

THE LADIES OF LLANGOLLEN

If I had been asked recently what I knew about the Ladies of Llangollen, my answer would have been that I had read something about them in the pamphlets on the history of St Paul's that had been around for many years. They had written about "the nice little Chapel", or was it "the nice new window"? From time to time I had thought it rather odd that a group of ladies in Llangollen had written about St Paul's. I wondered what sort of group they were; could they have been a very early form of WI?

I had not bothered to enquire further and so that is where it rested for me....until a few weeks ago. I was listening, rather half-heartedly, to "Brain of Britain" on the car radio when the question master said "Name the ladies of Llangollen". After a short pause the answer came "Lady Eleanor Butler and Sarah Ponsonby". "Correct" said the question master, who moved on to the next question. I was quite shocked; my education had obviously been neglected. There were two ladies, and their names were known, so there had to be some story about them of which I was completely ignorant.

When I reached home I could not get to the computer fast enough. I entered "Ladies of Llangollen" and received another shock. Lady Eleanor Butler and Sarah Ponsonby were two aristocratic women of Anglo- Irish descent who, after 10 years of close friendship, eloped across the Irish Sea in 1780, against the wishes of their families, and set up home together in a house "Plas Newydd" in Langollen. This, as you can well imagine, scandalised contemporary society. Their fame spread as their romantic friendship and lifestyle became known far and wide. They set about transforming "Plas Newydd" and its garden and started corresponding with a wide variety of people. The locals dubbed them "The Ladies" and in time many well known figures of the day visited them, including Wordsworth and the Duke of Wellington. For more information on these remarkable ladies, visit web sites you can find as suggested above.

So what had the Ladies written about St Paul's? Here is a quotation from our pamphlet "Ancient and Modern". "This window was Eginton's best and most renowned work. It is interesting that the Ladies of Llangollen, who recorded in their diaries their contact with the fashionable world through smart young men on their way to Ireland through Holyhead, tell on three occasions of hearing of the 'fine new window at St Paul's Chapel in Birmingham' "

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