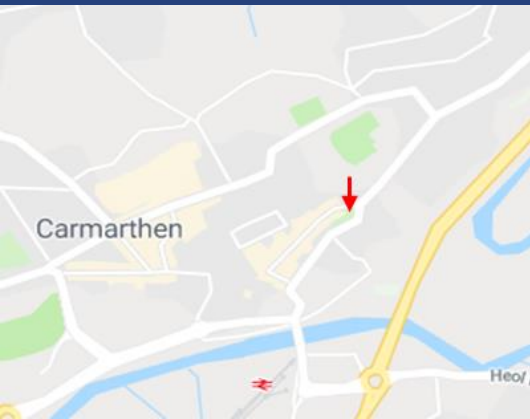


Personal Identity in Welsh Church Communities

The institutionalisation of the Christian church in Wales has long been affected by issues of national identity; the establishment of a Welsh archbishopric was one of the most important issues in the move towards Welsh disestablishment¹. How relevant is participation in a church community to the identities of Welsh Christians in today's increasingly secular society?

St Peter's Church in Carmarthen "plays a significant role in the life of the town"² according to its own website, but, beyond baptisms, marriages and funerals, how do members of the local community engage with the church and how does it inform how they self identify?



Background

The church itself is Anglican and is governed by the Church in Wales, the Welsh counterpart to the Church of England. There has been a church on the site for around 1500 years.

St Peter's Church is a fairly open church with its doors being open to the public for a significant amount of time outside of formal services. Aside from the usual Sunday services, morning prayer services are held three times per week along with midweek communion services held on Wednesdays. These smaller, less obligatory, services are likely to attract a slightly different crowd from those who attend the Sunday services, one that is, firstly, more inclined towards public and communal expressions of faith, and is, secondly, likely older and passed the age of retirement, allowing them the time to attend weekday services. The regularity of these, more exclusive, services suggests a decent rate of attendance. A church led bible study group is also held one evening per week.

Method

Attending multiple services of different kinds to conduct participant observation would be the best way to study who is engaging with the church beyond the Sunday services, as well as how and to what extent they do engage.

Asking for interviews would be the best way to determine how those being studied self identify. While the interviews should be kept unstructured, some of the key lines of questioning should be: how they would label themselves, how important they feel church membership is to their identity and why they engage with the church in the way that they do.

Ethics

When conducting the participant observation it will be vital that the participants understand why I am there and what I am doing, matters of faith and identity are inherently personal and therefore are sensitive topics, while it is often best to avoid the connotations of judgement that 'research' often brings, when dealing with people that one hopes to work with, honesty must come first.

Following the reasoning above, the interviews should be kept unstructured, to avoid the feeling of interrogation.

For both of these methods of fieldwork, informed, and preferably written, consent must be obtained from those involved.



¹Walker, D. (1976). Disestablishment and Independence. In: D. Walker, ed., *A History of the Church in Wales*. Cardiff: Qualitex Printing.

²St Peters Church. (2019). *Friends of St. Peters - St. Peters Church, Carmarthen*. [online] Available at: <https://stpeterscarmarthen.org.uk/church-groups/friends-of-st-peters> [Accessed 2 Oct. 2019].