

The St Chad Gospels



LICHFIELD
CATHEDRAL

The St Chad Gospels (formally known as the Lichfield Gospels, and sometimes still known as the St Teilo Gospels), is an eighth century Gospel Book housed in the Cathedral's Chapter House.

There are 236 surviving folios, eight of which are illuminated. Another four contain framed text. The manuscript is also important because it includes, as marginalia, some of the earliest known examples of written Welsh.

The manuscript was rebound in 1962 by Roger Powell. At that time it was discovered that in the rebinding of 1862 the manuscript had been cut into single leaves and that the pages had been trimmed during the rebinding of 1707.

Text & Script

The manuscript contains the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, and the early part of the Gospel of Luke. A second volume disappeared about the time of the English Civil War. The text is written in a single column and is based on the Vulgate. The manuscript has almost 2000 variances from the Vulgate, almost a third of which it shares with the Hereford Gospels. There are fewer variations in the text which agree with the Macregal Gospels and the Book of Armagh, 370 agree with the Book of Kells and 62 with the Lindisfarne Gospels.

The script is predominantly Insular majuscule but has some uncial characteristics and is thus called semi-uncial. There was a single scribe. The script forms strong links between the Lichfield manuscript and Northumbrian, Iona, and Irish manuscripts.



Marginalia

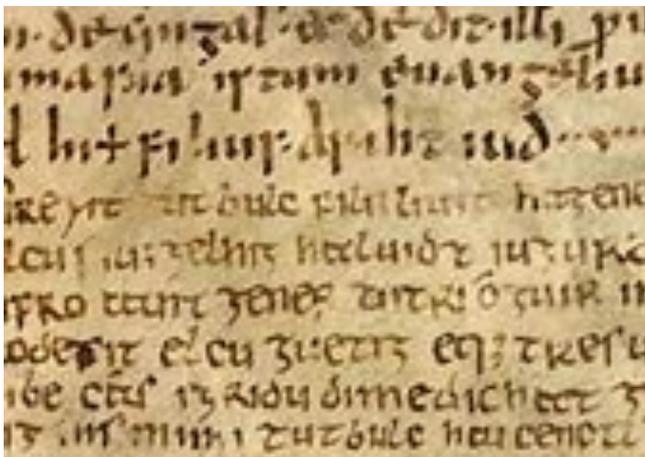
There are eight marginal inscriptions written in Latin and Old Welsh, which are some of the earliest written Welsh extant. The first records, in Latin, the gift of the manuscript "to God on the altar of St. Teilo" by a man named Gelhi, who, according to the inscription, had bought the manuscript for the price of his best horse from Cingal. The 'altar of St. Teilo' has in the past been associated with the monastery at Llandaff. However, it has been determined that the third, fourth and sixth marginal inscriptions refer to lands with fifteen miles of Llandeilo Fawr. It is, therefore, now thought that the book was given not to Llandaff but to the church at Llandeilo.

The second marginal inscription is of some interest as it contains a unique example of early Welsh prose, which records the details of the resolution of a land dispute. The first two inscriptions have been dated to the mid ninth century. The third through eight inscriptions date from the ninth and tenth centuries. The Latin and Welsh marginalia were edited by J. Gwenogvryn Evans, with John Rhys in their 1893 edition of the Book of Llan Dav.



Decoration

The manuscript has two evangelist portraits (St. Mark and St. Luke), a carpet page, initial pages for Mathew ("Lib"), Mark (*initium*), and Luke (*Quoniam*), a Chi Rho monogram page, and a page with the Four evangelist symbols. The Genealogy of Christ is framed (3 pages) and the last page is framed.



Provenance

The origin of the manuscript is controversial. It is not known who wrote the manuscript, for whom it was written or where it was written. Paleographic and stylistic similarities link it to Northumbria and Iona. Links to the Hereford Gospels suggest a Mercian origin. Some, especially those in Wales, have argued that the manuscript was written in Wales.

On the other hand, since the discovery of the Lichfield Angel in 2003, an increasing number of scholars has been persuaded that the Gospels originated in Lichfield, as the pigmentation of the two artefacts is too similar to be coincidental.

Although it is not known how the book came to be in Lichfield, it may have been there as early as the late tenth century and was almost certainly there by the early eleventh century. The opening folio contains a faded signature reading *Wynsige presul* which probably refers to the Wynsige who was Bishop of Lichfield from *circa* 963 to 972-5. Folio four contains a reference to Leofric who was bishop from 1020 to 1026.

Wherever it originated and however it came to Lichfield, it has, except for a brief period during the English Civil War, been at Lichfield since the eleventh century. In 1646, during the Civil War, Lichfield Cathedral was sacked and the library looted. This is probably when the second volume of the Gospels was lost. Precentor Walter Higgins is credited with saving the remaining volume. They were given to Frances, Duchess of Somerset, who returned them in 1672 or 1673. They have remained at the Cathedral ever since. They were put on public display in 1982. The bishops of Lichfield still swear allegiance to the crown on the Chad Gospels.