



FACTsheet 16

St Celynin's Church

Perhaps one of Conwy's best-kept secrets, St Celynin's Church and holy well rest amidst rocky outcrops high above the Conwy Valley, revealing remnants of ancient cultures and times past. From the 12th century, our ancestors would have navigated the steep winding tracks, nearly 1000ft above the nearest village of Henryd, to worship here.

Why was the church built in such a remote place?

The history of St Celynin's Church goes back much further than the church building. The area may seem remote to us now, but if we go back hundreds, if not thousands of years, we would come across small communities living here. You can still see evidence of those former communities today, with the foundations of medieval houses outside the churchyard wall to the east, as well as evidence of much older structures such as standing stones, hut circles and hill forts.



Llangelynin in the medieval period?



The tracks that lead to the church indicate that this area was an important crossing-point on the landscape, where farmers, herders, travellers and pilgrims followed routes leading to Conwy, Gwynedd, Llanrwst and even Ynys Enlli (Bardsey Island).

We know this must have been a popular route, because there was even an inn outside the churchyard to help weary travellers quench their thirst! The footings of the old inn are still visible - see if you can find them.



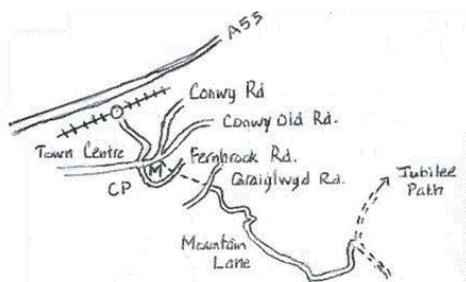
walking route

Grid reference: NGR SH 75126 73735

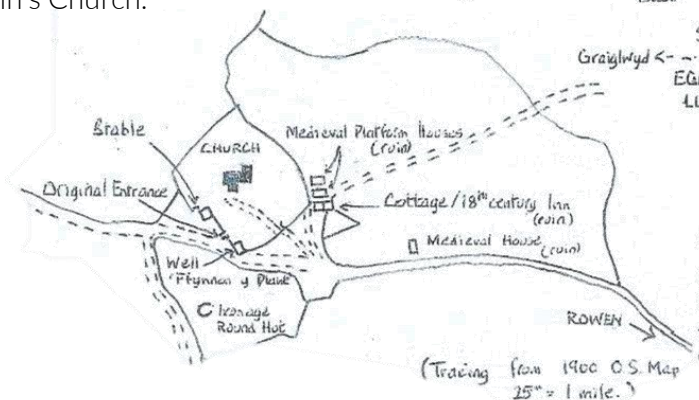
Nearest postcode: LL32 8LJ

This is a 2.5 mile walk which seems longer because of the climb up to Ty'n y Ffrith. From here the walk is much easier. The return journey should take half the time. Please ensure you are wearing suitable clothing and footwear for uneven terrain and changing weather conditions.

Starting at Penmaenmawr Museum, proceed up Conwy Old Road. Take the first right to Fernbrook Road, to Groesffordd Lane. Cross Graiglwyd Road to Mountain Lane and follow the route to Jubilee Pillars. Follow the track towards 'Ty'n y Ffrith'. Cross the stile which is below the large gate, and follow the path to the Afon Gyrach where you will find a stile and a bridge. Cross both, and continue along the path to the left of the wall to the ruined 'Waen Gyrach'.



Continue to the summit and follow the track towards the ruined 'Tyddyn Grasod' and large sheep pens. Bear right here, and cross the stile towards Ty'n y Ffridd Bach, where you will cross another stile. From here, follow the path to Garnedd Wen and St Celynin's Church.



exploring the church features

1. Porch

The porch is of the 15th century and the wooden threshold that you step over is 14th century. Remember to look up as you enter, to see the unusual sign above the church door.



You'll also see a 'squint window' in the porch. It is a type of hagioscope – a window positioned at an angle in the wall to permit people to see the altar from where it wasn't otherwise visible.

2. Water stoup

The water stoup was used by worshippers to cross themselves. It was still in use in the late 19th century.

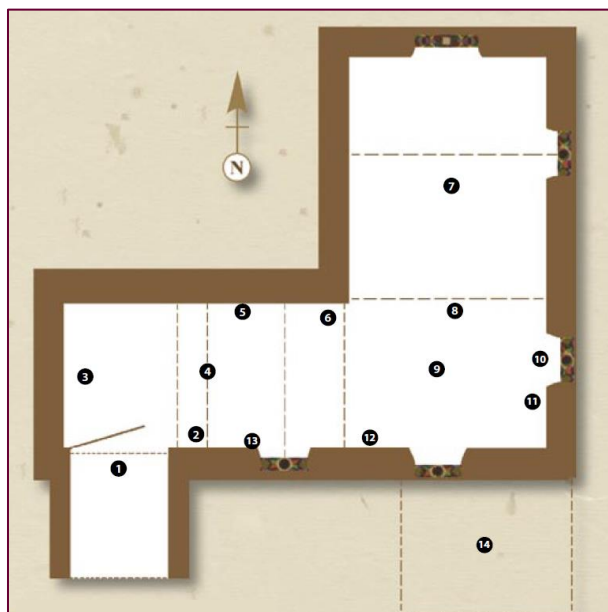
3. Font

The low, octagonal font is typical of 13th and 14th century fonts in this area. Many of them have been raised on pedestals.



4. Beam

This beam probably supported the rood loft above the rood screen. But after the loft was demolished, it was moved here to support a gallery which has now gone.



5. Nave walls

The walls of the nave date from the 12th century and are the oldest part of the church.

6. Panel

The panel in front of the pews is the remains of a 14th century rood screen and the box in front of it is thought to be that of a confessional or Rector's family pew.



7. **Capel Meibion or 'men's chapel'**

To the left near the altar, you'll see a raised area with an earth floor. This was known as 'the men's chapel', where until the 19th century the men would sit or stand during services, separated from the women. The floor would have been covered with rushes, meadowsweet or some other pleasant smelling leaves. Some people believe the 'men's chapels' were actually for the passing drovers, whose conduct (and possibly disease) parishioners wanted to keep at a distance!

8. **Benches**

The benches are from the 18th century. Notice the initials R.O.B., of the Reverend Owen Bulkeley, a former Rector and benefactor who died in 1737.

9. **Roof**

The remains of a boarded barrel-roof can be seen above the 14th century chancel.

10. **Statue niche**

To the left of the east window you'll notice the remnants of a niche. It dates from the 14th century and at one time it may have contained a statue of St Celynin. The window was installed later, removing part of the niche in the process.



11. **Writing on the wall**

In medieval times, the walls of many churches were painted with colourful images. The images helped worshippers understand the Bible teachings, because most people were unable to read or understand the Latin services. Some of the paintings depicted terrifying images that reminded people about what would happen to them if they didn't behave. During the Reformation (when Henry VIII broke away from the Church in Rome), a lot of these images were painted over or scrubbed away.

It is therefore likely that the wall writing in St Celynin's Church dates from the 17th century. The writing is the Creed (a statement of belief) and the Ten Commandments in Welsh, positioned below the words 'Fear God and honour the King'. Its position behind the altar served as a 'visual aid' for worshippers during services.

The painting of the skull, the "memento mori," was another popular image during this period, and is said to represent Jesus laying to rest the sin of Adam - to remind people of the inevitability of death.

12. Reading desk

The reading desk is thought to be Elizabethan apart from the later door.

13. Funeral bier

You'll see a ladder-like object positioned high on the church wall. This is a funeral bier that was used to carry the dead from their homes to their final resting place.



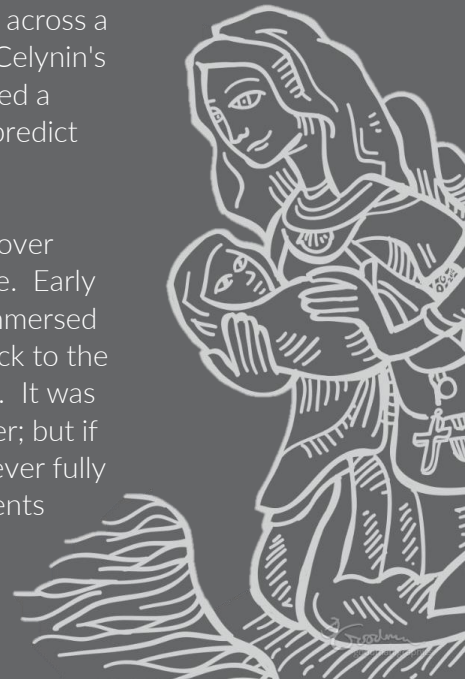
14. Capel Erianws

Look for the outline of the foundations of a small building to the left of the church as you leave. This was the former 'Capel Erianws' which was named after a farm in the parish.

St Celynin's Holy Well

If you head to the left corner of the churchyard, you'll come across a small, walled rectangular pool of water. This is known as St Celynin's Holy Well. Over the years, the waters of the Holy Well gained a reputation for having the power to heal sick children, or to predict whether a child's health would be restored.

The parents of the ill child would make the difficult journey over these mountains until they reached Cae Iol, a nearby cottage. Early morning or late evening, the child was carried to the well, immersed in the water and wrapped in blankets before being taken back to the cottage to sleep. Their clothes were then placed in the well. It was believed that if the clothes floated, the child would get better; but if the clothes sank, it was feared that the child would die or never fully recover from their illness. Some stories also tell us that parents would immerse their child in the water, in the desperate hope that the healing properties associated with the well would cure their child.



St Celynin

Celynin was allegedly one of the sons of the wicked prince Helig, whom legend has it, treated local people so badly that he was punished by God and his lands and palace were drowned by the sea.

In the legend, Helig pledges to send his sons to monasteries to devote their lives as Holy Men, to make up for his sins (which seems a bit 'off!'). This was the 6th century - the 'age of the saints' - when holy men were setting up their 'llan' (Welsh for enclosures) from which to preach. These enclosures were usually by the sea, near streams or rivers, or high in the hills.

If there is any truth in the legend, Celynin may have chosen the site because there was already an established community there. In the field beyond the churchyard are the remains of a round stone hut. This is romantically thought to be the enclosure where Celynin set up his preaching cell around 1400 years ago.

Also allegedly, Celynin's brother was Rhychwyn, whom it is said established the beautiful church on top of the mountain in Llanrhychwyn, near Llanrwst.

St Rhychwyn's Church is one of the oldest in Wales and it is well worth a visit.

