

A 19th Century Reynoldston Parson

It is just over 170 years since John Davies was inducted as Rector of Reynoldston.

He was a Gower man, born in the Parish of Llandeilo Talybont, whose ancient church has now been rebuilt at the St Fagans Folk Museum. His first curacy was in Porteyon. Here he acquired a reputation as a preacher and in his spare time he roamed the Gower cliffs and explored Paviland Cave. He was enough of an antiquarian to realise the importance of the fossils which he found there, and it was largely due to his enthusiasm that Dean Buckland, the eminent geologist was invited to carry out the first excavation of this now famous cave in 1823.

In 1833 Davies became Rector of Reynoldston and moved into the old Rectory with his wife Louisa, daughter of a London Welshman named Lloyd, and their two sons. It was the older of these boys, John David, born in 1831, who later became Rector of Llanmadoc and Cheriton, a most notable and lovable man and author of the classic "History of West Gower". Davies himself was Rector of Reynoldston for 40 years, until his death in 1873. Not least of his problems was the tumbledown church. C.D.Morgan in his "Wanderings in Gower", a rare and delightful book published in 1862, writes of Reynoldston - "We walk to the edge of Cefn Bryn, and below us we have the metropolis of Gower – a large village with pretty groups of trees...the Church is in the centre of the village – an old Norman building in a dreadfully dilapidated condition. The interior is even worse than the exterior – pits and holes in the floor, rotten old seats and crumbling timbers. It is the worst Church in Gower – it is quite a ruin if we except the Chancel, which has been put in good order at

the expense of the very worthy clergyman, the Rev.J.Davies. This gentleman has done all he could to have a new Church built but as yet unsuccessfully. There is nothing of interest about the old ruin (if I may call it so) except the little Norman window in the Chancel and the leaning tower. In the Porch we notice two holes. I asked a villager what those holes were intended for, and he said he used to think they were made to “chain wedding parties” when leaving the Church – a custom still prevailing in Gower. When the bridal party leave the Church, they are waited for by someone who fastens a rope across the road and demands a present, which he always gets.

Four years later Rector Davies got his wish and the present Church rose from the ruins of the old in 1867.C.D.Morgan and Rector Davies are both remembered by the Swansea historian W.H.Jones..”The Rev John Davies, Rector of Reynoldston had a wonderful reputation for discovering and destroying adders. On one occasion he was with his son in the Gower mail coach driven at this time by C.D.Morgan. When they were going at a fast trot and drawing near Nicholaston Church he remarked “This is the place where I usually kill my first adder”. They had not gone many yards further when he said “Stop Morgan and lend me your whip”. He jumped down and with the handle of the whip killed the adder in a thick hedge and drew it onto the road. He would never kill grass snakes though he found them just as readily as adders.

Parson Davies and his wife and their younger son Herbert lie in Reynoldston churchyard. We may be sure that the pleasing crosses which mark their graves were designed by the elder son J.D.Davies who expressed a wish to be buried with them, but whose last resting place is in fact near the porch of Cheriton Church.

