

Chapter 3 The North West pp 50-51

St Cenydd is Cowers' own Saint, and his legendary upbringing is classical in the annals of ancient history. The birth and upbringing of St Cenydd is described in some detail in Capgrave's 'Nova Legenda Angliae', written in Latin, and published in 1516. (However see Note 1)

St Cenydd was of noble blood, the son of Dihocus, a Prince of Brittany, who possessed a lovely daughter and was intimate with her, subsequently she became pregnant. As the Rev. J. D. Davies puts it 'by a most unnatural sin'. The child was born with his calf held up beneath its thigh, 'as just symbol of the great sin of its conception'. It is said that King Arthur ruled Britain at this time and held court at Loughor (apparently on Christmas Day). The child was taken there where Arthur ordered it to be cast into the river in a wicker cradle. The cradle drifted down the river into the Burry Estuary and so out to sea.

Apparently a storm blew up and the cradle rode the waves safe and sound 'toward a place (Worms Head perhaps), where seagulls in thousands flew around and snatched the child from the waves gently with their beaks and talons.'

'Divinely directed they made a bed of feathers for him in a hollow of rock and kept off wind and hail with their wings. And before nine days passed an angel of God descended bringing a brass bell, and placed it by the child's head. The bell had a brazen breast and was preserved in later years as a holy object and called the 'Titty Bell'. When the baby was hungry/ he turned his face to the bell and took a sweetened savour of infantile nourishment, more desirable than all mother's milk and than honeycombe.'

Apparently no natural childhood secretions passed and the clothes that he was wrapped in adapted themselves to his growth. He was also suckled by a hind, but learned from an angel that visited him what foods he should take locally, such as herbs. 'Eighteen years he stayed on Worms Head taught by the angel. Then God instructed him to move to a place about a mile off. On the way from Worms Head wherever St Cenydd rested springs suddenly came forth, twenty-four in all.'

As mentioned, Llangenydd has the largest church in Cower, and a saddle back tower to crown it. The original site on which now stands the church, was in fact that of Llangenydd priory, founded in the 6th century by the Celtic Saint Cenydd/ whose birth and upbringing were legendary, yet his life was recorded in history.

The Priory was destroyed by the Danes in 986, and again rebuilt at the beginning of the 12th century by the then Norman Lord of Gower, supposedly Henry de Newburgh (Earl of Warwick). The revenue from the Priory and lands, were granted to the foundation of St Taurin in Normandy (The Abbey at Evreux). This was known as an alien Priory, i.e. the revenue usually siezed by the King whenever he went to war with France, and returned to French owners when the war ended. However, in 1414 Henry V needed money badly and he siezed the revenues of all alien Priors for good.

Ultimately, he granted £20 per year pension out of the Llangenydd money to a faithful knight, with an incredible name, one Sir Hortonk van Klux, and in 1442 it was granted (including the revenues from land at Burry Holm, Pennard, Priors meadow, Llanrhidian and Sketty) by the Crown to an Oxford College - All Souls - as a memorial to those who had fallen in the hundred years war. The masters and Fellows held the Priory and grant until 1838.

Inside the Church is a Celtic gravestone cover, traditionally that of St Cenydd himself.

On the south side of the nave in a niche is the effigy of a knight with the lower part of the legs cut off to fit the opening in the wall. This was a member of the De la Mare family, old locals used to call it the 'Dolly Mare'. f^ '3 00 He is dated at around,(1300 ^38, as he is depicted inchain mail armour. He was probably one of the Norman De la Mare family who held a castle at Port Eynon where the Lucas's built a mansion later.

In the west end wall of the nave are three carved stone coffin lids, two show simple crosses, presumably graves of former Priors, the third, however, has a more complex interlaced pattern and is pre-Norman. Tradition has it, that this marked the grave of the Holy St Cenydd. Also buried at Llangenydd Church is the Welsh Prince, Gestyn ap Gwrgan (descendants of this family can be found listed on a pedigree stone in Penmaen Church). Another interesting stone can also be found at Llangenydd and is that of the Gordon's of Burry Green, or Burry's Green as cut on the stone, and reads: 'Richard Gordon of Burry's Green had a wife called Avis and she died in 1760 aged 100. Born in the first year of Charles II's reign she died in the last year of Hanoverian George II's reign. The son of Richard and Avis Gordon, another Richard, also of Burry's Green, was 81 when he died: he was, in 1770, High Sheriff of Glamorgan.'

#### Note 1.

While Capgrave was indeed a scholar of note, the work cited here was thought to have originally been compiled by John of Tynemouth, a Benedictine (born c. 1290), and Capgrave merely edited and re-arranged it, however, it has ever since passed under his name.

