

## Furnishings

The massive medieval altar stone is said to weigh two tons. It was found under the floor when the church was re-seated about 1890. The ledger stones in front of the altar are recorded in a publication giving details of all the monuments in the church and churchyard. This is available locally.

The altar cross and candlesticks of silvered wood, together with the brass chandelier, were given to the church in 1955–58. They are 17th century and the chandelier 18th century but incorporating earlier work. The chandelier came from Thrumpton Court, Nottinghamshire. All were given to the church by the late Ivor Bulmer-Thomas, first chairman of The Churches Conservation Trust. The four-sided pulpit is Jacobean. The chair near the altar is of Jacobean style and the wooden lectern is made up from various pieces.

There was formerly a royal arms of George I painted on boards and in a wooden frame. This had disappeared by 1953.

The churchyard remains the responsibility of the Parochial Church Council and local individuals have done and are doing much to maintain and improve it. Note, for instance, the sweet-chestnut tree planted to replace a huge mature specimen that died some years ago. South of the church are the remains of

the medieval churchyard cross, a number of tombstones and a rather fine yew tree.

### Annual Service

Most saints are commemorated on the anniversary of their death. John the Baptist, on the other hand, is usually commemorated on the anniversary of his birth, 24 June, and it is on or near that date that the annual service at St John the Baptist's church, Llanrothal, is held. All are welcome.

*Photographs by Christopher Dalton*

## THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION TRUST

The Churches Conservation Trust is the national charity that cares for and preserves English churches of historic, architectural or archaeological importance that are no longer needed for regular worship. It promotes public enjoyment of them and their use as an educational and community resource. In 2009 the Trust celebrates 40 years of saving historic churches at risk.

There are over 340 Trust churches scattered widely through the length and breadth of England, in town and country, ranging from ancient, rustic buildings to others of great richness and splendour; each tells a unique story of people and place. All are worth visiting.

Many churches are open all year round, others have keyholders nearby; entry is free to all. A notice explaining opening arrangements or keyholders will normally be found at the church. Such information can also be obtained from the Trust during office hours.

*We strongly recommend checking our website [www.visitchurches.org.uk](http://www.visitchurches.org.uk) for the most up to date opening and access details and directions.*

Visitors are most welcome and we hope this guidebook will encourage you to explore these wonderful buildings.

*Historic churches, due to their age and previous use, often have uneven and worn floors. Please take care, especially in wet weather when floors and steps can also be slippery.*

### Making a donation

Your donation, no matter how small, will enable The Churches Conservation Trust to save more historic churches across England. If you would like to make a contribution, please use a Gift Aid envelope located at the church you visit, see our website [www.visitchurches.org.uk](http://www.visitchurches.org.uk), or contact our fundraising team on 020 7213 0673.

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## CHURCH OF ST JOHN THE BAPTIST

Llanrothal,  
Herefordshire



# Church of ST JOHN THE BAPTIST

by David and Mary Hopson

## Introduction

It is difficult to picture Llanrothal church surrounded by houses. Yet so it was until at least the time of the Black Death (1348–49): archaeologists have found evidence to prove it. A road ran nearby and a mill stood by the river. Then all disappeared and the church stands as lonely today as the original Christian structure must have done when first erected by the Celtic hermit-saint Rhyddol (of whom practically nothing is known) some 1300 or 1400 years ago.

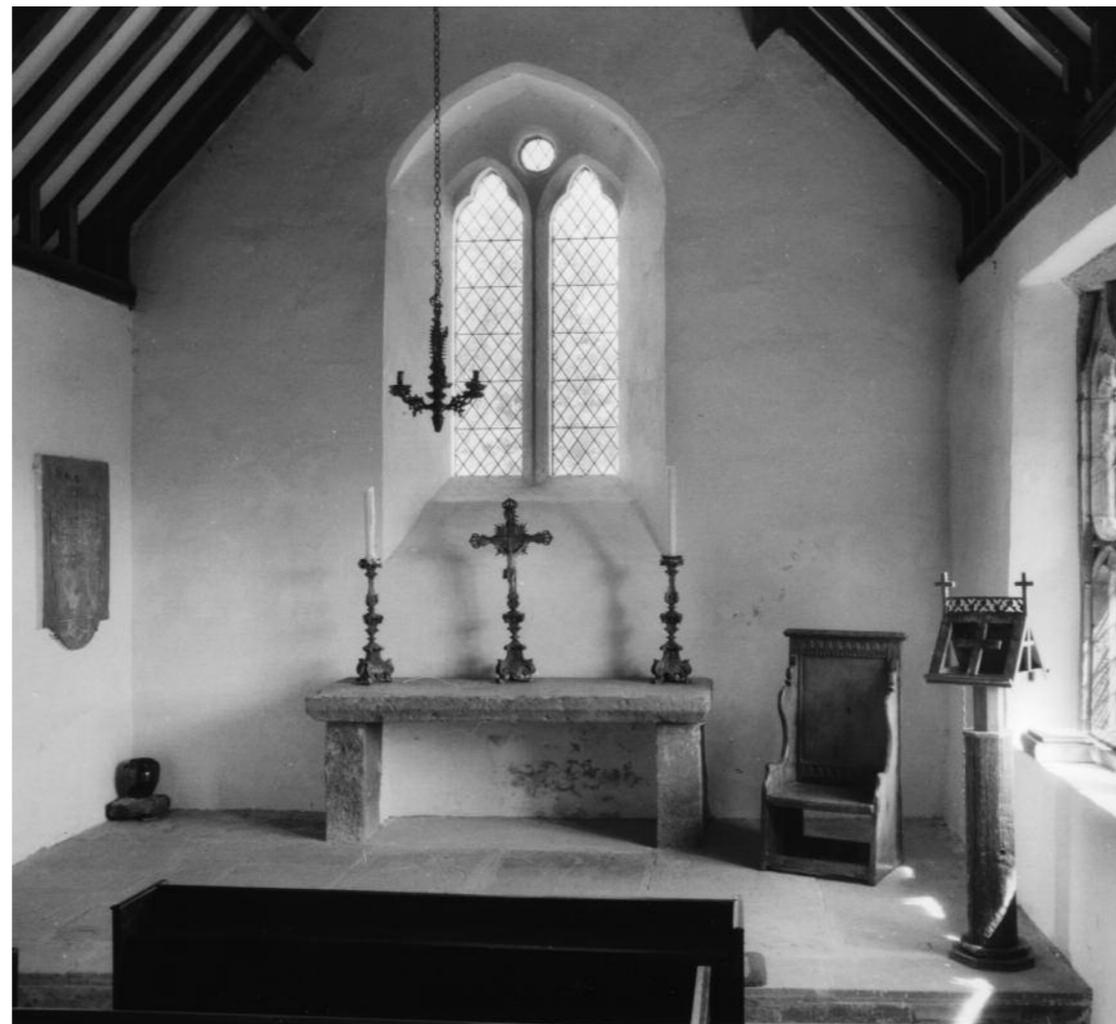
The present dedication to St John the Baptist must derive from after 1186. In the Book of Llandaff (c.1150) the church is referred to as *Lann Ridiol* ('Ridol's church') and in the Cartulary of Monmouth Priory, 1186, as 'the church of St Roald', Roald being a Latinised form of the Old Welsh equivalent of Rhyddol. Welsh was still being spoken in parts of rural Herefordshire till the mid-19th century.

Llanrothal never fully recovered from the tragic event of the late 1340s: its population remained small and scattered, its church barely viable. Llanrothal Court nearby is built around a 14th-century great hall. The farmhouse at Lower Cwm was home to a secret College of Jesuits established about 1600 and forcibly suppressed by the Bishop of Hereford in 1678. Remains of a motte and

bailey castle survive at Tregate Castle, some 1.2 miles (2 km) to the south. The story of the church's later years is briefly this:

In 1851, Lascelles' *Directory of Herefordshire* recorded that the vicar of Llanrothal, the Revd John D Watherstone, came out from Monmouth to conduct services at 11 am and 3 pm every Sunday: that was at the beginning of his incumbency. In 1882 (towards the end of his incumbency) a Vestry minute stated that 'the Old Parish Church' was closed and 'no service' was held there 'in any regular way'. Plans were made to erect 'a small iron church suitable to the requirements of the parishioners'. Needless to say the plans came to nothing and, before long, services at 'the Old Parish Church' were resumed.

But the fabric had begun seriously to deteriorate and a fairly major renovation in 1921 by H G Griggs of Newport (when the present north porch was fashioned out of the former vestry) served only to delay the day when it became necessary to abandon the now unsafe nave and concentrate on preserving the chancel and adapting it to congregational use. The roof was removed from the nave and the chancel arch demolished in 1948 and the work on the chancel carried out – by the Historic



Churches Preservation Trust and the Friends of Friendless Churches – in 1957–58.

The church was eventually vested in The Churches Conservation Trust on 1 April 1985. Since then the nave has been re-roofed (mainly in order to protect the walls from further deterioration), the walls made good and its windows glazed. The lime-washing of the whole of the exterior was undertaken partly by parishioners and partly by the Trust. The architect for the work was Mr Michael Bartosch of Cheltenham.

## The Church

The church is built of local sandstone. The roofs were formerly covered with stone slates but are now tiled.

Of the building that existed in 1186, only part of the north wall of the nave, together with one window, remains. The font may also be of this date. Most of the rest of the church dates from the end of the 13th century and the beginning of the 14th: the structure that dominated Llanrothal village when the Black Death struck was comparatively new.

The chancel arch, demolished in 1948, was of the late 13th or early 14th century and was built of tufa stone. North of the arch a blocked square-headed doorway, giving access to the

rood loft, was formerly visible: it was removed during the partial demolition of this area in 1948, together with two unusual recesses flanking the chancel arch on its west face. A replacement arch was built in 1958 in brick.

It was probably in the century following the Black Death that the church's most remarkable architectural feature was added. This is the big Perpendicular window in the south wall of the chancel which many think must have been brought from elsewhere because of the way the tracery lights are cut across.

The 1500s appear to have seen the building of the now ruinous south porch. It formerly contained a stoup or basin for holy water.

1680 is the probable year of construction of the typically Welsh bell-cote or turret, which features so prominently in old drawings and photographs of the church but which was demolished in 1948. It had a pitched roof and its west side was built of broken medieval coffin lids. 1680 is suggested because it was in the following year that the then churchwarden, Martin Boothby of Tregate, gave the church its bell – which was cast a mere five miles (8 km) away, at the foundry of John Pennington II in Monmouth and which was re-hung in Welsh Newton church in 1953 in commemoration of Queen Elizabeth II's coronation.