

# CHAPELS and CHURCHES of TONYREFAIL





## INTRODUCTION

**A**fter the founding of the Tonyrefail and District U3A in 2006, it was decided to form a local history group. The group's first project was to research and compile a booklet recording the history of the various places of worship in Tonyrefail, one of which was wantonly destroyed by vandals in October 2007: a sad reflection on the state of today's society.

Over a period of about eighteen months the group collected photographs and found out the facts relating to the history of the buildings pictured.

Tonyrefail has a rich heritage of religious architecture and the group has tried in words and pictures to do justice to this heritage.

Every member of the group has enjoyed this excursion into a very fascinating aspect of Tonyrefail past.

Sincere thanks are due to:

Beryl Davies

Marilyn Brookes

Pat Jones

Vernon Harding

Graham Owen

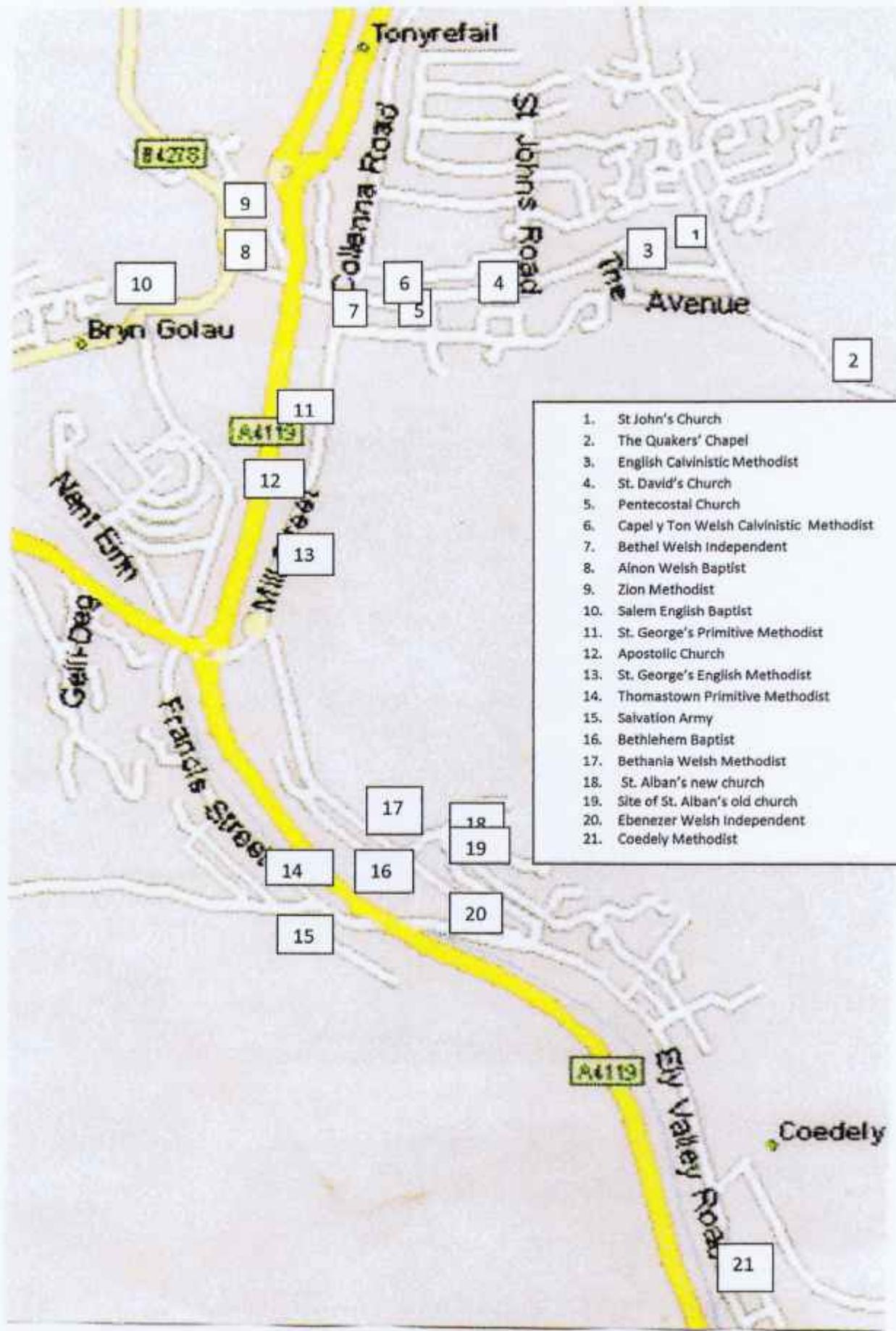
Brian Bevington

Hywel Gillard

and members of the U3A who helped in providing photographs. We are also grateful to Lynne, our local librarian, for providing a meeting place for our monthly roam into Tonyrefail past.

Hywel Gillard,

Chair, Tonyrefail and District U3A.



1. St John's Church
2. The Quakers' Chapel
3. English Calvinistic Methodist
4. St. David's Church
5. Pentecostal Church
6. Capel y Ton Welsh Calvinistic Methodist
7. Bethel Welsh Independent
8. Afnon Welsh Baptist
9. Zion Methodist
10. Salem English Baptist
11. St. George's Primitive Methodist
12. Apostolic Church
13. St. George's English Methodist
14. Thomastown Primitive Methodist
15. Salvation Army
16. Bethlehem Baptist
17. Bethania Welsh Methodist
18. St. Alban's new church
19. Site of St. Alban's old church
20. Ebenezer Welsh Independent
21. Coedely Methodist

## AINON CHAPEL



The Baptist cause in Tonyrefail was started in a stable loft near the "Three Horse Shoes Inn" in 1860. It was started by the then members, Mrs. Selina Lewis, Ty'n-y-coed Farm: John Williams, Nantmelyn: Rolant Grey, Williams Roberts, Blackmill: Mrs. And Mrs. Lewis, Rhiw Farm: Jenkin Davies, Llanilyd: Jenkin Thomas, Trebanog, Mrs. Amelia Davies and Mrs. Day.

It was Mrs. Lewis who was the chief instrument in starting the local cause. Both she and her husband worshipped at Soar Chapel, Dinas, where the Rev. J.W. Hughes (Arwystl) was the minister, and she finally prevailed upon him to start the cause at Tonyrefail. Soon afterwards the following brothers and sisters came to the place: - Mr. Lewis Davies, Tabor, Llantrisant: Mrs. Waddon, Merthyr: Mr. and Mrs. Davies, Mr. and Mrs. Rees Evans, and family, Pontypridd: Mr. and Mrs. Roderick, Capel Rhondda: Mr. and Mrs. Morgan, Capel Rhondda: Mr. Edward Morgan, Nantffin: Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Thomas and family, Cefn Cribbwr and Joseph and Marged Pritchard, Y Plas.

The first pulpit was lent by Soar chapel, Dinas, to which chapel it had been given by a family in readiness for a visit there by the famous preacher, Christmas Evans, so it became known as "Christmas Evans' Pulpit."

In 1862 the first chapel was built at a cost of £363, local farmers providing free haulage of the building materials. There were approximately twenty-four members at this time. The first minister, Rev. D. Marks Jones, was ordained in 1866 and died in 1868 at the age of 23 years. The next minister was the Rev. James Jones, who helped to start the Board School. He died in 1872. The next minister was the Rev. E. H. Price (1847-77) who was followed by the Rev. John Prichard.

In 1894 a new chapel was built at a cost of £1,500 and this was opened in March 1895 by the minister, who was supported by several other preachers in the opening services, which lasted for a week, from Sunday to Sunday.

The contractor and builder of the new chapel took over the old chapel as part of the contract price, and he, in turn sold the old seats to the members as settles for their homes.

Rev. David James succeeded Rev. Prichard as minister and it was during this time that the 1904-1905 Revival took place. In 1913, Rev. Daniel Jones was ordained at Aion, where he remained until 1920.

Rev. Robert Gimlett was inducted at Aion in 1925 where he ministered until his death in 1940.

In 1943, Rev. Gwyn Thomas was inducted and remained until 1950. He was succeeded by Rev. Thomas Davies who ministered from 1953 to 1956.

There were three branches from Aion. The first was Seion, Penrhiwfer, which cause was started in 1879.

The other cause was the English Baptist Church at Salem, Gilfach Road, which was started with the help of Mr. D. ap Morgan, and which is still flourishing.

The third cause was that of Bethlehem, Thomastown, which was meant to be a Welsh Church but as most of the members were English speaking, it became an English Church. Mr. Azariah Richards, Mr. Gwilym Lewis and Mr. D. ap Morgan supported this cause.

The Thomastown cause held their first meeting in a loft behind the Ely Hotel (closed in 1969) then transferred to Aion Vestry until it was decided to build a church at Thomastown.

The site of the church was dedicated on the 12<sup>th</sup> April, 1910 and the event was attended by fifty people, who marched from Aion Vestry to the site of the proposed church, singing on their way.

The church was opened in the year 1911 and by 1913 there were approximately seventy-five members, some having transferred from Aion Welsh Baptist Church.

There had been no resident minister since 1956 but services were held regularly until the 28<sup>th</sup> October, 1990.

A number of church meetings were held during the early months of 1990, but because of the poor state of the buildings, the costs of repair that would have been necessary, which would have rested on the few members that remained, it was decided there was no alternative but to close Aion.

The Deeds stated that in the event of closure the properties would have to revert to the East Glamorgan Welsh Baptist Association, and eventually to the Welsh Baptist Union. Advice was sought from them and a solicitor was engaged to arrange an inspection of the buildings and make a report. Regretfully, because of the bad state of repair the buildings needed to be demolished.

Demolition was carried out on the 24<sup>th</sup> January, 1992 and the site levelled. The ground was purchased by the Workmen's Club next door, and the site is now a children's play area



**New Saint Alban's Church 2007**

Saint Alban's Church has enjoyed a colourful past. Records show that over 50 years ago Services were being held at the old Imperial Hotel. In 1930 when this was no longer possible, it was decided to build a temporary Church to serve parishioners in the Thomastown and Coedely areas.

An old Army zinc-sheeted hut was purchased for £75, with a further £190 to be spent on erecting the building as a Church. Just over one-third of an acre was given by a Colonel Wingfield, a prominent land-owner as a Site for the erection of the Church.



**The Old Saint Alban's Church**

When the Rev. Bill Thomas the Vicar of Saint David's (the mother church,) arrived to take over the Parish, he and Dr. the Rev. Peter Hatherley, the Curate in charge of Saint Alban's, found themselves faced with what was almost an ultimatum. They were informed that because of the conditions of the old Saint Alban's, the insurance

company felt it had only a very limited life as far as cover was concerned. It was then decided to build a new church, costing £30,000, alongside the old building.



**Construction taking place on the New Saint Alban's Church 1980**

The excess land adjoining the proposed building was sold realising more than £11,000 and a similar sum was raised by a special committee set up in 1979 which had the benefit of private donations, among them, a £1,000 from the Pantyfedwen Trust, a £1,000 grant from the Llantrisant Community Council, and £500 from the Julian Hodge Foundation.

When asked whether, in view of falling Church attendances throughout the country, this was a time to build a new Church, Rev. Thomas said, "This can be described as an act of faith but we have had a wonderful response, several parishioners have given interest free loans and all agree a new Church is essential to the community.

Originally we had the choice of building a new house for the Curate, or a Church, we feel we are making the right decision."



**Rev Bill Thomas and Dr. the Rev Peter Hatherley at the Site 1980**

The building of the new Church took place during 1980-1981 with members and friends of the Church assisting in the initial construction and with the interior heating

and lighting design and installation, thereby helping to reduce the overall cost. Many local tradespeople and companies supplied materials at cost price and in some instances free of cost and transport.



**Churchgoers attending the Dedication of Saint Alban's Church 1981**

The Dedication of the new Saint Alban's Church took place on Sunday, 21<sup>st</sup> June 1981, and was carried out by The Right Reverend John Richard Worthington Poole-Hughes, Lord Bishop of Llandaff, and The Right Reverend David Reece, Assistant Bishop of Llandaff and Archdeacon of Margam.

The new Church serves a dual purpose, it holds normal Services, as well as being available for use by the local community for various functions. The Church is equipped with a modern kitchen equipped with gas and electric cookers, crockery and cutlery which has been donated by various Church members, and full use is made of the facilities.

The Church will accommodate a congregation of about 130.



**The Old and New Saint Alban's Church 1981**

## THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH



The Apostolic Church was started in 1921 by six families in Mr. John Phillips' house in Waunrhydd Road under the guidance of Mr. G. Williams.

From there they went to Garden City where they were loaned the Church Hut and it was here that the Apostolic Church was officially opened by Mr. D. P. Williams.

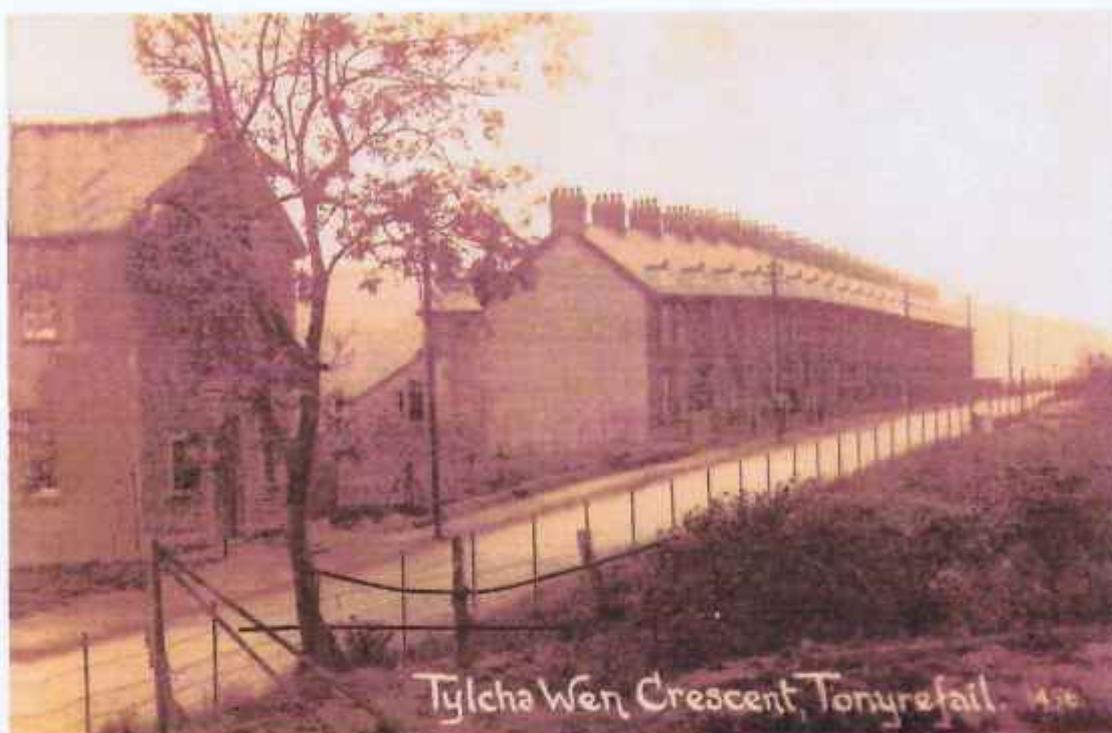
In 1926 they eventually returned to Tonyrefail where they occupied a doctor's surgery and a building in Waunrhydd Road.

The next move was to Capel y Ton vestry, which was loaned to them for twelve years, after which they built their present Church at Mill Street on a plot of ground given to them by Mrs. Blandy Jenkins.

Several missionaries have been sent out by this Church and they have also produced four full-time pastors.

The headquarters of this Church are at Penygroes, Carmarthen.

Extract from "The History of Tonyrefail" by Dilwyn Lewis.



**Bethania Welsh Calvinistic Chapel 1929**

In the first years of the nineteenth century, after the sinking of the Coedely Colliery, there was a large influx of population into the lower part of the Ely Valley. Many people came from North and West Wales, they were Welsh-speaking and Chapel-going. To cater for their spiritualistic needs non-conformist chapels were built by the Calvinistic Methodists and the Independents.

Bethania Welsh Calvinistic Chapel was opened in 1911 and some members left Capel Y Ton to help found the daughter Chapel which was built on the main Ely Valley Road.

For twenty years or more the cause flourished but with the anglicisation of the Valley and the emigration of many of the young people to more prosperous districts, the number of members steadily declined and despite gallant efforts to keep the Chapel open, it was eventually closed in 1949. The few remaining members joined Capel Y Ton in Tonyrefail.

The Chapel was sold to an industrialist and for a time became a factory making machine tools.

In 2005 it was sold again to a Builder who converted it into housing flats.



**Bethania Chapel Childrens Choir**



**Bethania Chapel converted into Flats 2005**



**Bethlehem English Baptist Church**

CAPEL Y TON PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF WALES.



1996

The first Methodist services were held in Collenna House in 1770. Mr. and Mrs. Evan Prichard, having heard tales of the great oratory of Rev. David Jones of Llangan, rode out on horseback one day to the church of Llanbedr on the slopes of the Rhiw Mountain to attend a great revivalist meeting. The Methodist movement was just then gathering strength in South Wales. The Prichard's were caught up in the religious fervour, and when the Dissenters (Methodists) broke away from the Mother church, services were held in the Prichard home.

Many famous preachers visited the house, among them Rev. David Jones, Llangan, Rev. Peter Williams and Rev. William Williams, Panycelyn, the great hymnist, who wrote an elegy for Susannah, one of the daughters of the house.

The pulpit used for the services in Collenna House was an object of great interest. Unfortunately, it was lost sight of in the course of time, and its ultimate fate is unknown.

The first Methodist chapel was built in 1791 on ground leasehold of 999 years, granted by the Prichard family. Forty-five years later, a second chapel was built behind the former one, with official opening celebrations on the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> November, 1836. In 1857 a vestry was built and this building was used as a Board School until 1870.

The third chapel was built in 1863, behind the second and this is the building known as Capel-y-Ton. Most of the work of the building was voluntary and the total cost was only £1,300. It was opened on the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> May, 1864 and all the debt was cleared by 1880.



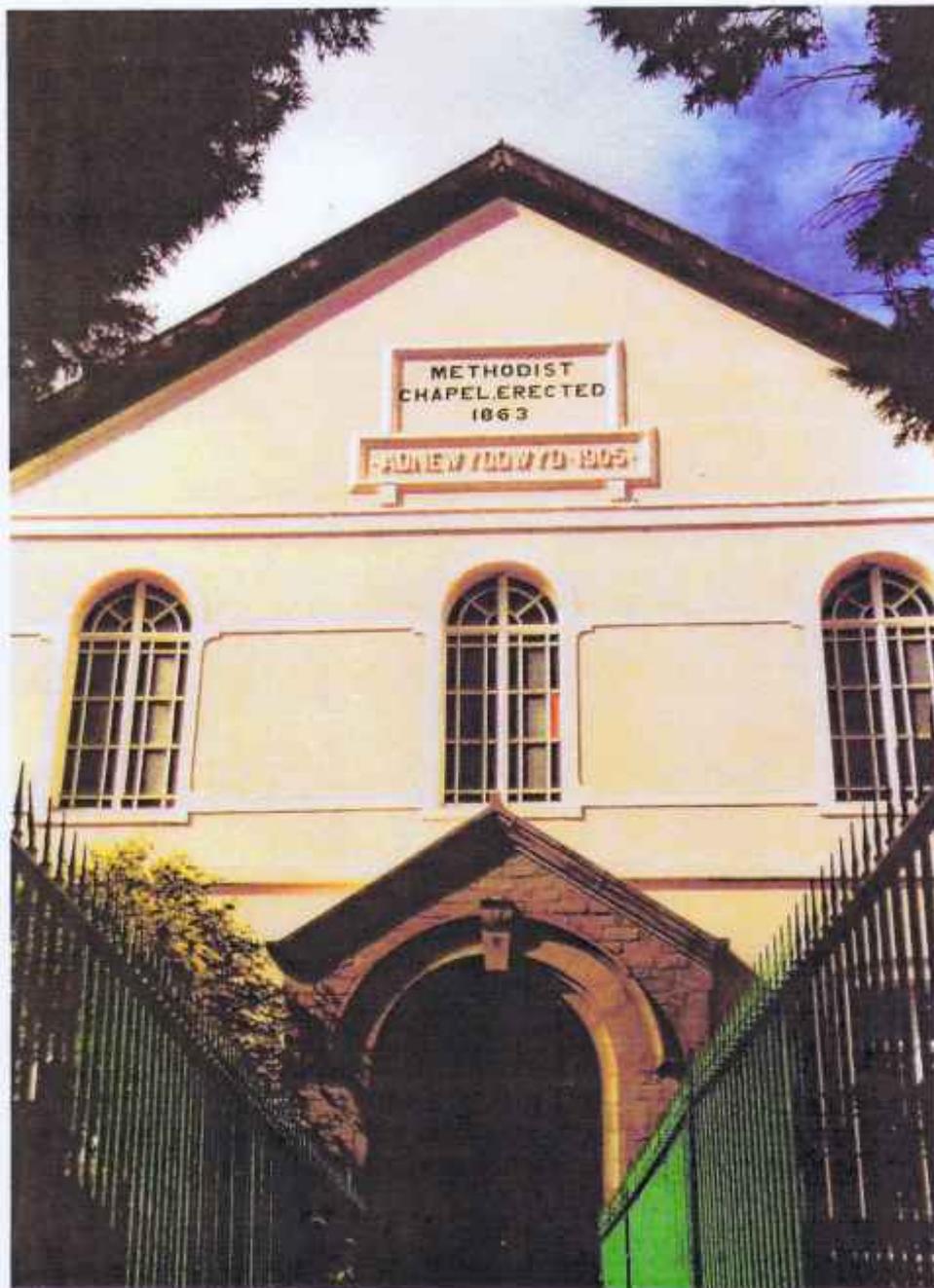
In 1893 the Chapel House was built and the vestry enlarged and renovated at a cost of £1,100. These two buildings were demolished for road-widening purposes in July 1969... Part of the graveyard was also taken and the remains buried in that area are re-interred at the Trane Cemetery.



Among the great personalities connected with the church through the two hundred years of its history, the most famous is the Rev. William Evans, the farmer preacher. Two of the first elders were David Evans, Garthgrabban, father of William Evans and Isaac James, who was miller in Tonyrefail at the time. The membership of the church in the early years was small and consisted mainly of women. By 1905, after the religious revival led by Evan Roberts, there were over three hundred members. The chapel closed in about 1998 and in 2006 the building was put up for sale. Unfortunately, in October 2007 the building was burnt to the ground by vandals.

The ministers who have served the church are in Chronological order, Rev. Richard Morgan, Rev. Cynolwyn Pugh, who later become a prominent member of the New York Welsh community while living there as a minister of the Welsh Presbyterian Church, Rev. David Davies, who later served as a minister in Saundersfoot, Pembrokeshire, and for a short time the Rev. Norman Davies. The church was then under the pastoral care of the Rev. Ieuan Owen of Pontypridd.

Extract from "The History of Tonyrefail", by Dilwyn Lewis.



**Capel Y Ton**



**Coedely Methodist Chapel 1960**



**Coedely Chapel converted to Bungalow 2005**

At the northern end of Coedely Village lay our Methodist Chapel, adjacent to the main road. It was a small low building with a green lawn each side of the gravel path leading to the entrance hall, surrounded by a stone wall. There was a small porthole cut through the wall at the side of the Chapel to allow deliveries of coal to be thrown from the gully into the coal "cwtych" on the other side. The entrance hall led into the Chapel, which was a single room with a stage and a small pulpit at the furthest end, where a side door opened into the vestry. Wooden pews were arranged on each side

of the aisle and three windows looked out on the lawns. Midway on the opposite wall stood a large cast-iron stove with a tin chimney pipe going through the wall at the side. A metal railing was set around as a safety guard.

As children we attended Sunday School and Anniversaries. Harvest Festivals were held in late August or September, the stage full of various produce and bunches of flowers from the allotments and back gardens. The highlight of the year, our annual trip to the seaside, Patey's charabancs parked outside the Chapel. The ladies dressed in their finery, flowery dresses and wide floppy hats, the long white lace gloves, the children rushing for a seat at the back of the coach, never away on time, the sun always shining, and leaving Coedely Village deserted behind us.

The Chapel was also used as an Infants School between 1924-1934 and my elder brother remembers attending. I have a faint recollection myself when I was five or six but it must have ceased being used as a School about then and the pupils transferred to Cwmlai Elementary School. There were two lady teachers but I forget their names. Mrs Legg who lived close by was the Chapel warden. From the time it was built in 1910-1912 until the early 1950's the Chapel was the centre of Community life, but then declined rapidly with only a few older people attending, my Aunts being among them.

I think it was about 1961 that it finally closed and was later sold and converted into a Bungalow.

Vernon Harding



### **Saint David's Church**

The foundation stone for the building of Saint David's was laid in March 1902 by the Lord Bishop of Llandaff the Right Reverend Richard Lewis.

The small Chapel of Saint John the Baptist would only accommodate about one hundred and fifty people and it was felt that a new Church was required to meet the increased population of Tonyrefail, now numbering some two thousand five hundred. The site, and one thousand five hundred pounds towards the building fund was donated by Captain George Pritchard of Collenna.

The total cost was estimated at three thousand three hundred pounds, and the contract for the erection let to Messrs C Beames and Nephew, Cardiff. Mr Bruce Vaughan was the Architect and the seating would be for three hundred and fifty nine people. The Church was consecrated on October 1903 with about three hundred people attending the morning service and about five hundred people in the evening service, a vast difference to the percentage of people attending at the present time.

Saint David's was licensed for Marriages in 1909 and the first marriage took place on the fifth of April 1909.

During 1910 a great deal of work was done on the church grounds by Mr. Rees of Tynybryn Farm and the electric lighting was installed by the Tonyrefail and Gilfach Goch Electric Light Company.

During 1917 the property known as "Ty Llwyd" was purchased as a vicarage at a cost of one thousand five hundred pounds, this house was sold in 1942 for one thousand one hundred and fifty pounds and a new Vicarage called "Brynawel," situated in a more convenient location was bought for one thousand five hundred pounds.

The Reverend M S Mainwaring was inducted by the Archdeacon of Llandaff in October 1950 and served the Parish until 1966 before leaving to serve the Ministry at Maesteg. The Archdeacon also opened the new Church Hall, which proved of great value, enabling the Parish to re-commence its activities, such as the Youth Guilds, Dramatic Society, Mother's Union and Ladies Sewing Guild.

During 1963 a Young Wives Group was also formed.

## ENGLISH CALVANISTIC METHODIST CHAPEL, PRETORIA ROAD



Members of the church who took part in the construction.

Top Row – left - right Mr. W. Budd, Mr. Albert Dix, and Mr. Aubrey Owen

Bottom Row – l – r Mr Jack Thomas, Mr. John Owen.

The English Methodist chapel was built in Pretoria Road following the religious revival of 1904. The revival came early to Tonyrefail. Dr. Phillips of Tylorstown set the flame alight. Chapels were filled every night for months for prayer meetings. Rev. Evan Roberts himself came on a preaching crusade and chapels were filled to overflowing.

The Methodists who could not follow the Welsh service in Capel y Ton, met for a time in the chapel vestry and a few left the Welsh mother church to help found the new cause, among them Mr. Henry Rowland.

Mr. Dan Enoch gave the land for the chapel to be built in Pretoria Road. It was an inauspicious edifice of timber, roofed with corrugated iron, but the cause flourished under the leadership of Mr. Henry Rowland. There was a large Sunday school and an active band of women workers.

Alas, in 1957 the chapel was destroyed by fire. The few remaining members dispersed to other churches and yet another cause became just a memory to be cherished in the hearts of the many who received their first religious training within the insubstantial walls of the “tin Chapel”.



**Ebenezer Chapel Choir 1927**

Ebenezer Chapel abutting Cwmlai Elementary School on the southern side was opened in 1912. This was a Welsh Independent Chapel, closely linked with Bethel Chapel in Tonyrefail.

For some years it was a thriving cause and a force for good in the district, but, eventually, and it seems inevitably, Ebenezer closed its doors for the last time in 1945, and in due course it was demolished.

I'm not sure when Ebenezer the Welsh Annilynwr Chapel was built but it must be about one hundred years or more. It was flat-roofed and was situated opposite Penygarrreg Road, next to Cwmlai School. It was demolished many years ago due to dampness through the roof.

A large congregation attended there and they participated in many various events. For example, many variety concerts, which were later held in Aion Hall to members of the public. Also annual Anniversaries, Cymanfa Ganu's, humorous sketches which were held in the Chapel and which everyone so enjoyed.

Also there were the Sunday School outings for the children which was the highlight of the year. Everyone enjoying the trip to either Barry Island or Porthcawl in Patey's charabancs, all laden with sandwiches, new daps, buckets and spades, etc.

There were many wonderful socials and fun evenings, especially, "Pass the parcel" and "Charades." (No Bingo then.)

Mr Thomas, a highly respected Minister was from Coychurch, middle-aged and was very well liked by everyone. The Organist was Mr Tommy Mathews from Pembroke Street and he was helped out occasionally by Mrs Lizzie Davies.

Some of the Deacons were Mr Richards and Mr Morris of Gilfach Road, Mr Joseph Tylcha Wen and Mr Harris of Penygarreg, and the Treasurer was Mr Harry Smith.

It was with great sadness when the Chapel closed and many members either went to Capel Y Ton or Bethel. The benches were purchased by members for sentimental value, as was the Organ, and my parents bought the Bible Cupboard which later served as a wardrobe for many years in my bedroom.

Mrs Davies



#### **St. George's Primitive Methodist Chapel now a Flower Shop 2006**

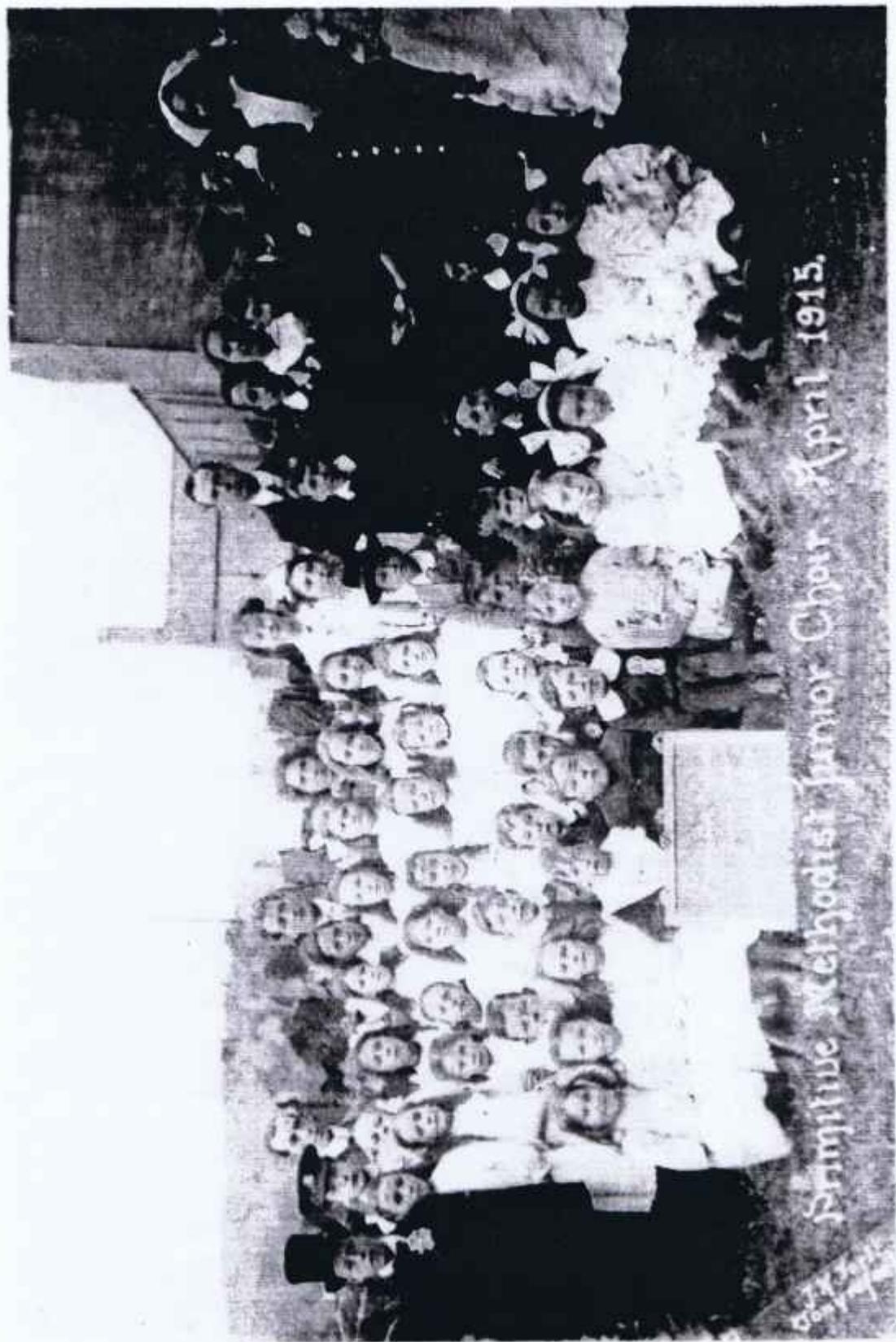
Saint George's Primitive Methodist Chapel was first opened in Mill Street in 1910 in the Tin Chapel. It continued to hold services there until the New Saint George's was built in 1925. It was then used as a "Youth Club" and table tennis tournaments were played there and I was told my Father and Mother met there and also my Mother's sister and her husband so I am sure other couples met there also. It was later sold to Henry Williams "a member of Saint George's" and it continued to be used by various organizations over the years among them the "D H S S". After Henry Williams death it was bought by Charles Riddle and when the New Saint George's closed in the 1970's he let it to Tonyrefail Old Age Pensioners and the Saint George members, so you could say the Old Chapel completed a circle.

#### **The New Saint George's**

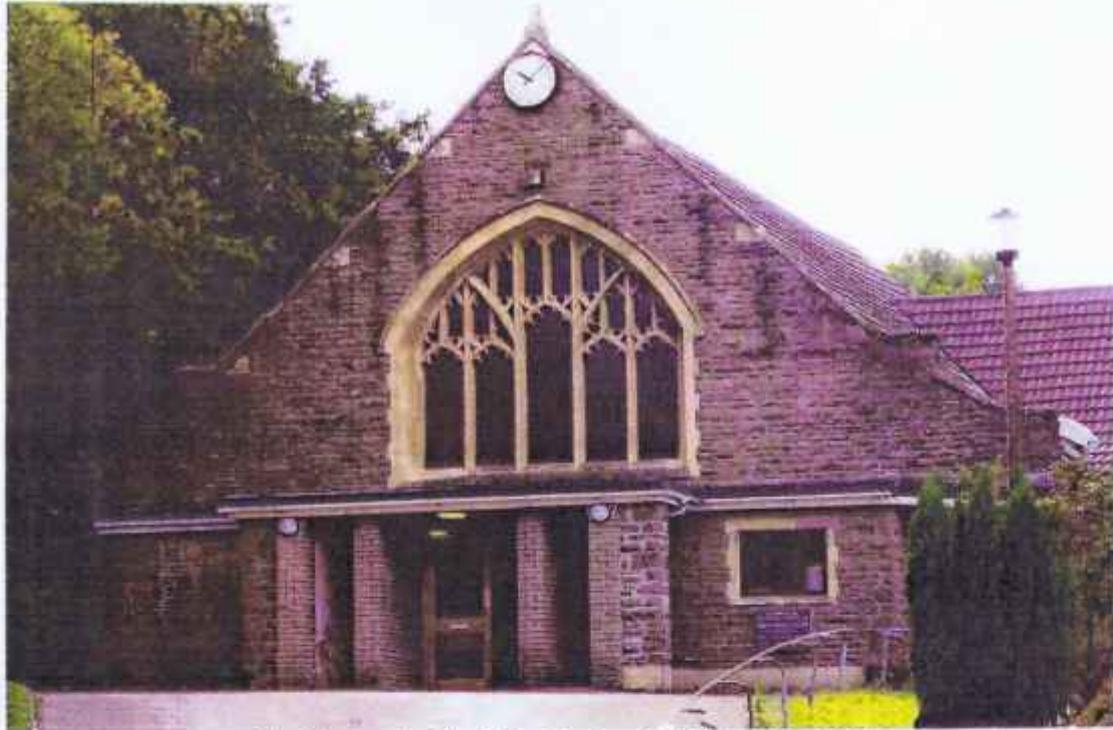
This was completed in 1925 with a grand opening ceremony. It was a thriving Chapel until the 1950's with a large Sunday School which held their Anniversary every June. The Chapel would be full during their three services and I am sure many people alive today remember taking part. In the 1960's with the membership reducing and such a large building being difficult to heat and keep dry as it was built of Bath Stone, "I am told quite porous," it was decided to divide the Chapel in two, and allow a Youth Club to be held in the back division. A vote was taken and some older members who did not agree were lost, but it was hoped the membership would increase from the young people.

Saint George's Youth Club was a member of the Methodist Association of Youth Clubs and visited other Clubs in many parts of Wales and England with Mr. Haydn John acting as Leader. They competed at Table Tennis and Five a Side Football. The Youth Club was open on Monday and Friday nights, it was also open on Sunday night for people who attended Sunday night Services. Alas this wasn't enough to stop the Methodist Movement closing the Chapel in 1970 but the local members voted in a protest to continue Services, with the help of local Preachers, back in the Tin Chapel of Saint George's. Sadly this has also closed as the congregation grew older.

**Pat Jones 2007**



Primitive Methodist Junior Choir April 1915.



**St. George's English Methodist Church 2007**

St. George's English Methodist Church is in Mill Street at the bottom of Tydu Lane. It was opened in 1925 to replace the less auspicious building in Mill Street, now used as a meeting place for the Old Age Pensioners.

The land on which the Church is built was owned by Miss Blandy Jenkins of Llanharan House. She gave the freehold of the land to the church members on condition that the land should be used for building a church and no other purpose.

The Rev. George Kendall was chiefly responsible for the decision to build the church and it was largely owing to his efforts that the project was achieved. He had been a Chaplain in World War 1 and an active member of the British Legion, so it is easy to understand why the full title of the church is St. George's Memorial Church.

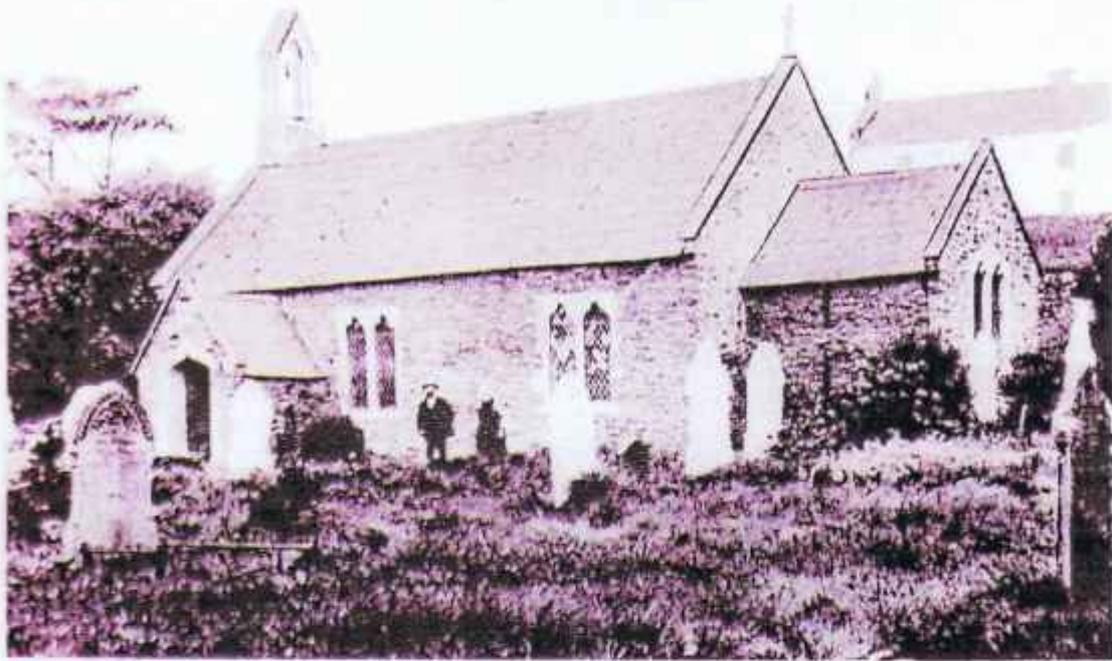
Rev. Kendall was also the officer in charge of taking out the Unknown Warrior.

The clock at the front apex of the building was installed in 1953, commemorating the Festival of Britain.

The former church, which had been built by a breakaway group from Zion, Penrhiwfer Road, Methodist Church "Bible Christians," continued in use for church youth activities until a few years ago.

The membership of the church has declined sadly from a few hundred to a mere twenty.

In 1970 this church closed and members now meet at the original hall in Mill Street. Later the same year the church was sold and is to be a Chapel of Rest.



### **ST. John the Baptist Church**

The church has been rebuilt and renovated several times since it was first established in the 1500s, making it the oldest church in Tonyrefail.

The first Services were held in 1901 but later, because of the growing population of Tonyrefail and the limited seating capacity in the Church a new church was built nearby- St. David's.

Sadly like many more of the Churches and Chapels in the Tonyrefail area in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the congregation fell away and the Church passed into the possession of the Scout movement.

At the present time there is talk regarding the grounds being taken over by an housing association and houses being built on the site.

## THE PENTECOSTAL CHURCH



The site where the original Pentecostal Church stood on Doctor's Hill.

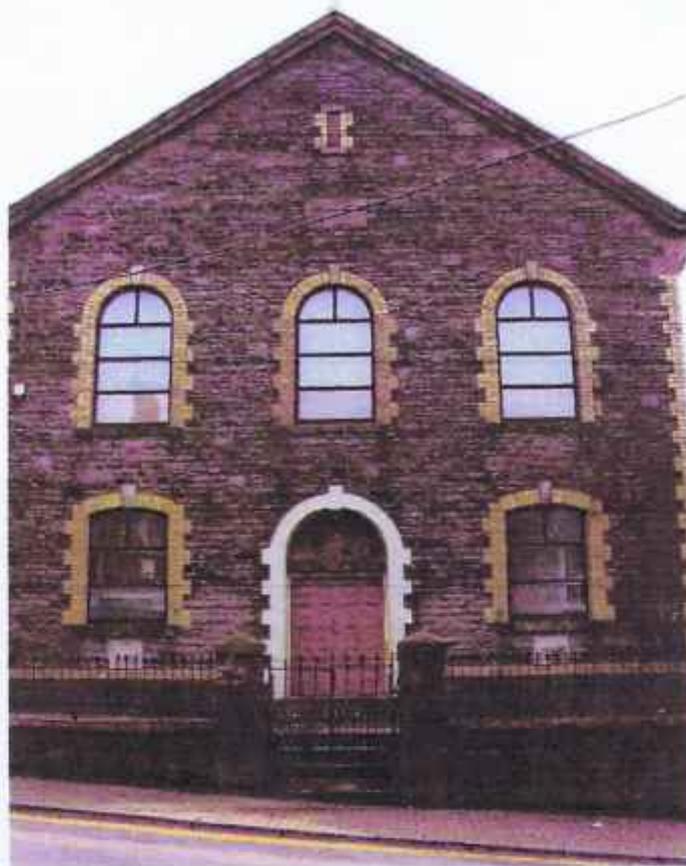
The Pentecostal work in Tonyrefail was first started around 1910 when a number of families began having meetings in their own homes. One such family was Mr. and Mrs. Sibley, always endearingly referred to as Mam Sibley and Dad Sibley and whose son, Eli Sibley was to be the first pastor of the Pentecostal church in Tonyrefail when it was later built.

When the number of worshippers grew so that homes were too small in which to assemble, a room was hired – this was above the local bake-house in Gilfach Road. Here it became necessary to hold two services on a Sunday evening, the first congregation leaving to allow the second to come in. Later a larger room was hired at Tonyrefail Boys' School and later still meetings were held in the Church "Hut", very kindly hired out by the "Church of England" friends.

Then came the decision to build. In September, 1923, the Pentecostal Full Gospel Hall, situated on "Doctor's Hill" (Cross Street), was opened. This was built mainly by voluntary labour, the stone being hewn from the quarry in Collenna Road. The first Pastor, Mr. Eli Sibley, ministered there for forty years. Due to his faithfulness and that of many helpers, the gospel has gone out to many parts of the world.

There is still an active Church with an ardent group of young people and a thriving Sunday school, the latter having a regular attendance of eighty to a hundred children.

When the Bethel Welsh Independent Church closed in 1975, the Pentecostal Church took over their building in 1978.



### **Bethel Pentecostal Church 1978**

The Pentecostal work in Tonyrefail was first started around 1910 when a number of families began having meetings in their own homes. Prominent members in the movement were Eli Sibley Snr., Walter Buttle and James Evans, they organized cottage meetings at various houses, amongst those used were Mrs. Kiff's at High St. and Mr Button's at Bruce Terrace, Penrhiwfer. Later, as the membership increased, they hired a large room above William's Bakehouse in Gilfach Road where they held two Gospel Services on Sunday Evenings. Brother Eli Sibley preaching to one packed house, while Brother Jim Evans waited outside with another crowd to use the room for a second Service afterwards.

Some time later Mr. Williams required the whole building to carry out his business and they were granted permission to hold Services at the Church Hall, then at the local Infant's School, with Pastor Eli Sibley sitting in the Teacher's seat and the rather large brothers and sisters sitting in the childrens tip-up seats.

During the 1921 coal strike it was decided to build their own Church, using voluntary labour. Trustees were elected, and they sought a loan of money from Bro. John Brookstone of Tonypandy.

They leased a plot of ground on Doctor's Hill, and a Christian contractor supervised the digging of the foundations. They sought, and were granted permission, to quarry stone for the building from the nearby Collenna Quarry and they obtained horses and carts from the Manager of Cilely Colliery to transport the materials to the site.

Charles Francis saw an advert in a magazine called "The Christian" for bench seats which would be given to any Church who wished to have them, and wrote to the address given. To the joy of all concerned they received a letter from the Railway

Authority to collect two truck-loads of church bench seats, to seat 150 people, that had been delivered to Tonyrefail Station, all delivery charges paid.

In September 1923 a short Service was held outside the Church, the doors were opened, and the Tonyrefail Assembly, as it was then known, came into existence.

The first Pastor, Mr. Eli Sibley ministered here for forty years. Due to his faithfulness and that of many helpers, the gospel has gone out to many parts of the world.

One great celebration in the history of the Church was "The Clearing of the Debt."

In September 1943, after twenty years of faithful giving, the final payment was made to Bro. John Brookstone, and the Assembly was debt-free.

This is still an active Church with an ardent band of young people and a thriving Sunday School, the latter having a regular attendance of eighty to a hundred children.

The present Pastor is Mr. Glyn Lansley.

## The Quakers' Meeting House

### Tŷcwrdd y Quakers



*Quakers' Meeting House, Treferig (photograph taken late nineteenth century)*

Quakerism was founded by George Fox in the north-west of England in the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Missionaries arrived in South Wales and large numbers were converted to the Society of Friends. In those days people were obliged to attend church regularly. The Quakers believed that all men were equal and refused to take up arms or bow or remove their hats unless it was in their meetings for worship. Many of the people who adhered to the Quaker principles were persecuted and often imprisoned, so they had to worship secretly and in out-of-the-way places. The Quakers' Meeting House was established near Tonyrefail, in a small house near Treferig. A Quaker, John Bevan of Treferig and his sons, sold the house, together with a burial ground and garden for the sum of £5 to the Society of Friends. The house was to be used as a meeting house for divine worship. A close friend of George Fox, William Penn, an Anglican, had been converted to Quakerism. He had been imprisoned on a number of occasions and because of a debt to his father, Charles II settled land on him in America and ordered him to call it Pennsylvania. Many Quakers bought land from him and followed him to America and the church fell into disuse. John Bevan and his wife went to America but returned a number of times and eventually came back to Treferig to live where he eventually died. He was buried in the graveyard at the Quaker's Meeting House and a



gravestone can still be seen but the plaque, shown in the picture above, is missing. The house is no longer standing and only the remains of the walls can now be seen. The house was afterwards sold and used as a dwelling house but the cemetery remains the property of the Society of Friends.

The house in ruins:





Beside the river - The scene today. To the left is the only gravestone still standing.



**Salem English Baptist Church**

**The History of Salem English Baptist Church, Tonyrefail  
The First Fifty Years**

In the early 1890's, the population of Tonyrefail was small, and the majority of the people were Welsh-speaking and Welsh-worshipping. This made it very difficult for the comparatively few English-speaking folk to find a spiritual home in this slowly growing industrial village.

At that time there came a traveller in literature to the district, of the name of Mr. Harris, from Cardiff. It was he who set many thoughts into action, and prevailed upon Mrs. Dan Phillips and Mrs. Powell to canvass the district, in the hope of establishing an English Baptist Church. The canvass resulted in a meeting in the Vestry of Aion Welsh Baptist Church, together with the deacons of that Church, in an effort to start an English cause. The officers of Aion gave the project their blessing and promised to give all the help required, other than financial help, as they themselves were struggling financially.

Mr. D.Ap Morgan of Aion agreed to lead this new body of worshippers, and their first meeting-place was the hay-loft over the Corn stores owned by Mr.W.L. Powell, where Mr.Williams' bakehouse in Gilfach Road, now stands. After a short period there they moved to the Council School, but the members were few and finances were insufficient to meet the fees the Education Authorities demanded. From the Council School they removed a short distance to the workrooms of Mr.D.L Jones, Draper, The Square, Tonyrefail. Here again the work of the establishment clashed with the meetings, this proved very discouraging, and they were unable to continue. In spite of this, these faithful and undaunted Christians travelled again to Aion Vestry for a short period, and it was whilst here, that they decided that they must put their faith to the test and build a place of their own.

A loan of £20 was obtained and the original chapel was erected and opened for worship in January, 1905. This building is still used as a Sunday School classroom. It was soon discovered that the chapel was rather small for the growing congregation and later in the same year the Deacons and Church decided upon a permanent building. The building of the new Church was carried out by Mr. Samuel Morgan, at a cost of approximately £300. The Sunday School had now grown considerably and it was agreed that a new School room was necessary and although the church was not free of debt, the officers undertook the responsibility of building one. This work was placed in the hands of "The Steam Joinery Co. Ltd." of Pontyclun, at a cost of £70 and was completed in 1931. In 1936, the officers were able to announce to the Church that the total debt was now discharged.

Salem continued to prosper, and in 1939 it was felt that the time had arrived, when they should seek someone to have the oversight of the Church. The choice fell upon Mr. W.T.J. Uppington who was then a student at South Wales Bible Training College, Porth, under the late Rev. R.B. Jones.

Mr. Uppington was ordained to this position on 15<sup>th</sup> January, 1940.

At the end of the War our young people returned and our congregation increased, so that at evening services, seating accommodation was insufficient and after many discussions, in 1952 the old entrance porch was removed and a new entrance built at the west end of the Chapel, thus giving room for more seats.

Today the Church membership stands higher than ever. The Sunday School with a good company of teachers and workers is flourishing and the church is free of debt. So we come to the end of 50 years of worship in Salem and the future looks good.

#### **Points of Interest**

The Church was established 8<sup>th</sup> August 1904.

The name Salem was given to the Church on 21<sup>st</sup> August 1904.

The present Church was opened on 9<sup>th</sup> December 1905.

Preachers. – Sunday – Mr. Davies and Mr. Ellias.

Monday- Mr. Treharne and Mr. Coles.

11<sup>th</sup> November 1906 the first baptismal services conducted by Rev. D.J. James of Aion Welsh Baptist Church.

Candidate Mrs. Florrie Cooper nee Coles.

First Harvest Festival service Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> October 1906, Preacher Mr. Coles.

Electric Light installed 14<sup>th</sup> October 1908.

New Vestry built 1931.

Sisterhood inaugurated 1934.

Marriage Licence obtained March 1936.

First Marriage- Miss Muriel Uppington to Mr. Glyn Powell.

1935 Mrs. Edwards and Mrs. Williams undertook sale of the Christian Herald for the Church.

1952 The Church alterations gave an additional seating capacity of 30 persons.



### **Opening of Salvation Army Chapel at Thomastown 1923**

A movement worthy of note in the history of the Village of Thomastown is the founding of the Salvation Army. Since the year 1920 this has played an important part in the life of the children of Meyler Street and Pembroke Street.

Commenced through the friendly gesture of the Williamstown branch in 1920 it was first housed in a black shed in Pembroke Street, kindly lent by a Mr. Boobyer. Later in a room at the back of a shop owned by a Mrs. Bunce, and in 1923 in the Army Hut especially acquired for its specific use, and a Mr Phillips became Sgt. Major. The Staff of a Captain and Lieutenant always took charge, through the years a succession of such Officers became fondly known among all children by the endearing terms of the "Cap" and the "Lef."

One outstanding personality of the movement was Mrs. Patrick, from 1921 onwards her keen interest was unshaken and unbroken. From 1939 she was in charge of the Sunday School and well deserved the title of the "Young People's Sergeant." Tribute should be paid to the good work done in the Village by the associates of the local Salvation Army in Thomastown when during the years of acute want and shortages many a family received necessary help. Throughout the darkest days of the industrial depression the Salvation Army Members were the only band of charitable workers in the Village who provided a warm breakfast for children who would otherwise be going to school with much less to satisfy their hunger.

My name is Jacqueline Webb and I was born on 10<sup>th</sup> August 1938 in the front room of 3 Pembroke St, Thomastown. This was the home of my great-grandparents Emma and George Painter, I lived there with my parents Doreen and David Lewis. The house was next door but one to the Salvation Army. During my time in Pembroke St I always attended the Salvation Army. I can still remember the singing, clapping and tambourine playing. I also remember Mrs Patrick from Meyler St being my Sunday School teacher and reading out of The Young Soldier. I remember the open-air meetings and the Anniversary when I recited a poem about the moon whilst standing on the stage. My Mother was brought up in the Salvation Army from the time of her birth in 1918. I can't remember my great-grandmother wearing the uniform but my great-grandfather did, he carried the Flag for the Thomastown Corps. There is a possibility that the Salvation Army meetings were held elsewhere before the opening of the official building in 1923.

I have very fond memories indeed of the Salvation Army in Thomastown. Jacqueline Webb 2007.



**George The Sixth Coronation Party 1937**

Hilda Lily Teresa Megan Doreen Elsie Ethel  
 Pearce Randell Harris Thomas Carey Hillier Patrick  
 Mary Harris Eddie Randell

? Maureen Megan Gwynneth Clifford  
 Coleman Blackburn Richards Thomas

Ray Bertie Leslie Bobby ? ? Terry  
 Pearce Elsworthy Elsworthy Cowdrey Patrick

?

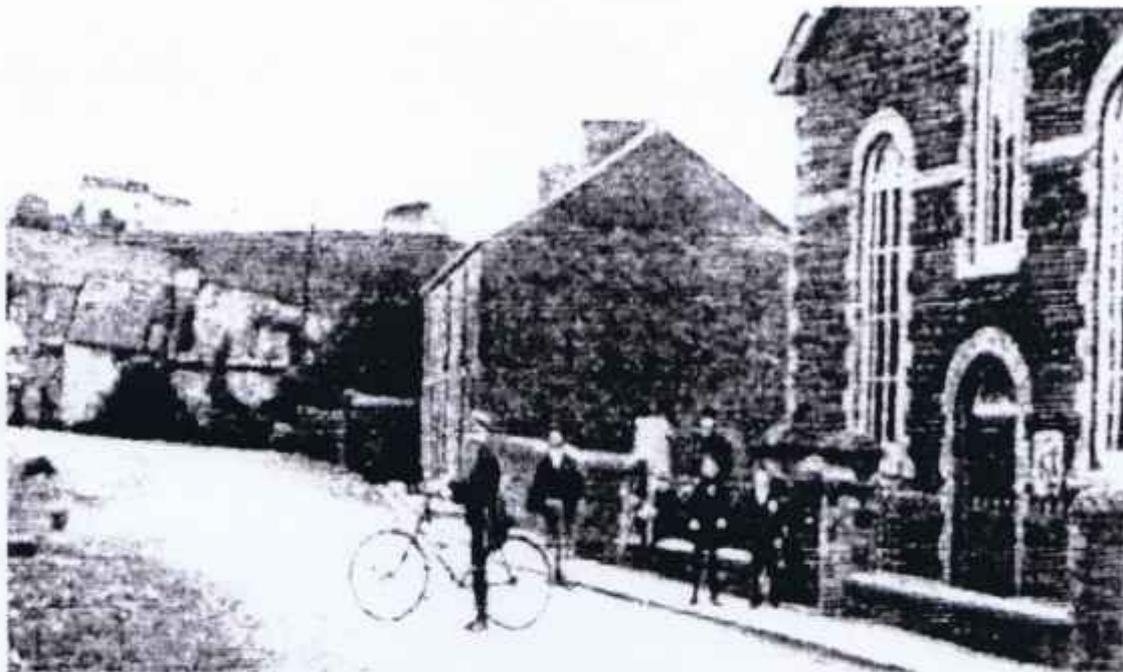
Mrs Margaret Dilwyn Bryn Albert Monty Jimmy Herbert Dennis Glyn Captain  
 Patrick Hillier Owen Pearce Randell Luck Jenkins Thomas Blackburn Jenkins Gilmore  
 Betty Pat ? Gwennie Elsie Barbara ? Mrs  
 Carey Harris Thomas Thomas Richards Munn  
 Mrs Lily ? Marion ? Betty Joan Myra ? Margaret ?  
 Richards Grover Smallman Carey Richards Blackburn  
 ? ? ? Jacqueline Donald Stella ? Rose  
 Lewis Blackburn Blackburn Randell



Thomastown Salvation Army Coronation Tea 1937

	?	?	?	Helen Munn
	Granny Brown	?	Bessie Munn	Mrs. Painter
	Sarah Randell	Mrs. Munn		
	Mrs. Lil Richards	?	?	Mrs. Patrick
Mrs. Cowdrey	Mrs. Mayes	?	?	?
?	Mrs. Pearce	Carrie Patrick	?	? Doreen Painter

**ZION METHODIST CHAPEL, PENRHIWFER ROAD, TONYREFAIL.**



The chapel was built in 1878. Prior to that, the members used to meet in one another's homes. In 1874 a minister from Cardiff, Rev. W. James used to ride to Tonyrefail on horseback to take services. Then in 1878 a hired local preacher came from Cardiff to take services. The services were mostly convened in Granny Corbett's, who was, at the time, the midwife in Tonyrefail, or in the house of Charles Morse, who is recognised as the founder of the chapel.

The chapel was one of six chapels, in what was called then the old Llantrisant circuit. It was under the Bible Christian Movement.

In August, 1876, Rev. J. Morris came into the circuit to act as circuit minister. Then the chapel was built in 1878. The Rev. J. Smallbridge came to open it and act as circuit minister.

There has always been a very warm fellowship in the chapel. It has often been repeated that one minister said on many occasions "I go to the morning service at Penrhiwfer Road, and whether there are four or fifty in the congregation I feel surrounded by a great cloud of Witnesses".

When the chapel was built it was the only chapel in Tonyrefail where an English service was conducted so the chapel had a good membership from the commencement. Here is a record from the Quarterly meeting of the Llantrisant Bible Christian Circuit held Brynna on the 17<sup>th</sup> June, 1899. "At Tonyrefail especially, where our chapel is generously full on Sunday

evenings, the conversation of several promising young men has greatly cheered us and has given an impact to our society there that will be felt in time to come”.

There is another record on 16<sup>th</sup> June, 1900. It was recorded of the chapel “especially in Tonyrefail has God’s saving Grace been revealed, fifteen persons having professed conversion in the ordinary services. This Church is the most promising in the circuit. The Sunday school is over-crowded and this along with the difficulty of meeting the demands of extra services, is making our friends think seriously of providing additional accommodation”.

In 1907 the connection had union with the Methodist new Connection and the United Methodists and were then called the United Methodist Church, the U.M. as they were referred to. This amalgamation lasted until 1932 when they were united with “The Wesley Methodists” and the Primitive Methodists” and were all called Methodists.

Three blows fell upon the Church which diminished its membership. First in 1910 when led by Matthew Corbett and his wife several members left the church and started cottage meetings, which eventually led to the building of The Primitive Methodist Chapel in Mill Street. The second blow fell when Mr. Charles Morse, a great uncle to David Morse, left Tonyrefail to go to the Transvaal in South Africa in 1913. This was a very sad blow. Mr. Morse was a most loved and revered gentleman in Tonyrefail. The third blow came in 1928 when an evangelist and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Hazel, held an evangelical campaign in the Church, and through the “seeds of doubt” which they sowed in the minds of their hearers several of the leaders and members left the chapel led by Mr. Maurice Pope and Mr. Alfred Bence. However, great as the blow was, under the guidance of Mr. Walter Hussey and Mr. Emanuel Wiggins, they carried on through the years. A very warm sense of fellowship has always been felt in the Church. Through death and the loss of several good friends the members were depleted and the church eventually closed. The building has been converted into flats.