

Creating stories at St Tysilio church



DENBIGHSHIRE DIGITAL ADVENTURES

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This is a great challenge for kids and adults alike. Take a look round the church's small graveyard; tombstones offer us clues to the past and the life stories of those who are buried here. But they can also conjure up new stories in our imaginations, to write down, tell to each other or even post up on Facebook!

See if you can come up with a story about some of the other people who have been laid to rest here.

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Before you start



How to get there

This adventure is at St Tysilio church, near to the village of Bryneglwys, off the A5104. The church is a little tricky to find, so if you're heading up the A5104 from Corwen, you'll see a sign post for Bryneglwys after approximately 7 miles. Travel down this road, until you come to some newly built white houses. You'll see a children's playground to the left; you can park by here. As you stand with your back to the playground and look to the left, you'll just be able to spot a set of iron gates with a small arch over the top, set down a small drive, between two houses. The church is just beyond here.

Post code:

LL21 9LL

Public transport:

For public transport options, call Traveline Cymru on 0871 200 2233 or National Rail Enquiries on 08457 48 49 50.

Activity starting point:

This whole activity takes place in the church yard, so start by standing outside the church's main entrance.

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Let's get started

'Bryneglwys' means 'Church Hill' and it's said that there's been a church here since the early seventh century. (1)

Churches were often built and paid for by the people that worshipped in them, and offer a window on how people came together to pray, to celebrate and, of course, to bury their dead.

This activity is all about conjuring up the past. By using the names and dates on a gravestone, can you come up with a story about the people that it commemorates?

If you stand looking at the church, and turn towards the right hand side of the grave yard, you should be able to hunt out the grave of Elizabeth Griffiths. Its not an easy one to find though, as its really worn. She died in 1900, followed ten years later by husband James. Nothing strange there but why do you think a year later their grandson, 24-year-old John Branston, was also buried with them? Why had he come to live with his grandparents? And why did he die so young?

Not all the graves need tell a sad story. Take Evan Williams, for instance. He died in 1772 at the ripe old age of 72, which was incredibly old in those days. You'll find his grave on the other side of the yard to Elizabeth's (and the writing on this one is much clearer!)

What sort of life do you think he led? Was he, like so many men around here, a sheep farmer? Or did he work in the slate mines? Why was he buried alone? And do you think there was a secret to his old age?

Why not jot down the key details from the gravestones, as well as how being in the space makes you feel or features on the gravestone that jumped out at you, so you can work your story up later? (2)



How long will this activity take?

It shouldn't take you too long to find all the graves that we mention (20mins to half an hour), but you might want to spend a little longer wandering inside the church.



What you need

A notebook and pen, or your mobile phone to jot notes down on.



Useful information

The church is open most mornings but is locked again in the afternoon.

Be aware that the grounds of the church can be quite uneven, and they're not always suitable for buggies or prams.



Getting back to the start

To walk back to the car, just head back down the small path leading away from the church, and towards the playground.



What did you think?

Tell us what you thought about this activity, and share some of your photos and stories on the Discover Denbighshire Facebook page.

Wealthy families were heavily involved in supporting their local church, and St Tysilio is no exception. The most famous family to be celebrated here is the Yale family, who even added their own chapel in 1575.

The Yales were part of a religious group called Puritans. Unfortunately for them, King Charles I hated Puritans, so in 1630 they decided to escape to the New World, or America as we now call it.

They returned in 1651 at the end of the English Civil War when Oliver Cromwell, himself a Puritan, had taken control of England. The family also had a new member, a son called Elihu, and in 1670 he set off to work in India with the famous East India Company.

He proved to be a great businessman and when he returned to England 27 years later, he had amassed a huge fortune. News of his wealth spread and he received a letter from America asking him to donate some money to a college close to where he'd been brought up. Elihu agreed, gave £1,162, and the Yale College, now one of the most famous universities in the world, was born.

What do you think is the story behind the small, unmarked wooden cross in the middle of the graveyard, behind the church? Was it for a stranger passing through the village, that no-one knew? Or perhaps there was simply no-one to pay for a proper headstone? (3)



Perhaps the saddest grave belongs to the Edwards' – can you spot it? Six members of the same family all buried together, with the poor father Edward outliving his wife and four children. What do you think happened to them?

If you've got enough details, see if you can write a family history about one of the graves. Do you think life was hard living in rural Wales before the days of electricity and running water? And why do you think churches were so important to people?

You might want to draw what you think the people looked like, too.

Remember, stories are great to share – so you could post up your story from St. Tysilio on the Discover Denbighshire Facebook page when you've finished (search Discover Denbighshire).

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Don't miss

Whilst you're in the area, there's lots of other great places that you could visit...

Nant Clwyd y Dre

Parts of this intriguing building, which is one of the oldest town houses in Wales, date back over 700 years, and it's the story of the way in which different owners have altered, renovated, extended and redecorated the house that's central to its 'Seven Ages' tour. Look out for the ornate French four poster bed bought by the wealthy Jacobean owner Simon Grey, and the Georgian bedroom, with its panelled walls and incredible Chinese wallpaper.

Nant Clwyd y Dre is on Castle St, Ruthin, LL15 1DP

For more information, visit: www.denbighshire.gov.uk/heritage or call 01824 709 822

Corwen

Corwen is at the heart of Owain Glyndwr country, and retains strong links to the hero of Welsh nationalism. Look out for the magnificent church of St Mael and St Sulien, with its atmospheric graveyard. Several great walks also start in the Centre, up into the woods overlooking the town, and to Caer Drewyn, one of the best preserved Iron Age hillforts in Wales.

Corwen is on the A5, 12 miles from Llangollen.

For more information, visit www.discoverdenbighshire.co.uk

St Elidan, Llandelidan

The village of Llandelidan lies in the hills at the southern end of the Vale of Clwyd. Built in the 15th century, St Elidan is a great example of a 'double-naved' church when, in effect, a new church is added to the side of an existing one. Despite a Victorian make over, there are still many ancient features to enjoy, including sections of the medieval rood screen, which separated the congregation from the altar. Out in the graveyard, look out for the tomb of Coch Bach y Bala, the Welsh Houdini, a serial escapee from jails across North Wales.

For more information, visit www.cpat.demon.co.uk/projects/longer/churches/denbigh/16842.htm

St Mael and St Sulien

Owain Glyndwr left his mark on this picturesque Welsh church, a place brimming with intrigue and history. It's said that the cross on the huge stone lintel above the door on the south side of the church was made by his dagger, thrown in a rage from Pen y Pigyn, up on the wooded slope overlooking the church.

The church dates back to the late 15th Century, and while the interior was given a make-over in Victorian times, a huge 17th Century chest remains, and in a niche by the altar is a carved memorial to a 15th Century vicar.

The church stands in a yew filled graveyard, just back from the main street in the centre of Corwen.

Caer Drewyn Hillfort

Unlike other hillforts in the area, Caer Drewyn doesn't have great earth banks or ditches around it. Instead it has a large dry stone wall, the remains of which are still standing. It continued to be used long after the Iron Age had ended and legend has it that Owain Glyndwr gathered his troops here after he proclaimed himself King of Wales in 1400.

The closest parking is at the local swimming pool, located on the B5437 opposite the end of the bridge over the Dee, on the A5. The site can be reached by public footpath signposted on the B5437, next to the swimming pool.

For more information, visit www.denbighshirecountryside.org.uk/heather-and-hillforts-landscapes/

Llangollen Steam train

The canal was just one factor that turned Llangollen into such an important transport hub in Victorian Britain. The railway first arrived in the town in 1848 and was a sensation for day trippers, who arrived in their thousands to take in the air and the fantastic views. The line and station closed in 1965 and were left to decay until enthusiasts re-opened them in the 1970s as a popular tourist attraction. The station has now been beautifully restored, with its own tea room and a regular timetable of trips of old steam locos.

For more information, visit www.llangollen-railway.co.uk or call 01978 860 979

Plas Newydd

For nearly 50 years, this unique black and white cottage was the home to Sarah Ponsonby and Lady Eleanor Butler, otherwise known as the Ladies of Llangollen.

The couple spent their 'sweet and delicious retirement' at Plas Newydd, reading, writing and painting. They became celebrities of the age, with romantic poets such as Lord Byron and Wordsworth, as well as the Duke of Wellington, among their visitors.

The house was given its Gothic exterior by later owners but the oak carvings that fill the interior were all collected by the Ladies. The gardens are also worth a stroll, and there's a café and bowling green, too.

Plas Newydd, Hill Street, Llangollen, Denbighshire, LL20 8AW.

For general enquiries, bookings or special occasions please call: 01978 862834 (April – Sept), or 01824 708274 (October – March)

For more information, visit www.denbighshire.gov.uk/heritage