

# A History of the Start of 'The Parish of Killay'

*by David Morgan*

## In the beginning

In the middle of the 19th century the parish was an agricultural area with small country lanes through which you could travel to Three Crosses and to Gower. It was not a parish in itself but was part of the parishes of Cockett, Sketty, Bishopston and Llanrhidian Higher. This was to change with the arrival of the railway line from Swansea through Killay and Dunvant to Gowerton. This line was put down in order that the coal resources, which were not very deep underground, could be harvested, sold and transported. Naturally a work force was needed to carry out all the many activities that are part of an industry. Thus people moved into the area, built houses, settled down and the villages of Killay and Dunvant came about.

As the separate village groups grew so the requisites of social living slowly came into being. Not least amongst these needs were the demands of religion. At first those who followed the Anglican faith walked to their nearest church. This would have meant a walk to St Paul's in Sketty through the lanes or, if you wanted to cross fields, to St John's in Gowerton.

According to a passing reference in the early-published records of the parish, F.S.Bishop and R.G.Cawker held the first services in Killay in the tiny three-roomed Church School, which was situated on Gower Road. This building was on the left hand side of the road between present day St Hilary's and the Railway Inn. Services were held in this building on alternate Sunday evenings starting in 1886. It is recorded in the recently published book on the Parish of St Paul's, Sketty that both Mr Bishop and Mr Cawker were churchwardens in 1884. Thus devout layman first led Anglican worship in this area.

Just prior to the turn of the century, more formal arrangements were made to meet the needs of the people of Killay and Dunvant. In 1897 the Right Reverend John Owen, Bishop of St. David's visited Dunvant to consecrate the small mission church which had been erected near the junction of Goetre Fawr and Dunvant Roads, on a site which has long been surrendered to housing. This temporary building, known with affection as 'The Tin Church', was built at a cost of £500 and seated 300 people, and was dedicated, for reasons that are now unclear, to the somewhat obscure St. Martin of Tours.

Possibly named thus out of a simple desire to honour the saint on whose day, November 11th, the ceremonies were held. Whatever the explanation, St. Martin's served the people of the district for 29 years; and marked the first real recognition of the needs of the parishioners who lived miles from the mother church of St. Paul in Sketty, during a period when public transport was all but nonexistent. For those interested in the development of the area when St Martin's was first in use there was no Goetre Fawr road, the main passage from Killay to the church would have been by way of Goetre Fach Road that met Dunvant Lane.

## St. Martin's

The curate in charge of St Martin's was the Rev. David Price M.A. who was also the first assistant curate of St Paul's, Sketty. From 1901 to 1913 he was the Rector of Port Eynon. The Rev. Lewis Davies (1901-1908) followed on. He returned to the Killay district after retiring as vicar of Cefn Coed. Mr. Davies was followed by Rev. Gwilym Smith (1908-1911) later to become vicar of St. Peter's, Carmarthen and a canon of St David's. Canon Smith's successor was Rev.L.P.Rees (1911 – 1914), who in turn was followed by Rev. D .D Jones (1914 – 1919). Both of these clergymen subsequently held livings in St David's diocese, which then, and for some years to come, included all parishes in the then County of Glamorgan west of Llansamlet.

On the overall map of this enormous diocese, at that time the largest in England and Wales the area that now makes up the parish of Killay, must have appeared insignificant Yet church people in the district were becoming restive The Rev. D Eustace Jones was appointed in 1919 until 1921. During this time however for some reason the congregation was dwindling. After twenty years the "temporary" church of St Martin's was showing signs of living up to its description. The residents, who still considered themselves Anglican, continued to urge their problems on the then Vicar of Sketty, Canon H J Stewart. One parishioner, Mr. Jenkins, was in the habit of visiting Canon Stewart each Monday morning to remind him of the increasingly serious needs of the outlying areas of his parish.

## The move towards a new Church building.

Finally, in 1921, the Rev. D. .Lynne Davies was appointed as curate in charge of Killay and Dunvant. The new minister subsequently often told the story of his first service in St Martin's, when he preached to a congregation of twelve, including the three small boys who made up the choir. The

building itself was equally unimpressive. Constructed of corrugated iron, it had fallen into a state of disrepair such that the sky was visible through the roof. This, together with the absence of any heating system, must have made it a chilly introduction for congregation and curate alike. Certainly it provided sufficient incentive to start planning immediately towards the building of a new church. An even more urgent concern, however, was to identify additional church people who were not then actively involved in parish affairs. Writing many years later in the Lent, 1950 issue of Home Mission News, published by the Additional Curates Society that had contributed to his salary in those early days, Mr. Lynne Davies recalled this phase of development, in part as follows: " Two days after my arrival I called on the churchwarden to discuss the situation with him. The first question to be asked was; 'Is there anyone in this area who is likely to give us some help?' The answer was: ' No one, unless the stationmaster at Dunvant will', ' How am I to get in touch with him?' 'Go down to the railway station and take the next train to Dunvant. You will find Mr. Bound very genial.' I did as I was advised. ' You are a busy man, Mr. Bound' I said ' and I must not detain you. I only arrived here two days ago and am a total stranger to the district; nevertheless I have come to ask you a great favour. I have come to ask you for your moral support in building up the Church in this district. Will you give it?' ' I shall be delighted to do all I can, as well as my wife and child', he replied, ' I have been waiting for someone to come along '.

Elsewhere the reaction was similarly encouraging; two months after the new priest's arrival, in September 1921, the small but growing membership was understandably elated by the results of the first of many church fetes, which raised the sum of £210 towards the New Church Building Fund. Within a year the churchyard of the present St. Hilary's was purchased, and in 1922 was dedicated, during one of his last visits as Diocesan to

Swansea, by the same Bishop John Owen, who, in one of his earliest visits, had officiated at the opening ceremonies for St Martin's. Several more years were to elapse before the church was completed, but now visible progress was being made.

In 1923, the Church School, where this story had begun so long before, was once again acquired for use. Vandalised and long unused, the building was repaired as a labour of love by Mr. George Thorne, who had recently retired to Killay after years spent in construction in West Africa. Thereafter it was used for Sunday School, and evensong was said there each Sunday for the benefit of the Killay residents. The latter was possible only through the help of various ordinands from the Sketty district, several of who were later ordained in the diocese of Swansea and Brecon. The diocese coming into being that very same year, 1923. Amongst the ordinands the Rev. Leslie Norman, Rev. Ieuan Davies and Rev. Bill Bromham were particularly appreciated.

In 1924 the old parish hall was obtained and similarly renovated. But despite the heavy expenses incurred as a result of these expanding activities, work towards the new church continued. In the years 1921 – 1926 the sum of £5,000 was raised for this purpose. In 1925 the foundation stone of St Hilary's was laid, and in October of that year the independent parish of Killay was created, with Mr. Lynne Davies as its first vicar. Mr W.J.Bound and Mr. W. Diment were churchwardens. Curiously, both were railway men, as were many of the early churchmen of the parish, and when, in 1926 at the first Easter Vestry of the new parish, promotion forced Mr. Bound's resignation as Vicar's Warden, he was succeeded by yet another railway man, Mr. John Powell. Stationmaster, signaller, and superintendent of the line – all manner of railway personnel participated equally in the early history of the Parish of Killay. During the early months of 1926, construction work on St Hilary's continued. The architect for the church, which was

designed to seat 250 people, was Mr.G.Moxham, F.R.I.B.A. Much of the foundation work was by means of a pick and shovel. As the building grew scaffolding made from wooden poles and planks lashed on to the poles with strong rope rose alongside the walls. The black mortar for laying the bricks was mixed and brought up from Clyne Valley and Mr T Jones of Dunvant was the builder. The roof was made in sections by John Bevan a foreman in the joinery yard in Francis Street, Swansea and then brought up by horse wagon to be assembled on site. Brown, an ornamental mason in Swansea, did some bath stonework. In building and ^furnishing it, the young parish benefited from the contributions of many well-wishers, non-residents as well as parishioners. Lady Edwards of Hendrefoilan gave the Chancel in memory of her husband, Sir John Edwards. The lectern was the gift of the Mothers Union members of the parish. For many years the donor of the pulpit remained anonymous, but now it seems reasonable to record that this was the gift of Mrs. D.D.Williams, then a resident of Upper Killay.

The font came from the parish of Penrice in Gower. Admiral Sir Henneage Vivian, who had retired after a colourful naval career to Clyne Castle, presented the new church with a chalice and paten, both of old Italian craftsmanship. On the day of the consecration the altar was graced with a cross, which came from the old St Martin's, but Sir Clive Edwards and his sister, later Mrs. Davan-Wetton, presented shortly thereafter a new cross and candlesticks.

What is regrettable at this late stage is that no accurate list has apparently survived of the smaller items donated by individual parishioners in those early days. However with the establishment of the Parish Magazine a few years after the opening all items have been acknowledge gratefully and precisely. Certainly many families bought one or more chairs, which, the parochial church had decided in council, should be

installed instead of the usual pews, the church furniture that was current at that time. Most of all, however, parishioners contributed their enthusiasm and their physical labour to bring about a transformation of what, at first, was an unpromising if not downright depressing scene. For according to Mrs. D.Lynne Davies, wife of the first vicar, writing some years later she said: " I first saw the church on a cold January day in 1926. The previous day I had attended services in my own 12th century parish church, which had been preserved so lovingly through the centuries, and before me in Killay was a yet unnamed church, stark, solitary and ugly in its sea of mud. Inside were bare brick walls instead of mellowed stone. No floor had been laid, yet the possibility of later beauty was revealed in the rose window and barrel roof. In May 1926 I became one of the band of enthusiastic workers eager to have the church ready for its consecration in August. Well do I remember the People's warden, Mr.Diment, on his hands and knees scrubbing the floor, whilst I tried to reach the real colour of the font, which was nearly black with grime. Looking back, the early part of 1926 seems full of domestic detail. For example, I had found a blackened object among the encroaching brambles in St Martin's. By dint of much 'Brasso' and elbow grease, it later emerged as the beautiful alms dish still in use at the parish church.

The villages themselves (Dunvant, Killay and Upper Killay) had distinctive characteristics, though all shared in the darkness and mud. There were no streetlights or pavements. People brought their torches, or, in some cases, their lanterns to guide them to church and I suffered one rather bad fall one evening on my way to take a Sunday School teachers' preparation class in the old church school



Few houses existed on the Gower Road. Wimmerfield was grazing land. Goetre Fawr Road was improved in the early twenties, and Goetre Fach Road was then a delightful country walk with the much more attractive name of Fairy Grove Lane. In 1927 Dunvant Park was opened, and with it came the steady building of a fringe of houses. Until this time no shopping square had been built in Killay, so the obvious thing to do was to walk to Sketty – no easy task, as pushing a pram uphill on the return journey over an unmade pavement often needed help from a friendly passer by.”

It was in this rural setting that the new church was prepared for its consecration, which took place on August 10th, 1926. It was long overdue, for the congregation had long since overflowed the little church of St Martin’s. Indeed the new building was too small to accommodate the congregation that attended its consecration by the first Bishop of Swansea and Brecon, the Right Reverend Edward Latham Bevan. As a result, an anonymous reporter for the South Wales Evening Post, in relating that some clergy were forced to robe outside, could not resist adding, “there was no accommodation for the surplus or the surplice”.

The South Wales Daily Post reported the happening more fully in its 11th August edition: “Smiling blue skies drew such a large crowd to the consecration of St Hilary’s church, Killay, on Tuesday afternoon that, before the time of the ceremony, every seat in (he church was taken and there were many people clustered about the porch and windows. The ritual was impressive. Around the side of the church came the choir, their surplices blowing in the breeze, and the Lord Bishop of Swansea and Brecon, imposing figure in his gleaming gold robes, his mitre and crook. He paused at the closed main door and, following the order of service, knocked with his staff. The door was opened and, followed by the attendant clergy, who included

the Archdeacon of Gower (the Reverend H.S.Williams) and the new vicar, Dean Lynn Davies, he entered. During the consecration service the Bishop delivered an address. He said: 'We have come to the day, which has long been awaited in the thoughts, and expectations of those who are now gathered within these newly erected walls. For quite a time it had become obvious that the development of the district demanded that some new provision should be made for worshippers, but the times had been difficult and it was with profound thankfulness that they now gathered to consecrate the church. The increase of parishioners in that part had shown that there was a great need for development. It will not be without some regret that some of you will leave that temporary church to come to this most worthy structure, but it is evident that the needs of the people require a permanent building for their use.' During the last three years there hail been not only this parish created but four or five new parishes also established in the diocese, and St Hilary's was the third new church to be consecrated. On Friday last they had kept one of the most important days in the church year, the Day of Transfiguration, and thankfulness should be the keynote of the present gathering. The bewigged Clerk read the legal document giving the titles, specifications and legal rights of the building, and the Lord Bishop signed the parchment before the altar, saying, 'By virtue of our Holy Office.

e we do now consecrate and set apart from all common usage'. (The discerning reader may wonder at the Bishop's words that 'times had been difficult'. The building took place at the time of great industrial strife, which came to a head in the General Strike. The Reverend H. Hughes also recalls a conversation with Mrs Lynne Davies in which she said that when they were building the church they ran into money problems owing to the effect of the General Strike and so they had to curtail their plans and the church is one bay shorter than was first planned.).

Earlier it has been said that the reasons for dedicating the early church in Dunvant to St Martin of Tours, was a little obscure although there is reason to believe that it was the tradition to dedicate to St Martin in places where the pagan area needed conversion to the faith. The choice of dedicating the new church to St Hilary is one of association between St Martin and St Hilary who were companions and friends. The choice is appropriate, however other possibilities were considered, some verging on the frivolous. The new vicar's immediate family rejected St. Boniface on the grounds that it would not do to give the impression that the church had been called after the vicar, who was somewhat round of face. A more serious suggestion to dedicate the church to St Helen, who, historically, had been linked to Gower, was finally turned down on the grounds that newspaper headlines such as "Record Crowds at St Helens" might be a source of confusion. Perhaps there was something inevitable after all in the choice of St Hilary; for, following the harvest festival service in the autumn of 1925, at a time when this saint's name had yet to be mentioned, a letter of thanks for the vegetables donated to Swansea Hospital was received from the Matron, Miss Scovell, which was addressed to "The Vicar and Churchwardens of St Hilary's Church, Killay"

So finally, it was, following a week of celebrations, the parishioners were left with a brand new church and a heavy burden of debt, to the tune of £3,200. Which could be considered a very large debt to carry in those days. It must have been difficult at times to avoid a preoccupation with financial matters. Moreover the vicar refused to mention money from the pulpit. Thus most appeals appeared in the Parish Magazine, which was published for the first time in January 1928. The price of the magazine was two pence and remained so for many years to come; the announcement of which was followed by the plea that " those who can afford are asked to pay in advance to enable us to pay the printer promptly every

quarter". From such comments, and the many references to unemployment and the economy, it is easy to reconstruct something of the cloud of uncertainty and poverty, which hung over the area in the years between the great world wars.