

CITY AND COUNTY OF SWANSEA

LISTED BUILDING	Church of St Nicholas, Nicholaston, Swansea
Grade:-	II*
Date of Notification:-	19.07.00
National Grid Reference:-	SSS125088428
O.S. 1:10,000 Sheet No.:-	SS58NW
CADW Reference No.:-	23538
C & C of S Reference No.:-	LB:440

Notes:-

Location:-

At the south side of the road from Penmaen to Penrice. Square churchyard with gate and stile at the north-west corner.

History:-

A Gothic Revival church featuring intricate and distinctive carving and craftsmanship in stone and other materials, built in 1892-94 to the design of the architect George E Halliday. Although replacing an older church. Perhaps of the C13 which was said to be exceedingly plain, the new building was thought of as a restoration and stands on the older foundations. Of the earlier building the stones of the chancel arch and one roof truss in the chancel are the principal items retained in Halliday's design.

The work was commissioned by Miss Olive Talbot of Penrice, the sister of the patroness. Miss Talbot was a benefactress who funded a considerable amount of Anglican church restoration or building in Gower in the late C19. Her monogram appears at the head of the west window. The restoration of St Nicholas church cost about £2000. Miss Talbot died at her home in London before its completion, but not before seeing the stonework of the reredos which had been brought there and assembled for her inspection.

The architect signed his work on the hinges of the nave and vestry doors. The craftsmanship in stone is by William Clarke of Llandaff, who acted also as contractor. The metal work is by Singer of Frome and by Morgan and Williams of Cardiff. Mr Morgan being the blacksmith.

The stiff-leaf style of the architectural enrichment is enlivened with miniature representations of birds and other animals, generally juvenile. Many of the human heads in the carved stone work are thought to be portraits; an angel corbel at the north east of the chancel is a portrait of the architect's daughter.

Exterior:-

The church is a late C19 masterpiece in the Early English style, consisting of nave, chancel, north-west vestry and south porch. Apart from the addition of the vestry, the church follows the form of its mediaeval predecessor, but in detail and craftsmanship it is a complete contrast. The facing masonry is in irregularly sized and sneaked courses of rock-faced local conglomerate sandstone with carved work

in grey-green Bridgend stone and pink freestone. The roofs are slate with all gables coped and carrying finial crosses. The coping mouldings blend with the crosses at the apexes and with the carved figure bearers of the kneeler stones.

The south porch has multiple shafting to both the outer archway and the inner doorway, the detached shafts in pink competing with bold and deep-cut-grey-green mouldings, some keeled and treated as lesser shafts. The arches have multiple mouldings and the caps are enriched with profuse foliage in tight wreaths under the circular abaci, exposing the stiff stems beneath. At foot the columns stand on large deeply hollowed mouldings with angle-leaves over the plinth corners. The outer arch is carried up to a final niche for the figure of St Nicholas, shown with his episcopal crosier and in the act of the benediction. Within the porch are side seats and at the east side an early gravestone which was found in four pieces built into the bellcote has been resembled. It has incised cross with Celtic head and Calvary base. At the west is a bellcote with a trefoil-headed opening under a label mould with heads. There are corner shafts with floral caps and two lancet sinkings in the sides with labels also terminated by heads. Over the west wall the bellcote stands on a double corbelling of mouldings above a trefoil arcade. Stone roof and cross finial. The bell, retained from the earlier building is dated 1516 and has a cast inscription in Dutch. The east window is of three lights, with detached pink shafts; female heads as label terminals; birds and beasts in the stiff leaf enrichments, little demons biting the sill. The side windows of the nave and chancel are single or double lancets, or slit windows copied from the earlier church. The west window is a tall single lancet. The south side of the chancel has a slit windows copied from the earlier church. The west window is a tall single lancet. The south side of the chancel has a slit window and a lancet, with another single lancet in the north side. The south side of the nave has a single lancet to the west of the porch and a pair to the east. The north side of the nave has a slit window only. The vestry has two round windows to north: a pair of lancets to east, and a doorway to west. In the angle between the vestry and the north wall of the nave is a chimney with corbels supported on the heads of quarrelling choirboys.

Interior:-

The church is entered by the south doorway which continued the virtuosity of the porch. The interior has miniaturised details throughout the design retains stonework of the original chancel arch, up to the imposts; the stonework has been dismantled and reconstructed, as is evident of the original arch; which was 'rude and pointed' according to Glynne's description, suggesting the C13, though Halliday's drawing shows it as round and so possibly earlier. Other early stonework remains visible at high level in the chancel arch wall, above the pulpit.

The nave is dominated by its enriched oak roof with high collar beams, arch braces carried down below carved cornices to carved stone corbels, two rows of purloins, and two stages of wind braces, with carved bosses. At left is a carved pulpit with alabaster figures of three great Anglo-Catholic preachers, Keble, Liddon and Pusey, in its panels. The pulpit has its own opening through the chancel wall, with the arch mouldings featuring the Fathers of the Church, those of the Western Church on one side and those of the Eastern Church on the other. The architects monogram is punched on the vestry door hinges. The nave windows have nook shafts: two of those on the south side are valued also. The stiff-leaf decoration is richly varied. The inside face of the entrance doorway carries a frieze of the heads of the apostles. The nave is paved in marble and the original heating apparatus stands beneath a central floor grille.

The chancel is entered by small brass gates. Its floor is of Numidian and Devonshire marble, in red, black and white symbolising blood earth and purity. The alter is comparatively plainly carved, and stands on a white marble podium, and is part of an integrated design with an alabaster reredos incorporating figures carved in white marble, stained glass, and side silk drapes hung on metal brackets. The central carved figures are the Virgin and Child, with angels and prophets. The east window shows the Crucifixion and St Mary and St John, the window shafts are in Connemara marble. At the south side a piscina and aumbry have been retained in situ, having been discovered under the plasters of the earlier church.

The chancel roof is also massively timbered in oak, with angels on the cornices. A C14 truss of the earlier chancel is retained. Repositioned against the east face of the chancel wall. The pews and the prayer desks are in teak. The ends of the former carved with flowers and animals and the latter carved with intricate decoration of fish and pelicans.

The stained glass throughout is by Burlison and Grylls of London, to Halliday's design. The architect's drawing for the east window has been preserved, and interestingly in the representation of the Crucifixion the skull of the name Golgotha shown in the drawing has been omitted from the window. The west window represents St Nicholas.

The mediaeval cylindrical stalactite font was recovered and placed on a new plinth. It was found in the floor of the earlier building: a square font was use in the mid C19. At the entrance there is also a mediaeval water stoup, found in the south wall of the earlier nave, also placed on a new plinth. At the west are memorials to members of the Voss family, James George of Nicholaston and to the Rev C R Wells. At the north side are memorials to Miss Olive Talbot and to the fallen in the Great War.

Listed:-

Listed at II* as a particularly fine example of late Victorian Gothic Revival design and craftsmanship.

Reference:-

S Glynne, 'Notes on Welsh Churches' in Archaeologic Cambrensis (1897) (written 1836);

J Newman, Glamorgan (Buildings of Wales, 1995) p.476;

G R Orrin, The Gower Churches (1979) pp. 50-53;

The Cambrian, 14 Dec. 1894;

Pre-restoration sketches of the church by G E Halliday;

NMR: File Ecclesiastical SS58NW