

2020: Year of Anniversaries

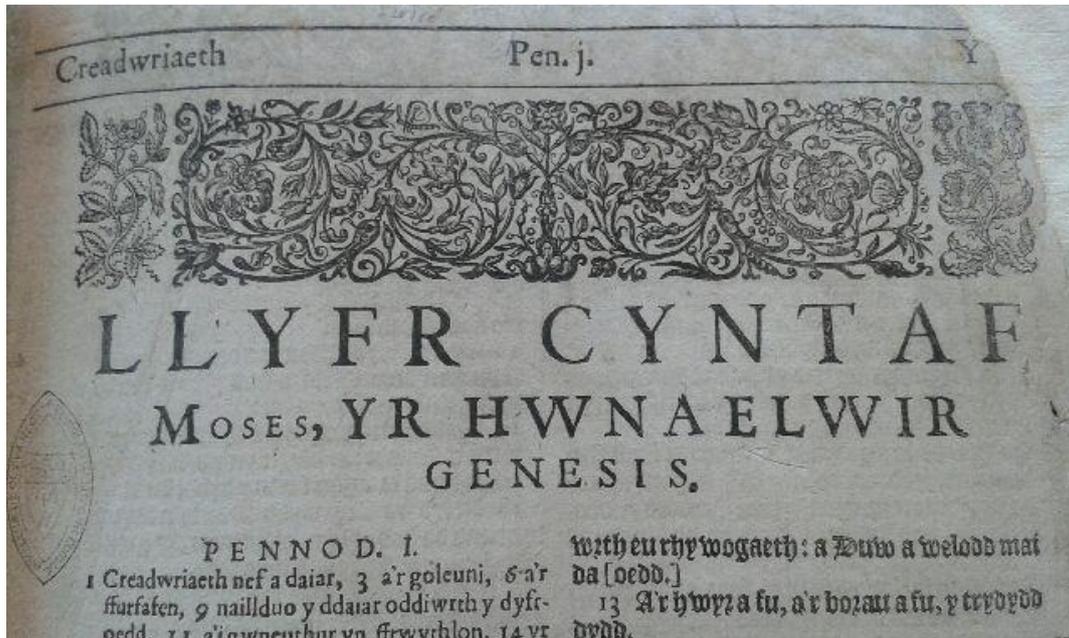
Mari James, Library Development Officer, St Davids Cathedral

St Davids Historical Society, May 2020

When the subject of this Talk was agreed, it was intended to focus on key events and developments of the past of which 2020 was going to be an opportunity to commemorate as an anniversary. The two main ones being 1920 and the Establishment of the disestablished Church in Wales, and 1620 and the production of the first widely distributed Bible in Welsh, which was partly translated in St Davids. And not forgetting, of course, the 25th anniversary of the St Davids Historical Society itself. These major events of the past are all times when a Rubicon was crossed, when a fundamental change was made that could not be reversed. I must congratulate the Society that you have selected a year which will itself become one of those Rubicon years. All of us will remember where we were in 2020, what we did, how it felt. Talks will be given in future on "The Anniversary of 2020". And I must also congratulate the Society in particular that you got your own celebrations of your 25th anniversary in before the world closed down!

1620 – Beibl Bishop Parry

1620 was a turbulent year. Elizabeth I had died in 1603, ending an eventful 45 year reign and being the last of the five Tudor monarchs. She was succeeded by James VI of Scotland, son of Elizabeth's arch enemy Mary Queen of Scots. James became James I of England (and of Wales). During the Protestant Reformation, and the increasing distancing of church operations from the Roman Catholic church throughout Europe, a key element was having the facility to be able to hear and read the Bible in your own language: in the vulgate. This was important to Martin Luther in Germany who translated the New and then the Old Testament himself into German. It also had wide resonance in Wales where the majority of the population were Welsh speaking. The Bibles that were read to them were in Latin or, more recently, occasionally in English.



First page of 1620 Welsh Bible. The book of Genesis. LLYFR CYNTAF = FIRST BOOK.

A translation of the New Testament into Welsh from the original Greek was first produced in 1567 by William Salesbury who was largely working in Abergwili near Carmarthen. This translation was partly a product of

teamwork. Richard Davies was Bishop of St Davids between 1561 and 1582. He worked with Salesbury and translated in particular 1 Timothy, Hebrews, James 1 and Peter 2. Thomas Huet was St Davids Precentor between 1560 and 1591. This was effectively equivalent to the Dean. Huet translated the Book of Revelations. The Salesbury translation was used as the basis for the work done by Bishop William Morgan, who led the Commission set up by Elizabeth I to produce a Bible in Welsh. After Bishop Morgan's death, the work was completed by Bishop Richard Parry. It was published initially in 1588 and, after further editing, in 1620.

It was a hugely impressive, scholarly exercise to go back to the original languages of the Bible as far as was practicably possible. This meant largely Greek for the New Testament and Hebrew for the Old Testament. The Welsh scholars then translated direct from the two old languages into the contemporary Welsh of their day. It is noticeable that the language of the 1620 Bible is still comfortable to follow for Welsh speakers today. It was the version of the Bible used in Welsh until relatively recently. This is a tribute to the 17th Century translators concern to produce a Bible that was easily understood by the congregations in Wales, many of whom had Welsh as their first, and only, language.

Equally impressive was the logistical exercise that was required as part of the project. Every church in Wales was to have an identical copy of this Bible. They are large volumes that were designed as public books to be set on the lecterns in churches and read from by the clergy. The covers were impressive with metal decorations and clasps. But they were also working books which were used every week, often more. While several copies of the 1620 Parry Bible still exist around Wales, in the Cathedral Library and in the National Library in Aberystwyth. Many of these show clear signs of wear and tear over the last 400 years. One of our copies in the Cathedral Library has been restored and rebound for us by the National Library. That volume can now be more easily displayed in the Cathedral Library. We also occasionally make arrangements to take it out briefly for display elsewhere under special arrangements. We also have another copy that has not been restored. We call this our loose leaf copy. The front and back covers have come off (although we still have them), the stitching on the spine has almost completely disappeared, the corners of the pages are broken or gone where fingers and thumbs have turned them over the years. The state of this Bible is not so much a sign of dilapidation and lack of care, but rather the opposite. It is a sign of a much loved and revered book that has been much used over 400 years and bears witness to the many dozens of people who have read from it over its lifetime.

While the 1620 Welsh Bible was a product of the theological and political movement of the Reformation, it was also made possible by the technological revolution of printing. In St Davids Cathedral, and elsewhere, the Bibles, prayer books and other works of the old church were produced individually by hand. This work was often done by monks and their many apprentices. Some of it was beautifully scribed in gorgeous colours. Other works were straightforward handwriting, with just the occasional coloured capital lettering. When the new-fangled technology of printing first started to appear, it was not trusted by all. The books were no longer produced by holy monks, but by an industrial process that could produce hundreds of identical books. To address some of this distrust, many early printed books often used red ink to adorn some of the frontispiece and other important pages to make them look a little more like the old illuminated manuscripts. It is noticeable that the frontispiece of the 1588 Welsh Bible uses this red highlighting in its dedication to Elizabeth I as "her most excellent majestie". But by 1620 the new technology, and the trust in it, had moved on. The 1620 Bible is printed completely in black and white.

The 1620 Welsh Bible was the first widely available Welsh language Bible. It was also key to the survival of the Welsh language. Many of the expressions used in the new translation became idioms in Welsh. Many of the previously illiterate population learnt to read by reading the Bible in Welsh. It was not just the Bible that was opened up to Welsh speakers, but the whole world of learning and education.

As a slight aside, in 1620 there was also a major outbreak of what was then called the plague. There are references to the very nasty bubonic plague in London, Venice, Vienna and elsewhere. But it may be instructive

to us this year, that we are not remembering 1620 for the plague but for the more hopeful achievement of the production of the Bible into Welsh.

1920 – Disestablishment of the Church in Wales

Moving on 300 years to 1920 – it was in this year that the legislation setting up the Church in Wales came into effect. It had also had a turbulent gestation period. The Church in Wales Act was introduced in 1912 and finally passed in 1914. Earlier legislation had been vetoed by the House of Lords. Along with the Government of Ireland Act, it was then passed swiftly before the First World War. The usual parliamentary scrutiny was cut short. The 1911 Parliament Act had removed the veto power of the House of Lords and the Church in Wales Bill did not go through the House of Lords where the strength of opposition meant it was not expected to pass.

As part of the disestablishment settlement, the Church in Wales elected its own Archbishop of Wales from among its 6 Bishops; the Welsh Bishops no longer had to be members of the House of Lords and the Sovereign was no longer the Head of the Church in Wales. Of course, in St Davids we have a special relationship with the Sovereign despite this, as the Sovereign is a member of the Chapter of the Cathedral. The present Queen has recognised this by her visits to St Davids, not least to grant the City Status to St Davids in 1995.

Moves to take away the perceived privileges of the Anglican church in Wales has existed for some time before the final legislation. These were largely based on the powers of the state that were exercised by the Anglican church on members of other churches and chapels, as well as over Anglicans. This was particularly resented in Wales where more people were members of non Anglican denominations than of the Anglican church. Although Anglicans, including John Owen, Bishop of St Davids, were able to accurately draw attention to the Anglican church being the largest single denomination in Wales. Much can be done creatively with statistics on all sides of heated arguments, as we are currently aware.

Some of the debates over the setting up of the Church in Wales echoed debates that have occurred over the centuries on the role of church authorities as against the role of state and government authorities. These are also evident in another anniversary that falls in 2020. 850 years ago the murder took place of Thomas Becket in Canterbury Cathedral on 29th December 1170. This was the result of disagreements between Becket as Archbishop of Canterbury and the King at the time – Henry II. It is intended that this anniversary will also be marked in St Davids Cathedral. This is not least as Henry II visited St Davids in 1171, the year after the murder.

The Service Registers in the Cathedral Library show there was no special service held in St Davids to mark the setting up of the new Church in 1920. This probably reflects the opposition that existed among many in the existing church to the disestablishment. This opposition included understandable opposition to the disendowment that was part of the disestablishment settlement. St Davids Cathedral and the rest of the Church in Wales had the ownership of its fabric and possessions removed and placed with the newly formed Representative Body of the Church in Wales. This was a single body covering the whole of Wales. Relations between the generally known “RB” and elements of the church have not always been felicitous in the years since, but in this anniversary year of 2020 it is good that there are helpful and practical working relations between the RB and the Cathedral.

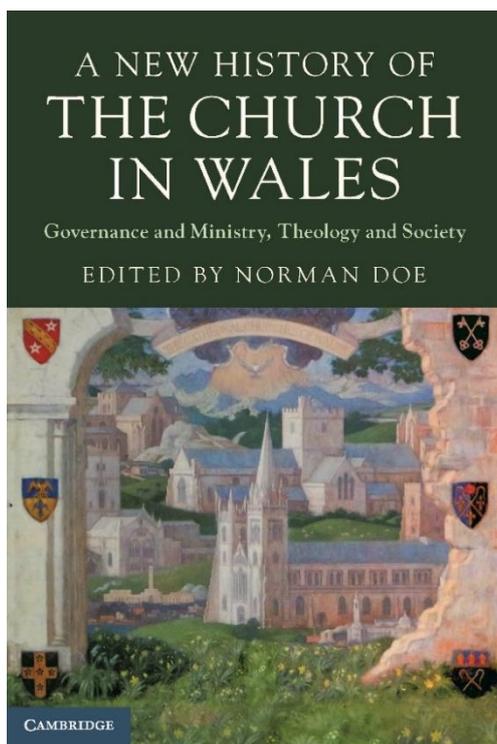
It had been intended that this April there would have been a day of events held in the Cathedral to launch a new book marking the disestablishment anniversary. The Choral Evensong service at the end of the day’s programme would have included a Prayer for the Church in Wales that was written 100 years ago. It now seems strangely apposite for us in the 2020 that has emerged, in its seeking that “leaders and people may meet with a good courage the difficulties of this time”.

A PRAYER FOR THE CHURCH IN WALES:

O God, Who in Thy wonderful providence orderest all things for the fulfilment of Thy purpose: send Thy blessing, we humbly beseech Thee, upon Thine ancient Church in Wales, that its leaders and people may meet with a good courage the difficulties of this time; and, being renewed in faith and charity, may so strive together with a single desire for the advancement of Thy Kingdom that they may bring forth more fruit to Thy glory: through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The reference in this prayer to “thine ancient Church in Wales” is part of a narrative that presented the new church as having a validity that connected it back to the ancient Christian church of Dewi Sant, the age of the Celtic saints, Jerusalem and the Holy Land. In the 12th Century Geraldus Cambrensis, Gerallt Cymro, had also argued that the church in Wales, particularly in St Davids, did not owe allegiance to Canterbury. He argued for an independent Welsh Archbishopric. In a way the installation of an Archbishop of Wales as part of the disestablishment settlement can be seen as the fulfilment of Gerald’s unsuccessful campaign – only 800 years later. This was also reflected in a unique visit to St Davids in 1925 to welcome the new Welsh church to the fold of Christendom. A group of Patriarchs of the eastern Orthodox church came, including the Patriarchs of Jerusalem and Alexandria; the Metropolitans of Nubia and Kiev and the Bishop of the Jordan. Large crowds from St Davids and the surrounding area came to see the procession of Patriarchs, church Clergy and non-conformist preachers as they traversed from the Cathedral to the large marquee set out near the Bishops Palace. Fascinating photographs of this visit can be seen on the Cathedral Library website. The 1920s cloche hats of the ladies in the crowd are as intriguing as the robes of the ecumenical clergy.

These comments merely scrape the surface of the story of the disestablishment of the Church in Wales and the developments in that new church over the last 100 years. A new book has been published by Cambridge University Press and edited by canon law expert Professor Norman Doe of Cardiff University. The book includes excellent and revealing chapters by many associated with the St Davids diocese and area. Although the major event in April launching the book in St Davids Cathedral has been postponed, copies of the book are still available for sale at reduced rate from the Cathedral Library. For information on purchase of *A New History of the Church in Wales*, email to: Library@StDavidsCathedral.org.uk or phone 01437 460141.



Sessions at the St Davids Historical Society usually include a Question & Answer session at the end. This is sometimes the most exciting part of the event! If anyone would like to send any questions on this brief piece, they are welcome to address them to Mari on Library@StDavidsCathedral.org.uk and we will endeavour to deal with them.

If you use Twitter, then please Follow the Cathedral Library Twitter account @StDavCathLib. This will keep you up to date on activities in the Library, as well as providing access online to some of our historic and eclectic Collection. Information on a range of topics associated with the Library and the Collection is also available on the Library website, which now includes the St Davids Cathedral Library blog.

www.stdavidscathedral.org.uk/discover/library .