

## *Tour of St David's Church*

### **Church Inside**

**Thank you for joining us in our celebrations of 800 years of continual worship here in St David's Naas. It is an ancient place but the church is also a living church where parishioners gather to worship regularly.**

**The history of St David's Church in Naas**, which mostly came to light during the last Restoration 1989/1993 dated the stone structure of the church to be about 1212. Research showed 1212 was the first recorded reference to St David's church when it was listed as one of the possessions of the Hospitallers of St John of Jerusalem.

**To give a context to the sight where St David's Church** is situated, we should first go back to the time when Naas (Nás na Rí) meaning the meeting place of the Kings, was the place where Kings of Leinster met and held council. The hill of Tara would have been another such place of assembly. So from that time it was a quite a special meeting place. St Patrick is said to have visited this site on his travels baptising and preaching the gospel. The church at that time was probably dedicated to St Patrick or St Corban.

**In 1175**, Naas was occupied by the Normans and many of these Anglo Normans settled in Naas. The feast of St David marks his death, which is stated to have been in 589. He is patron saint of Wales.

The church is of simple design, a building commonly seen, dating from the Norman times.

In **1606** the church was featured in the Inquisition of James 1 where it had grown to contain three chantries – The Holy Trinity, St Mary's and St Katherine. Thomas Drew R.H.A. writing in 1878 conjectured that the Protestant settlers established in Naas by the Duke of Ormond in **1648** probably altered the church in many respects. A record from **1648** describes the interior as of Jacobean style.

In **1789** the sum of £118.11s3d was expended on the roof. Also in **1830** major work was carried out on this church.

**The Baptismal font** to the left as you enter the church dates back to the 12<sup>th</sup> Century and is said to be one of the finest examples of its period and almost certainly a relic of the Dominica of Naas, and predates the church. This font may be regarded as a relic of the early Irish Christian Church, and probably was in use in the pre-Norman Church of St Corban. The font was found lying out in the church grounds around **1860** by Archdeacon DeBurgh, who brought it into the church, where it rested on props of turned wood for many years. Thomas Drew in **1878**, had a word for the ancient font, and felt it was time, that so fine an example of an early twelfth century font deserved to be restored. At that time only the basin portion remained. The back marble font is decorated with leaf

shaped ornaments, which at one time stood on marble shafts and a suitable base. The font was restored in **1880** under the guidance of Mr Drew and paid for by Thomas J. DeBurgh of Oldtown., Naas. This font is still in use.

### **The Wall memorials**

The memorial **on the south wall** is dedicated to **Earl of Mayo** and is worth reading where a bequest of £20 per annum forever to the trustees of the Church. On the **north side** there are two plaques dedicated to the **Eustace Family of Robertstown**. Also on the north side are memorials dedicated to The **DeBurgh Family**. The DeBurgh's came to Naas in **1700** he was a surveyor General of Ireland.

On the **Chancel Wall** the **Wolfe Family** of Forenaghts are remembered.

Many of the dedicated plaques that hang on the **back gallery wall** came from **Killashee Church**, which was closed a number of years ago.

**The Brass Eagle** was presented by the **DeRobeck** family who dedicated it to the memory of Coralie.

### **Stained Glass Windows**

The opinion of Mr Ken Ryan of the Abbey Stained Glass Studios, Dublin. Specialists in the design, manufacture and restoration of Stained Glass Windows. In a letter to the Architect Mr Eamonn Hedderman & Co. dated September 7<sup>th</sup> 1988. They described the stained glass windows in St Davids' as follows:- The three light window in the **Sanctuary** of the Church is of French origin, and are over one hundred years old. There are two, two light windows in the **Nave** each with a circular light over incorporating five cusps. These windows are from **Mayers of Munich, Germany**, and are dated **1882** and **1894**. He then goes on to give an opinion on the condition, treatment and protection of the windows". During the restoration all recommendations were followed and carried out.

### **The Church**

The church is one foot wider at the east end, than at the west end, and the east wall is remarkably out of square, the south wall being about two feet longer than the north wall. The chancel has the appearance of inclining to the north side. This peculiarity was not unusual at that time because it is known or believed that it was the practice of mediaeval builders to set a church, not due east and west, but as the east was indicated by the rising of the sun on the day of the beginning, or on the feast day of the saint to whom the church was to be dedicated. Owing to the existing building not being square, there may have existed on the site a building or wall from an earlier church whose orientation did not happen to suit the ideas of the Welshmen, or they may have built the church as close to the existing wall without regard to it being square. The lack of significant architectural evidence is due to the centuries of plundering inflicted upon this historic building. From **Edward Bruce in 1316 to Rory Og O'Moore in 1577**, and throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This building was ransacked, burned, despoiled, but thankfully survived it all.

### **Looking back to the Gallery**

To mark the end of the 1989/1993 restoration, the Naas Quilters under Grainne McElloitt made and gifted a beautiful silk **quilted cross** to the church, they were inspired by the tiles on the floor dating from the 1830 restoration. These tiles are covered with carpet to protect them.

**The organ pipes** are a reminder to the organ that once stood at the side chapel. The **old organ dated 1901** and gifted by the de Burgh family, was beyond repair at the last restoration 1989/93. At the end of the restoration, a new electronic organ was donated to the church by Major John De Burgh, of Oldtown, which the vestry and parishioners were very thankful for. Where this old organ stood we now have a beautiful space in which many intimate prayer services are held.

### **The Crypt**

The most surprising find during the restoration was the discovery the crypt, this is a honeycombed foundation structure under the church but has little height.

During the last restoration, workers were digging outside on the south side of the church and came upon a wall of old brick some feet below the surface when they were working on the damp course in 1989/90. An opening was made where once an archway gave access to a sizable L shaped room. This can be seen through the opening in the floor in the Sanctuary. It can be opened but it takes four strong people to lift up the floor.

This L shaped room was the resting place of five coffins, three male, one female and one child. These remains belonged to the Mansfield family, from Morristown Lattin. They were known as the Lattin Mansfields. They lay undisturbed there for over 300 years. They have since been buried in St Maudlins Cemetery along with any other remains that were unearthed. Also half way down the church on the south side another tiny crypt area was discovered with a number of skeletal remains. The remaining crypt had been filled with rubble prior to this restoration.

### **Discovered Baptismal Font during the recent restoration**

The granite Baptismal Font preserved in the crypt is from early Christian times and would have been in use until the 12<sup>th</sup> Century. It was found in the grounds during the recent restoration.

### **The Sandstone Slab in the crypt**

Is the Carpenter Tomb slab in red sandstone was removed from the central isle during the last restoration and preserved in the crypt. The wording is: 1655 Joshua Carpenter born at Lyme Devonshire in 1585 died in Denmark 1655 and was brought back here to be buried. Joshua Carpenter was involved as a steward with Wentworth in the building of Jiginstown Castle on the Newbridge Roa

## **Outside the Church**

*Leaving the Vestry go to the left*

### **The David's House.**

This current building was once a school for the children of the town. Built around 1807. The Master was the Rev. J. Harrison. A previous building once stood on this site **and was instituted in the 12<sup>th</sup> year of Queen Elizabeth 1<sup>st</sup> in 1570.**

**The Gate Lodge** is the little cottage at the entrance and was built around the same time as St David's House.

In **1672** the churchyard, which was formally open, was railed in for the first time, but it remained a sort of thoroughfare until **1679**.

*Then go to right to St David's Castle*

### **St David's Castle**

In 1206 King John came to Naas and granted a Charter to Maurice Fitzgerald. In 1210 he held a parliament in the Castle. It was the strongest defence in Naas at that time. The **Castle later became the vicarage** with the arrival of Rev. DeBurgh family in 1700. In 1750 the Rev. DeBurgh resigned from the church.

*Towards the church tower*

### **Noteworthy people buried in the graveyard.**

On your left side there are two headstones dedicated to the Brophy brothers. These two brothers were killed from the ill fated Emmet Rebellion 1803.

**Stand and look at the Church (southside)** and notice the architectural Norman design of the church omitting the tower.

*Move to the south wall*

The **outline of the crypt** is still visible outside at the south side of the church. Above this there is a memorial plaque and in its dedication are a number of spelling mistakes, if you look closely you will see where the spellings were corrected.

## The Tower

It is said **Lord Mayo** had great ambitions to build a steeple that would resemble St Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin and in 1781 he erected what we have as a tower today. There is an inscription plaque over the door to the church that reads "*Ruinan Invenni Pyramidem Reliqui*" meaning (I found a ruin, I left a steeple). It never got beyond its present height as it is rumored that Lord Mayo had a row with the Vestry at that time and moved to Kill where he was instrumental in the building of the church inclusive of its steeple.

A wooden steeple stood where the current stone structure now stands, and the **Bell which is situated in the tower was cast in 1674**. We can presume it hung in the old steeple which was then transferred to its present position. The inscription on the bell reads "*Os meum laudabit Dominum in ecclesia S. Davidis de Naas*" (My mouth shall praise the Lord in the Church of St David at Naas). The inscription is followed by the initials "W.C.R.P" these refer to William Cory and Roger Purdoe, the two principle members of a company of bell founders who came from Sailbury in 1671 to re-cast the bells of St Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin.

## 1989/90 Restoration

In 1989 the Vestry decided it was time to restore St David's as the roof and walls were letting in water and the floors showing rot and rising damp making it a very unhealthy place to worship. The Architect appointed to assist us was Mr Eamon Hedderman a person well used to restoring old buildings and had also been commissioned to work with the Roman Catholic Church in Naas, so he came highly recommended.

As with all old buildings an archeologist was appointed to oversee the opening of the grounds, he was Dr Brendan O'Riordan a local person, who was a former director of the National Museum. He oversaw all the digging and referenced all artefacts found. A number of fragments of broken tiles were found probably dating from the middle ages. A pottery handle, which may have come from a wine jar was also found dating from 12<sup>th</sup> century. These fragments are now with the National Museum.

A Steering Committee was set up to coordinate the fund-raising for all the costs. This committee worked very hard and within five years had raised the required amount of £250,000 and our Church was once again a beautiful place to continue God's work.

In **1990** St David's Church in Naas rekindled its links with St David's Church in Wales. Invitations have resulted in a number of visits to and from Wales.

