

CADW/ICOMOS REGISTER OF LANDSCAPES, PARKS AND GARDENS
OF SPECIAL HISTORIC INTEREST IN WALES

REGISTER ENTRY

NEVERN, ST BRYNACH'S CHURCHYARD

Ref number PGW (Dy) 67 (PEM)

OS Map 159

Grid ref SN 083 400

Former county Dyfed

Unitary authority Pembrokeshire

Community council Nevern

Designations Listed building: Church of St Brynach (Grade II*); Churchyard of church of St Brynach (Grade II*); Mounting block by churchyard entry (Grade II); Gate to new churchyard (Grade II)
Scheduled Ancient Monuments: Great Cross (Pe 164) and Vitalianus Stone (Pe 151)

Site evaluation Grade II

Primary reasons for grading The survival of a magnificent and unusual avenue of yew trees, probably dating to the medieval period, on the approach to the church entrance. The churchyard also contains unusual walled family vaults.

Type of site Churchyard

Main phases of construction Twelfth century; fifteenth century; 1864.

Site description

The church of St Brynach is situated at the heart of the small village of Nevern. It lies at the foot of a steep south-west-facing hillside which flanks a small valley whose stream, the Caman, runs southwards to join the river Nyfer at the south end of the village. The vicarage lies a short distance to the west.

The church is cruciform, with a square, buttressed and crenellated tower at the west end. The tower is twelfth-century and most of the remaining fabric is late-Perpendicular in style, dating to 1425-1525. The church was restored in 1864 by the architect R.J. Withers, of London, at which time the south porch was added. Further restoration work was undertaken in 1952. The dedication to St Brynach, an Irishman, indicates that the site has an earlier history, going back to the early Christian period. The 'Life of St Brynach', in the British Museum, states that a local chieftain, Clechre of Clether, apparently related to St Brynach's wife, gave the land, or 'llan' to the church in the sixth century.

The churchyard lies mainly to the north, east and south of the church. The ground slopes up northwards, becoming steeper to the north and north-east of the church. On the south-east side the churchyard is bounded by the B4582 road. The main entrance is off this road, opposite the south porch. A simple iron gate is flanked by tall piers of squared stone, with tapered tops and ball finials. Over the gate is an ironwork lantern. There was once a wrought-iron grid between the piers, which prevented animals from entering the churchyard when the gate was open. The piers are flanked by rubble stone boundary walls, which curve down to about 2 m high. To the west the wall runs along the west side of the churchyard, by the Caman stream. To the east the wall flanks the B4582 road, becoming higher down the slope, towards the entrance. Just east of the entrance is a nineteenth-century mounting block.

A straight tarmac path leads from the entrance to the south porch. This is flanked by a very fine avenue of four evenly spaced, large, widely branching yew trees. Under them are a few graves. According to a local superstition one of the trees near the entrance weeps blood. These trees are clearly of a great age and probably date to the medieval period, possibly the fifteenth century, when the major part of the church was built. The only other planting in the churchyard is a closely planted row of Irish yews, probably dating to the restoration phase of 1864, along the south-east boundary wall.

To the east of the avenue, near the church, is a famous Celtic cross, dating to the tenth or eleventh century. It is a four-metre high stone, with a circular cross on the top, covered with elaborate geometrical patterns. The inscriptions on it have not been deciphered.

On the north side of the church the churchyard is bounded by a low rubble stone wall which becomes higher towards the east end. Near the west end is an arched gateway with an iron gate, leading to a path to the vicarage. Just inside is the grave of Alfred Heron Tenison, who died at Nevern vicarage, aged 22, in 1888. East of the church, on the upper part of the churchyard, there are three enclosures surrounded by low stone walls with triangular tops and iron railings above them. These are the family vaults of the Bowens of Llwyngwair. At the entrances to each, and at each corner, are piers with stepped tops and ball finials. The enclosures contain graves and have upright memorial stones set into their upper walls. One of those in the middle enclosure is to three infant children of the Revd D. Griffiths, vicar 1783-1834. At the east end of the north side is an entrance, with an iron gate and steps down to a path leading to the road.

Sources

Secondary

Fenton, R., *An historical tour through Pembrokeshire* (1811).

The church of St Brynach, Nevern, Pembrokeshire (booklet in church).