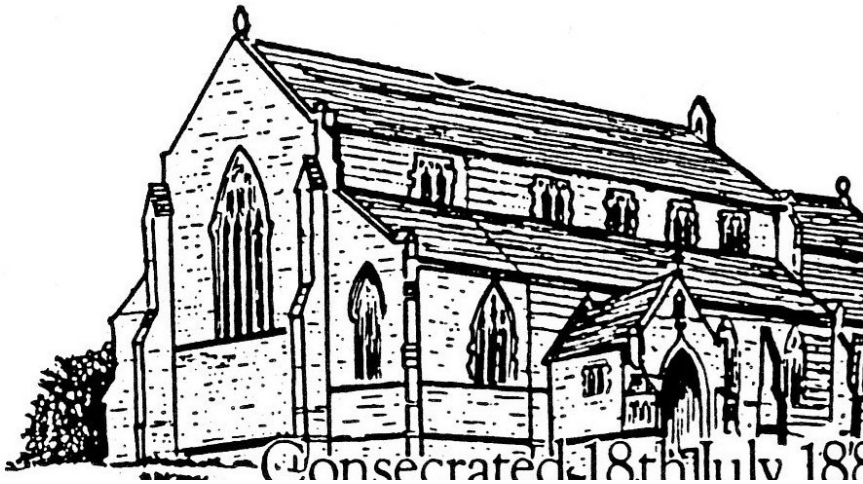


## St Gabriel's Church, Brynmill, Swansea



### HISTORY OF ST GABRIEL'S

#### *St Gabriel the Archangel*

In traditional Christian theology Gabriel is one of the archangels, or messengers of God. In the story in Saint Luke's Gospel it was Gabriel who announced to Mary that she had been chosen to be the mother of Jesus.

#### *The Dedication*

The land on which St Gabriel's was built was given by Colonel W L Morgan, the owner of most of the land on which St Helens and Brynmill now stand. He asked that the church should be dedicated in honour of St Gabriel because his older brother, Jeffrey, who had been killed in action in Ethiopia in 1868, was buried in a church in that country with this dedication.

#### *The Foundation of St Gabriel's*

By the 1880s Swansea was rapidly spreading west. King Edward's Road and St Helen's Avenue had been built and houses were starting to climb up Rhyddings Park Road and Finsbury Terrace. St Gabriel's was built to meet the needs of this new and expanding community. Work started in June 1888 and the church was consecrated just over a year later in July 1889. The architect was Thomas Nicholson, of Hereford. St James's church on Walter Road is also his work.

The appearance of the church in 1889 was rather different from what we see today. The interior was plainer with much less adornment, and the nave was one bay shorter. The final bay, to the west of the porch, was not added until 1931. The original design included a tower at the west end, but this was never built.

## ***The Tradition of St Gabriel's***

Almost from the start St Gabriel's has followed the Catholic (or 'high church') tradition within Anglicanism. This can be seen most clearly in the way in which we worship and the way in which the church is furnished, but more important (if less apparent) are the beliefs which underlie this style of worship.

It is especially to Canon M H L Williams, the third vicar (1911–1949), that St Gabriel's owes this tradition. He made every effort to beautify the church and to enhance its worship. Most of the ornaments were donated by members of the congregation, with the persistent encouragement of Fr Williams. And at a time when Morning Prayer was the main act of worship in most Anglican churches on a Sunday, Fr Williams made Solemn Eucharist the most important service every Sunday. After his death in 1957 a stained glass window was installed as his memorial. You will see it beside the St Nicholas altar in the north aisle.

## **DESCRIPTION OF ST GABRIEL'S**

You will probably have entered through the door on the north side of the church. As you come in you are in the nave, the main seating area. Screened off to your right is the social area for meetings, refreshments after Mass, the parish lunch and such like events. This part of the church was only added in 1931. The different colouring of the stone shows where the original building ended. The door in the main west wall leads into the kitchen area, an extension that was built in 2011.

To your left, at the east end of the nave, you will see the fine wooden rood screen and beyond that is the chancel and the high altar at which Mass is celebrated every Sunday. To the south of the chancel is the Lady Chapel and in the north aisle of the nave is the chapel of St Nicholas. These are used for weekday celebrations of the Mass when fewer people are present.

### ***Baptistery***

The south aisle of the nave forms the baptistery. The present font was installed in 1931, although its design is purely medieval and was probably rather anachronistic even at that date. It was designed by Frank E Howard who also designed the high altar reredos. Outside Eastertide the Paschal Candle stands beside the font.

### ***Stained glass***

The stained glass in the great central window in the west wall was installed between 1949 and 1959. It depicts a selection of early Celtic saints. The windows at the west end of the aisles were given in 1967 and 1972 in memory of members of the Excell family and Maria King respectively. They are all the work of Celtic Studios, as is the Williams memorial window in the north aisle

### ***Stations of the Cross***

All round the walls of the nave you can see carved panels, fourteen in all, which mark incidents in the final hours of our Lord's life from when he was condemned to death until he was laid to rest in

the tomb after his crucifixion. They were donated by members of the congregation between 1928 and 1933 and designed by an Anglican sister, Sr Dorina. Similar sets can be found in a number of other Anglican churches. Following the Stations of the Cross is a devotion that is particularly suited to Lent and Passiontide.

### ***Icons***

In the centre of the nave you can normally see an icon of Christ, which was presented by Fr Brian and Mrs Jones. The icon of Saint Nicholas on the windowsill beside his altar was given by the Edwards family in memory of their son, Timothy. On the south aisle, near the font, is the icon of St Anthony of Egypt; it was presented by a former Bishop of Swansea & Brecon, Anthony Pierce. The icons are modern work, but all reflect the historic tradition of icon-writing.

### ***Rood screen***

The nave is divided from the chancel by a very fine wooden screen which was given in 1914. It is the work of Geoffry Lucas (1872-1947), an architect who is better known for his connection with the Garden City movement of the early twentieth century. The figures of Christ on the cross, with Mary and John on either side, were added later. The pulpit was given by Colonel Morgan in 1898.

### ***Chancel***

The high altar, with the gilt and painted reredos behind it, was installed in 1920 as a memorial to the men of the parish who lost their lives in the Great War. It was the work of Frank E Howard. The east window was given in 1925. It is based on the early Christian hymn of praise, the *Te Deum*. The most prominent figures are the archangels Gabriel (left) and Michael (right). The wooden panels on either side of the altar and the green and white marble steps were added in 1912 as a memorial to the much loved second vicar, John Pollock (1890–1911).

### ***Lady Chapel***

The screen around the Lady Chapel also forms part of the war memorial. The names of those who died are engraved on the panels facing the nave. The altar in this chapel was originally the high altar and is believed to be the work of Fr John Davies, one-time vicar of Llanmadoc in the Gower peninsula; he was a friend of Colonel Morgan and pursued carpentry as a hobby. The two episcopal chairs near the font are also his work.

The Blessed Sacrament is reserved in this chapel in the tabernacle behind the altar so that Holy Communion may always be taken to the sick whenever it is needed. St Gabriel's was one of the first Anglican churches in Wales to revive this practice.

At the entrance to this chapel there is an unpainted wooden statue of Mary holding the infant Jesus. It is believed to have originated on the continent and to date back to the 17th or 18th century.

## **Times of Sunday services**

9.30 a.m. Solemn Mass

6.00 p.m. Evening Prayer and Benediction (normally 1st Sunday of month)

Mass is celebrated on most weekdays: details are in the Magazine or on the web site.

<http://www.st-gabriels-swanseas.co.uk/>

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