

CITY AND COUNTY OF SWANSEA

LISTED BUILDING	Church of St Mary, Rhossili, Swansea
Grade:-	II*
Date of Notification:-	06.03.64 amended 19.01.00
National Grid Reference:-	SS41660088080
O.S. 1:10,000 Sheet No.:-	SS48NW
CADW Reference No.:-	11547
C & C of S Reference No.:-	LB:044

Notes:-

Location:-

At the centre of Rhossili village. Stone churchyard wall in rubble masonry with some older gravestones built into rear face, timber gates E and W, stile beside E gate.

History:-

A much restored church of the C14, unexpectedly incorporating a fine Norman south doorway of the C12.

St Mary's church probably consisted originally of nave and chancel only. Early mediaeval features include a low-side window and the slight inclination south of the axis of the chancel. The tower is evidently an addition, blocking an earlier high level west window. It has a traverse saddleback roof of unknown date.

The very fine Norman entrance arch, unique in Gower, is unlikely to be in situ, as the hilltop situation of the church suggests a post-Norman foundation. In mediaeval Rhossili there were two village settlements, the older one below the Down with the old church (SAM 414) and the newer village on the hilltop, with this church. The two settlements and their churches appear to have coexisted until the late middle ages. There is a theory (supported by local tradition) that the arch came from the older church below the Down, and excavation has confirmed that dressed stonework appears to be missing from the chancel wall of the older church. Furthermore, the arch in its present position appears to have been rebuilt with poorer craftsmanship. It may therefore have been salvaged and inserted at the time of abandonment of the older church. A finger sundial scratched on the left column cap of the Norman arch shows it was at one period an external door.

St Mary's church was much restored in the C19. A drawing in 1855 by Caroline Lucas suggests considerable dilapidation. Glynne in 18847 refers to the east window as 'modern pointed'. This may have been a first improvement. The floor was bare clay and the roof was much lower than at present. The north and south lancet windows of the chancel had by then been blocked up. There was a stone bench along the chancel east wall, but this is now lost. In 1856, under the Rev J Ponsonby Lucas, £500 was spent on restoration, including the re-opening of the chancel lancet windows. In 1890, still under Mr Lucas, £905 was spent on further restoration and reseating, for which Ewan Christian was architect and H Rosser contractor. Most of the cost was paid by Miss Talbot of Penrice. The church was re-roofed and repaved: the porch rebuilt: the two windows were added in the west end of the nave, a window in the south wall of the tower, and the low-side-window was re-opened and glazed;

also the base of the tower was formed into a vestry. The roof was further repaired in 1970, and a screen erected at the west of the nave to enlarge the vestry.

Exterior:-

Nave and chancel with a small west tower and a south porch. The tower is low and has a transverse saddleback roof, without parapets. Local axe-dressed conglomerate sandstone masonry apart from the dressed stone of the windows and doors: the north and south windows of the nave and its coped gables in sandstone and the windows in sandstone and the windows and coped gable of the chancel in oolitic limestone. Slate roofs with tile ridges to the nave, chancel and tower. The tower has single slit belfry lights to north and south and a round chimney.

The east window is in Decorated style with two cinquefoil main lights and a quatrefoil top light. Label-mould to this window only with carved heads as terminals. The north and south windows of the chancel are broad trefoil-headed lancets. The low-wide-window in the south wall of the chancel is a re-opened mediaeval window, with a slight ogee point. The three windows to the north of the nave and five to the south are all broad featureless lancets.

Plain half-round outer arch to the porch. The inner doorway is the special feature of St Mary's: a two-order arch, the inner order plain apart from a jamb chamfer with decorative upper stops. The outer order is decorated with two bands of outward-pointing chevrons and nook-shafts with carved caps. There is some misfitting at the crown of the chevron arch. Dogtooth label-mould with small oval carved head now slightly left of centre: carved heads as terminals. The left terminal head is more worn; the right head is larger and may be later. Finger sundial in the abacus of the left cap.

Interior:-

Chancel and nave without aisles, entered by a south porch. Quarry tiled porch and nave with wood blocks under pews: 9 bay C19 nave roof with low collar beam trusses, boarded soffit to rafters. Plastered internally apart from west wall, where a rough opening to tower survives at high level, walled up. The chancel arch is equilateral-pointed and chamfered each side. Oak pulpit at right, carved in Gothic style, stone plinth, three steps.

Two steps up at chancel arch. Quarry tiled chancel floor, with some glazed encaustic tiles; three-bay chancel roof with high collar beams and arch braces, boarded soffit between rafters. The altar stands a little forward from a carved Gothic oak reredos. Round altar rails on brass standards; the altar and rails donated by Miss Talbot 1891. Carved Gothic choirstalls. Beneath the south window is a trefoil-headed recess, perhaps a piscina, the bowl missing, or an aumbry.

The stained glass to the nave and the east window is all C20. The two-light east window (1948, by Celtic Studios) depicts the Annunciation. The re-opened low-side-window is glazed in plain Cathedral glass of yellow tint. Main side windows of the chancel in clear glass. The font stands near the south door: mediaeval, slightly tapering cube on a very short round pillar; square plinth plus C19 lower plinth and step. Rough tooling marks.

At the north side of the chancel is a bronze plaque to the Rev J P Lewis (Rector 1855-98), under whom most of the church restoration took place, and his wife Rebecca. At the north side of the nave, left, a white marble tablet to Signalman Gibbs, who died in action in 1918, and right, a tablet to Edgar Evans, RN who died in 1912 on Capt. Scott's expedition to the South Pole: carved with a representation of his burial scene in Antarctica (by Brown of Swansea).

Listed:-

Mediaeval church much restored in the C19 but retaining a fine Norman doorway and good mediaeval tower.

Reference:-

S Glynne in *Archaeologia Cambrensis* (1897) p. 303 (written 188848);
R L T Lucas, *Rhossili Parish Church and the Old Church in the Warren* (1982);
J Newman, *Glamorgan (Buildings of Wales, 1995)* p. 541;
G R Orrin, *The Gower Churches* (1979) pp. 77-80;
Lamberth Palace Library: ICBS file 4935;
NMR Wales Files Eccl.SS48NW & Glam. Eccl. Addl. Inf.