

In 2009, Burry Port is the third largest town in Carmarthenshire after Llanelli and Carmarthen itself. It is, however the youngest too. It began life as Pendryn, later Towyn Bach, a small settlement on the eastern side of the ancient parish of Pembrey. In the last 200 years, it has grown from 200 residents to 9000, swallowing up the nearby village of Pembrey to become a suburb of itself.

The birth of Burry Port began during the first years of the reign of Queen Victoria. The industrial revolution was at its height. Britain had ruled the waves since Nelson's famous victory at Trafalgar and was pretty much dominant on land too since the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo. These victories had laid the foundation for a long period of economic success from which this new town would emerge.

At the centre of the industrial revolution was the city of Birmingham, which during this period became known as 'the workshop of the world' and rose to be Britain's second largest city. Amongst the many industries and processes that were born in Birmingham at this time was that of electro-plating. It was this industry that ultimately gave birth to Burry Port and bestowed upon it a Parish Church.

The man behind the plan was George Richards Elkington (1801 -1865) who spent his whole life in Birmingham, marrying Mary Auster Belleny with whom he had five sons and a daughter. Elkington together with his cousin Henry Elkington pioneered electro-plating. With the financial help of Josiah Mason they were able to expand their business and the demand for Elkington plate escalated.

By the late 1840's, the partners decided to invest in the copper smelting trade and in 1849 they established the Pembrey Copperworks Company alongside the harbour in Burry Port. They were kind and generous employers and in 1855 the company built an Infants, Girls and Boys school (known today as the Copperworks School in Morlan Terrace) and houses for the staff near the works.

As a devout Anglican, George Elkington became aware that many of his English speaking Anglican employees – a significant number of whom had come to work here from England – had no English place of worship (although the English Methodist Church was built in 1866). And so he began plans to build a Church as his supreme gift to the town and to provide for the needs of his workforce.

Sadly, he did not survive to see his church as he died in his home at Pool Park, Ruthin on 22 September 1865. In his will, however, he requested his five sons: Frederick, James, Alfred, Howard and Hyla to build the church – which they did – as well as providing a generous sum of money for its upkeep. A modest brass plaque on the inside west wall of the church commemorates this.

A prominent site, on a slightly raised mound east of the town centre was chosen, at a point where land parcels belonging to Mr Mansel Rees of Cilymanllwyd, Mrs J K Hand of Glyn Ivor and Mr T V Colby of Rhosygilwen, Haverfordwest merged. All three owners kindly gave of their land for the building of the church, the process of which began soon after George Elkington's death in 1865.

The Architect was Wilson, Wilcox & Wilson of Bath. They designed a fine three aisled building in the early decorated Gothic style of the 13th century. Mrs Howard Elkington laid the foundation stone on 6 July 1875. A coin of the realm and a parchment with the story of the foundation were placed inside. The contractors were Wall & Hook of Brimscombe who used local stone with bath stone dressings.

The end product was opened on 9 December 1877 by Basil Jones, Bishop of St Davids who in his sermon suggested that the church be named St Mary's after Mary Elkington – the late founder and benefactors wife. It was later consecrated in 1903 and remained a chapel of ease of Pembrey until 31 July 1959 when it officially became the parish church of the new parish of Burry Port with Pwll.

A WALK AROUND THE CHURCH

The building measures 105 feet in length, 57 feet in width and the apex of the nave roof is 60 feet high. The tower and spire are 130 feet from the floor to the weathervane. Entry into the building is via the south porch surmounted by gargoyles of Queen Victoria and Bishop Basil Jones.



The FONT facing you as you enter the church is a chunky alabaster basin supported by fine marble shafts on a Caen stone base. The present Vicar was baptised here!

The nave contains a variety of STAINED GLASS. Moving clockwise, the west window was a donation by parishioners to mark the centenary of the church in 1977. Designed by Celtic Studios, Swansea, it depicts *Resurrection and the Church Triumphant*. The window in the North Aisle facing the south door is the most recent. Depicting the *Creation*, this was designed by Janet Hardy and installed in 2000.



The four bays of the NAVE contain very beautifully decorated bath stone columns. Each of the columns is individual and the detail is worth noting.

Moving clockwise again, there are three further stained windows. Two are Celtic Studios Swansea: the north east window is entitled *Suffer the little Children* and the south east window *the reading and learning of the scriptures*. The remembrance window is by James Powell & Sons of Whitefriars, London and depicts *Dewi Sant & St Illtyd*. It was dedicated after the second world war in 1949.



The EAST WINDOW by Hardman (Birmingham) is a particularly fine piece of painted glass depicting the Ascension. It is in memory of Mary Elkington, wife of the benefactor of the church.



Above the organ is the TOWER and SPIRE. This is one of the landmarks of the area and can be clearly seen from the Gower peninsula. Unusually, the tower has a ring of 5 BELLS which were given in thanksgiving for the 5 Elkington brothers who built the church at their fathers request. The tenor bell weighs 7cwt and they are in the key of B flat.



Welcome to

St Mary's

Beneath the window, the reredos, depicting the Blessed Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene surmounted by Dewi Sant (patron of Wales) and St Illtud (Pembrey Parish) was designed by Mowbray to mark the 50th anniversary of the church in 1927. This was badly affected by woodworm and was restored to celebrate the millennium in 2000.



Whilst the people of Burry Port are justifiably proud of their parish church, St Marys is more than a place that tells a story. It is, above all else, a living church and the centre of a community. It is the 'Cathedral' of Burry Port as it houses the many acts of worship that take place here weekly, including baptisms, weddings and funerals, and the many community events and organisations that use it.

Also of note in the chancel is the SEDELIA. These three stone seats to the south of the sanctuary are testimony to the quality of the building and the extra mile that the Elkingtons travelled in their desire to produce a building that reflected the prosperity of this new town. Above the respective seats are carved a bible, a chalice representing the sacrament of the altar and a vessel of water reminding us of the importance of our baptism. On the north of the chancel is the two manual ORGAN given by Howard Elkington and his wife and built by Halmshaw of Birmingham.



THE
PARISH CHURCH
OF BURRY PORT