

## **The Abbey Church**

The church at Belmont was built to the designs of Edward Welby Pugin, son of the great Augustus Welby Pugin. Built in the decorated, early English style, it demonstrated the resurgent optimism of the restored Catholic faith. The exterior is in local pink sandstone, simple and unadorned, especially the west front which is reminiscent of many classical monastic facades of the fourteenth century. The interior is faced with warm Bath stone. Light from the rich aisle windows frequently suffuse the whole space. It is a beautiful place to sit on a sunny summer's afternoon.

The Church, dedicated to St Michael and all Angels, is dominated by four elegant, steeply pointed, arches which support the central tower, leading the eye heavenwards. Originally this was the crossing, but now the altar stands here at the centre of the Church, well suited to the revised liturgy. On the modern stone altar is carved the figure of the Lamb of God. Symbols of the four evangelists, (Matthew the man, Mark the lion, Luke the (Hereford!) bull, and John the eagle) stand around on the corbels of the central pillars, calling to mind the heavenly liturgy of the Book of Revelation and the worship of the Lamb.

Originally the high altar stood under the angel reredos at the East End, in a spacious sanctuary. This is now the Blessed Sacrament Chapel, and the place where guests often join us for our celebration of the Divine Office. Below the window showing the angels Michael, Raphael and Gabriel and the nine choirs of angels, the reredos continues this theme with an angelic orchestra sounding of praises of God. This was decorated in 1978 with colour washes and gold leaf.

Under a magnificent wooden roof stands the monastic choir, where the Community gathers five times a day for the Divine Office and Mass.

The side altars are dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary, St Joseph, St Benedict, and a Memorial Altar commemorating the old boys of the school who lost their lives in the Second World War. The North Transept was formerly an elaborate chantry chapel dedicated to the Welsh Saints. In the chapel of St Benedict, a reliquary with ornate brass doors contains a relic of the True Cross which is venerated on Good Friday and the Feast of the Holy Cross.

In the north transept, below the main window illustrating the four fathers of the Welsh Church, is the ornate tomb of Bishop Brown OSB, the first bishop of the new diocese of Newport and Menevia. The other monument is that of Bishop Hedley OSB and together within this chapel they remind us of the close association of Belmont with the Principality of Wales and the Archdiocese of Cardiff.

There has recently been a major refurbishment of the Abbey funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and match funding donations from the Belmont Abbey Parish. The biggest bonus to this refurbishment is that the Abbey Church is now warm and no longer ice cold in the winter months!

The organ at Belmont also underwent a significant programme of restoration and enlargement in 2009 by Nicholson and Co. It is one of the finest and most comprehensive instruments in Herefordshire and the Archdiocese of Cardiff. The organ has 3 manuals and a pedal board. There is also a separate 'floating' West Great organ to help support congregational singing. The organ has 51 speaking stops and 2998 pipes; the largest being 32 feet in length and the

smallest 2 inches. The action is electrical throughout and a state of the art computer system allows the organ to be fully programmable. It is used to accompany around 1500 Monastic and Parish liturgies a year. We, the parishioners, are privileged to worship at Mass and to share the Monastic Office with the monks.