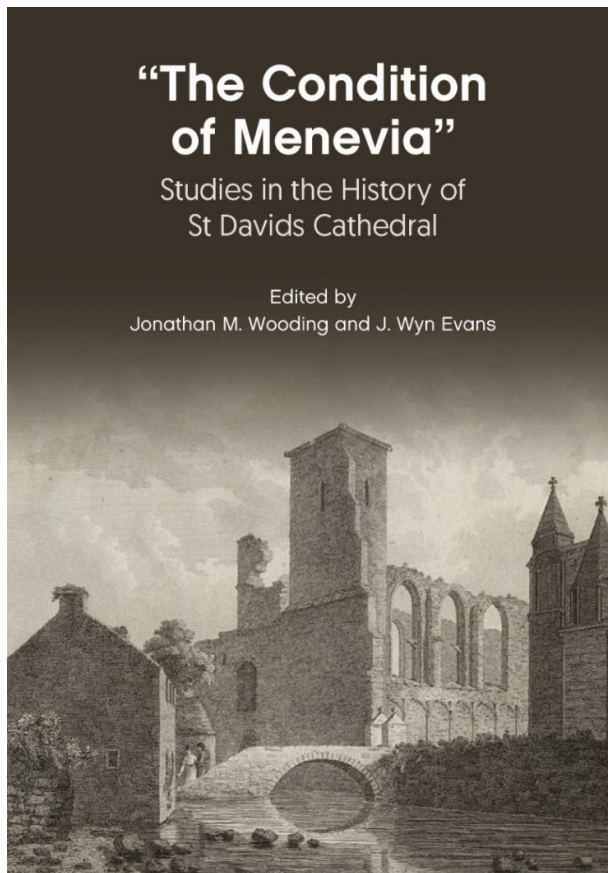


Wooding, Jonathan M, and J. Wyn Evans, editors, “The Condition of Menevia:” Studies in the History of St Davids Cathedral. Cardiff, UK: University of Wales Press (A special issue of The Journal of Religious History, Literature and Culture, Volume 9, Number 2) November 2023.¹ Pp. 175.

Reviewed by the Rev Dr Stephen Sharman



St Davids Cathedral stands in a small valley in Southwestern Wales not far from the Atlantic coast. The present building dates back to the 12th century and rests upon a Christian site, which in turn dates back to the 6th century. Here St David of Wales founded a monastery and became the first bishop of Menevia-St Davids.

This reviewer wishes to begin his review of this excellent book by recalling his first visit to St Davids. This took place when J Wyn Evans was Dean of St Davids. On a summer Friday, he travelled

west from London Paddington on an inter-city express train across Sothern England and Southern Wales, calling at Reading, Bristol Parkway, Newport, and Cardiff. At Swansea, he changed into a small local train, which took him on

¹ Distributed in North America by the University of Chicago Press.

to Haverfordwest. There he left the train and took a bus for the rest of the journey. As the bus approached St Davids, he could see beyond the town to the Atlantic Ocean on the horizon. He arrived in St Davids late afternoon and found his bed and breakfast. On his way to find a restaurant for supper, he heard the Cathedral bells ringing and went there instead for Evensong. The service was sung by a small choir of men and boys calmly and reverently. He found himself in a place and at a time when prayer was valid. The stones of the Cathedral were drenched with the prayers which had been said and sung in that place.

He spent the weekend at St Davids. He attended the services of the Holy Eucharist in the Cathedral on Saturday morning and Sunday morning and the Evensong on Sunday evening. For the rest, he explored the coast paths. He visited St Non's Well and St Non's Chapel. St Non was St David's mother, and the chapel marks the spot where St David was born. The coastal path runs along the Pembrokeshire Coast. As a pilgrim walks on the path, he can hear the ocean waves beating on the rocks below him. He can feel the sea breathes blowing off the ocean. He can hear the sea birds singing of faraway places. In all of this, the pilgrim can hear the voice of God speaking in the still, small voice that the prophet heard in the wilderness. This reviewer has been back to St Davids several times and continues to find St Davids a place where the presence of God can be sensed.

With these experiences present in his heart and soul, this reviewer welcomes this new book about St Davids Cathedral. It is a worthy sequel to another book edited by Jonathan M Wooding and J. Wyn Evans, *St David of Wales: Cult, Church and Nation: Studies in Celtic History* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press 2007). This second volume continues the work of studying the Cathedral, which the first book began. This new volume contains an introduction and nine chapters. The chapters explore various aspects of the history of the building and the community of the cathedral. The chapters are: Jonathan J. Wooding, "St Davids before the Cathedral" (pages 1 – 17); Malcolm Thurlby, "St Davids Cathedral: the 1182 Church" (pages 19 – 43); Dyfed Elis – Gruffydd, "Building and Ornamental Stones of St Davids Cathedral" (pages 45 – 60); Tim Palmer, "Dundry Stone and other Limestones in the Fabric, Fittings and Monuments of St Davids Cathedral" (pages 61 – 69); John Crook, "The Shrine of St David" (pages 71 – 94); Nigel Yates, "From Nash to Scott: The Maintenance of the Fabric and Worship of St Davids Cathedral, 1793 – 1862"

(pages 95 – 109); J Wyn Evans, “Llewelin Lewellin and the Condition of St Davids” (pages 111 – 129); Julian Orbach, “Gilbert Scott and the Restoration of St Davids Cathedral” (pages 131 – 146); and John Morgan–Guy, “‘The Glow and the Glory:’ Contextualizing and Interpreting the Stained Glass of St Davids Cathedral” (pages 147 – 172). These authors are all renowned and competent scholars in their fields. As we shall see, some of them contributed essays to the first volume.

We begin with Johnathan J. Wooding’s essay on the early history of St Davids, “St Davids before the Cathedral.” Dr Wooding gives his readers an able analysis of the history of the monastic community that occupied the site where the 1182 Cathedral now stands. He discusses the life and ministry of St David and refers to the *Life of the Saint* written by Rhygyfarch. Gerald of Wales also appears in his analysis. This essay is a valuable background for the other essays in this volume. To the earlier volume, he contributed an essay titled “The Figure of David.” Dr Wooding, who greatly increased our knowledge of St David and the history of his foundation in Menevia, was this reviewer’s PhD supervisor.

The next three essays in this volume study the structure of the present Cathedral. They are Malcolm Thurlby, “St Davids Cathedral: the 1182 Church,” Dyfed Elis–Gruffydd, “Building and Ornamental Stones of St Davids Cathedral,” and Tim Palmer, “Dundry Stone and other Limestones in the Fabric, Fittings and Monuments of St Davids Cathedral.” These articles are, at times, highly technical and will interest architects, engineers, and stone masons. They will also teach their readers to see the building with new eyes. Visitors and pilgrims to the Cathedral who read these articles carefully will see features of the Cathedral that they had never noticed before.

The next essay by John Crook is called “The Shrine of St David.” When this reviewer first visited St Davids Cathedral, there was a box in an opening between the High Altar and the Holy Trinity Chapel, which contained the reputed bone of St David and St Justinian. Scientific testing proved that the bones were not old enough to be the bones of the saints, and they had been removed to another place in the cathedral. John Crook explains this in his footnote 31. His essay describes the shrine, its history and its conservation in 2011 – 2012. His essay is enhanced by black-and-white photographs and detailed plans. The previous volume, *St David of Wales: Cult, Church and*

Nation, contains three essays on related themes: Fred Cowley, “The Relics of St David: The Historical Evidence” (pages 274 – 281); T.F.G. Higham, C. Brook Ramset and Linid M. Nokes, “AMS Radiocarbon Dating of Bones from St Davids Cathedral” (pages 282 – 285), and John Morgan–Guy, “Shrine and Counter–Shrine in 1920s and 1930s Dewisland?” (pages 286 -295)

Buildings decay. They suffer from the changing ideas of different generations. St Davids Cathedral was built in an age of faith. It was transformed during the Reformation. It suffered neglect and was restored. Nigel Yates’ essay, “From Nash to Scott: The Maintenance of the Fabric and Worship of St Davids Cathedral 1793 – 1862” (pages 95 – 109), and Julian Orbach’s essay, “Gilbert Scott and the Restoration of St Davids Cathedral” (pages 147 – 146) describe the work which the Cathedral received to preserve it and to restore it. Gilbert Scott’s work of restoration gave us the building that we see today. Nigel Yates’ previous work about St Davids Cathedral was published as “The Diocese of St Davids in the Early Nineteenth Century: A Reappraisal” in the volume *St David of Wales*.

J. Wyn Evans’ essay is titled “Llewelyn Lewellin and the Condition of St Davids” (pages 111 – 146), and in it, he explores the administrative history of St Davids in the mid1800s and, in particular, a dispute between the Dean and the Schoolmaster. The two gentlemen quarrelled about the finances of the School and the Cathedral. Bishop Evans’ essay gives his readers valuable insights into the relations of the personnel of the Cathedral, the state of the Cathedral, and its need for repairs. Bishop Evans wrote an essay, “Transition and Survival: St David and St Davids Cathedral,” for the first volume.

The last essay in the book is by John Morgan-Guy and is called “The Glow and the Glory: Contextualizing and Interpreting the Stained Glass of St Davids Cathedral” (pages 147 – 172). His article about the windows and the mosaic in the Cathedral is illustrated by numerous black-and-white photographs that help the reader understand his arguments. Color photographs would have been welcome. Many of the windows are well above eye level, for example, the windows in the east end of the presbytery, and the photographs help the readers to see what a visitor to the cathedral would be unable to see clearly. This is a fascinating essay that introduces the readers to the windows and the mosaics and to the patrons who commissioned them and paid for them.

John Morgan–Guy’s previous essay on the Cathedral described a visit by Orthodox Hierarchs from the East in his essay “The Visit of the Eastern Metropolitans and Patriarchs to St Davids Cathedral in 1925” in *From the East to the Isles* (Johnathan M Wooding and Andrew Louth, editors, Oxford: Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius, 2019). Links between St David and the East do not exist only in the legendary past when St David was believed to have travelled to Jerusalem and been consecrated bishop there.

This reviewer enjoyed reading this book and confesses that he has learned much about the Cathedral from it. The book has given the readers essays on the Cathedral’s building, its patron, St David, its furnishing, its people, and its history. These are good essays, well-researched and well-written. They grow out of previous studies of St David and his Cathedral and demonstrate that the study of St Davids Cathedral continues. This reviewer highly recommends this volume and looks forward to the next book about this holy place.

About the reviewer: Father Stephen Sharman is a priest at St. Nicholas Parish in Narol, Manitoba. He received his PhD from the University of Wales Trinity Saint David in 2013. The title of his dissertation was *Visions of Light in the Writings of the Venerable Bede*.