



Small Pilgrim Places Network

NEWSLETTER

September 2026



The Church of All Saints, dating from the 14th Century, stands in the ancient little settlement of Radwell, Hertford-shire. Nearby, the River Ivel is one of only 250 rare chalk streams in the world. Parts of the Ivel are now dry due to over-abstraction. Radwell Rector, Rev Bill Britt, has developed a short pilgrimage route from the church to Ivel Springs, including six stations for pilgrims to pray for the revival of this chalk stream as a wildlife habitat supporting a broad range of wildlife.

Other self-guided pilgrim paths have been developed in the Herts/Beds area. They are circular routes of between 2 and 8 miles long through beautiful countryside, stopping at small rural churches and historical sites. Each route includes detailed directions, a map, local history and a spiritual reflection. You can find details at <https://bedfordshirepilgrimages.org.uk/>.

A warm welcome to this edition of our SPPN newsletter, the third and final one of the year. Inside you'll find an account by core member Ali Green of a busy week travelling around the Isle of Man, visiting five potential new SPPs and people connected with them, as well as a chapel that has been a member for some years. You'll also find an informative piece about ancient holy sites, known as keeills, on the island.

Read too about how one woman fell in love with a little church that influenced an important life decision. And look out for two invitations - one to contribute to our new book, due to be published next year, and the second to send us details about your "small treasures" - we're waiting to hear from you!

Island Places

Core member Ali Green recounts a fruitful visit to the Isle of Man

Agneash Methodist Chapel on the Isle of Man has been a member of the SPPN for some years, and I was hoping that one day I would be able to visit and add it to the 80 or so Places to which I've made pilgrimages over the last decade. When several Anglican churches on the island expressed an interest in joining the Network, I had the ideal opportunity to spend a week touring the island, visiting the churches and meeting those who care for them.

My first stop was at Agneash, where I met hospitaller Hilary Simm, who explained that the chapel stands on one of the ancient pilgrimage routes that crossed the island in Celtic times. The current place of worship, Hilary said, started life in 1857 as a Primitive Methodist chapel, serving local farmers, farm labourers, miners and their families. These days, the small congregation has a wide-ranging ministry to its many visitors, including walkers who value the open doors and refreshments on offer. Others from overseas come tracing their family history, since many local miners emigrated to Australia, New Zealand and the USA.

Next on my list was Kirk Maughold, by tradition named after a fifth century Irish prince and bandit who was converted to Christianity by Saint Patrick, and eventually became the island's bishop. In the churchyard here, managed for nature conservation, I found the rectangular foundations of a number of small ancient chapels known as keeills, described below in the article by Phil Craine. A shelter nearby houses the largest collection of stones and crosses on the island, the earliest dating from the 6th century.



Hilary and Ali in Agneash Methodist Chapel



Ian Faulds with the collection of stones and crosses at Kirk Maughold

In the nave is an ancient stone cross bearing the oldest carved stone example of the Manx Triskelion (the Three Legs of Man). Ian Faulds, priest and expert on Manx heritage and early Christian history, told me that a Celtic monastery probably once stood on the site. He said that the tradition of pilgrimage that has existed here

since the days of St Maughold is still continuing. On a table in the nave are pilgrim badges, certificates and leaflets, the result of several years of planning by Ian. The Triskelion Way, launched in 2016, now links Kirk Maughold to Peel Cathedral on the west coast.

Not far from Peel is the village of Dalby, my third destination. St James Church, overlooking the sea and surrounded by a small, wildflower-rich garden, was built in 1839 as both a place of worship and as a school for local children, who were largely illiterate. After a period of neglect, the building was restored and re-purposed to serve both the local community and visitors. The original schoolmaster's accommodation is now open as a drop-in space and overnight stay for walkers, weekenders and visitors coming for the annual TT races. Local Minister Cheryl Cousins explained that as St James is a silver-award Eco-church, the little shop, where villagers pay into an honesty box, holds many products that are Fair Trade, refillable and eco-friendly.



A Celtic Communion at St James' Church

The old school rooms are now used as a community meeting space with kitchen facilities. The church section retains its pews and wood panelling, and remains a quiet space for stillness and reflection. After looking around I stayed on to join a Celtic-style evening Communion service, held "in the round" in part of the community space.

My next port of call was a complete contrast. Old St Runius, which dates from the era of Viking-Celt Christianity, fell into disrepair in the 20th century and was saved from closure by volunteers. Hidden behind high hedges next to a country lane, a path leads through the churchyard to the west end. The low, narrow door, on which a sign welcomes pilgrims, opens to reveal an utterly simple, spare interior, where centuries of history and devotion are palpable. Without water or electricity, the space is lit by candelabras hanging from its exposed roof beams and deep-cut round-arched windows set into the very thick south wall. Near the altar table are two ancient stone cross slabs, one dating from the 7th century.



The interior of Old St Runius Church

Not far away is another example of a church sharing its space with a school room. St Luke's, built in 1836 to the same design as St James', is surrounded by a stone-walled churchyard offering commanding views across the countryside to the sea. In the light, airy interior, the nave is furnished with pews, behind which is a small refreshment area. I was joined by the vicar, Janice Ward, who explained that once the dividing screen is pulled back, there is room to hold wedding receptions and other events in the section that had once been the school room.



Ali and Janice talk in St Luke's

My final visit was to the series of 17 conceptual gardens that surround the Cathedral Church of Saint German, Peel, where I was shown round by Rosemary Clarke, who lives nearby. Each garden is deeply symbolic, from the twelve pairs of pleached Beeches at the entrance, signifying the disciples of Jesus, to the stone bench set under a stand of willows, trimmed to resemble an upturned boat to echo St Maughold's journey to the island across the sea from Ireland.



Rosemary beside a sculpture designed by Angela Patchett, 2017, in the Cathedral gardens

Other gardens explore the history of humankind and of faith. An impressive labyrinth of dark and light stone slabs takes up a central space. Other themes include St Francis, patron saint of ecology, and his Song of Creation, the history of Methodism on the Island, and peace and reconciliation, focussing around a Celtic-style war memorial. The Knockaloe Garden is named after a World War I enemy internment camp on the island, the largest of its kind in the British Isles.

Each of these sacred spaces had its own very particular sense of welcoming spiritual presence, and I was happy to encourage all of them to become Members of SPPN. Once they are listed, my journal entries will appear, as usual, on the 'Ali's Journal' page of our website.

Manx Keeills

Phil Craine explains some of the mysteries of ancient sites on the Isle of Man

A *keeill* is the Manx Gaelic word for a Christian 'chapel' – the Isle of Man's earliest. About 170 were built on the island between the 6th and 12th centuries, soon after the gospel arrived on its shores. But less than 40 are visible today, dotted around the island. They are all in ruins, with remaining walls no higher than 4ft – though the entrance and position of a window can sometimes still be seen. A typical keeill is rectangular, oriented roughly



Lag ny Keilley

east-west, perhaps 20ft long by 10ft wide internally. The earliest ones were constructed from sods of earth but some of the later keeills were larger and built with stone. The roof – thatch or maybe turf – has long gone.

There's much we don't know, but keeills were probably not for congregational worship as we understand it, but rather a

chapel for an extended family-clan based at a farm, or perhaps a wayside shrine. A walled graveyard surrounds some keeills, and a well and priest's cell may be nearby. Some think that an itinerant priest would visit a family's keeill at a time of baptism or funeral. Memorial carved crosses and other decorated stones have been found at many keeills and moved to the present parish churches.

Each May, 'Praying the Keeills Week' takes place; a week-long series of events – several walks, a talk and a coach trip. . This has been organised by local churches since 2006, believing that the week



Corrody Keeill

provides opportunities to step aside from the busyness of life, and rediscover what we may have lost. See more at <https://prayingthekeeills.org>



Our Celtic forebears would have described the keeills as “thin places” where we can draw close to God in prayer, meditation or silence - as they can be to us today. They are often found in remote and beautiful locations, such as the coastal gem of Lag ny Keilley, overlooking the sea, or Keeill Pherick (Patrick's chapel in Manx Gaelic) in Glen Mooar, close to Spooyt Vane (White Spout) waterfall.



Cabbal Pherick keeill

In such spots, the beauty of creation combines with a humble simplicity to offer a portal into the divine.

Pulling Out The Stops At Kirk Maughold

Ian Faulds recounts a summer of Manx celebration

What a busy summer it has been at Kirk Maughold on the Isle of Man this year. Our annual week-long festival (St Maughold's Week), dedicated to the legacy of our founder Celtic saint, Maughold (pronounced Mack-uld) was a great success. It featured lectures, a pilgrimage to nearby St Maughold's healing Well, led by the Bishop of Sodor and Man, the Rt Revd Tricia Hillas, a series of organ recitals, a specially-composed musical 'soundscape', afternoon teas, and Festal Evensong led by our Rector, Revd Daniel Norris, with the Bishop as preacher... As if that was not enough, the Week ended with a magnificent Garden Party almost on the seashore...



The wedding procession

One of the main attractions, however, was an event that turned back the clock to Victorian times and brought out dancers in Manx costume, fiddlers and even a chimney sweep. The traditional Manx Wedding concert took place in the church and featured songs, period customs and a great deal of fun and laughter! A nearby barn had been transformed into a special venue for the wedding breakfast, there was dancing on the Green... and the Village was truly *en fête*.

Our pilgrimage has also been active during the summer period. Several pilgrim groups have visited this medieval site and a short video has been commissioned to put us further on the map. The story of St Maughold is one of transformation and second chances and this, perhaps, is part of his appeal. All are made very welcome! The 36-mile pilgrim trail leading to the site – the Triskelion Way – is much walked, and we are now preparing to welcome the Archbishop of York at the end of September.



Dancers on the Green



Llanfihangel Genau'r Glyn

Hospitaller Ann Barlow describes how she fell for a church in West Wales that has become a recent addition to SPPN

My first visit to the church at Llanfihangel Genau'r Glyn (St Michael's Church) happened as a result of arriving early for a house viewing. The church car park was the only place where we could safely pull the car off the narrow lane through the village for the half an hour we had to wait until the agent arrived for our appointed time.



My husband and I were looking for a retirement home within reach of sea and hills. The house fitted the bill perfectly but I maintain that it was the church that clinched the deal. Once we'd visited we knew that it was where we wanted to stay. It was only later that I learnt of the very specific moves that had taken place to create the atmosphere of welcome that we felt so distinctly in the church and its surroundings.

Llanfihangel Genau'r Glyn, roughly translated as the Church of St Michael at the mouth of the valley, lives up to its name. It stands on the tip of a wooded hillside overlooking the village of Llandre. From the outside the building itself looks small and squat – a Victorian rebuild surrounded by ancient gravestones and even more ancient yew trees – but the combined efforts of a dedicated congregation and an enthusiastic heritage group have contributed to making the church a place of peace and hospitality.



It's probably the situation that first attracts visitors and it was here that the initial focus was placed. The local heritage group initially came together in 2005, primarily to maintain the old hillside graveyard. Alongside the maintenance it was decided to record the gravestones, making details available for family history researchers. With advice from Caring for God's Acre, a management plan for churchyard mowing was developed to nurture the abundant wildlife in the immediate surrounds.

A permissive footpath was established from the churchyard into the surrounding woodland, skirting the remains of a Norman motte and bailey castle.

Llanfihangel Genau'r Glyn has been the inspiration for poets over centuries and information boards alongside the path encourage walkers to stop and muse over verses inspired by the place. With the Poetry path beginning and ending in at the lychgate, the development of the church itself as a centre became the next major project.

In 2013 funding was granted from several sources, including CADW and European Community funding, to establish a Church Heritage Trail around twelve places of worship in the area of North Ceredigion. This was named the Peaceful Places trail – in Welsh, Llefydd Llonydd. St Michael's at Llandre became the hub for the project, with a reordering of the west end allowing for the creation of two meeting areas with kitchen facilities and an accessible toilet.

The ground floor room forms the entrance to the main church and it's there that visitors can rest and absorb the particular atmosphere of the church. Although the main body of the church dates to the nineteenth century, the stained glass windows were not installed until the twentieth century, and it is those which serve to create the impression of light and colour throughout the building.

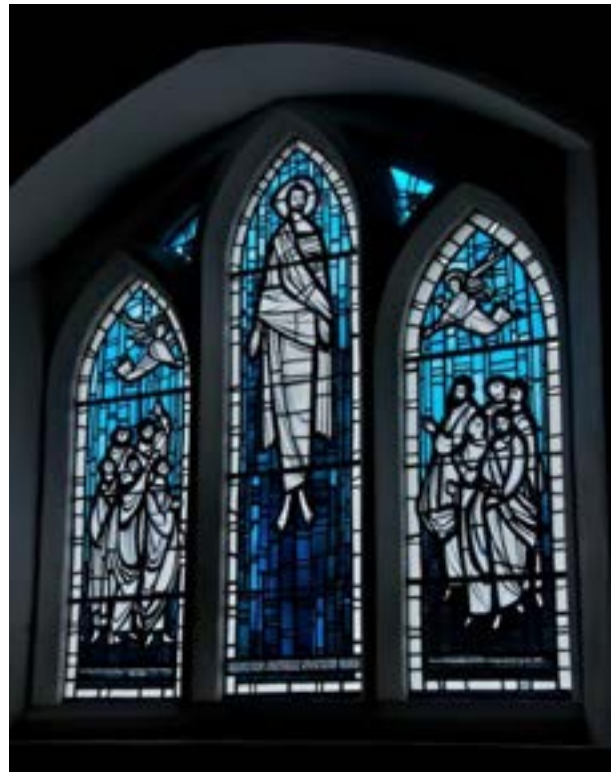


It was the large east window which immediately captured my attention when I first entered the building. It's a 1930s depiction of the Te Deum with the predominance of white and blue glass providing a jewel-like backdrop to the figure of Christ in red robes. I still find myself able to sit simply gazing at it as I find new detail each time I look. In contrast, two windows designed by the artist Roy Lewis and installed in the 1960s seem more simplistic in style but are equally dramatic. The window depicting the Ascension on the south wall is particularly captivating as it uses only blue and white glass, and as a result the silhouettes of the figures can be seen equally well from the outside of the church as from the inside.



So it was, five years ago, I fell in love with a church, before even seeing the house we'd come to look at. After that our move was inevitable and I quickly found myself involved with the congregation and the community. It wasn't long before I joined the rota for ensuring that the church is opened every day. Usually when I open, I take time to absorb the quiet and sit as the sun shines through the south facing windows reflecting their colours onto the north wall. The noise of tractors or of the two trains an hour through the village does little to detract from constant birdsong.

Often I meet walkers who, having taken a turn round the Poetry Path, like a peaceful place to sit and take breath. The village heritage website, with its full list of gravestone inscriptions, brings family history researchers, and the surrounding environment leads to interesting conversations. Artists are inspired by the landscape and from time to time the church has formed a backdrop for exhibitions of their work. Future plans include establishing a regular programme of quiet days and creative retreats. With facilities for refreshments, there is space to relax while at the same time absorbing the peace which this ancient site continues to offer in today's busy world.



Peaceful Places website [Welcome | Peaceful Places](#)

Llandre Heritage website [Home page Llandre Heritage](#)

The Peaceful Places Network

Lindsey Shaw-Miller enjoys a pilgrimage around several Welsh churches.

The Peaceful Places Network connects 17 churches in mid-west Wales. It is a driving route, but some of the churches lend themselves to walking between. Each church has a story, a history of its own that is powerfully situated in this impressive landscape. It is a feature of the network that the setting of each church is part of the experience: St Michael's in Llandre publishes a separate guide to its beautiful churchyard, and the ancient woodland that surrounds it.



The Network goes from Strata Florida in the south-east to Eglwys-fach in the north-west. You don't have to visit the churches in any order, nor do you have to visit them all. Some, such as Llantrisant, Hafod and Cwmystwyth, constitute a natural group, which you could extend to Ysbyty Istwyth. Llanilar and Llanfihangel-y-Creuddyn are a proximate pair. I visited Llandre, Borth

and Eglwys-fach, a trio which can be walked between. The distance between Borth and Eglwys-fach, eight miles, is appreciable, but from Borth you could take the train to Dovey Junction, along the Dove estuary, and walk back to Eglwys-fach from there. Add to that

the initial two miles' walk from Llandre, with its verdant, sloping churchyard, across fields and along the coast to Borth, and you have a spectacular day.

Every church on the Network is open all day. Some are large and well-resourced, such as St Michael's, Aberystwyth, which overlooks the sea front. By contrast St Hilary's, Llanilar, is a small, mediaeval survival in the lower Ystwyth valley. It has a mid-14th-century bell and houses the Maesmynach stone, thought to have been brought there from a hill fort near Lampeter. The stone has distinctive patterning on one face, which has been dated to the 9th/early 10th century.

Several of these churches were renovated or completely rebuilt, with considerable sensitivity, in the late 19th century. There is some excellent, modern stained glass. St Michael's in Llandre is a space of solidity and calm, illuminated by wonderful windows. St Matthew's at Borth is raised on a mound, behind the seafront, its environment governed by the alluvial plain that gives way to dunes at Ynyslas. This is a proud church, keeping watch over its graves, some of which are artworks in themselves. The church is a single cell with a very high ceiling, and more highly coloured, arresting glass.

There are eleven windows, several with modern glass designed by Celtic Studios. In 1925 Uppingham School was evacuated to Borth to escape a typhoid outbreak. In gratitude, the School gave an appreciable sum for repairs to the church, and commissioned a new east window, a full and complex design on the theme of faith. Llandre and Borth churches have a window dedication in common: St Cecilia and St Francis, paired. Music (St Cecilia) and nature (St Francis), such vital aspects of this peaceful trail and its Welsh context.



The chancel, St Matthew's,

Photos by Lindsey Shaw-Miller

St Michael's at Eglwys-fach, where my walk ended, is famous for being the church where the poet R.S. Thomas was the vicar 1954–67. Alongside the church is the Iron Room, a corrugated chapel where an annual poetry festival takes place in his honour. He and his wife, the artist Elsie Eldridge, transformed the interior with locally forged ironwork, which they commissioned: two dramatic chandeliers, a delicate lectern and an altar cross. The pews, panelling and beams are painted black, with white walls above. The effect is austere, but solid and grounded. There is an informative display about the couple, with examples of Elsie Eldridge's work. Here again, the setting is significant, and quite different from the first two churches. Set back from a main road, with ancient trees around it and a stream running through the churchyard, it is a counterpoint to the old iron foundry, positioned beside the water and across the road. This was established in the late 18th

century to cast cannon and cannon balls for the American War of Independence. Its role is now unconnected with conflict.

Here is just one example of a peaceful pilgrimage made accessible by this visionary network; a nurturing web woven through 17 different spaces and locations. It is the perfect encouragement to gratitude and contemplation, outside in nature and inside in luminescent, tranquil interiors.

Small Pilgrim Places In Print

The summer edition of the glossy subscription periodical, *magnet*, carried a piece by SPPN core member Ali Green. Titled Skilful Hands, it looked at the craftspeople who, over many years, have enhanced and enriched the interiors of parish churches across England. Ali chose intriguing features in various materials in four churches, all members of SPPN.



Stone masonry was illustrated by the beautifully carved romanesque pillars and arches of St Laurence Church Pitlington, near Durham. For stained glass, she chose a medieval window in St Mary's Church, Orchardleigh near Frome, which shows St John the Evangelist bearing a chalice from which emerges a delightfully wriggly, poisonous mini-dragon, referencing a legend that St John survived unscathed from being offered a poisoned drink.



Wood was represented by two more recent examples, both from the 20th century. One was a pulpit with carved wooden panels depicting historical figures, Celtic knot designs and repeated nature-inspired patterns at St Hilda's, Lucker in Northumberland. The other was a delightful little carved mouse, created by Mouseman furniture makers of Kilburn. It is one of several hidden around the interior of St Mary Magdalene's Church, East Keswick near Leeds.

If you care for a Small Pilgrim Place, do you have a 'small treasure' there? Perhaps a piece of embroidery depicting local scenes, an unusual corbel or gargoyle, or a special plant or feature in the churchyard or garden? It may not

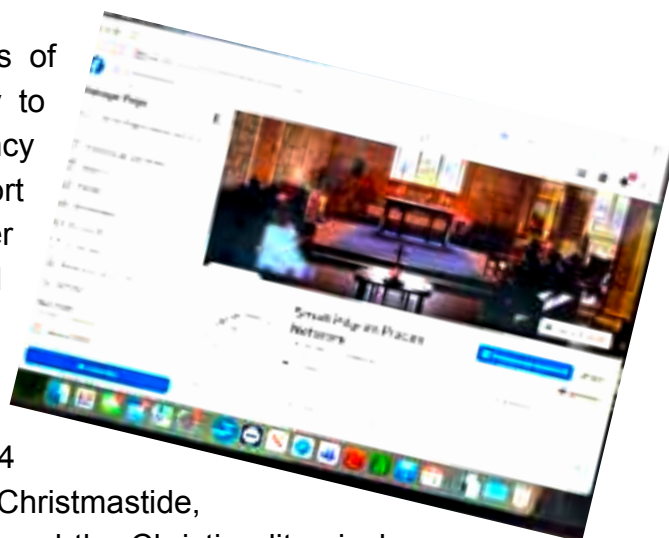
have any monetary value, but is nevertheless something in your Place that you love and cherish. Whatever it is, we'd love you to tell us about it.

Do send a description of your 'small treasure', together with a photo, to alig9@btinternet.com, and we will include it in our next newsletter.



Seasonal Posts

We are now in the season of Creationtide, so as usual during September and the first few days of October, a SPPN facebook post appears daily to celebrate the natural world and our dependency upon it. Each post carries a little poetry or short text for reflection, together with photos of Member Places on the network. By clicking on 'like' and 'share', you can help others get to know about our many beautiful Small Pilgrim Places.



The last post will be on St Francis' Day, 4 October, and then the posts will start again for Christmastide, with texts and poems appropriate to the season and the Christian liturgical year.

Update On Our Planned New Book

Core member Terry Faull writes:

Following the appeal in the last Newsletter for suggestions for inclusion in the new SPPN book, we have been pleased to receive ideas from a couple of Places. — **but would like many more, please!** Stories and paintings would be welcome, and it will be especially pleasing to include comments from visitors about how they have enjoyed their visit to a Small Pilgrim Place.

It is hoped that a new larger A4 format will allow for more and higher quality images. Depending on the range of Places to be included, it may be possible to group the entries by region as this might help a reader plan their visits. Perhaps a few 'logbook' or visitors' book pages could be included as a record of Places visited?

The late summer and autumn months are a good time to visit a Place. Here is a quote included in the leaflet produced jointly with the Quiet Garden Movement about St Winwaloe's church and the Digbna Prayer Garden in Cornwall, and which is a candidate for the new Book:



"When one is still and listens, one begins to be in touch with a mysterious element that is within each of us, which can transform and shape us"



New Members and Places

Membership secretary Dilys Stone writes:

We extend a warm welcome to new individual members Cheryl Cousins (Isle of Man), Anna Lewis (Cardiff), Rosemary Gibson (Isle of Man), William Stanley (Kidderminster), Janet Studley (Honiton) and Malcolm Lorimer (Crewe).

New Places that have recently joined the Network are St James Dalby, Isle of Man; St Bartholomew's Sealand, Flintshire; and St Margaret of Antioch Denton, Northants

And finally. ..

Contact details - Let us know of any changes in email address etc

Keeping up to date - Please check whether your subscription needs updating.

Leaflets - Please do let us know if your Place is in need of more leaflets, by emailing enquiries@smallpilgrimplaces.org

CofE Churches - Could you consider listing your SPPN status on A Church Near You?

New Celebration Book - Do you have any stories and images to send to Terry Faull? sppnbookeditor@gmail.com

"Small Treasures" - Do let us know of about a "small Treasure" connected with your SPP. alig9@btinternet.com

Your news - Have there been changes or events at your Place, or plans for spring or Easter events that you'd like to share with the Network? Please let us know - we'd love to include your news and views in the next newsletter. alig9@btinternet.com

The next SPPN newsletter will be with you in January 2027