NEWTOWN'S OLD PARISH CHURCH
AN UNEXPECTED WOOD CARVING AT GREGYNOG

On the sideboard in the Blayney Room at Gregynog is something unexpected: a simple carved plaque depicting the old parish church of St Mary's in Newtown (the remains of which stand in their own quiet park just off Newtown's Broad Street). We believe it was made by John Llewelyn Jones (c.1816-1876), a wood carver who lived in Parker's Lane, Newtown. He was responsible for the removal of St Mary's late medieval carved rood screen to the new parish church of St David's in the late 1840s. His son Edwin was also a wood carver.

John Jones's great grand-daughter told Newtown local historian, the late Maurice Richards, that John had carved some of the panelling in the Blayney Room at Gregynog Hall. This is unlikely, as the panelling is dated 1636, but may give a clue as to what the Old Church carving is doing at Gregynog.

It seems that John Jones and his son Edwin were engaged to work on the reconstruction of the Blayney Room panelling following the rebuilding of Gregynog Hall by the Hanbury-Tracy family (the barons Sudeley). We know that Edwin also had contracts to work 'in Cheltenham' – almost certainly at Toddington, the major seat of the Sudeleys. Indeed, in the 1861 Census John Jones and his family are recorded as living in Cheltenham, although by 1871 they are back in Newtown. As the former Warden of Gregynog, Dr Glyn Tegai Hughes, comments, 'The inescapable conclusion seems to be that the job of reconstructing the 1636 panelling for the Blayney room had finished by 1861 and that father and son were then found work at Toddington.'

We do not know how long the carving of the old church has been at Gregynog or how it came to be here. Maurice Richards believed that several similar carvings were made – one was still in the possession of the Jones family, and one in Newtown Textile Museum. A box with an identical carving on the lid was sold on ebay recently for several hundred pounds. We can only hope that it was bought by someone who knew its story.