

St Mary's College, St Davids
Virtual Talk -



The History of St Mary's College (from the Ancient Monuments Website): 'The Former Chapel of the College of Saint Mary was founded in 1365 by John of Gaunt and Bishop Adam Houghton, to make provision for one Master and seven Priests who were to ensure properly trained clerics for the conduct of Cathedral services. The cloisters were built shortly after the Chapel. The College survived until 1549 but was ruinous by early C19, the ashlar tracery having been robbed for building works, notably for John Nash's West Front of 1793. In 1966 the Chapel restored as Cathedral Hall by Alban Care with a new low-pitched eaves roof and vertical window mullions.'

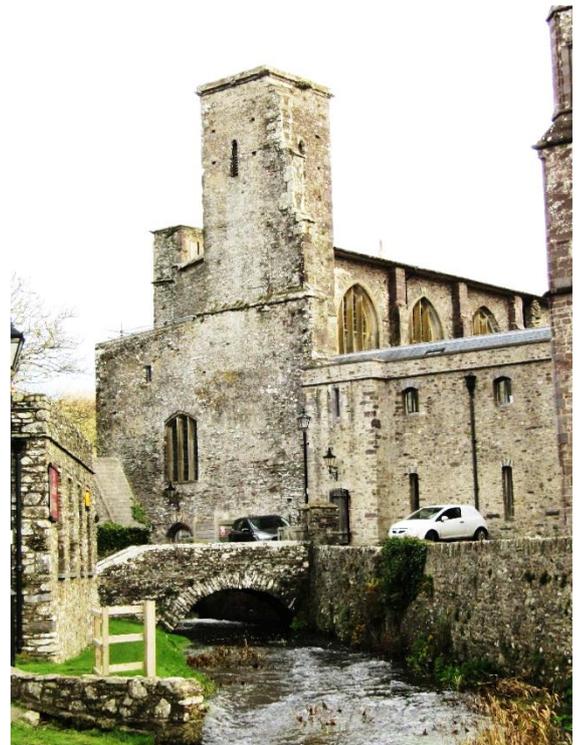
What follows are the notes originally written by Kay Halliwell, wife of Canon Halliwell, around the early 1960s and kindly offered for the newsletter by her son Tom.

Some Thoughts by Kay Halliwell:

It is some time now since St Mary's Hall stood in ruins blending gracefully with the Bishop's Palace in its fading splendour against a rose-red evening sky, and some said 'what a pity to change the picturesque decay that time has wrought' and, like "owls among the ruins" nodded their far from sage heads. Fortunately for us there were men of vision carrying the torch - that Bishop Connop Thirlwall, Dean Basil Jones, and Dean Allen passed on, and so saving our great Cathedral before its final collapse.

In fact, it is wryly amusing to read old journals and letters of the mid-19th Century when the tourists and pilgrims of that era came sightseeing - with much difficulty - 17 hills in 16 miles - and having to walk up those hills to help the weary horses and carriage. How could they know that these dead stones could live again? How apt was the question: "do they have services here?" - and they did - but only just. How could they visualize that this quiet remote corner of Britain would once more, like the Middle Ages, be thronged by Pilgrims from the farthest corners of the world - to gaze in wonder at such an holy place and to worship together in a constant round of prayer, unceasing, and of singing - rising like incense - for over 2000 years?

Alas by the year 1878, time, storm and tempest aided by Henry VIII and Cromwell had done their worst, though restoration now began, but part of the Cathedral was never finished, and the St Mary's College Chapel - founded in 1377 by Bishop Adam Houghton, and erected over a long vault or crypt, where the bones of the dead were deposited: "Here (says Manby) the bodies of many Bishops. Friars and Monks, are said to lie."



Cymdeithas Hanesyddol Tyddewi a Phebidiog St Davids and Dewisland Historical Society

Dean Parry, and several other members of the Cathedral Chapter had this dream of restoring this noble Chapel to provide the Cathedral with a Parish Hall and all the activities that radiate from the Cathedral centre. Space to welcome the many friends, associates, and Pilgrims - Missionaries - Mother's Unions - and the vast fellowship of Christians to refresh, and discuss, and meet the workers in the vineyard.

Let us hope that the time has now come when its original purpose can be restored again. Christ had a great concern for the welfare of the multitudes that followed Him; to hear his words; and to know His presence. He said that it was necessary that they could sit down and have some simple refreshment. How often do the tired and exhausted visitors ask for a cup of tea? They are not concerned that it is not served on fine china, and accompanied by elaborate cakes - good as that is on great social occasions and Parish Fetes - demanding, as it does, the many willing helpers and cake-makers.

I visualize this now as a place where people and pilgrims - our fellow men and women can sit in this beautiful and sacred Hall, and meet and talk to their friends, clergy, stewards and others; relax with their children and eat their sandwiches - wait for the next service or Choir Practice. I have been asked: "but who is going to do all this?" - with the nightmare visions of soaring mountains of washing up that will arise!!



(Tom & Kay Halliwell were instrumental in the movement to secure the successful restoration of the former College as a Parish Hall in the following years with the eventual dedication, in 1966, by Archbishop Edwin Morris).

I feel sure Kay would be delighted with the welcome provided to all forms of pilgrims by the Refectory ... "We serve delicious food and drink in one of the most beautiful spaces in Wales. The Refectory at the Cathedral offers home-made food, made from local ingredients. We are accredited members of the Pembrokeshire Produce Scheme. Our lunch menu changes daily and we always have freshly made sandwiches and cakes on offer, plus excellent tea and coffee".



**Cymdeithas Hanesyddol Tyddewi a Phebidiog
St Davids and Dewisland Historical Society**

Postscript: St Mary's College was established in 1365, by Bishop Adam Houghton, for one Master and seven priests. The 'college' was not intended for the purpose of education but was developed in the early medieval period as a way of introducing more formal rules of governance to churches and cathedrals. The priests of the college – or canons – were organised within a formal chapter, a self-governing corporate body presided over by the dean. Each canon was supported by a separate endowment, or prebend (hence prebendaries). The chapter, or college, held responsibility for the election of the rest of the officials of the church, for ensuring standards were maintained and particularly for ensuring that canon law was followed.

Though the college was not a monastic foundation in the early days members were expected to live a similar lifestyle. According to '*History and Antiquities*' the original Vicar's College was a common building established by Bishop Beck (c.1287) but Bishop Houghton required them all to live within the same precinct, but occupying separate houses ... "*Next adjoining to ye north & east ... here are ye Ground ... of ye House belonging to ye Vicars Choral ... Here ye Vicars lived, as Petty Canons, in a Collegial Manner, having Chapel and Common Hall ...*". Unlike monks the clergy were occupied in preaching and ministry, beyond the confines of the cathedral, and offered dedicated prayers for the dead. This became associated with the Chantry - where a donor could specify one or more priests to sing a number of services for their soul following their death. It was believed such masses might reduce time spent in purgatory, helping atone for their misdeeds and allow their soul entry to heaven. The "chantry" priests were maintained by the income derived from lands or rents from properties left for that purpose in the wills of wealthy. Areas within the cathedral were set aside for "chantry duties", generally dedicated to the donor's favourite saint. Many chantry altars became richly endowed, often with gold furnishings and valuable vestments.

By the time of the Reformation these endowments were seen as a source of corruption of the of the clergy (and a source of the wealth and power of the Church beyond the feudal control of the Crown). Chantries were accused of having misappropriated funds and lands so Henry VIII's Parliament(1545) passed an Act decreeing their closure - and the transfer of all their funds and lands to the king! After his father's death Edward VI's the new Chantries Act (1547) resulted in the seizure of the assets of 2,374 chantries and guild chapels. The Chantries Act also confiscated all the estates of the church expressly for use in education resulting in the collapse of many church schools. Archdeacon Yardley ascribes the eventual destruction of the Vicar's College to Bishop Barlow as part of his sweeping changes to the cathedral's organisation.

According to '*History and Antiquities*' by the latter part of the C16th the Vicars College comprised both clergy and laity, often with little education and no duty other than providing the cathedral choir, with a tendency to seek employment outside of the Close (one even running a tavern within the precincts of the Cathedral)! Over the decades many canons lived outside of St Davids – and paid someone to act in their absence so they did not have to remain within the community. As a result, by the time of the Reformation, properties became neglected in the absence of some of the residents, and the records refer to '*the vicars houses now in decay*' and "*the vicars alsoe were then admonished to sett by parte of the next fine they received towards the rebuilding of their house now ruinous and decayed*".

Jones W B & Freeman E A; The History and Antiquities of St Davids (1856); Pub 1998 Pembrokeshire County Council Cultural Services