

T?'r Meirw Bochrwyd gydag Eglwys Sant Cynog yn y cefndir

Wales's only parish mortuary – or 'Dead House' (where bodies were kept in Victorian times before burial) – will be saved from ruin thanks to £50,000 raised by National Lottery players.

The Grade II listed building in Powys is currently on the register of Buildings at Risk, and experts had given it less than 12 months to survive if emergency works were not carried out.

Dead important

The Dead House is part of St Cynog's medieval church in Boughrood, which was entirely rebuilt in the 19th century.

The then vicar, Henry de Winton, commissioned a separate building to be constructed alongside the church to house corpses prior to burial, as it was believed following the 1848 London cholera epidemic that the disease had been caused and spread by decaying bodies.

This was visionary thinking in Victorian Britain, at a time when it was still common practice to keep the deceased in the family home until sufficient decomposition had taken place to discourage grave robbing of bodies for medical dissection.

Fit for the land of the living

The National Lottery funding will help bring the Dead House back to life, restoring leaded glass windows, protecting masonry which contains 19th-century graffiti and replacing the earth floor with one made from re-used headstones.

Volunteers will also research the significance of the Dead House and the history of the Victorian parish it served, creating an exhibition in the restored building which will be open to the public for the first time.

A short bilingual film about life expectancy, the Poor Law and medicine in the Victorian period will also be shared on the People's Collection Wales website, while a reproduction parish coffin for the burial of paupers will also be on display.

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