

## 7.3 Llanrhychwyn, St Rhychwyn

### 7.3.1 Description and Statement of Significance

St Rhychwyn's Church is located in an isolated position to the North of the Conwy Valley, approached via narrow steep roads and across a field. It is described by Cadw as the oldest surviving Church in Wales. It allows us to see what Welsh churches looked like before the Normans' influences. Llywelyn Fawr, Prince of Wales, and his wife Joan worshipped here in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century and stayed at their Trefriw lodge.

St Rhychwyn's church was extended in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and the 16<sup>th</sup>, suggesting that the old church continued to flourish long after St Mary's was established. The church probably began as single cell chapel of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Part of the south wall by the doorway may date from the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Some alterations were made in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The church is small, twin aisled and rectangular, with a four bay colonnade of square piers and a bellcote on the north-west gable with a possibly 12<sup>th</sup> century lime washed interior. Fragment of original stained glass from the 15<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> centuries remain.

Ancient artefacts here include the font from the 11<sup>th</sup> century and pulpit from the 17<sup>th</sup>. The bell dates from the 13<sup>th</sup> century and may once have hung in Maenan Abbey. The east window has coloured images of the Virgin Mary and of the Holy Trinity. The type of colouring is rare, and this example is probably the oldest of its kind in Wales.

A well dedicated to St Rhychwyn is located in the woods south of the church, accessible on foot but via a circuitous route which crosses some uneven terrain.

The listing description details;

#### *History*

Early religious site, the churchyard encircled by ancient yew trees. Llewelyn ap Iorwerth is traditionally said to have worshipped here before building a more convenient church at Trefriw c.1230, apparently to spare Princess Joanne, his consort, the strenuous daily journey up from the valley. The present church began as a single cell rectangular chapel, probably of the C12th; the western section of the S aisle is of this period. This was lengthened and re-roofed, probably in the C14th and a second, northern aisle was added in the early C16, probably under the patronage of Meredith ap Ieuan ap Robert of Gwydir (d.1525). Some openings were altered in the C18th and C19.

#### *Exterior*

Twin-aisled rectangular church, the earlier, S aisle of flush-rendered rubble and the later N aisle of roughly-dressed slatestone blocks. Slate roofs, the outer pitches of old heavy slates, the inner modern; coped and kneelered gable parapets, exposed rafter ends to eaves. Rubble gabled bellcote to W gable of N aisle with Tudor-arched bell opening and plain bands to cill and lintel levels. Deeply-recessed round-arched entrance to S aisle with C17 door of post-and-panel type with pegged, arched frame; original pivot hinge arrangement. To the R of the door a plain square leaded window with internal wrought iron grille; slate lintel with carved date 1737. Further, similar window to R, undated. The E window is a C15 2-light window with cusped sandstone tracery heads and chamfered reveals.

The N aisle has an original square 2-light window to L, with chamfered slatestone surround and contemporary wrought-iron grille; C19 mullion. To the R and near-centre, an original square-headed, chamfered doorway, converted in the mid C19 to a window, at which point partly blocked; rendered oak window frame with trefoil head. Exceptionally long quoins to the NW corner. The E window is similarly original and is a large square Tudor-arched opening with chamfered slatestone arch and reveals and contemporary iron grille as before.

#### *Interior*

Slate flagged floors, in part incorporating C18 and early C19 gravestones and stepped-down centrally in each aisle to give a lower floor level to the E. The S aisle has 10 clustered roof trusses of braced collar type and the S wall is correspondingly raised about 80cms with contemporary timber stud framing. Boarded barrel vault to eastern, chancel section. Oak altar rails with turned balusters, the rail inscribed with date 1636 and initials W.O; these are not in their original position. Early C17 oak altar table with scrolled brackets to plain frieze and plain stretchers to octagonal-sectioned legs. Fragments of mid-late C15 stained glass to the upper

half of the E window; grisaille with yellow stain, depicting a fragmentary Trinity to the L and Madonna and Child to the R. The S and N aisles are separated by an arcade of 4 bays with large square piers with chamfered bases and abaci.; timber wall plate.

The N aisle has a 5-bay arch-braced collar truss roof with chamfered trusses and 2 tiers of cusped windbraces; plain rafters and purlins. Fixed C19 pews to lower half of aisle (towards E). Octagonal oak pulpit with panelled faces and a carved shield inscribed `TW EE 1691 Anno ED (for churchwardens). Associated reading desk to R and early C17 coffer below, inscribed (when later adapted): PW OP 1720; all have C18 graining. Fragments of C16-C19 stained glass appear in the N windows. The E window retains much of its original stained glass of the early C16. This depicts a crucifixion group to the centre with St. David and a further bishop-saint below; fragmentary inscriptions. Plain early Medieval font with chamfered sides and no base. Simple arched slate tablets to (S wall): John Thomas and John Davis, wardens, 1762, and W face of E arcade pier: Richard Robert Thomas, 1785.

#### *Reasons for Listing*

Listed Grade 1 as an important and well-preserved Medieval church retaining good internal and external character.