him they received the manor of Glossop in Derbyshire, which was to become their most valuable asset and what they valued more, his political protection during these most troublesome times. The monks at Chester recorded: '1157 In this year (the abbey of) Basingwerk is founded. A battle royal fought at Coleshill, in which Eustace the constable perished with many of his comrades; and King Henry fortified Rhuddlan and Basingwerk, and conquered the Welsh.'<sup>28</sup> Henry II had won back Tegeingl which had been lost in 1149. He was determined to hold it and to this

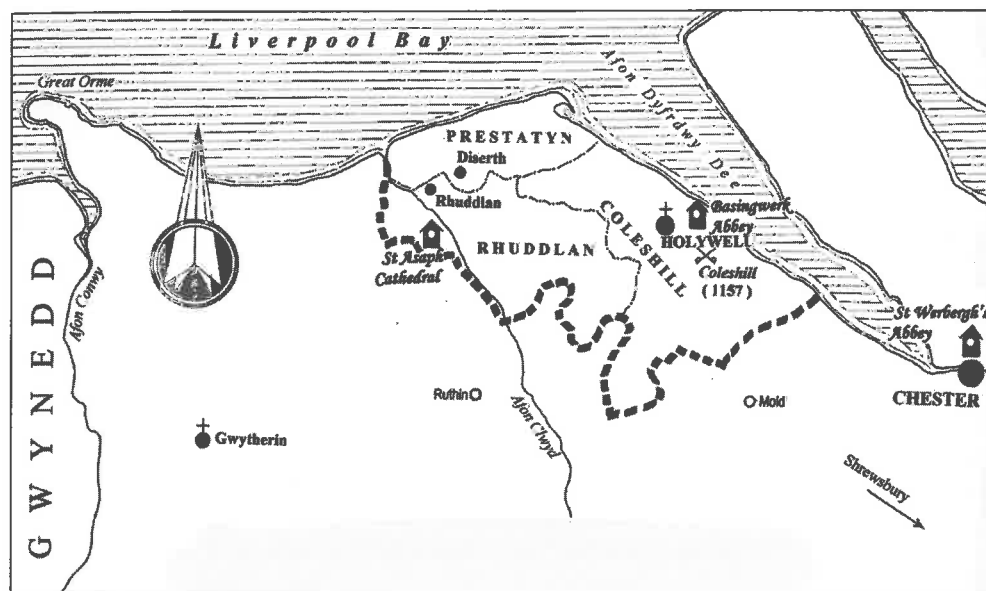


25. Basingwerk Abbey 'North West View'. Engraving by S. and N. Buck 1742.

end he rebuilt the earth and timber castle of Basingwerk which had been destroyed during Stephen's reign. It is said that in 1159 Henry provided further protection for the monks and the pilgrims visiting St Winefride's well by establishing a house of Knights Templar there.<sup>29</sup> They were a religious brotherhood, founded in Jerusalem some forty years previously, to protect Christian pilgrims in the Holy Land, and to fight to safeguard the territory conquered by the Crusaders. A strange and chivalric guardianship of warrior-monks to protect the territory of the Welsh virgin martyr from her countrymen. An uneasy peace was maintained until 1165 when Prince Owain Gwynedd hit back. After his death, his son Dafydd swore fealty to the English king. He was removed in 1197 and was succeeded by his nephew Llywelyn ab Iorwerth, 'the Great' (1173–1240), who until his death in 1240 was to hold most of the Perfeddwlad. But the earl of Chester, Ranulf III (d.1232), was not going to give up without a fight and in 1210 raised a castle at Holywell to fortify what was now a frontier zone and protect the pilgrims.<sup>30</sup>

The princes of Gwynedd, Llywelyn the Great and his son Dafydd (1240–46), were now in a position to show their favour to the Cistercians. Llywelyn gave them the church of Holywell, St Winefride's well, Gelli grange, pasture land and confirmed old gifts and made new ones, as did his son when he succeeded him.<sup>31</sup> For the gift of land in Penllyn and Llyn Tegid at Bala, the princes expected some recompense in the form of customary Welsh gifts of food, *gwestfa*, provisions of bread, butter, fish and cheese for a hunting party of 300 of their men once a year. Dafydd's successor, Llywelyn ap Gruffudd (1246–82), increased this requirement to supply 500 men with two foals and money in lieu if they did not hunt.<sup>32</sup>

Soon after they had received their charter from Dafydd ap Llewellyn in 1240 the monks of Basingwerk were faced with an uncertain political situation. This



26. The Medieval Hundred (Cantref) of Tegeingl, comprising the commotes (cymedau) of Coleshill, Prestatyn and Rhuddlan.

continued throughout the rule of Llywelyn ap Gruffydd, (d.1282) who prospered at first because of the weakness of the English king, Henry III, and opposed him by supporting his enemy Simon de Montfort (d.1265). Relations with the English Crown deteriorated further on the accession of Edward I in 1272. Llywelyn persistently refused to do homage to him and the king decided to break him. There was no lasting peace until this happened. The monastery at Basingwerk was in a buffer zone which frequently turned into a battlefield. At this time the bishop of St Asaph 'was forced owing to the ruin of the diocese by fire and slaughter, to beg and live on borrowed money'.<sup>33</sup>

The final crisis was reached after 1277. The monastery was on the invasion route to Llywelyn's heartland west of the Conwy and, to make the passage safer, the English king ordered the monks to cut down their wood at Gelli. Basingwerk was thus clearly identified with the invading English host. Although they were given letters of protection from the king, their property suffered since the invaders lived off the land. It was reported after the death of



27. Arms of Owain Gwynedd (died 1170), Prince of North Wales, to be seen on the chapter stalls in Bangor Cathedral

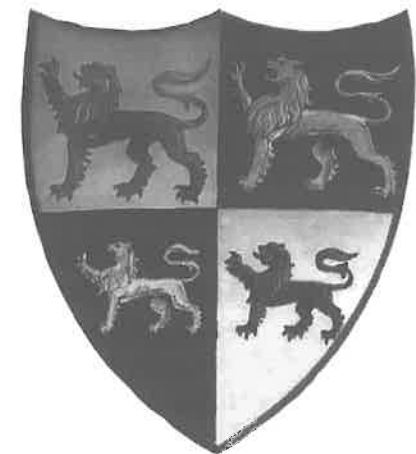
Llewellyn 1282 and the final Welsh defeat in 1283 that:

Sailors of the Cinque Ports, who were in the King's expedition in Wales, and their servants entered the granges of the abbot of Basingwerk at Caldey in Wirral and took away goods to the value of £9. Other granges in Englefield suffered when certain persons of the King's expedition stole corn, other goods, drove away animals, and did damage to the value of £40. Members of the household of William le Botiler entered 'a town of the abbey called Haliwelle, burned it and drove away animals of the abbot and his villeins to the value of £8.' The King's soldiers took colts and mares to the value of £10 from the abbot's stud, and corn of the tithes of the church at Haliwell worth £20. Further injury was committed when Prince Llywelyn, and his brother Dafydd entered the abbey and took £10 sterling and two horses valued at £10.<sup>34</sup>

This claim for damages gives some indication of the prosperity of the abbey and some of its possessions in Holywell, other parts of Tegeingl and on the Wirral. There were other properties outside Wales which remained unmolested, for example, Glossop in Derbyshire.

Compensation in north Wales, amounting to about £1,700 for war damaged churches was paid out on 3 November (Feast of St Winefride) 1284, at Chester. Basingwerk Abbey received £100 in damages, Philip, the vicar of Holywell, sixty shillings compensation, John, monk of Basingwerk, one mark (13s. 4p. – 66 n p), as the abbot's agent. He was described as 'procurator of Holywell church' and amongst his duties was the collection of tithes and pilgrims' offerings. The other cleric who received compensation of one mark was Madog 'chaplain of Holywell'.<sup>35</sup>

From such payments we may speculate on the relationship between the abbey and the local church at Holywell. Three clerics were mentioned as holding some office in the town of Holywell as surrogates or assistants to the abbot. There may have been more. In the claim by the abbey authorities relating to the extensive damage caused in the town of Holywell there is no mention of any particular premise relating to or designated as 'St Winefride's Well'. But compensation was paid to the vicar for damage to the church. The church building was probably the only substantial structure associated with the well at this time for the use of pilgrims. We have seen that *Robert's Life of Winefride*, written about 150 years



28. Arms of Llywelyn ap Iorwerth (Llywelyn the Great), Prince of North Wales 1196-1240, to be seen on the chapter stalls in Bangor Cathedral.

previously, is fairly accurate about topographical details and the miracles in both lives are detailed in their mention of the church, mill and stream. Whatever arrangements were in place they must have seemed satisfactory to both the monks and the pilgrims. The thirteenth century drew to a close with a political settlement enforced on the Welsh, which was to bring peace until the destructive uprising of Owain Glyndŵr a hundred years later. The cult of St Winefride had taken hold and her guardians at Basingwerk remained firm in their devotion to her cause.

### The development of the cult; pilgrimage

Pilgrimage throughout the Middle Ages was one of the universal features of the Christian Church. It spilled out beyond Europe to Jerusalem in the Holy Land. It was more than a journey to the places associated with Jesus and his Apostles. It became a series of military crusades to recapture the holy city from Islam undertaken by European kings at the direction of the Pope. The prize was more than territorial conquest, it was the salvation of the immortal soul and the welfare of the body.

On the *Mappa Mundi* in Hereford Cathedral, Jerusalem is placed at the centre of the world. This was the most important place for pilgrims to visit and other journeys took them to Rome to view the relics and holy places of the chief apostles Peter and Paul and the tombs of martyrs. The popes issued pilgrims there with plenary indulgences,<sup>36</sup> granting them full remission from purgatorial punishment in jubilee years. Equally popular after the ninth century was Santiago de Compostela in Spain where the corpse of the apostle St James the Greater, martyred by King Herod, was discovered. St James is represented in art as the archetypal pilgrim and Sir Walter Raleigh even after the Reformation took him as his model.

Give me my scallop-shell of Quiet  
My staff of Faith to walk upon;  
My scrip of Joy, immortal diet;  
My bottle of Salvation;  
My gown of Glory, hope's true gage;  
And thus I'll take my pilgrimage.<sup>37</sup>

Pilgrimages undertaken overseas today might be seen as international, but in the Middle Ages, they were regarded as merely travelling from one part of Christendom to another; the Church was universal. Christian Europe was then a cultural unity, with its peoples sharing common values of charity, belief in miracles, veneration of saints and their power to aid the penitent sinner and those afflicted by sickness with no other remedy but a visit to a shrine or healing well.

Each nation had its own special saints, and sacred places: St Albans, Canterbury

(Thomas à Becket), St Davids, Durham (Cuthbert), Bury St Edmunds, Hereford (Thomas Cantilupe), Lincoln (Hugh), Lichfield (Chad), the shrines of Our Lady and many others. These saints were biblical, martyrs of the early church, Saxon, Norman, Welsh, Scots, Irish, Cornish, and were remembered daily in rotation in Church calendars and the liturgy. Other saints became the patrons of local guilds or were relied upon to perform particular favours. As the Middle Ages drew to a close, the images of saints were magnificent, prolific, omnipresent, and they were the chief ornament of rood screens, wall paintings, and stained glass. The cult of the saint was also a private matter reserved to the individual in their domestic devotions by the ownership, design and use of their own prayer diary, the book of hours.

Why did pilgrims come to St Winefride's Well? One answer is that the cult of St Winefride became popular through her twelfth century lives and other versions, which circulated in the late Middle Ages. She had her own feast day and lessons in the Sarum Calendar used in the Province of Canterbury. Most effective, however, in drawing pilgrims to Holywell was the reputation of her well gained as a curative shrine where people could find healing, spiritual comfort and make their devotions and offerings to their spiritual protector. The path to the well became a familiar part of the pilgrims' route.

An anonymous medieval poem, *Cywydd Gwenfrewi a'i Ffynon* [A cywydd to Gwenfrewi and her well]<sup>38</sup> (lines 35–64), describes the reputation of the healing well and the cures received at Holywell.

*Gwenfrewi loywgw lwys,  
Bur odiaeth, o baradwys,  
Hon a gafas gan Iesu  
Ystôr, fawr ei hystori fu.  
Y deillion o dywyllwg  
I oleuni, di a'u dwg;  
Os byddar fydd gwâr gwirion,  
Fe glyw fry'r galw o'r fron;  
Y mudion a gai ymadrodd*



29. *St Winefride.*

*Gloyw bur, a'i gael o'i bodd.  
 Os crupul trachul heb droed,  
 Fe ddaw adre' ar ddeudroed  
 A bwrw'r ffon gron gryno  
 I ffordd a myned ar ffo!  
 Fe gâi ynfadwyr ynfydion  
 Synnwyr deg, os yno don'  
 Gan y ferch y sy'berchen  
 Ar iechyd y byd o'i ben.  
 Os cleifion efryddion fydd,  
 Hi a'u lleinw mewn llawenydd.  
 O bob gwlad yn ffynadwy  
 I'r ffynnon a ddôn' bob ddwy;  
 Pob dwyfil dieiddil y dôn'  
 Ar ffyniant, bawb i'r ffynnon  
 I brofi muragl purwin  
 A'i flas ymhell na'r gwin.  
 Iachâ'r byd, gloywbryd glwys,  
 A tho' eneeidie' 'mharadwys;  
 Dyro inni oleuni'r wledd  
 A bodd Duw ni bydd diwedd.*

[35] Bright and dear [and] beautiful Genfrewi, / exceptionally pure, of paradise / obtained from Jesus / a treasure whose renown was great. / [39] The blind from darkness / to light you bring; / if a gentle innocent be deaf, / he hears above the call from the hill; / the dumb would obtain / bright and pure speech obtaining it by her favour. / [45] If it be an emaciated cripple without a foot, / he will return home on two feet, / and cast away the stout [and] useful stick / and flee! / [49] Foolish madmen would obtain / the sense of ten men, if they come there, / from the girl who is owner / of the health of the world throughout it. / If there be disabled [and] sick, / she will fill them with joy.[55] / From every country in twos [i.e. the countries] / they come happily to the well; / every two thousand [people] come vigorously [and] happily. / All to the well / to experience the miracle of pure wine / whose taste is far better than wine. / [61] Heal the world, one of beautiful fair appearance, / and place souls in paradise; / give unto us the light of the feast / to which, God willing there will be no end.

Who could resist such an invitation to receive the power and favour of St Winefride and the blessing of healing at her well? Pilgrims who had experienced such a miraculous cure would not leave it unrecorded. Many of the sick pilgrims had nowhere else to turn. They came desperate men and women, as a last resort believing that St Winefride would grant them that most precious gift, restoration of health. Their journey was invariably made through the help of their local

community and at their bidding as a modern pilgrimage is to Lourdes. Many of the medieval poems in Welsh to St Winefride mention the part played by the eucharist in healing and as restoration to the community in the body of Christ. Their neighbours would suggest that a particular saint might be able to help them and they would join in an act of corporate intercession to the saint.

In the Middle Ages when scientific knowledge of healing was practically non-existent, people were more ready to believe that healing was most likely to have taken place through the intervention of God and the favour of his saint rather than in some instances naturally. Later in the story of healing at St Winefride's Well in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries more detailed narrative accounts of cures will be considered. Local newspapers contain detailed narrative accounts of cures at the well from the end of the nineteenth century onwards and in the twentieth century many accounts of cures have been kept.

The reason why pilgrimages have been undertaken to St Winefride's Well down the centuries has remained the same. It is primarily a journey in faith to a holy place involving sacrifice and self-discipline. The experience is meant to be self-illuminating, a journey in union with God, a true 'pilgrim's progress' in the sense in which John Bunyan described it. A series of trials and tests bringing the believer closer to God with a fuller realisation of his own spiritual needs. As that great fourteenth century mystic Margery Kempe put it: 'I asked the Lord if I should go on a journey; he said, "Go in my name. I will go with you and bring you back in safety."' Pilgrims have a goal to come to St Winefride's Well to say their prayers in the saint's company. There is always spiritual benefit, a cure of the soul, if not a miracle of bodily healing. The scene has always been as Celia Fiennes described it 1698 'an abundance of the devout on their knees ... all round the Well'.

In the Middle Ages the preparation for a pilgrimage was organised and blessed by the participant's community. If the pilgrimage was far distant and across the seas extra precautionary arrangements were made. All debts were settled, permission received from the overlord, and letters of commendation issued recognising the bearer as a pilgrim as distinct from a wanderer, to enable him or her to receive privileges of alms and lodgings. The local church ceremoniously equipped him in pilgrim's garb; scrip, staff and hat which were sprinkled with holy water. To emphasise that they were being sent on a religious mission, the pilgrims made their confession and before parting joined with their community in the eucharist. Finally their guild or fraternity escorted them to the city gate and the great adventure began.

Pilgrims were not alone on the road. Following one of the established pilgrimage routes which crossed Britain and Europe, they would meet en route a variety of others making the same journey, in the hostels situated within a day's walk, or at other shrines. By the fourteenth century St Winefride's Well was one of the major shrines to be visited and one of the places contained within in the

vast triangle of pilgrim centres as far away as the holy well of Jesmond Dene in Northumberland and Walsingham in Norfolk.<sup>39</sup> Some pilgrims travelled in organised groups like those Chaucer immortalised as they journeyed from the Tabor Inn to Canterbury intent on enjoying themselves: well-seasoned travellers, no stranger to such an enterprise, like the experienced Wife of Bath who had been everywhere and savoured every adventure. Other pilgrims, under safe-conduct, were compelled to make their journeys by a magistrate or ecclesiastical court as a penance to purge themselves of the crimes they had committed. They were easily recognised by their garments, and if they had committed a capital crime by chains about their necks, arms and waists. Minstrels would accompany some groups, tales would be exchanged and useful information obtained. One thing all pilgrims were keen to learn was the benefit they could obtain from visiting certain shrines or holy places.

Many pilgrimages were embarked upon to obtain an indulgence for the pilgrims and those they represented. Their families and neighbours who benefited from such an investment financed the pilgrims for this purpose. It was of immense spiritual value mitigating their punishment after death, for an indulgence gave them some reduction from their time in Purgatory, the place where the soul went after death to be purged of sin before entering into eternal salvation. This 'temporal punishment' could be lessened by the granting of an indulgence. The specific time granted in an indulgence referred to the amount of punishment that would have been remitted by the same length of time in undertaking canonical penance. Only the Pope could grant a full release or plenary indulgence, but generally shorter periods of remission were granted. No indulgence ever gave the power to release pilgrims from guilt as well as penance. Confession was therefore an essential preparation to every pilgrimage. Indulgences could be obtained to aid the repairs of damaged churches and shrines if visited by the pilgrim.<sup>40</sup> In 1427, the abbot of Basingwerk was licensed to dispense Pope Martin V's indulgence for a period of ten years. It specified a period of remission 'of a year and forty days penance to penitents who visited the well on the principal feasts of the year and dedication, the octaves of six of them, and the six days of Whitsun week, and of a hundred days to those who during the said octaves and days, visit and give alms for the repair of the Chapel of Saint Winefride the Virgin, called Holliwell whose buildings are collapsed'.<sup>41</sup> The buildings under the shadow of the nearby Castle Hill had suffered destruction during the rebellion of Owain Glyndŵr (1400–06), together with the tower of the existing church which probably dates from this period.

The pilgrims may have approached Holywell from Chester and, whilst there, visited the relics of St Werburgh and the Rood. Leaving the city they could take the route to St Davids or turn along the north-Wales coast to other centres such as Clynog and the two ancient pilgrim paths of Llŷn.

One may imagine what the experience of the pilgrim on reaching Holywell

was.<sup>42</sup> In the Greenfield valley, on the road to the well, the pilgrims found prayer stations.<sup>43</sup> Some of them would have spent the night at the abbey, in the accommodation provided for them, where they would, if necessary, receive alms or medical attention before the final mile to the Well. The Benedictine Rule prescribed that all guests should be received, both rich and poor. As late as the end of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth centuries, Abbot Thomas Pennant had built substantial accommodation for pilgrims. Tudur Aled reported that the guests there were so numerous that they had to be accommodated for meals at two sittings. In all probability local inns and alehouses also provided hospitality. King Richard II is said to have visited St Winefride's shrine at Holywell in 1398<sup>44</sup> and on 16 August Benedict, vicar of Holywell, received a grant from the king 'of sixpence a day, being about to erect a house at Holywell where poor pilgrims visiting St Winefrides might be received and entertained'.<sup>45</sup> No doubt King Richard was so beleaguered by his enemies at this time that he directed Archbishop Walden to further the cult of St Winefride by ordering the celebration of her festival with nine lessons along with those of David and Chad. At the opposite end of the pilgrim's route at St Davids the bishops had, in 1287 and 1385, made special provisions in the cathedral statutes for pilgrims, taking them into their protection and building 'a hospital in which wearied travellers may be entertained'.<sup>46</sup> This obligation was common to monastic orders and no doubt observed at Basingwerk and in the town of Holywell being under the abbot's jurisdiction.

Having reached Basingwerk the pilgrims were on the last lap of their journey, the climax of which would take place the next day after a short night's rest. Their arrival was on the eve of the Feast of St Winefride's Martyrdom, her decollation on June 22, a long summer's day to savour the delights of celebrating not only Winefride's Day but whatever favour she could bestow on them. If accommodation was scarce, the weather was probably favourable for sleeping out in makeshift shelters in the abbey grounds. The abbey's bells and the birdsong from the nearby woods would rouse them at dawn and after washing in the stream they were ready to start for the shrine following the stream a mile



30. Pope Martin V who, in 1427, granted an Indulgence to pilgrims visiting the Well the proceeds of which were devoted to the repair of the buildings at the Well or Church at Holywell

or so up hill. The monks provided a simple breakfast of milk and bread and fish from the river or nearby seashore. Their meal finished, led by a Cistercian brother to guide them, excitedly they set off to the shrine. After three hundred yards the guide halted the procession at a prayer station to point to the pathway leading to the site where Winefride kept her convent before she left for Gwytherin. After simple devotions, the monk would point out to sea to the north-west and traced for them the route Beuno's cloak escorted by the curlew was borne on his rock to Clynog. Then they continued climbing the hill clutching tight their pilgrim's staffs and singing a psalm. The sick were tenderly carried St Christopher-like by the strongest, with their guide reassuring them that they would soon be in the presence of St Winefride.

The earth was wearing its rich garment of trinity green and the trees flowered in white blossom for the festival. Ahead southwards the sun was beginning its course up the hill before them. They did not follow the cold clear winter star as the wisemen did at mid-winter but the warm brilliant sun at the summer solstice. They looked for their own physical and spiritual rebirth in the water of Winefride's Well. And they had a foretaste of what awaited them as they caught the reflection of the myriad dazzle and dance of the sun in the clear water of the spring stream as it tumbled joyfully down to the sea. It was as the priest poet described it centuries later 'pale water, frail water, wild and reeling water in this leafy lean over...moist and musical'.<sup>47</sup> After another stop they made the final ascent.

On turning the next corner they were met by the familiar sight of a shrine in festive mood. It seemed as if the whole world were present. Rather like the day of Pentecost with people speaking in tongues, mostly, it must be admitted, in the language of the native Welsh excitedly, melodiously, and demonstratively selling their wares and directing strangers to their stalls. Beggars there were in abundance lying on both banks of the stream, blocking the way to the church and the healing water. People jostled each other, desperate, anxious, and determined not to be deprived of any contact with the power of St Winefride.

But the patient monks of Basingwerk and the parish clergy of Holywell were as skilful as the temple keepers at Jerusalem in the time of the old dispensation. Everything to them was orderly. For every purpose there was a place, for the pilgrim to obtain his desires a ritual, for St Winefride to dispense her bounties an inexhaustible jewel chest, and an offering for the shrine. No one was sent empty away.

The monk who had brought them from the monastery took charge and led them further up the hill from where they could look down at the place where Winefride's decapitated head touched the ground and the spring burst forth. They turned to the left and were led into the church, Beuno's church, his legacy to Winefride, where some of their fellow-pilgrims had kept vigil through the short summer night. They moved out of brilliant sunlight away from the noise of

the market place and the thunder of the spring into the hushed reverence of the church. Here was an image of St Winefride inviting them to her presence. Now the pilgrims were at peace and in this familiar ritual of flickering candles, and the smell of incense, they joined their earnest intercessions throwing themselves upon her compassion before the altar and adding their candles and requests to the many offered that day. As if in a trance they moved slowly in this holy place until they went out by another door.

Following another path they stumbled down to the edge of the wonderful, powerful, miraculous well. The water erupted, tumbled, boiled, roared and rushed forth not as an evil force but 'as clear as glass, greenish like beryl or aquamarine, trembling at the surface with force of the springs.' Tinted blood red were the stones to remind the pilgrims of the virgin's martyrdom.<sup>48</sup> They were stunned by the thought that such healing power was at the disposal of Winefride; any doubts which previously lingered in their minds, were completely removed. She had the power to work miracles and the marvelling multitude shared the same conviction. 'They were on their knees in abundance round the well in prayer.' The weak were gently carried to the healing water by their fellow pilgrims and immersed by the assistants at the well. Those who could walk followed the ritual and bathed three times. Others turned aside to use the eye well. Some when the opportunity presented itself knelt, arms uplifted, on Beuno's Stone in the water to say their prayers. All were preoccupied by their own necessity. Many cried out as the shock of the water sent excruciating waves of pain through their bodies as a sign of healing. There were times when the lame walked, the deaf heard, the dumb spoke, and all manner of signs and wonders took place with few of them which passed unnoticed by the vigilant priests.

There was a booth set up at which the pilgrims could transact the most important business of obtaining the indulgences they had come for and those for other members of their community. An offering was made towards the repair of the buildings and the pilgrim was handed his indulgence. He peered eagerly at the scraps of paper, which promised precious days of remission from Purgatory and carefully put them in his scrip or bag, which he wore around his neck across his body. This was filling up with blood-tinted pebbles, and dried sweet smelling moss to be wetted and used as a poultice, green and



31. A sick pilgrim carried through the waters:  
stone corbel overlooking the holy well.

stringy, known as Winefride's hair, and *ampullae* containing holy water from the well. Another official pinned to his hat the lead pilgrim's badge of St Winefride's Well to add to his collection.

The most moving objects to be seen were a variety of non-monetary votive offerings left by pilgrims as a symbol of their miraculous cures: crutches, candles, coins, jewels, clothing, wax or silver images of human limbs, eyes, breasts, teeth, ears, etc.<sup>49</sup> Earlier in their progress they had passed one of the shrine's richest offerings: a gown of russet velvet adorning the image of St Winefride with which it was decked out on feast days. Isabella, countess of Warwick, had bequeathed it to the shrine in 1439.<sup>50</sup> Her husband, Earl Richard, had been more generous four years earlier when he commissioned a golden statuette of himself weighing twenty pounds for dedication to St Winefride's shrine in Shrewsbury.<sup>51</sup> After the ritual of the progress round the church and the well, and the completion of their transactions, the pilgrims walked down the stream and back into the clamour of the world outside. The street in front of the little houses stretching up to the town cross was one big bazaar with booths of vendors of religious souvenirs. It was time to go home.

#### **The flowering of the cult: c.1430–1540**

The final century before the Reformation saw the flowering of the cult of St Winefride in Britain. The centres at Holywell and Shrewsbury benefited most and here we may trace evidence of artefacts of royal and noble patronage. St Winefride was taken up by the monarchs of the competing dynasties of Lancaster and York, and received the devotion of the new house of Tudor. The Welsh bards, the poets of her homeland, devotedly sang her praises in their own language. Naturally the saint was highly popular in her homeland, north-east Wales, and at the end of the fifteenth- and beginning of the sixteenth-centuries the crypt and chapel of St Winefride's over the well was built as the most lasting of her medieval monuments. The shrine at Shrewsbury was destroyed at the Reformation and the reliquary and chapel at Gwytherin gradually decayed and disappeared through neglect. There are few artefacts which survived the iconoclasm of the 1550s, and the seventeenth-century civil wars. These are mainly fifteenth- and sixteenth-century stained-glass windows, a few pieces of sculpture, and portrayals of the saint in illuminated manuscripts. But there is enough to imagine the extent of the spread of her cult and the high regard in which she was held.

#### **Royal connections**

Edward (d.1376) the Black Prince was connected with Flintshire as earl of Chester and recruited archers from the area; in 1398 his son Richard II came on pilgrimage and established a royal chantry at Holywell and subscribed towards a pilgrim's hostel near the well.<sup>52</sup> Henry V continued this patronage and in preparation for

his military campaign in France came to the well to ask the saint's blessing. He returned after the victory at Agincourt to express his gratitude. As the chronicler recorded: 'going with great reverence on foot from Shrewsbury to St Winefride's Well in North Wales.'<sup>53</sup> It has been suggested that this was part of Henry's policy of 'wooing Celtic sensibilities,' demonstrated by his gruelling pilgrimage and direction to Henry Chichele, archbishop of Canterbury, to raise the status of four saints' days: those of George, David, Chad and Winefride. The king was grateful to the Welsh archers for their part in the victory over the French and relieved that Glyndŵr was dead.<sup>54</sup>

Henry intended to found a chantry at Shrewsbury 'to the praise of Almighty God and St Winefride' but died before it was realised. This desire was later fulfilled by his son Henry VI who, in 1449, conferred on the abbey ten pounds a year of the revenues of the parish of Nesse to fund a chantry in the conventual church of St Peter, Shrewsbury.<sup>55</sup> Henry VI's tutor, Richard Beauchamp, earl of Warwick,<sup>56</sup> patronised Winefride's shrine at Shrewsbury, and left money to build a chantry chapel in St Mary's, Warwick. It is one of the most splendid examples of its kind in England. The stained glass for the east window was made by John Prudde (c.1447), King Henry VI's glazier and included Beauchamp's four favourite saints: St Thomas of Canterbury, St Alban, St John of Bridlington and St Winefride. The Welsh saint is robed as a prioress in deep purple, wears a crown and carries an elaborate pastoral staff and an open book.<sup>57</sup>

#### **A royal chantry chapel at Holywell**

For nearly 140 years (1398–1536/7) the English monarchy had an almost continuous link with the cult of St Winefrede through the foundation of a chantry at Holywell. It was a place established for daily prayers and masses to be said for themselves and the souls of their ancestors. For this purpose they kept a priest whom they supported by an annuity or small pension. The chantry at Holywell was most certainly a small altar chapel in the parish church, or part of the well shrine. Only a small minority of chapels in churches had specially endowed priests of this kind. In *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, completed in September 1535, the chapel of St Winefride had two ecclesiastical values. One was the value of the offerings at the shrine, the other in respect of the royal chantry which was returned as an ecclesiastical benefice in the hands of the Crown.

The information relating to the establishment of a chantry dates from an unspecified year in the reign of Richard II (1377–99) is given in letters patent issued by Edward IV on 29 March 1465. The chantry was supported by an income from rent from the king's mills in the county of Flint with the chaplain appointed and paid by the Crown to perform specific duties. The document stated:

Know ye that we have granted to Geoffrey Lewys, chaplain, an annual pension of 12 marks during his life, to celebrate masses in the chapel over the well (*supra*

*fontem*) of Holliwell in our county of Flint, in honour of the Blessed Virgin and Martyr Winefrede, as was done from the time of our noble progenitor Richard II until a short time since, to be received out of the issue of our mills of Disserth and Pentre, to the intent that divine services may be lawfully kept up (*custodiri*) there in honour of God and the said Saint. And we have granted him that for his life he shall be our chaplain, which is of our foundation, to celebrate there for us and the souls of our progenitors.<sup>58</sup>

Sometime during his reign Edward (*fl.*1461–83) came on pilgrimage to Holywell, an event referred to by the poet Tudur Aled (*c.*1465–1525): ‘Edward came to his land to her, And the moss upon his crown.’ It seems feasible that the pilgrimage coincided with the re-establishment of the chantry. The sight of the splendid figure of the young Yorkist king with Winefride’s moss adorning his crown was a gesture treasured at Basingwerk and told by the monks there to the poet.

The royal chantry was continued by Edward’s successors in various forms. On 7 April 1484, Richard III, ‘out of devotion for St Winefride and her well where she was martyred,’ granted the abbot of Basingwerk an annuity of ten marks from the exchequer of Chester ‘for the maintenance of a chantry priest continually to celebrate in the chapel over (*de super*) the said well.’<sup>59</sup> Following Richard’s defeat at Bosworth in 1485 his victor, Henry VII, renewed this provision and appointed ‘Howell ap Day chaplain with an annual pension of £10 for life, to celebrate divine service daily in the chapel of St Winefride in Holiwell.’<sup>60</sup> Henry VIII maintained a succession of chaplains: 4 June 1515 – Edward Pennant, clerk, annual pension ten pounds,<sup>61</sup> succeeded in 1525 by Owen Hensheman and, on 8 May 1531, by Peter Fowler – both on the same terms.

### Iconography of St Winefride at Shrewsbury

All we know about the medieval iconography to St Winefride at Holywell is what remains in the carvings of the chapel and crypt erected within less than forty years of the Reformation. The rich decoration in the church above the well: images, wall paintings, and stained glass, did not survive these years of change, and what little might have survived disappeared when the church, apart from the tower, was rebuilt in 1770. But a parallel to what may have been found at Holywell may be discovered through an examination of the representation of St Winefride in medieval carving and other artefacts in the old abbey building at Shrewsbury now Holy Cross Church.<sup>62</sup> This link has been revived in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries at Shrewsbury Abbey, and in Shrewsbury R.C. Cathedral of which St Winefride is secondary patron.

Abbot Nicholas Stevens (abbot 1361–99) rebuilt the shrine of the saint and probably placed it in a chantry chapel constructed to the saint’s honour and for the benefit of the many pilgrims. A small fragment may survive,<sup>63</sup> part of the



32. Guest accommodation at Basingwerk Abbey.

reredos, which is now placed under the St Winefride window in Holy Cross Church, the old abbey church. This remnant has been described

as a sculptured stone three feet by two feet, within foliated tabernacles, three figures each twenty-two inches high. In the centre is a female bearing a clasped book, on her right hand is St John the Baptist, with his symbol of the lamb, and on her left, a mitred abbot, his hand elevated in the act of benediction. Perhaps two of these figures have been meant for Saint Wenefrede and St Beuno.<sup>64</sup>

This shrine may have been built by Abbot Stevens to house the newly acquired bones of St Beuno. They were ill-gotten having been stolen from Rhewl, near Llangollen in Denbighshire, by monks and servants of the abbey who were fined for the felony but kept the relics.<sup>65</sup> Whether for all their troubles they got the right relics is a matter for conjecture. On his death St Beuno’s body was coveted by three communities: Clynnog Fawr, Nefyn and Bardsey and legend has it that as his body was being carried to burial, the procession halted and a dispute took place about its final resting place. Before it was settled the bearers fell asleep and when they awoke found three coffins resembling each other in every respect. It is said that Clynnog secured the true one.<sup>66</sup>

Another interesting artefact is the common seal of the fraternity of the blessed Winefride the Virgin. On 9 February 1487, Abbot Thomas Mynde was granted permission by royal patent to establish a confraternity within the premises of the



33. St Winefride flanked by St Beuno and St John the Baptist: suggested fragment of her former shrine in Shrewsbury Abbey, illustration from *A History of Shrewsbury*, Owen & Blakeway.

monastery. The statutes he proposed were similar to those of confraternities throughout England. There may have been a similar body in Holywell linked with Basingwerk, established by whatever body of merchants or lead cartel was powerful enough to do so. The rules or statutes show how the cult of St Winefride was likely to be observed by a group of laity in the late Middle Ages. Membership was open to both sexes, all were to assemble on St Winefride's Day, 3 November for Mass. Abbey funds of £10 per annum were to be used to endow two chaplains who would offer daily prayers at St Winefride's altar for the well-being of the king and queen, and of the abbot and his confraternity. 'When a member died, a requiem was to be sung for his soul: but when the founder himself died, he was to be honoured with a requiem every Wednesday and Friday, and with nine full lessons read before the monks and the confraternity on the anniversary of his death.'<sup>67</sup> To celebrate the foundation of the confraternity at Shrewsbury in 1487 Lowry argues that William Caxton printed a brief folio text entitled *The lyf of the holy and blessid vyrgyn saynt Wenefryde* commissioned by Abbot Mynde. The seal of the Shrewsbury Guild shows the martyrdom of St Winefride, an image that may also have been used formerly as a pilgrim's badge. In the same year (1487), to celebrate the prosperity and peace brought by the accession of Henry VII, the rich wool merchants of the Draper's Company probably made a generous donation to the purchase of the large bell weighing 35 cwt. inscribed in Latin. 'Remember, holy Wenefrede, to God us recommend,/ That by His pity He may us from bloody foes defend,' and about the middle 'Mary, pure and pious maid! / Those whom I call together aid.'<sup>68</sup>

#### The iconography of St Winefride in north-east Wales and elsewhere

There are a limited number of pre-Reformation representations of Winefride remaining in north-east Wales. A statue of her was included in the sculpture

saints in King Henry VII's Lady Chapel in Westminster Abbey. Almost all the artefacts honouring Winefride perished in the 'Great Spoliation' and the small number which remain cannot possibly convey the richness and variety of objects of devotion which once existed. But what is lacking in evidence we must attempt to reconstruct in the imagination. Objects commemorating saints were mass-produced at the end of the Middle Ages, chief of which were images in stone, wood, stained glass, illuminated manuscripts and, later, printed books. These were the work of master craftsmen, masons, carvers, metal-workers, etc., employed on building and furnishing cathedrals, churches, royal palaces and chapels and other of the king's works as well as aristocratic patronage. At the end of the fifteenth century St Winefride's crypt and chapel fell within the orbit of such an enterprise and enough clues survive to appreciate its scope and splendour.



34. Seal of the Confraternity of St Winefride, established at Shrewsbury, c.1487. Tours in Wales, 1778, T. Pennant (illustrator, Moses Griffith).

#### The ecclesiastical seal of the Dean and Chapter of St Asaph Cathedral

We will begin our survey of such artefacts by looking at a small bronze matrix of an ecclesiastical seal outside the list of devotional items given above. It is a functional, utilitarian object having a decorative device common to the Middle Ages; an example of the sacred spilling over into the mundane when the honour of the saint was proudly invoked and exhibited for devotional and authoritarian purposes. This is the official seal used from the mid-fifteenth century onwards by the dean and chapter of St Asaph Cathedral. The chapter was the body of secular clergy, 'the canons', with the dean at their head, responsible for administering the cathedral. When they made important decisions their seal was attached to documents. The seal expressed the corporate nature of the governing body, which exercised its jurisdiction over the mother church of the diocese and is shown as a symbol of one communion in the body of Christ. There are three figures on the seal. None of them are named: two are bishops – in the centre St Asaph standing in eucharistic vestments, pastoral staff in his left hand, his right hand upraised in blessing; dexter (right), the diocesan bishop kneeling in veneration; – with sinister (left), St Winefride as a holy abbess, standing, holding her crook with her left hand and possibly in her right hand a book. Below, centre; in a round-arched niche is the dean to front in prayer, to either side of him some seven canons facing inwards and also kneeling in devotion. The mundane stamp or seal becomes a symbol which expresses the corporate nature of the church and its worship down the ages and its veneration of the founding saint of the diocese Asaph with whom

is closely linked Winefride. Her reliquary is the sign that she is a special saint of the diocese venerated for her martyrdom and miraculous works.<sup>69</sup> This assumption that Asaph is on the seal as principal patron of the diocese, and Winefride as the recipient of the most prominent saints' cult, is confirmed by the fact that this dual status, as it might be, is recognised in the post-Reformation, tridentine, *Martrologium Romanum*, drawn up, in the late sixteenth century, under Cardinal Baronius where Asaph and Winefride are the only Welsh saints included.<sup>70</sup> The seal may also reflect a degree of pride on the work of restoration of the cathedral completed by Bishop Richard Redman (1471–95) which included the fine canopied stalls.

#### Woodcarving

Nothing survives from the Middle Ages of the many images carved in wood representing St Winefride, which must have existed. Many of them would have dated from the mid-fifteenth century onwards as part of the furnishings of the churches enriched in the late fifteenth century rebuilding particularly those in the vale of Clwyd. They would have provided companion images of saints on the rood screen with those in the stained glass. In many of these churches there was an architectural division between nave and chancel, and they had therefore to rely upon an imposing loft and screen for the ritual division of the church.<sup>71</sup> The western front of the loft which faced the people in the nave of the church was utilized for the illustration of legend and story and commemorated the more important doctrines and saints of the church. An example, which still survives, is the legend of St Melangell and the hare carved on the rood screen at Pennant Melangell in north Powys; one may visualize the legend of St Winefride receiving similar treatment in Holywell.

#### Stained glass

The narration of the story of St Beuno and St Winefride and some of their miracles based on the twelfth-century lives was to be seen in the east window of Capel Beuno attached to Clynog Fawr church but has long disappeared.<sup>72</sup> Representations of St Winefride in stained glass have survived in two places in north-east Wales: at Llandyrnog in Denbighshire and Llanasa in Flintshire. Both of them date from c.1500 and are examples of 'York type' glass.

At Llandyrnog, glass of the same date includes a seven-sacrament window and in other windows displays a common medieval feature, that of a number of saints side by side.



35. Seal of the Dean and Chapter of St Asaph Cathedral.

We see this in the east window in the north aisle with the corporate grouping teaching the doctrine of the communion of saints. Four female saints arranged in the same window make this more interesting: Winefride; Frideswide, abbess (patron saint of Oxford University); Catherine of Alexandra, martyr (patron saint of scholars and learning); and Marcella, a local anchoress.<sup>73</sup> In other lights are St David (possibly St Deiniol).<sup>74</sup> It is interesting to speculate on the choice of subjects for the glass at Llandyrnog. The date of c.1500 coincided with that of Ffoulk Salusbury, dean of St Asaph and rector of Llanrhaeadr and Llandyrnog. He was the eldest son of Thomas Salisbury of Lleweni, the leading family in the vale of Clwyd, Lancastrian supporters, patrons of the bards and themselves poets. Ffoulk Salusbury was the patron of Sion ap Hywel who wrote an *awdl* to Gwenfrewi and to her well, in 1512. The learned dean was in 'the thick' of the literary renaissance in the vale of Clwyd. Remembering his Oxford days, he introduced with pride the virgin abbess Frideswide, and brought Catherine in as Winefride's *alter ego*. The presence of Marcella (Marchell) a local anchoress, takes us back once again to *Robert's Life* of Winefride, for she was sister to Diefer, patron of Bodfari, and Teyrnog, the founder of Llandyrnog. This choice of stained glass gives a homely insight into the way country parishioners and their eminent rectors demonstrated their belief in the household of faith. Most communities in the area probably shared the high regard held for St Winefride at Llandyrnog.

The window light of St Winefride at Llanasa was brought, it is said, from Basingwerk Abbey, after the dissolution of the monasteries. The account of its journey to the position it presently enjoys at Llanasa is complicated by questions of provenance, removal, restoration, and correct attribution.<sup>75</sup> Most of the furnishing from Basingwerk Abbey were dispersed and lost. The most substantial objects rescued were the stalls, which went to St Mary's on the Hill, Chester. It appears however that the first lay owner of the abbey, Harry ap Harry, the first of the family of Mostyn of Talacre, had some of the stained glass removed to Llanasa parish church. This transfer was first noticed in 1825 when an account appeared in the *Gentleman's Magazine*.<sup>76</sup> These stained-glass panels were removed from the east of the south aisle and reordered to the east of the north aisle and altered in 1877. The figures involved are an unnamed bishop, St James the Greater, St Laurence (martyr) and the window now attributed to St Catherine. The latter is, however, almost certainly Winefride and shows her



36. St Gwenfrewi: fifteenth-century glass, Llandyrnog church.

with a neck scar. Archdeacon Thomas suggested that it dated from the time of Katherine of Aragon, wife to Henry VIII, because of its inclusion of saints associated with Spain (Laurence and James).<sup>77</sup> It does, however, indicate the rejection of St Winefride by the Anglican Church in the diocese. Perhaps they thought she was too near to St Asaph after the Reformation and she lost the position she enjoyed in the fifteenth century as illustrated by the cathedral seal.

### Henry VII and St Winefride

Henry VII's victory at Bosworth was, against great odds, owed in no small measure to the Stanley brothers: Thomas, Lord Stanley, married to the king's mother, Lady Margaret Beaufort; and Sir William Stanley, who was reputed to be one of the wealthiest men in the kingdom. The new king was descended from the Tudors in Anglesey; the Stanley brothers owned great lordships in north-east Wales. The new king needed as much support as he could muster and the least of his gestures was to embrace Winefride in the panoply of saints from whom he sought help.<sup>78</sup> This is why Winefride is among the saints depicted in Henry VII's Lady Chapel in Westminster Abbey. Here Winefride has remained untouched by iconoclasts from the beginning of the sixteenth century. Peter Lord<sup>79</sup> states that 'The sculpture was probably the work of a Flemish artisan, who had an unusual distinctive style, and her image is far from the conventional ideal of a female saint. She is presented as an individual plucked from life.'

### The poets and Winefride

Sir Glanmor Williams captured the great surge of creative power and energy which occurred in Wales at the end of the Middle Ages when he said 'there began to unfold the dazzling efflorescence of what was appropriately categorized by the late Saunders Lewis as *Y Ganrif Fawr, 1435–1535* (The Great Century). These were years of an unsurpassed renaissance in Welsh verse and prose.' Part of this great outburst of poetry and religious devotion are poems in the Welsh language sung to the praise and wonder of St Winefride and her well.

The vale of Clwyd was the scene in north-east Wales for a literary renaissance<sup>80</sup> and, along with Basingwerk Abbey, was a major centres for the cult of Winefride. Literary learning was in the hands of the bards; they were the guardians of Welsh scholarship. Dafydd ab Edmund (fl.1450–97) of Hanmer, and his nephew Tudur Aled (fl.1465–c.1525) and Gruffudd Hiraethog (d.1564) were amongst the major exponents of this tradition. The area was rich in county families, great and small, who entertained the bards in their homes and, in return, received eulogies and elegies to their hosts and families.

The two Cistercian abbeys in north Wales, Vale Crucis and Basingwerk, were both liberal in their hospitality to the bards. It was customary for the poets to spend the three great Christian festivals, Christmas, Easter and Whitsun, at the home of one of their patrons where they would experience 'a great feast of praise

to God'. The abbeys were also a source of knowledge where precious manuscripts could be read and transcribed. The hall of the abbot's house was a meeting place for distinguished travellers and clerics from Europe and Ireland. It was an outpost of learning and a contact point for scholars. The abbots provided not only intellectual conversation but also good accommodation and the best food and wine, and the guests in return composed eulogies to praise their host and immortalise his abilities and good deeds.

In the time of Abbot Thomas Pennant (c.1480–c.1515/22) scholarship, patronage, hospitality, eulogy, and devotion combined together in a remarkable, creative way in producing buildings, manuscripts, and fine examples of Welsh poetry which praised both Winefride and the monks. His more famous namesake the antiquarian described him as 'the hospitable, the useful, the valiant Thomas Pennant.'<sup>81</sup> Dr Enid Pierce Roberts has paid tribute to the scholarship of the Pennants at Basingwerk.

The abbot was author of Latin grammar while his brother the poet-cleric Huw Pennant, compiled and copied manuscripts of pedigrees, history, *Vitae*, religious, astrological and herbal essays and translated the *Legenda Aurea* into Welsh.<sup>82</sup>

Gutun Owain (fl.1450–98) the bard spent considerable time there copying chronicles, genealogies, Welsh versions of the lives of the saints and other material.

Three poets of Abbot Pennant's generation composed memorable works in honour of Winefride. All of them expressed in a vivid way the religious themes of their day. In their poetry they reflect the popular religious ideas of late medieval Catholicism and relate them specifically to Winefride and her well. Like all the poets of their generation their verse was composed as an adoration of the saints and the locations



37. King Henry VII.

38. St Winefride: stone statue in Henry VII's Lady Chapel, Westminster Abbey. Note the decapitated head lying on the holy well.



associated with them. The background to their poetry is the rich cultural flowering in stained glass of the legends of the saints, the expression of the suffering Saviour in carved and painted rood screens and the devotion of the faithful to the sacraments of baptism, the eucharist, and the wounds of Christ. In the life and martyrdom of Winefride they were presented with an ideal subject.

The event of her martyrdom, the severing of her head by Caradog, brought forth blood, and from that place issued a healing spring. They praised her martyrdom as a resurrection event. They compared the mingling of her blood with the water of the spring to the water and wine of the eucharist, the celebration of the passion of Christ. The well was not only the scene of her death it was a place of baptism and new life and miracles of restoration and healing.

The holy well was a sacred place and was revered as such by the poets who evoked a multitude of images to remind them of this. The hill above the well they likened to Calvary and the suffering of Winefride to that of her Saviour. Particularly poignant of suffering were the blood stained stones which were revered as relics of Winefride and her martyrdom. The well was likened to a huge baptismal font which received the faithful pilgrim's as the river Jordan did at the time of Christ and John Baptist. The blood-red stones gave the well water a tincture and quality which brought forth comparison to the changing of water into wine at Cana in Galilee. There was no end to the ingenuity of the poets in their imagery and description of St Winefride's Well and which often included a eulogy to the abbot of Basingwerk

*Ieuan Brydydd Hir Hynaf* (fl.1450–85)

Ieuan was a poet from the district of Ardudwy in Merionethshire who wrote on a variety of themes. Over half of his surviving poems treat religious subjects, as, for example, his celebration of the famous rood at Chester. His praise poem to Winefride was written at the end of the fifteenth century and was probably composed as a result of a pilgrimage to the well and entertainment by the abbot, Thomas Pennant, at Basingwerk. It is entitled *Cywydd i Wenfrewi a'r ffynnon* [A *cywydd* to Gwenfrewi and the well].<sup>83</sup>

His poem praises Winefride and in a brief recollection of the events of her life at Holywell the poet commemorates her martyrdom by Caradog, her restoration by Beuno, and the stone she 'sent' to him 'over the sea.' All of these episodes are derived by Ieuan from the *Anonymous Life*. He informs us that the motive of his pilgrimage to Holywell is to obtain grace and a cleansed soul, and receive drops of her miracles, and in her presence be healthy. He employs the description 'there is rough water and blood upon stones' to develop themes of grace, purification, and healing. Water and blood become symbols of the eucharist and holy baptism, and, 'this water' is seen as 'the best wine to overcome sickness.'

Extracts from the poem give a description of the well and its surroundings, and the variety of pilgrims who come to be healed there.

*Mae'n y fron, fal manna fry,  
Ferw awen i Wenfrewi.  
Tai sydd fal y tes iddi,  
Tref o gaer nef i'n gwawr ni;  
Ac wrth y dref, gwyrthiau a drig:  
Dŵr garw a gwaed ar gerrig* [lines 5 to 10]

[There is on the hill-slope, like the manna above, / a bubbling inspiration to Winefride. / To her the houses are like sunshine. / A heavenly citadel town for our dawn. / And near the town, miracles take place; / [there is] rough water and blood upon stone.]

There is a wonderful description of the pilgrims at the well / spring.

*Mae yn ei ffons, man o'r ffydd,  
Y byd megis maen bedydd:  
Ac yno mae, gwen a'i medd,  
Urddonen i'r ddwy Wynedd.* [lines 41 to 44]

[Here's in her fount, a place of faith. / The world as if [in] a baptismal stone: / And there is possessed by the maiden, / A Jordan for the two Gwynedds].<sup>84</sup>

Ieuan lists the healing miracles of Winefride's as given in the Gospels.

*Os un a ddaw heb synnwyr,  
A'i caiff ond enynnu cwyr,  
A d'wedyd os mud ydyw,  
Os byddar, clae'r y clyw;  
Un heb gerdded i'r redeg,  
Dyn dall i weled yn deg.* (lines 27 to 32)

[If one arrives insane / he will receive it [sanity] on lighting a candle / and can speak if mute / If deaf clear will be his hearing / if crippled to run / a blind man to see well.]

*Sion ap Hywel ap Llywelyn Fychan* (1485–1530)

Sion ap Hywel was a local poet with lifelong associations with Holywell and district, who enjoyed the patronage of local clergy and abbots of Basingwerk and Glyn Conwy. He was a frequent visitor to Basingwerk with other bards, particularly his teacher Tudor Aled, and with them took part in the first Caerwys eisteddfod in 1523 under the patronage of the Mostyn family.

Sion ap Hywel composed 'An *awdl* to Gwenfrewi and to her well, 1512', of seventy-seven lines in length. The poem declares his intention to venerate Winefride and the place of her martyrdom. In his treatment of his subject an

underlying theme is the comparison of the benefits of the 'wounds' of Christ at his death and passion, to the 'injury' 'the severed head' which Winefride suffered at her martyrdom, for from the wounds of both victims issue blood and water. Christ's is the eucharistic sacrifice, the mingling of the blood and water in the chalice, as on the cross it flowed from His 'breast', His sacred heart and wounded side. Winefride's is the mingling of her martyr's blood with the water of the well, which issued from the spot where her decapitated head fell. The use of the word 'breast' may also refer to the medieval image of the 'Pelican in her Piety' which feeds its young with its own blood until the pelican itself dies and is a symbol of Christ's sacrificial death. This symbol is to be seen in churches in the vale of Clwyd at Llangynhafal and Llanrhaeadr Nghinmeirch.

*Gwenfrewy, Duw fry, gwaed y fron, – mor debyg  
'Dyw'r aber i'r ffynnon;  
A gwaed rhudd yw godre hon,  
Gweryd ar y main geirwon.* [lines 1–4]

[Gwenfrewi, God above, the breast's blood how similar/is its flow to this well;/ with its red blood bottom/and moss on rough stones.]

Sion rhapsodises on his view of the well. The 'precious blood from the fair neck of Winefride and the crimson tintured stones fill a fountain full of red-coloured wine from which comes deliverance'. The well is the 'paradise of all Britain' and with the moon's reflection in the water it becomes a 'silver relic', and contains 'excellent milk-breast'. This is perhaps the milky nature of the water after a storm or refers to the miracle at the well when after the expulsion of the French from Gwynedd the water in the well assumed the same quality, which had special healing properties.

*Llawnin ffons'n llenwi'n un ffair,– llu'n nofio  
'N llyn afon y byddair;  
Lloer wingrofft, llawr ariangrair,  
Llwyth o fryn nef, llaethfron aur.* [lines 9–12]

[The font in a turbulence filling with wine, a throng of people bathing/in the pool of the river of the deaf;/ the vineyard moon a silver relic on the ground,/ a family from heaven's hill, excellent milk breast.]

The poet sees the hill above the well as Calvary, from which Christ's victory was won and describes Winefride's presence at the well in mystical terms.

*Wedi hyn, o'r bryn, wir Brynwr – bydoedd  
A Bedydd, yr un Gwr,*

*Gorau Brenin, gwir Brynwr  
Y gwnâi Ddu y gwin o ddŵr.  
Y dŵr a anfoned i Wen – deg Frewy,  
Dug friwiad bob gwythen;  
Y gwaed, purwaed, am y pen,  
Yr holl waed yw'r afrlladen.  
Afrlladen yw gwen, a genau'r Drindod,  
Ac un Duw'n archollau;  
Mae'r ffrwd mor braff ei rhadau,  
Mae gwres ac mae mwg o'r grau.* [lines 26–37]

[Thereafter [i.e. following the martyrdom of Winefride] from the hill, true redeemer of the worlds/the one God, the best King, true Redeemer/did God make the wine from water./The water that was sent to fair Gwenfrewi [she]/bore the wounding of every sinew. The blood, pure blood, around the head,/ All the blood is consecrated wafer./The maiden is a wafer, and the mouth [piece] of the Trinity/and the one God as wounds [the crucified Saviour?];/The stream is so powerful in its blessing./There's warmth and vapour from the blood.]

In the final lines the theme changes from the blood and wine of the eucharistic sacrifice to the water of holy baptism. The well is the fine and holy Jordan because of Gwenfrewi [Winefride] to which 'a multitude makes its way.'

*Cyrchu llu ati, llety – llan cleifion  
Llanwan' yr afon yn llan Wenfrewy.  
O'r berw boglynwyrdd mawr yw'r boglynnu,  
Mae aur ar ei delwau, mor wir y dyly;  
Mae'r gwyrthiau mor frau, mawr fry – 'Ewropa,  
Mae mw nai'r Afia am Wenfrewy.* [lines 68–73]

[A multitude make their way to her, lodging at the church of the sick,/ they fill the river at Gwenfrewi's church./From the green bubbles great is the gurgling./ There's gold on her effigies, justly deserved./ The miracles are so generous, more than [miracles] in Europe,/ there is the treasure of Africa because of Gwenfrewi.]

*Tudur Aled* (c.1465–c.1525)

Tudur Aled was one of the greatest among the poets of the gentry in the late Middle Ages. His roots were at Llansannan, near to Gwytherin where Winefride resided as an abbess at the end of her life and he would have visited her reliquary



39. 'The Pelican in her Piety': wooden sculpture in the church of St Dyfnog, Llanrhaeadr-yng-Nghinmeirch.

and chapel there. Poetry was in his blood, a gift which was nurtured by his uncle Dafydd ab Edmund, the chief of Welsh bards. Tudur wrote for patrons in north-east Wales and one of the most memorable and hospitable was Thomas Pennant, abbot of Basingwerk. The bard was impressed by his host whom he described as a man of dark complexion, noble in bearing and a lion in the field. He sang of the hospitality dispensed by the abbot at whose table was to be had huge dishes of fine food: roast meat and poultry, white bread and sugar, and the sweet wines of Aragon and Brittany.<sup>85</sup> Although both bard and abbot had knowledge of the world they had a common devotion to Winefride and served her with distinction.

Tudur much in evidence during his lifetime as a guest at Welsh religious houses spent his last days donned in the Franciscan habit at the Orders Friary in Carmarthen where he was buried. Like his pupil, Sion ap Hywel, he wrote a beautiful poem to Winefride, *Stori Gwenfrewy a'r Ffynnon* [The Story of St Winefride and her Well].<sup>86</sup> Tudur Aled's poem uses theological themes similar to those developed by Sion ap Hywel, but he develops them, as we might expect, in different ways. Both poets make the comparison between Christ's passion and Winefride's martyrdom, although Tudur adds that her lying under Beuno's cloak recalls Christ's burial in the tomb, while her uncle celebrates Mass, at the end of which 'Gwen was raised, and Jordan's bath sprang up'. Sion ap Hywel had more to say about the eucharistic sacrifice and baptism, although Tudur alludes to both sacraments in a most delicate way. Tudur describes the well in terms of baptism

*Aber brwd o'r brew briwdan,  
Os brwd gwllith yr Ysbryd Glân  
Irder byd yw'r dŵr bedydd,  
A elwir ffons olew'r ffydd.*

[A fervent stream from the boiling, burning wound, / Fervent is the dew of the Holy Ghost / The water of baptism is the fresh growth of the world, / And is called the fount of the chrism of faith. [lines 55–8)]

He recalls the main themes of Winefride's life and the 'relics' of her martyrdom available to pilgrims. The valley of the stream shows forth these treasures and the odour of sanctity:

*Aroglau nef i'r glyn yw;  
Ager gwin o'i gaid,  
Fal gwynt o fêl y gyntaid;*

[The perfumes of heaven belong to the valley, / The vapour of wine came from its gravel bed, / Like the smell of the first swarm's honey. [lines 38–40)]

The passion of Winefride's martyrdom and its powerful blessing is beautifully compared with that of her saviour:

*Man pêr ar bob maen purwyn,  
Main ag ôl gwaed mwnwgl gwyn;  
Beth ydyw'r ôl byth a drig?  
Band ei gwaed bendigedig?  
Dagrau fel cawod egroes,  
Defri Crist, o fannau croes,  
Daioni Crist corff dyn, o caid,-  
Derbyn deigr dŵr bendigaid;  
Dyfriw gwaed, fal dwfr a gwin,  
Dwyn iwel wyrthiau dan chwerthin;*

[A sweet mark on each white stone, / Stones with the trace of a white neck's blood. / What is the trace, which remains forever ? / Is it not her blessed blood ? / Tears like a shower of wild rose berries, / Christ's drops, from the arms of the cross, / The health of a man's body, it were obtained, / Came from receiving a tear of the blessed water, / Drops of blood like water and wine, / Joyfully bringing about miracles.' [lines 43–52)]

Tudur sings of the well bringing healing and salvation as 'ointment' and 'medicine for salvation.' Such is its reputation that he has seen 'a hundred people light candles there' and witnessed cures for all ills that through the presence and intercession of Winefride are 'signs of God's power accomplished.' Here at the well the saint is 'doctor' who helps in the cure of the body and the soul. The leading men of the realm, king, nobility and courtier make their way to the well. King Edward IV made his pilgrimage and, in respect to the sanctity of Winefride, placed 'the moss upon his crown.' It is not surprising that old and young and indeed the 'throng of the world's companies' with dignity come there and make garlands out of the moss.

The poem concludes with lines that recall the special character of the holy well and its continuity stretching back to Buono in the seventh century, and looks forward to his distinguished patron, Abbot Pennant, completing his work at the well. This discussed in the next section. The building of a new crypt to house the well with a chapel over it is the last act of the medieval Catholic Church to show the high regard in which she was held in Wales and beyond before the Reformation.

### The cult blossoms: the perpendicular chapel and well chamber of St Winefride

#### *The evidence for the building of the chapel*

It is now becoming clear that there is absolutely no documentary evidence to support the claim that Lady Margaret Beaufort, the mother of King Henry VII, and members of the powerful Stanley family into which she married, were responsible for the building of St Winefride's Well. However, it is worth discussing the claims and counter claims for patronage which resulted in the erection of the magnificent late-perpendicular chapel and well of St Winefride which for 500 years has played such a large part in the history of the cult of St Winefride. But first an observation on the difficulties which surround the establishment of any claims relating to the erection of the building.

The most reliable evidence for dating a building is information which relates to its commission by an owner or patron, design by an architect, contract of works, employment of builder and craftsmen, and payment on completion. The survival of such written evidence from late medieval Britain is rare. It occurs when building works were undertaken in the name of the monarch, and paid for by the treasury, and may occur in ecclesiastical archives, if they were not monastic and lost at the dissolution of the monasteries. If such documentary evidence cannot be found, then it must be sought elsewhere. An obvious place to look for it is in the architecture of the building itself, by identifying the style of the building. In the case of St Winefride's Well it is late perpendicular, with a proposed date of around 1500.<sup>87</sup> Further evidence is provided from the carved heraldry in the stonework. This is a way of dating the building, but the trap of equating patronage to the display of heraldic badges is to be avoided. Another speculative area is that created by antiquarian writers, the 'old gossips of historical writing', who, years after an event, may spread false tales which, if plausible, may turn into a tradition which subsequently becomes sacred and not easily disposed of when firmer evidence turns up.

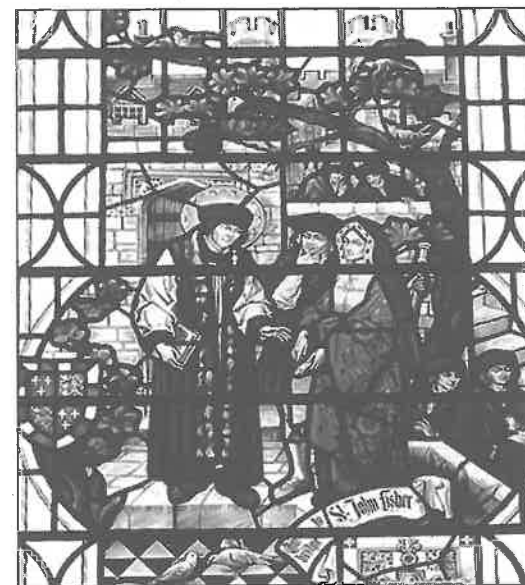
For nearly 300 years there has been an unwarranted attribution that Lady Margaret Beaufort was the patron of St Winefride's Well. Antiquarians who visited the building within the first hundred years of its existence, such as John Leland (1506–62) and John Speed (c.1610) do not make mention of Beaufort or Stanley patronage, neither did William Camden. The first claim for the patronage of Lady Margaret Beaufort was made by Thomas Hearne 223 years after her death (1509). Hearne (1668–1735) was a scholar and sometime librarian of the Bodleian, Oxford, and corresponded with scholars from all over Britain. He wrote in his notes on 9 January 1732/3:

It is a tradition that Margaret, Countess of Richmond, erected the building over St Winifred's well at Holywell in Flintshire and that the workmen were the same that built King Henry VII's chappell at Westminster, who also (they tell you) built

Wrexham (Church) Tower. According to Willis's Survey of St Asaph, Wrexham Tower was built in 1507 and according to Hollingshed the first stone of Henry VII's chappell was laid in 1502–3.<sup>88</sup>

The tradition mentioned by Hearne was repeated and enlarged upon forty years later by Thomas Pennant (1726–98), the distinguished antiquarian of Downing, who was closely involved in the affairs of Holywell. He wrote:

This building, and the chapel over it, rose from the piety of that great house [i.e. the Stanley family], which left these memorials of its benefactions: there are besides some marks of the illustrious donors; for example the profile of Margaret, mother to Henry VII, and that of her husband the earl of Derby, cut on the same stone.<sup>89</sup>



40. Lady Margaret Beaufort, countess of Richmond and Derby: window in St Winefride's RC Church, Holywell.

#### *The architectural evidence from the building*

What are these memorials of benefaction Pennant speaks of? They are heraldic badges and sculpture carved in stone throughout the crypt and chapel.<sup>90</sup> The late perpendicular style of the vaulted well-chamber with moulded stone arches and timber roof of the chapel over the well are ideal for a display of heraldic ornament and figure subjects on corbel, boss and spandrel.

The Tudor dynasty is well represented. In the crypt at the base of the central pendant boss are the royal arms of England and Wales: a dragon and a greyhound of Henry VII are carved in spandrels at the entrance to the well on the right. Over the outside door to the gallery is the portcullis he derived from his mother, Margaret Beaufort, whilst inside are the arms of Katherine of Aragon,<sup>91</sup> three pomegranates in a shield surmounted with a crown.

The dominant decorative representation is that of the Stanley family.<sup>92</sup> They were linked to the Tudor dynasty by the marriage of Margaret Beaufort to Thomas Stanley who was created earl of Derby in 1485. It is suggested that the two are seen in profile together high in the ceiling of the crypt and there are other badges of the family – the legs of an eagle, the eagle and child, the three legs of Man. Most interesting however are the decorative emblems belonging to Sir William Stanley (d. 1495), younger brother to Thomas, and his wife Elizabeth



41. Example of carving at St Winefride's Well – the Tudor dragon.

Hopton. The arms of Sir William, a wolf's head enclosed in a garter and those of Elizabeth Hopton, a barrel with a plant issuing from it, are in the crypt ceiling. Sir William Stanley was executed in 1495 for his implication with the pretender Perkin Warbeck. He had received the Order of the Garter from Richard III and displayed the wolf's head as chamberlain of Chester. In spite of his disgrace, there is no attempt to expunge his memory from the building.

Randle Holme, the antiquary, left a description of the well armorial features.

Holywell Armes.

France and England jet over the Springs.'

A stages head copassed in a escochion.

An Eagles foot. Three pomgranats with a crowne Royall on the Shield.' A crosse croslet or else cross regulat and trunked.

A woolfes head Araz.

In the dressing Rome. [the gallery over looking the well].

A Eagle and Child in a shield supported by two Angles. [Angels]

A Lion Rampant.<sup>93</sup>

In spite of this profusion of heraldic badges with the labels of Henry VII, Margaret Beaufort and the Stanleys stamped all over the chapel and well crypt, there is no evidence that any of them made a financial contribution to the building. As Jones and Underwood point out 'There is no record of Margaret's ever making any donation. In the summer of 1502 ... it was Thomas Stanley, not his wife, who sent an offering to Holywell on the feast day of St Winefride.'<sup>94</sup>

It is possible that the superb perpendicular design of the well was that of Robert Vertue who worked at Westminster Abbey from 1475 until his death in 1506, in partnership with other masons, including his brother William who died in 1527. Was Hearne wrong in saying that Margaret Beaufort 'erected the building over St Winefride's Well' and correct in his statement 'that the workmen were the same that built King Henry VII's chappel at Westminster'? It might be argued that the stonework of the chapel and well, with the addition of the traditions of the eighteenth-century antiquaries Hearne and Pennant provide enough circumstantial evidence to make a case for the major initiative's lying with Sir William Stanley and his brother Thomas Stanley, earl of Derby, with the support of their wives Margaret and Elizabeth Hopton, and a grateful Henry VII deputing his skilled craftsmen for the enterprise.

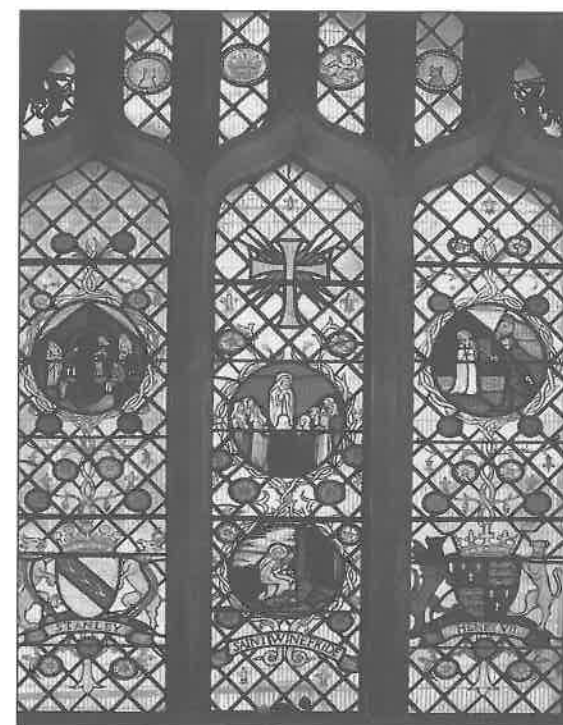
However, no mention, has been made of the possibility of the involvement in the building of the chapel by the monks of Basingwerk or their abbot, Thomas Pennant. The antiquary, his namesake, is silent about any part he played in the building of the well and/or chapel, and if he had had any evidence for such a role he would have been proud to mention it.

In the roof of the gallery is the head of an abbot, possibly that of Thomas Pennant, abbot of Basingwerk when the chapel was built. It makes sense that the abbot of the monastery which had been custodian of the well for nearly 300 years should have played a major role in enhancing the shrine of St Winefride. This was the period in north-east Wales of the rebuilding and enhancement of churches and a literary renaissance of which the abbey of Basingwerk was a centre. Abbot Pennant had the reputation of being a builder and added a new guest accommodation, and other buildings to the abbey. These were described by the poet Gutun Owain (fl.1450–98):

a good house for the corn on the other side,  
there is a malt house-and it has a brick house;  
there is a stone wall by Cilgwri,  
and upon it a gate house.<sup>95</sup>

However, more important to our discussion is the praise that he received as a builder from two poets, writing after Gutun Owain was dead, on the building of St Winefride's well and chapel. The first reference was made by Tudur Aled, who describes the site of the well as being 'In Beuno's place, in Pennant's hand' and continues:

*Am un Abad, mae'n obaith  
Ygwyl Duw ei glod a'T'waith;*



42. Modern stained-glass window in St Winefride's Chapel depicting the heraldry of the Tudors and Stanleys and scenes from the life of St Winefride.

*Yng nghor yn Iorc, neu 'Nghaer Non,  
Y gorffenno gau'r ffynnon.*

For the same abbot we hope/That God sees his glory and his work;/May it be in the choir of York, or in Non's city,/That he finishes the Well's arch.<sup>96</sup>

More informative is the poet Sion ap Hywel who entitles his praise poem 'An awdl to Gwenfrewi and to her Well (1512). [*Awdl i Wenfrewi a'i ffynnon* (1512)]

*O law Tomas urddaswin  
Yr aeth y gost ar waith gwen:  
Diwan adeilad, da iawn y dylud,  
Da y darparwyd, iti y darperir,  
Pymthecant (mi a'i gw'rantwn)  
A deuddeg oed oedd Duw gwyn  
Dwy fodfedd am bunt o'r bont i'r clochdy,  
O'r ddaer i frig yr eurdderw fry;  
Deg mil deg cant yw gwaith y tŷ'n Sychnant  
A deugain rifant i dŷ Gwenfrewy.*

From the hand of Thomas of distinguished wine/did the expenditure proceed on the/construction work [at the well of] the fair maid:/A stout building, full well were you entitled [to it],/Fifteen hundred (I would aver it)/and twelve [years] was the age of blessed God/ two inches for a pound from the bridge to the belfry,/from the earth to the top of the fine oak above;/ten thousand [and] ten hundred is the labour of the house in Sychnant/and forty do they account to the house of Gwenfri.

And so the poet's provide the most conclusive evidence we have for the date and person responsible, Abbot Thomas who completed the building in 1512.

#### *The architecture and ritual arrangement of the building*

St Winefride's Well and Chapel were designed principally for the use of pilgrims coming to the well, and were organised as such. It was built near other religious buildings that had been there for centuries. The parish church, first mentioned in 1093, and set above the well, was adjacent to the chapel. Somewhere in the church was an altar for a chantry priest to perform his duties; since he was first heard of in the reign of Richard II (deposed 1399). Where did the local clergy live – the vicar, the chaplain, the procurator, all mentioned in 1284? How close was the hospice for pilgrims begun by Benedict, the vicar in 1398? Unfortunately we do not know.

But we are certain of the site of the old parish church, and the well determined its own location. The new buildings erected at the close of the fifteenth and

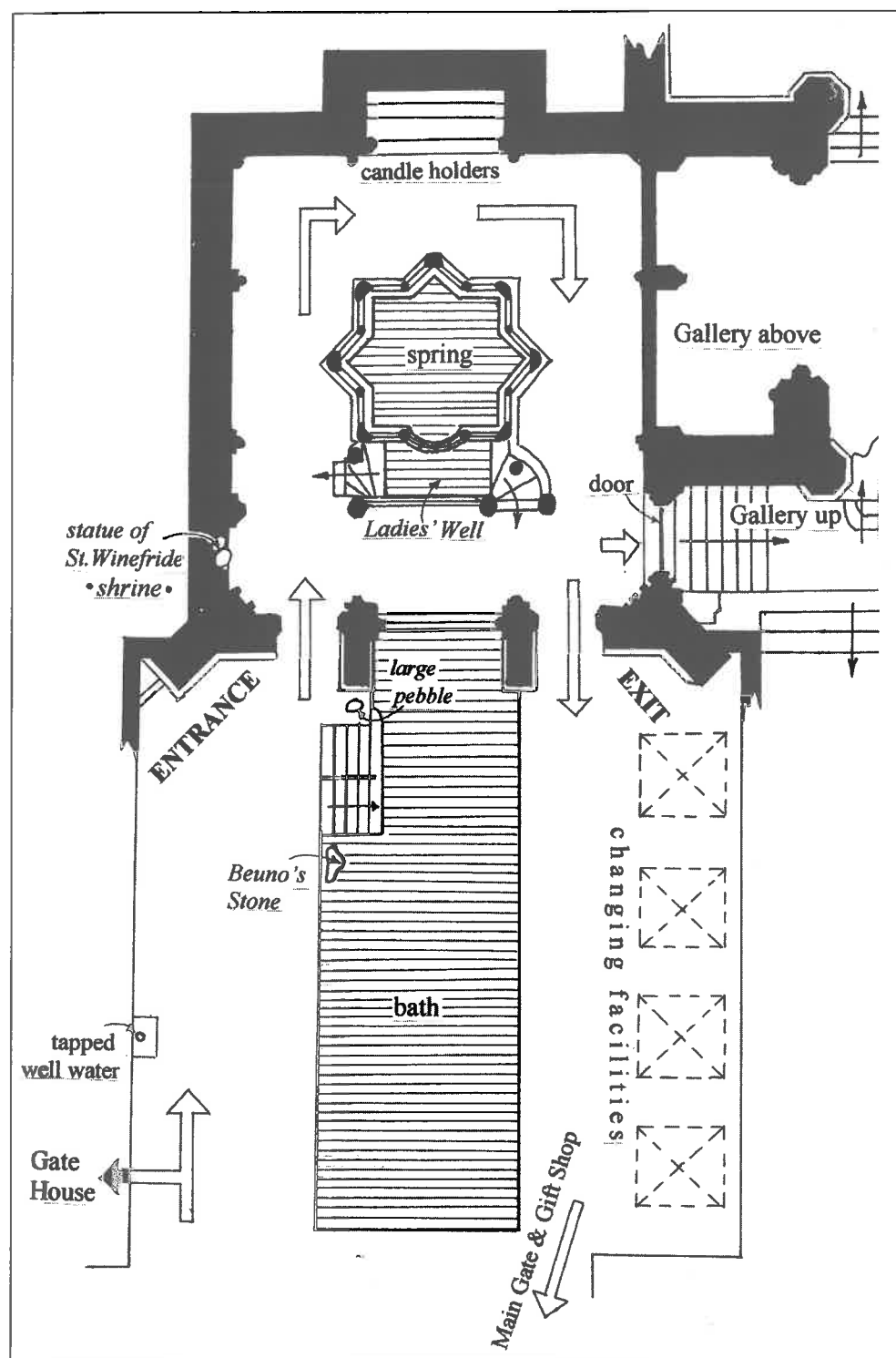
beginning of the sixteenth centuries are set on a hillside, with a crypt covering and enclosing the sacred well and spring, from which issues the stream rushing to the Dee over a mile away. Built over the crypt is a chapel whose entrance and roof levels match those of the parish church adjacent and separated a few yards away from its solid tower. The church too is perched on the hillside overshadowed to the south-west by Castle Hill.

The perpendicular, slim and elegant profile of crypt and chapel nestles and provides shelter, sanctuary and entrance to healing well and stream. The well building is a sacred grotto, a sanctuary for the richly-adorned image of St Winefride. For centuries, until the source of the spring was diverted and replaced, there was the awesome experience of hearing a deafening roar of water and seeing it streaming out of the sanctuary of the crypt into the sunlight. Inside the crypt, candlelight chased a myriad of colours on richly-painted vaulted ceilings, picking out carved legends of Winefride and Beuno on the pendant over the pool. Angels accompany them adding dignity to sculptured faces and to the heraldic badges of patrons and benefactors who join the assembly as if on perpetual pilgrimage. The pilgrims' journey in the crypt was short and memorable as they paused to pray and circulated in procession, filled with wonder and enchantment round the vaulted ambulatory. Reciting the creed, rosary beads in their fingers, the pilgrims concentrated in their devotion, made intercession, and solicitation for the precious gifts of forgiveness and healing. To achieve this they made the ritual passage through the smaller pool nearer the entrance. Having passed through this highly charged theatre of experience they came out into the open.

Outside, the stream glinted in the sunlight. Crimson-tintured stones and twisted garlands of moss were St Winefride's invitation to them to receive blessings and cures gifts and relics to cherish and share with loved ones at home. The whole world was there: all ages and conditions, many desperate, all hopeful, some surprised by joy. Anything might have happened as it had done for centuries. Above there was a canopy of over-arching trees from the eastward heaven above. It is as Tudur Aled said: 'The state of grace (so great is the procession) is indeed a paradise of the soul. Heaven's chrism is at the source of the stream.'

Above the well crypt is the chapel connected with it, most of it built over, and resting upon the outer walls of the chamber below so that the two form structurally one building. Its entrance from above is in the parish churchyard. The chapel chancel at the east end is a few yards below the church tower. The building comprises a chancel of pentagonal shape, a nave of four bays, and a north aisle of three bays with a wooden roof low pitched, of camber beam construction, with arched braces. The carved corbels, both stone and timber, are of a variety of subjects.

The chapel has had a varied history since the Reformation. Ownership of it, when finally confirmed in the 1930s, was placed in the hands of the Anglican



43. Recent plan of the crypt at St Winefride's Well.

Church in Wales, whilst that of the well crypt in possession of the local authority. Whereas the well crypt has never ceased to be visited by pilgrims, the chapel has been used for different purposes, some of them secular. A session house in the seventeenth century, for 150 years as a school and for religious purposes used by the parish church. Photographs of the 1940s show it furnished for Anglican worship. It is now empty and unfurnished, but fortunately considerably restored by the Ministry of Works in the 1950s and subsequently Cadw.

There is no documentary description, no record of wooden furnishings, stained glass or other evidence apart from the empty shell of the building, to help us determine its furnishings. However another *awdl* by Sion ap Hywel with the title *I'r Grog* [To the rood], which is a meditation on the rood in the chapel 'near St Winefride's Well'. The poet could have been writing about a major furnishing in the newly constructed chapel of the well. The *awdl* opens with the lines: *Duw, 'r wirgrog eurgrair Sydd fab i'r Arglwyddes Fair* [the rood, the golden relic, is God's true cross and as such an object of veneration]. The chapel was used by pilgrims in conjunction with the well when it was first built and from then until it passed into the hands of the church by law established at the Reformation thirty years later. As for its uses: Masses and litanies would be performed, and it would be furnished with at least one altar in the chancel and probably another in the south aisle. There may have been a richly ornate rood screen separating nave from chancel with niches for images of saints. Priests in attendance would hear penitents, record miracles and accept offerings. The building, larger than most well chapels, reflected the popularity of pilgrimages at the end of the Middle Ages.

The number of windows in the chapel provided scope to develop themes close to their patron's heart. Such a suite of stained glass was provided in 1500 by Thomas Stanley, patron of Gresford parish church, who gave the east window there with is Tree of Jesse, figures of the Virgin, St John and Christ displaying His Mother as Queen of the Universe – the theme of the churches dedication to All Saints – and other figures.<sup>97</sup> Maybe the same glazier provided the windows for the Holywell chapel with the Virgin, St Winefride and St Beuno at the top of the list.

As was the custom the craftsmen in stone and wood took a great delight in expressing their faith and humour using the opportunity to poke fun at rich and poor in their sculpture. Their favourite places for display were stone corbels decorating arches or on roof supports and bosses. Many of their traditional figures are to be seen in the chapel although some are difficult to make out because of age and former neglect. When the Commissioners on Ancient Monuments visited in 1910, they reported that the chancel roof was supported by corbels with suggested representations of the seven deadly sins.<sup>98</sup> Christopher David provided illustrations of others;<sup>99</sup> they include bestiary figures, the mantichora (human head on a lion's body), lencrota (a fabulous horse) and griffin

(body of a lion, wings and crooked beak of an eagle). Grotesque faces stare and grimace at each other across the nave. There are various figures: the apocalyptic horse and rider, two men in combat and others. There are religious motives: an angel carrying a shield with the five wounds of Christ, a vase of lilies and *fleur de lys* representing the Blessed Virgin, scenes of the months – harvest for September, with wheat and grapes which may also represent the eucharist and acorns for October. Other stone corbels repeat Stanley family badges – the eagle's claw, the barrel with a plant issuing out for Elizabeth Hopton. There are busts of men and women on corbels in the north aisle that may represent Thomas and William Stanley and their spouses. A modern stained-glass window represents St Winefride, the Stanleys and Henry VII. But the empty chapel is rather forlorn, denied its sense of purpose and with its glory departed, a fate which came too soon after its erection.

## NOTES

1. D. H. Williams, 'Basingwerk', *Cîteaux*, vol. 32 (1981), p. 89.
2. F. Winward, 'The Lives of St Wenefred', *Analecta Bollandiana*, vol. 117 (Brussels, 1999), pp. 81–132.
3. C. David, *St Winefrides Well a history and guide*, 1969, n.p.
4. J. G. Edwards, V. H. Galbraith, E. F. Jacobs (eds), *Historical Essays in Honour of James Tait* (Manchester, 1933); Arthur Jones, *Basingwerk Abbey*, pp. 169–78, pp. 171–2.
5. G. Omerod, *The History of the County Palatine and City of Chester*, (2nd ed, Thomas Helsby, London, 1882), vol. 1, p. 17 and p. 191.
6. D. H. Williams, op cit, p. 89.
7. A. Jones, op cit, p. 171.
8. R. R. Davies, *The Age of Conquest Wales 1063–1415* (Oxford, 1987), p. 46.
9. J. Tait (ed.), 'The Chartulary or Register of the Abbey of St Werburgh, Chester', *Chetham Society New Series*, vol. 79, p. 236.
10. *The Victoria History of the County of Chester*, (University of London Institute of Historical Research, OUP, 1980), vol. III, p. 151.
11. R. C. Christie (ed), 'Annales Cestrienses or Chronicle of the Abbey of S. Werburg at Chester', *Lancashire and Cheshire Record Society*, 1887, p. 23.
12. R. R. Davies, op cit, p. 49, and C. R. Williams, *The History of Flintshire*, vol. 1 (Denbigh, 1961), p. 71.
13. See previous fn 12.
14. G. Williams, 'St. Winifred's Well: Ffynnon Wenfrewi', *Flintshire Historical Society Journal*, vol. 36, 2003, p. 36. D. Knowles, *The Monastic Order in England* (Cambridge, 1949), p. 346, fn 2.
15. G. Williams, *ibid*, p. 36.
16. *Ibid*, p. 36.
17. H. Pryce (ed), *The Acts of Welsh Rulers 1120–1283* (Cardiff, 2005), p. 346.
18. J. Tait (ref. fn 9), p. 41.
19. G. Williams, op cit, p. 36; see also R. A. Brown and H. M. Colvin, *The History of the King's Works*, vol. 1 (London, HMSO, 1963), p. 67, fn 2.
20. H. Pryce, op cit, p. 460.
21. *Victoria History of the County of Cheshire*, op cit, vol. 3, pp. 151–2 under 'The Abbey of Combermere'.
22. Rebuilt in 1769 and rededicated to St James the Great.
23. *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, vol. 1, 1846, p. 114.
24. Huw Price (ed), op cit, p. 346.

25. B. G. Charles, *Non-Celtic Place Names in Wales* (University College, London, 1938), p. 225.
26. See fn 18.
27. See fn 6.
28. See fn 11.
29. See fn 14.
30. See fn 19, *The History of the King's Works*, vol. 1, p. 67.
31. H. Pryce (ed), op cit, pp. 344–6 and p. 460 and *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, vol. I, 1846, pp. 102–8.
32. D. Williams, op cit, p. 92.
33. D. R. Thomas, *History of the Diocese of St Asaph*, (Oswestry, 1908) vol. 1, p. 49.
34. *Cheshire Sheaf*, vol. XIX, p. 38, 1922, quoting from *Calendar Inquisitions miscellaneous*, vol. 1, p. 302.
35. J. G. Edwards (ed), *Littere Wallie* (Cardiff, 1940), Nos. 135, 144, 150.
36. For first date indulgences issued by Pope see Sumption ref, fn 40, p. 141.
37. Sir Walter Raleigh, *The Passionate Man's Pilgrimage*.
38. *Cywydd Gwenferwi a'i Ffynnon* see Maredudd ap Huw, op cit, pp. 154–9.
39. N. White, *Gerard Manley Hopkins in Wales* (Seren, 1998), p. 47–8.
40. For a discussion on Indulgences see J. Sumption *Pilgrimage* (Faber & Faber, 1975) p. 141–5 and R. W. Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages* (Penguin, 1970), pp. 136–43.
41. *Calendar Papal Registers concerning Great Britain*, vol. 7, p. 504.
42. This is my own speculation.
43. G. H. Jones, *Celtic Britain and the Pilgrim Movement* (Hon. Soc. of Cymmrodorion, London, 1912), p. 406.
44. D. Webb, *Pilgrimage in Medieval England* (Hambledon & London, 2000), p. 134.
45. Thirty-sixth annual report of deputy keeper Public Records, 1875, *Welsh Records: Recognizance Roll of Chester*, p. 214.
46. G. H. Jones, op cit, pp. 450–1.
47. Gerard Manley Hopkins, SJ, see ch. 1, fn 39.
48. R. B. Martin, *Gerard Manley Hopkins a very Private Life* (Harper Collins, 1991), p. 240.
49. R. C. Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrimages*, (Book Club Associates, 1977), pp. 96–9.
50. A. Walsham, 'Holywell: contesting sacred pace in post-Reformation Wales', p. 213, in W. Coster and A. Spicer (eds) *Sacred Space in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge).
51. M. J. C. Lowry, 'St Winifred and the Lady Margaret Beaufort', *The Library*, sixth series, vol. 5, No. 2, 1983.
52. See fn 45.
53. C. Given-Wilson (ed), *The Chronicle of Adam Usk* (Oxford, 1997), p. 463.
54. Lowry, op cit, p. 111.
55. *Ibid*, p. 112–3.
56. See fn 50, his wife Isabella bequeathed her russet coloured gown to deck the image of St Winefride.
57. See E. R. Kibble, *The Stained-Glass Windows in the Collegiate Church of St Mary Warwick* (Leamington Spa, 2005).
58. Chester Recognizance Roll 4–5, Edward IV, M. 8.
59. Chester Recognizance Roll, Richard III, m. Id.
60. Chester Recognizance Roll, Henry VII, m. 2.20, May 1486.
61. *Thirty-ninth Annual Report Deputy Keeper*, 1878, PRO, Chester Recognizance Roll.
62. I. Ross, *Shrewsbury Abbey, The Parish Church of the Holy Cross*, R. J. L. Smith Associates, 1999.
63. The evidence from H. Owen and J. B. Blakeway, *A History of Shrewsbury*, 1825, p. 78 is given below. T. Gray Hulse is of the opinion that the figures were part of a tomb chest and if it was a depiction of St Winefride then the accompanying figure is more likely to have been St Eleri rather than St Beuno.
64. Owen and Blakeway, *ibid*, p. 73.
65. A. T. Gaydon, *The Victoria County History of Shropshire* (London, 1973), vol. 2, 1973, p. 33, citing British Museum Hargrave ms 313, ff52 v-53.

66. G. H. Jones, op cit, pp. 34–5.
67. Lowry, op cit, who cites Calendar of Patent Rolls Henry VII and Owen and Blakeway, op cit, p.122 f.
68. Owen and Blakeway, op cit, 67–8.
69. For a discussion on the Chapter Seal see D. H. Williams, *A Catalogue of Welsh Ecclesiastical Seals as known down to A.D. 1600: Part III: Capitular Seals*, p. 159 and D. R Thomas, op cit, vol. 1, pp. 376–7.
70. I am grateful to T. Gray Hulse for this observation. He further adds that one of Baronius' helpers was the exiled bishop of St Asaph Thomas Goldwell.
71. F. H. Crossley, 'Screens, Lofts, and Stalls situated in Wales and Monmouthshire, part four: Denbighshire', p. 3, *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, vol. xcix, p. 3.
72. Browne Willis, *Diocese of Bangor* (1721), p. 302–3.
73. M. Gray, *Images of Piety: the Iconography of traditional religion in late medieval Wales* (BAR, British Series, Oxford, 316, 2000).
74. Ibid, p. 34.
75. M. Lewis, *Stained-Glass in north Wales up to 1850* (Altrincham, 1970), pp. 52–3 and plate 53.
76. *Gentleman's Magazine*, November 1825, pp. 401–2 and M. Lewis, *ibid*, pp. 52–3.
77. Marriage negotiations for the marriage of the Spanish Princess Katheryn to Prince Arthur began in 1489.
78. See M. Gray, 'Welsh Saints in Westminster Abbey', *Trans Hon. Society of Cymmrodorion* (London, 2006), vol. 13, n.s., pp. 9–12.
79. P. Lord, *The Visual Culture of Wales; Medieval Vision* (Cardiff, UWP, 2003), pp. 273–4.
80. For the discussion which follows have relied on: Enid Roberts, 'The Renaissance in the Vale of Clwyd', *Flintshire Historical Society Publications*, vol. 15, 1954–5, pp. 52–63, and Enid Roberts, 'The impact of the Cistercians on the Welsh Life and Culture in north and mid Wales.' *Transactions of the Denbighshire Historical Society*, vol. 50, 2001, pp. 13–20.
81. T. Pennant, *The History of the Parishes of Whiteford and Holywell* (London, 1796), p. 33.
82. E. Roberts see fn 80 under Denbighshire.
83. In the Middle Ages a *cywydd* was a term for a group of poetic metres consisting of rhyming couplets, each of seven couplets. I am grateful to K. Lloyd Gruffydd for his English translation
84. Medieval [sic] Gwynedd was divided into two parts: *Uwch Conwy* 'above the Conwy, i.e. west of the river, and *Is Conwy* 'below the Conwy' (known as *Perfeddwlad*).
85. C. R. Williams, op cit, p. 132.
86. This *cywydd* has been translated and discussed by T. M. Charles-Edwards, *Two Medieval Welsh Poems – Stori Gwenfrewi a' i ffynnon – The Story of St Winefride and her Well by Tudur Aled (1480–1526)* (Gwasg Gomer, Llandysul, 1971), no pagination.
87. E. Hubbard, *The Buildings of Wales Clwyd* (Denbighshire and Flintshire) (Penguin, 1986), p. 371.
88. W. Salter ed, *Remarks and Collections of Thomas Hearne*, (Oxford Historical Society, 1921), vol. 79, p. 149.
89. T. Pennant, *Tours in Wales*, vol. 1 (London, 1778), pp. 28–31 and repeated in Pennant's *History of the Parishes of Whiteford and Holywell* (London, 1796), pp. 219–25.
90. All are badly weathered. Illustrations of them are to be found in C. David op cit.
91. Arrived England 1501, married first Arthur d.1502 and second Henry 1509.
92. Not as profuse here as in St Mary's Parish Church, Mold, Flintshire.
93. D. Thomas, op cit, p. 31, reference to Harleian MSS 2129, f.175.
94. M. K. Jones and M. G. Underwood, *The King's Mother Lady Margaret Beaufort Countess of Richmond and Derby* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 150.
95. Quoted by D. Williams, op cit, *Caiteaux*, p. 104.
96. T. M. Charles-Edwards, op cit, lines 108–12.
97. Maredudd ap Huw, op cit, pp. 178 & 184.
98. M. Lewis, 'The Glass at Gresford', *Transactions Denbighshire Historical Society*, vol. 7, p. 134.
99. *The Royal Commission on Ancient Monuments in Wales and Monmouthshire II, County of Flint*, 1912, p. 44.
100. C. David, op cit.