

# LLANCARFAN SOCIETY NEWSLETTER 156 DECEMBER 2013

CHURCHGOERS'  
EDITION



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## EDITORIAL

Churchgoers' edition! What am I on about? It's perfectly clear that the lovely decent people who turn up to church services in St. Cadoc's on a Sunday or Wednesday could very often be counted on the fingers of two hands. But, despite my being numbered with the village pagans, I'm among the countless thousands who delight in our church, and the richness of heritage that it represents. Your and my ancestors made this church, which was the focus of their craftsmanship, their music, their art, their births, their marriages, their mourning and their celebration. The recent remarkable discoveries & funding of the resurrection of these treasures of craft and history bring a timely reminder that we must not let this heritage slip away. As a small gesture, the *Llancarfan Society Committee* sees this as an opportunity to devote most of these pages to celebrating and informing both visitors and ourselves about the revelations that have put St. Cadoc's back on the map. It's been a year or two since St. Cadoc founded the monastery here, the 'clas' of circa 650 AD, giving itself the task of disseminating its messages of spirituality and learning. A key part now of the Church Conservation Project's brief, handed down with benevolence by our funders and sponsors, is very fittingly 'outreach' and education. It chimes well with the Llancarfan Society's aspiration to conserve and pass on our village's history. So we are more than pleased to be part of recording and summarising some of the news and the tales, questionings and understandings, that have caused us all to be 'uplifted and amazed'.

## THE GHOSTS OF WORSHIP PAST

### *A sigh of relief as the church doors re-open*

It is not always easy to peel the conservators off the wall. When Jane Rutherford and Anne Ballantyne are up there, dealing with the perilous cave system of micro-cavities beneath our wall paintings, they need to concentrate. That's why, during the eight-week conservation sessions, there appear on the church door discomfiting 'closed' notices that hardly placate the frustration of disappointed visitors. The frustration is mutual – Jane & Anne say they'd much rather put 'Welcome' on the mat. But, despite their instinct for education, they fear they'd never get any work done. It's a dilemma, the downside of managing access to the remarkable.

Our paintings are remarkable from at least two perspectives. The first is that they've survived at all. So much of Britain's church heritage, hidden rather than destroyed in the Reformation, has vanished through ignorant Victorian 'improvements', or been mutilated or destroyed by mistaken attempts to preserve or restore. Nor was the destruction reserved for the Victorians. The biggest gaps in our paintings are thanks (it appears) to a 20<sup>th</sup> century cupboard, electrical gullies, and the famous architect George Pace's juggernaut of a vestry. Not surprisingly, people are therefore drawn in their hundreds by the fact that *so few* mediaeval wall paintings of *such* quality have managed to survive *undiscovered* so late in Britain.

The quality of the work is the second perspective. They are of international significance. Scholars are not reserved in describing 'our' wall artist as 'a genius', his work innovative, & in several ways unique. Conservators have nose to wall intimacy with the artist. They trace his brushstrokes with their scalpels. They see daily how, with no preparatory under-drawing, this mediaeval craftsman uses the simplest pigments to turn a headful of stories into the visual celebration on the wall. He was that good.

Anne and Jane are also the first to admit to the privilege and excitement of their being the magicians chosen to reveal again, intact, the lost creativity of five and a quarter centuries ago. 'Intact' is the keyword. The palette of basic pigments that the artist worked with – ochre (iron oxides), lamp black (carbon), and lime wash (calcium carbonate) – came with a many-lifetimes guarantee. The layers of post-Reformation slaked lime 'fossilised' the art in time (a bit like the volcanic dust of Pompeii and Herculaneum). But when you've got up to around twenty-seven layers of limestone trying to pull the paintings off the wall, and under-wall watercourses of damp trying to push them off – then 'intactness' doesn't come easy. In Jane Rutherford's words, 'These pigments don't fade – they fall off!'

**OK.** So when the conservators are up on their scaffold, fighting off visitors, what are they tackling, and what unique survivals are they rescuing?



Well, we've mentioned the mini Wookey Hole caves within the walls, Llancarfan's 'model village' version of the caverns & gorges (as it were) that riddle the Cheddar limestone across the Severn. Our church-wall limestone layers differ only in scale – micro-caverns and nano-caves. Into these holes our rescuing conservators inject lime-bearing solutions, at times with hypodermics, on other occasions on an epic douche-like scale.

At the macro end of the operations, they point to the gaping flaming mouth of the giant dragon (not George's) that can now be seen, about to engulf the tray of golden coins which rewards the deadly sin of *Avarice*. Behind this hidden picture was what Jane named 'The Bat Latrine'. Many of our sensitively-protected bats roost over The Sins. The recently cleaned, filled and consolidated cavity, *behind* the limewash layers and beneath the bats, had for decades been the depository of our residents' guano donations. Not the pleasantest of tasks for any art conservator to tackle.

Then again, our conservators will share with academic specialists an account of migrant salts within the walls (carried by those *Legoland* under-wall moisture flows). Our ancestors were buried beneath and alongside these church walls. Their return to nature means that their natural salts dissolve and themselves travel up the walls, crystallise beneath the lime layers, and then try to push off or cloud the paintings. We may have a unique '*Death & The Gallant*' displayed on the now visible surface (read about Dr. Gray's new booklet on p.16), but beneath the paintings conservators also battle with a zombie-like invasion by the salty dead.



But enough of the underside story. What are the unique pictorial elements that make this art important? Large and small, this is a taste of them:

- George is only the third St. George, dragon, & full supporting cast ever found in Wales. It is by far the finest.
- George's costume is remarkably ornate. From the horse's caparison to his armour & flowing sleeves, it is a feast for costume historians.
- George is blessed by the Virgin Mary – the only discovered image on a British wall of St. Mary blessing the deeds of 'Our Lady's Knight'.
- The two coats of arms, the local family Bawdrip, and an incompletely surviving Raglan/Herbert, are quite rare as 'words from our sponsors', promoting the local gentries' benevolence in paying for the paintings.
- *Death & The Gallant*. Painted maybe by a less assured hand, but the only wall-painted revelation in Britain of this mini *Dance of Death*.
- The pioneering sophistication of style – the paintings boldly break through the frame where the dynamism of the subjects needed it. This Baroque innovation was not to become commonplace in Britain until about 1600, more than a century after our works were painted.
- And then there are the Sins – elaborately pictured, politically sensitive, and as they reveal themselves, perhaps the finest surviving example in Britain to depict the sinners' fates as they slide into a (sadly vanished) hell through the fiery dragons' mouths.



To sum up then, according to the conservators they mostly expect to spend much of their professional lives conserving the wonders of *known* works. In this case, they have discovered and rescued and re-presented works that were for so long unknown. It happens to very few. We in Llancarfan join them in the privilege of taking this journey of discovery.

## **CHURCH CHORES & WARDEN'S WISDOM :**

### **Some Q&As with Churchwarden Jean Veysey**

*The dynamic Mrs. Veysey is reticent about the good that she does. But do it she does do. Her CV (as if she needed one) includes many add-ons to her (mother of four, grandmother of thirteen) family life in Llantrytyd. E.G. 13+ years as an NHS volunteer with the Eye Unit, Heath Hospital, proved, she says, among the most interesting of life's opportunities. And now she works with the Cowbridge Insight Club, which looks after blind people. But back in the day she ran a 'supplies' office in Cardiff, supported her husband's MOD role in Germany, and for five years was General Secretary of the Vale Agricultural Show, even by commuting from Dusseldorf. So the skills she brings to St. Cadoc's are admired, prized - & probably feared!*

**Q :** *How did you become a churchwarden?*

**A :** The Rev. Malcolm Davies deliberately told me a big whopper. When asked what I would have to do as warden his one word was 'nothing'. Thirteen years later I'm still in a state of shock – and it was in the interregnum of 18 long months after Malcolm retired that I fully realised how much there was to do.

**Q :** *What's surprising about running a church?*

**A :** Well, don't let anyone be put off applying in future, but I'm astonished by how much paper – a whole rainforest – arrives in the post, on the computer, by hand, with so many bodies requiring information. Endless lists re church buildings, possessions (not of the satanic kind), activities (see the 'sins on the wall' for past congregations!), attendees, ages, what they ate for breakfast . . . ! It's like a visit to the Dentist, awful while in the chair, but lovely after the ache has disappeared.

**Q :** *What do you prize most in a congregation?*

**A :** Willing volunteers not only with a sense of duty and competence, but with joy to serve whoever is in charge. I'm particularly grateful to those thankless cleaners who remember dust-catching ledges under the pews, and flower-arrangers who wonderfully take away the old oasis!

**Q :** *What was your most embarrassing moment?*

**A :** My first Midnight Mass in St Cadoc's, 24 December, years ago. Husband driving up Treguff hill meets car coming down. Trying to reverse, requests wife (wearing posh satin Christmas shoes) to assist reversal by getting out into the mud. Daughter-in-law in back hides from resultant argument as to unsuitability of satin shoes for ankle deep mud. Finally arrive late and fall down steps into church. At least 1000 turn to look – well, we were well attended in those days – at 3 inches tall churchwarden!

*Continues on Page 15*

## WHAT'S NOT TO CELEBRATE?

**St. Cadoc's Open Day : 14 September 2013**

Back in 1548, when the iconoclasts were bringing in buckets of slaked lime to obliterate our mediaeval wall paintings, they probably weren't thinking 'they'll have fun re-discovering this lot in 2009'. Some would surely be thinking 'It doesn't seem five minutes since grand-dad helped those visiting painters to put up the scaffolding. Pity really.' And history certainly records those who chose to take into hiding the church's spiritual iconography and craftsmanship in hope of a return to times that would appreciate such creativity. Those times are now. And now that we have had a full four or more years of revelation and admiration in which to enjoy the hidden craftsmanship, we're beginning to realize just how lucky we are that these works of art are returning to re-energise our village church.

During these latest years of discovery, those ancient paintings have often called the tune for our *September Open Days*. We felt it only natural that one way or another, youngsters should be in the church (alongside the parish record investigators and the memorial transcribers) to respond creatively to the works of their ancestors. It was a high point when two years ago Michael Wood chose to film us for BBC-2, telling some of the Reformation's story against a background of our youngsters re-creating images limed out by puritanical excess. Good stuff. 'Outreach' continues.

This year, given that the church's other enigmatic treasure, the reredos, was being conserved behind chipboard, and that a return to a peaceful civilised norm still seemed a millennium away, we went one step further. We invited the animator Gerald Conn to join illustrator Emma Levey in sharing the skills of animation with visiting youngsters. The charming outcome is meant ultimately to form part of a future interpretive video.

We also responded with enthusiasm to (Judge) Greg Taylor's generous long-term offer to mount a fund-raising concert in the church. It was splendid to join an enthusiastic audience for his time-honoured folk band, *Yr Hwntws*, and to applaud their performance of songs which included some of those collected by our local bardic rascal, Iolo Morganwg. To see Greg's 1<sup>st</sup> birthday grandchild dancing in the aisle to grand-dad's music was a delight, and mirrored the enjoyment of the day's 200 or so visitors.

Thanks again then to all involved, whether they brewed a welcome, baked enticements, be-flowered corners, or guided our understanding (as did Bill Thomas & Sam Smith in telling tales of the walls). In the words of our Archdeacon Peggy, and the Rev Mark Dimond - 'the church was alive'.





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 OPEN DAY  
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 14  
 September  
 2013





## BUT LLANCARFAN'S NOT JUST ABOUT CHURCHIFYING!

You've heard of trophy wives? Well, the guys on the right are trophy husbands! Graham Brain has won the Annual Road Safety Support Award for his GB Extreme Tour, and Jim Barratt's team scooped up a firmament of awards for Jim's brilliant Village Hall Community Cinema. Hence, the visit to view the silver screen on the 13th of November by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media & Sport, Maria Miller, with MP Alun Cairns & Jeff James, our local councillor.



With her usual talent for pleasing our tastebuds, Gwyneth Plows led the Mystery Tour to the 'Bunch of Grapes', in Pontypridd on 3 November. We were scared to bits by winners in the Fox's Hallowe'en night. And back on September 8th, Gileston ploughs were out in force to celebrate the fine machines that turn the earth for nature's bounty.



## WHAT'S OCCURIN'? OR MAYBE EVEN OCCUR'D!

### LOCAL NEWS

*This news rundown below is an unashamed rip-off from the online **Membership Newsletter of the Llancarfan Community Cinema**. It is winningly managed by our Vice-Chairman, **Jim Barratt**. It reflects the fact that here at the Llancarfan Society we're trying to do our bit to develop useful pointers to our other community websites, of which we've discovered at least eight. We plan to update the online version of our Newsletter Archive, & also reflect the news from sites run by, for instance, the school, pub, cinema, church, Cerys Potter Foundation, and Community Council. So 'watch that space' as **Llancarfan.org.uk** provides a sign-posting page, so to speak, linking to community grapevines. Meanwhile, Jim writes :*

- ❖ The run up to Christmas is always busy and this year is no exception. The coming weeks have plenty to offer, and all are welcome.
- ❖ On Thursday **5 December** St Cadoc's is celebrating completion of restoration of the Reredos with a gathering in the church from 6.30pm (please let Penny Fell or Jean Veysey know if you wish to attend).
- ❖ Friday **6 December** has an evening with the *Vale Male Voice Choir* in the Village Hall, organised by the Llancarfan Society. Tickets, which cost £5 for adults and £1 for children, are available from Gwyneth Plows or any other committee member, and include refreshments (you are invited to bring your own drink).
- ❖ The village Christmas tree will be lit on **Sunday 8 December**. Please gather by the tree next to the ford from 6.00pm and be prepared for carols!
- ❖ Finally, Jenny and Edward Knott have kindly re-launched the *Llancarfan Christmas Quiz* this year, taking over where Audrey Porter left off. Quiz sheets are available from Jenny, Sue Taylor or *The Fox and Hounds* from **1st December**, and cost £2. All money raised goes to the Village Hall fund, and answers need to be returned by **4th January**. The quiz will also be available at the *Despicable Me 2* show (**3 p.m. 14 Dec**).



<http://us5.campaign-archive2.com/?u=8a9d210eabc7122695d58347a&id=ced15b5376&e=5d5fb26b7d>

### LLANCARFAN SOCIETY : OUR PRESIDENT WRITES

“Returning home to Llancarfan for a number of very happy reunions was only possible because of the kindness of Kay and Graham Brain, who looked after my home and (sadly) the last day of my cat. I was able to attend the Hundredth anniversary of my school where I was a pupil, having



previously attended the fiftieth with my mother. Another reunion I had was with the staff of the school where I had been head teacher for 33 years.”

“The Annual dinner of the Llancarfan Society was again an evening of good food and excellent company. Many thanks are deserved by the organisers and the committee.”

“For me the highlight of the visit was the Church Open Day, when the life of Iolo Morgannwg took on a new perspective for me. My thanks to Yr Hwntws who performed wonderfully. I’m looking forward to seeing everyone at Christmas. But in the meantime, why not now propose Llancarfan become a world heritage site! ”

*Barbara [Milheusen]*

### **ASPECTS OF ST. CADOC’S CHRISTMAS CALENDAR**

3 <sup>rd</sup> December	1400 Barry U3A for ‘wall talk’.
5 <sup>th</sup> December	1830 onwards. Presentation Evening. See opposite. <i>All are welcome to join ‘the great &amp; good’ in viewing the reredos restoration, the latest wall conservation, &amp; the launch of Maddy Gray’s fascinating new church booklet.</i>
12 <sup>th</sup> December	1100 Cowbridge Book Club for ‘wall talk’.
15 <sup>th</sup> December	1900 The Nine Lessons & Carols service.
16 <sup>th</sup> December	0930 School Carol practice.
17 <sup>th</sup> December	1030 School Carol Service.
24 <sup>th</sup> December	1500 Christingle & Crib Service.
24 <sup>th</sup> December	1130 Midnight Mass.
25 <sup>th</sup> December	1100 Christmas Morning Eucharist.

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For most of the past issues & more details please see the (to be updated) website at <http://www.llancarfansociety.org.uk/>

**NEXT COPY DEADLINE PLEASE : 21 FEBRUARY 2014**

Behind a wall of chipboard, and the occasional drapery of gauze for services, brilliant conservators of wood & mediaeval colour have been working to understand and breathe new life into the mysterious Reredos.



Paint conservator Liz Cheadle tells the Secretary of State about the reredos before she conserved its colours



Sam Smith narrates some of the tales on the walls to Maria Miller, the Reverend Mark Dimond, and the Vale MP Alun Cairns



Councillor Jeff James joins Maria Miller under the watchful eye of churchwarden Jean Vesey

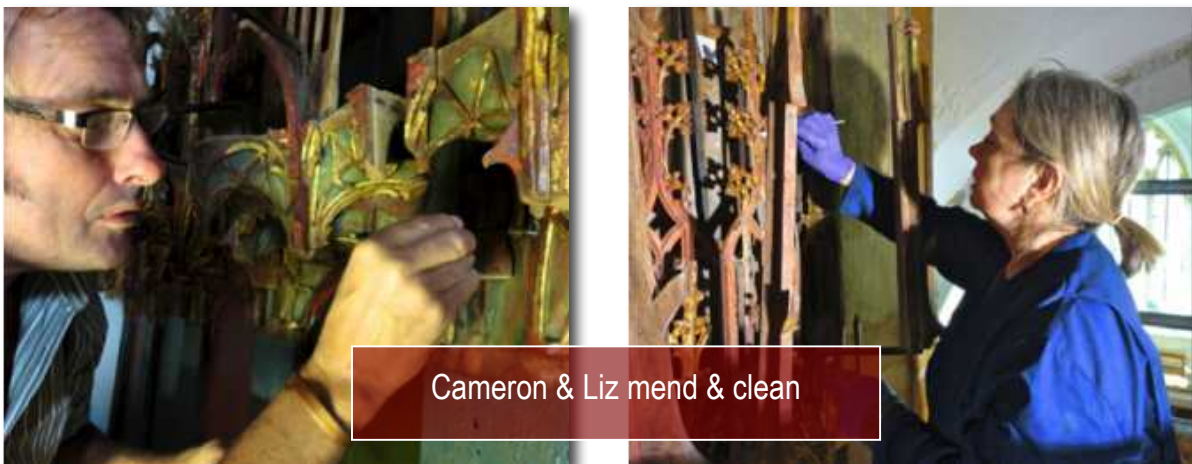




## A 'CURIOUS & COSTLY TABERNACLE' *The Mediaeval Rainbow Revealed*

It may be an astonishing & ancient relic which is now revealed again, rising behind the north aisle's altar. However, those of us who in the past were tempted to call the 'reredos' the 'What on earth's this Here-o-dos?' are not the first to question its history. (You'll gather this bit isn't the formal report on the history of St. Cadoc's other exquisitely puzzling church treasure!)

Back in 1771, a survey of Glamorgan churches reported that St. Cadoc's 'curious and costly tabernacle, which forms a screen for the altar, and the canopy over it, are greatly out of repair.' This illuminating observation (*Gloucester Archives ref : D936 E/213*) turns out to be important as the *earliest reference* to what we now know as the 'reredos'. The term 'curious' is significant too, because this 'may indicate that its origins were obscure even at that date.'<sup>1</sup>



Obscure even in 1771? So back then, in George the Third's time, with a vicar called Richard Bassett here to summon his flock, nobody seemed to know where it came from. They didn't keep things in good order here. According to the said survey, for instance, the pavement (of the north aisle) was ' . . . tho' newly done, as coarse as a farmer's yard, and ought to be taken up and laid better.' So the dusty old reredos was low on priorities!

It's higher now though. Over the past months, the chipboard barrier has obscured this intricate creation of the past, and its detailed conservation in the present. Go really close now and you can relish what the craftsmen of about 1510 carved, and then what their colourist colleagues painted almost instantly. (The 'Polychrome Conservator' Liz Cheadle knows this because there is no telltale dust layer between the base wood and the colours.) Mind you, 'peyntynge' is not the whole story, because the application of

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<sup>1</sup> Dr Amelia Pannett, *Archaeology Wales Historical Report* to St Cadoc's PCC

gold leaf (of which there is much here) seems almost a process of enfolding the golden wafers around the carving. Others will explain.

While the gold leaf may crown the pinnacles of this reredos, there are other rediscovered colours too which give clues to its place in history. You'll find here blue-greenish azurite, lead white, vermilion, red lead, and copper glazes too. Azurite is a copper ore, ground to produce various intensities of colour. As for the lead colours, you're probably familiar with them. But vermilion? This 'red sulphide of mercury' was made by the rare synthesis of mercury & sulphur 'into the likeness of cinnabar', much sought after by the alchemists, and not readily available before the 1400s. Somehow they made chemistry sound quite lyrical in those times mediaeval.

Back here in the present, Liz Cheadle, with Conservation Joiner Cameron Stewart, and led by Timber Conservator Hugh Harrison – these three have been lyrical too with their skills and craftsmanship. They tell us how unique this 'costly tabernacle' is. As Hugh explains, '... canopy work like the reredos at Llancafarn can be found in almost every cathedral and major church in England and Wales. But none of these grand arrays of woodwork are coloured and gilded as at Llancafarn.'

Hugh also points to the unique use of 'simple metal brackets to display the ornate pinnacles, in front of the canopy spires. They float as though by magic - a daring concept not found anywhere else.'

Well, judge for yourselves. The PCC's Conservation Panel still look forward to the final conclusions, not least some intriguing hints as to the age of the wood and where it came from, which we hope to report in due course. Liz Cheadle says that the investigations 'have revealed how the canopies were reassembled at Llancafarn and mounted onto early softwood panels.' So again, the implication is that they were originally designed for somewhere else, and moved here when they were perhaps already 200 years old. Today's layout is not the original one.

Over to you then, history detectives. Do we see here re-structured relics rescued from the dissolution of local monasteries in around 1537? Might they have come from Neath Abbey, or perhaps Margam? Might they have fallen off the back of a cathedral, so to speak – for Llandaff has been in a rather ruinous state on more than one occasion in history? Perhaps the scientific dating process and research will reinforce some of these options.

Meanwhile though, all praise to the work of the wood & paint conservators. They have surely transformed a neglected treasure into an intricate thing of beauty, delicately carved, and splendid in its original subtle colours.

***Continued from Page 6***

## **Q&As with Churchwarden Jean Veysey**

**Q :** *As you imply, church congregations are getting smaller. How would you change that?*

**A :** I'd enclose the nave by installing glass upper units, and glass doors below – sited within central archways – similar to Llantwit Major. This would keep the nave very warm, tropical, and encourage more to attend. We can hold up to a hundred people in the nave alone. And cooler temperatures for the south aisle would allow the paintings to be preserved in 'art gallery' conditions. Many people would not be happy with this, but smaller congregations are a sign of times, and if we could keep people warm in traditionally cold churches, this is one area where excuses could be overcome. It might also encourage those who come to see the paintings to stay and talk about the church. Even go along to their own.

**Q :** *To paraphrase Private Eye, has anything unusual ever happened to you in connection with a bat?*

**A :** Well, when I played for Wales against Australia, I batted many a six towards the Bus Terminus. No – sorry – wishful thinking! There is nothing amusing about bats. There was one unfortunate incident a few years ago, when the dehydrated remains of one (it was dead already) clattered up the extension pipe of the vacuum cleaner. When the bat people came we took the dust bag apart to retrieve the evidence. It was duly confirmed that the bat had died from natural causes. Apparently it had been a bad wet summer for bats, with not enough insects to feed on. But no. With five species of the creatures roosting in the church, you sometimes feel they are better looked after than the congregations, and those of us who have to clear up after their generous donations. The bats I mean.

**Q :** *Finally, what most delights you about the church?*

**A :** The pillars. They are strong, standing solidly planted on the ground, stretching up to the roof, symbolic of faith. The church is filled with the sense of prayers over the centuries. It never fails to inspire me. And looking in the visitors' book, it seems I'm not alone.



Opening of Galilee Chapel, Llantwit Major : 2 November 2013

## DANCING WITH DEATH

*An Awful Warning  
in a Welsh Church*

by

*Dr Madeleine Gray*



**5 December 2013** : Launch date for this new booklet, a fascinating companion piece to St. Cadoc's first & best-selling 'wall paintings' publication, *Step In St. George*. It is written by Dr. Madeleine Gray, Reader in History for the University of South Wales. May we have the pleasure of the next dance?

“ By the end of the Middle Ages, all across Europe, churches and other public buildings had graphic paintings and carvings of death – not just skeletons but corpses full of worms.

The church at Llanccarfan has a particularly gruesome example of this macabre art form, in a painting of 'Death and the Gallant'.

Our revolting skeletal figure grasps a young man firmly by the hand. Was this a portrait of a real young man? Whether a portrait or an archetype, our *Death & The Gallant* is a unique surviving image on the wall of a British church.”



Dr Gray & Llantwit historian Nigel Williams at the opening of The Galilee Chapel