

## Spending a while in the Wye Valley

Neil and Marion spent two weeks discovering the beauties and oddities of the Wye Valley this summer. Here is a description of just two of the churches they found

### Church of the Holy Cross - Kilgwrrwg



This church, it is claimed, is the remotest church still in regular use in Wales (and probably England too!)

It is quite difficult to imagine people attending this church as a congregation. It is approachable only on foot and then after quite a steep descent down and then a steep ascent up a country cow pasture.

As we approached the church we had to climb over a wooden stile then cross a wooden bridge over a stream and mount a hill and then, before us was a stone stile into the churchyard. We had, without realising it, approached via the back door route!



As we climbed the stile, there before us immediately was the grave of Able Seaman R. Morgan.

His precise and white Commonwealth War Graves Commission headstone was standing out rather, as it sat in the family plot alongside his deceased relatives and amid the tangled trees of the churchyard.

We had seen several such isolated Commonwealth War Graves during our recent forays into cemeteries around the world. I thought to myself, how ubiquitous are the war graves of British men and women, no matter where you are in the world, and no matter how

remote you think you are from the well-trodden paths of cemeteries and battle-fields, the signs of the British at war are always about to be discovered.

It was a sobering moment.

Then, after a tour of the church itself, we came across the grave of Sarah, wife of James Davies who died September 6<sup>th</sup> 1828 aged 50 years. Her headstone bore the following little quatrain:

Here lies a Woman of such are left too few,  
The loving Wife and tender Mother too;  
Easy she sleeps till Heaven shall raise her dust,  
Yielding her Soul to the Mansions of the Just.



The verse has such a home-spun feel to it, but yet, how warm are the words, and how lovingly they have been composed to convey the deep respect and love which she inspired in her husband and family.

One of the unexpected pleasures of our visit to Wales was to meet, quite by chance, the Revd. James Coutts who is a former curate of the parish where I now work in Greenford, and Mrs Stephanie Coutts. He was at Greenford in the 1960s and remembers some of the people still around today. He is now a retired priest and former rector of Monmouth. James and Stevie Coutts invited us to dinner in their village called Tregagle, close to Penallt, and showed us a poem, written by Ruth Bidgood, an octogenarian friend who was inspired to pen the poem following a visit to Kilgwrrwg Church, as follows:-

### **Looms**

A small church, branch-hidden,  
stands high at the hill centre  
of a round valley.

It holds time as buttercups by the path  
hold globules of rain.  
Before we came  
we were here already.

To see, nothing  
unforgettable: little to hear,  
only soft breath of rain.

What amazes is power;  
as if in this place  
great silent looms are running, running,  
endlessly mending the rents  
in torn lives, endlessly shaping,  
changing, enhancing, endlessly enriching  
the weave of darkness and light

Nothing is lost.  
Though we go back down rainy fields,  
cross the stream, turn away,  
we shall stay.