

# Capel

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THE CHAPELS HERITAGE SOCIETY



TAFLEN WYBODAETH LEOL

LOCAL INFORMATION SHEET

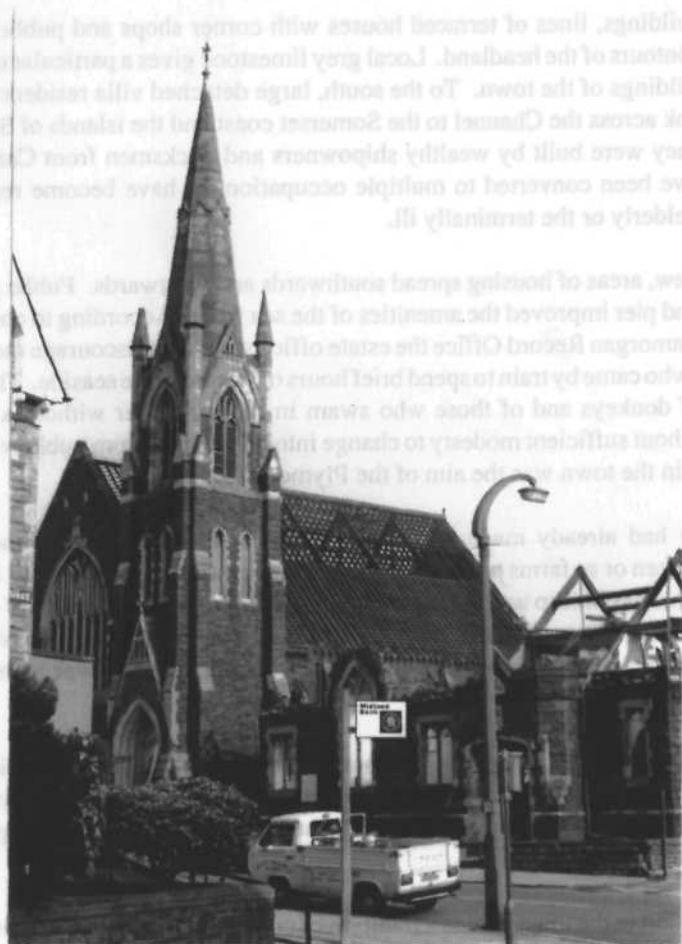
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PENARTH

CYFARFOD Y GWANWYN

1991

SPRING MEETING



Christ Church during demolition in 1989

The parish church of ST. AUGUSTINE, rebuilt by William Butterfield in 1865/66, stands on the skyline of Penarth Head, a prominent landmark for shipping in the Bristol Channel. The headland sheltered Penarth dock, on the River Ely, and overlooks the combined estuaries of the Taff and Ely, and the docks of Cardiff on the farther side.

The history of Penarth as a town dates from the building of its dock, which was opened in 1865 to relieve the pressure on, and break the monopoly of, the Bute docks at Cardiff. Penarth parish had a population of 72 in the 1801 census, 105 in 1851. The manor had belonged to St. Augustine's Priory, later the Cathedral, in Bristol, but had been leased, then acquired, by the Earl of Plymouth of St. Fagans Castle. The Plymouth estate office retained considerable control over the planning, building and development of the new town, offering 99-year leases and remaining the ground landlord.

The earliest buildings, lines of terraced houses with corner shops and public houses, followed the contours of the headland. Local grey limestone gives a particular character to the older buildings of the town. To the south, large detached villa residences along the cliff top look across the Channel to the Somerset coast and the islands of Steep and Flat Holm. They were built by wealthy shipowners and docksmen from Cardiff, but today most have been converted to multiple occupation, or have become residential homes for the elderly or the terminally ill.

As the town grew, areas of housing spread southwards and westwards. Public gardens, a promenade and pier improved the amenities of the sea front. According to correspondence in the Glamorgan Record Office the estate office sought to discourage the 'rabble from the hills' who came by train to spend brief hours of leisure at the seaside. The Agent disapproved of donkeys and of those who swam in the sea either without a bathing costume, or without sufficient modesty to change into one hidden from public view. An air of gentility in the town was the aim of the Plymouth Estate.

Nonconformity had already made an appearance in rural Penarth when the parish consisted of a dozen or so farms or cottages, before the creation of the town. In 1819 the farmhouse of Thomas Phillip was registered in the Bishop's Court as a place of meeting for people of the Baptist persuasion. In 1845 James Thomas of Carmel, Bonvilston, a Welsh Congregationalist, preached in John Tyler's farmhouse, and was to return on several occasions.

It was the passing of the Act authorising the building of a dock which led to an influx of population, navvies who dug the dock, builders, craftsmen, tradespeople, shopkeepers and others whose livelihood was associated with the dock, with ships, their cargoes, the export of coal, and the sea.

Each denomination in the town retains a tradition of congregations who first met in lofts over farm stables and later in public halls, usually the Lesser Hall and the Jubilee Hall, both built by Solomon Andrews of Cardiff. The earliest meetings which took place in

the town were joint meetings of Baptists, Calvinistic Methodists and Congregationalists, who met together from 1858 in a stable loft on the site of the present-day Lloyds Bank and Windsor Road Arcade, at today's roundabout in the centre of Penarth. The Calvinistic Methodists were the first to build a purpose-built chapel, which opened in 1861.

Meanwhile, a practical step had been taken in 1860 by Miss Mary Ann Morgan of East Barry House, Barry, who rented premises and paid the salary of a Lay Agent to bring Christian teaching and fellowship to the dock navvies, twelve hundred of them, who were known for their unruly behaviour and undesirable habits. Later the services of a schoolmaster were engaged, and the congregation went on to build Arcot Street Wesleyan Methodist church, opened in 1864.

*Chapels in order of an itinerary, not in chronological order:*

**TRINITY METHODIST, STANWELL ROAD** <sup>(1)</sup>. The present church, in a Gothic style, with a fine spire, was designed by Henry Budgen, FRIBA, and opened in January 1901. The congregation, drawn from the south and westward-spreading residential areas, had been meeting since 1890 in an iron church on the site. This was known as 'Playter's Church' and had been built in the 1880s by supporters of a powerful but controversial preacher, a former curate of St. Augustine's, who had become unacceptable within the Established Church but drew a congregation of personal adherents for some years before moving elsewhere. In 1896 a schoolroom was built alongside the iron church, designed by Jones, Richards and Budgen. Trinity was damaged by bombing in 1940, and its stained glass windows were removed for safety to the Coed Ely Pit, Gilfach Goch. In 1970 a Day Centre for the Elderly was established and in 1986 a radical remodelling of the schoolroom accommodation provided meeting rooms and ancillary facilities.

**STANWELL ROAD BAPTIST** <sup>(2)</sup>. The congregation was formed in 1885 by a number of members from Tabernacle Baptist who felt the need of establishing a Baptist chapel in the developing residential area of the town's 'West End'. The Sunday School building, fronting on Victoria Road, bears the date 1887. The present church, in a Tudor Gothic style, was opened in 1896.

**CHRIST CHURCH CONGREGATIONAL, STANWELL ROAD** <sup>(3)</sup>, opened in 1897. A congregation, brought together in 1882, worshipped first in Andrews' Lesser Hall then the Jubilee Hall, and from 1883 used an iron church on the site of the later Windsor Cinema, now converted into a garage, at the corner of Windsor Road and Railway Terrace. The Stanwell Road building was in a Perpendicular Gothic style. The architects, named on the foundation stone, were Habershon and Fawckner of Pearl Street, Cardiff, London and Newport. The builder was D.G. Price. A lesser hall was added in 1905. The 110-foot spire added grace to the roofscape of the town until the church was demolished in 1989.

Joseph Parry (1841-1903) played the organ here and is buried in St. Augustine's churchyard. The Reverend Elvet Lewis, the Archdruid Elfed (1860-1954), attended Christ Church when he lived at Erw'r Delyn.

The decision to give up the site resulted from the approaching termination of a 99-year lease and the high cost of maintenance. The congregation, part of the United Reformed Church since 1973, was invited to join St. David's Presbyterian Church of Wales in Elfed Avenue, to become, on Easter Day 1985, the **ELFED AVENUE UNITED CHURCH** (12). The site of Christ Church has now been redeveloped in yellow brick, and provides office accommodation above shops.

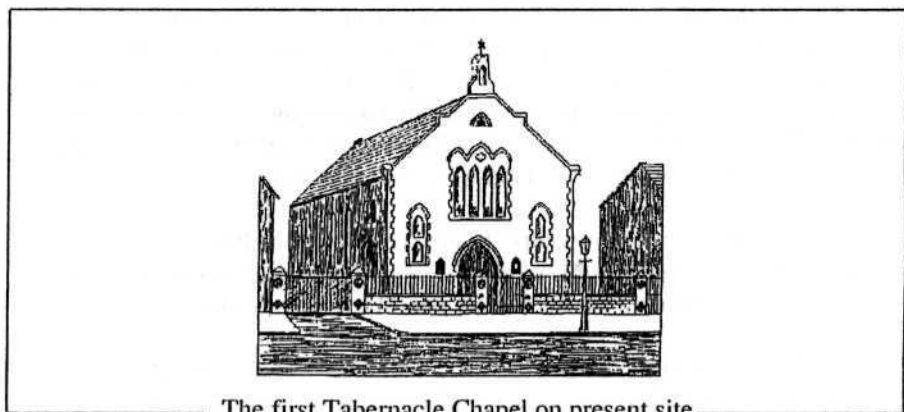
**ALBERT ROAD METHODIST** <sup>(4)</sup>. After the destruction by fire of its Arcot Street church, the Wesleyan Methodist congregation chose a site in Albert Road for its new building, designed by Henry Budgen, FRIBA, in an Early Decorated Gothic style. It opened in 1907, with 'modern tip-up seats' in its galleries. The schoolroom was destroyed by fire during the Second World War, when it was in use as a NAAFI canteen, but the church escaped damage. Re-building in the 1950s restored the lost schoolroom accommodation. In 1973 it was decided to convert the church and schoolroom into a multi-purpose building offering a wide variety of community service while remaining a place of worship. Albert Road was the first church in Penarth, and one of the earliest in the country, to undertake such a transformation. An architect member, David Pile, designed the alterations, which were carried out by members' labour and skills. The stained glass from the John Henry Fraser memorial window is now on the other side of the Atlantic, having been re-set in Bell Street United Church, Ottawa. The 1922 organ is in use in Brunswick Street chapel, Swansea. The church tower has lost its original pinnacles, which had become unsafe, and now has a more solid appearance.

**SARDIS CALVINISTIC METHODIST, PLASSEY STREET** <sup>(5)</sup>. Opened in 1861, this was the first purpose-built nonconformist chapel in the town, built by David Jones of Bristol, a native of Penmark, who had settled in Penarth. From 1858, the congregation had attended the joint meetings in a farm loft. Services in Sardis were held partly in English, partly in Welsh, but in 1879 it was decided to use English only. The church was rebuilt in 1886, and continued in use until the early 1950s when it was decided to build **ST. DAVID'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF WALES, ELFED AVENUE** (12), which opened in 1954 in an area of post-war housing. The Plassey Street building found a new use as a camping equipment centre, Jofa Tents, but was later acquired by Jehovah's Witnesses. They demolished the former Sardis and built a new **KINGDOM HALL** on the site in 1989/90.



Gospel Hall

**GOSPEL HALL, PLASSEY STREET** <sup>(6)</sup> was built by D.G. Price of Penarth and opened in February 1877. It has an interesting Arts and Crafts façade but plain interior, relieved only by a painted text on the wall, 'I sat down under his shadow with great delight and his fruit was sweet to my taste' (Song of Solomon, 2,3). The Plymouth Brethren built a second meeting place in 1954 in Tennyson Road, to serve an area of post-war housing, but this has now closed.



The first Tabernacle Chapel on present site

**TABERNACLE BAPTIST, PLASSEY STREET** <sup>(7)</sup> was founded by members of Bethany Baptist, Cardiff. The congregation met in a series of locations before the chapel was built in 1870. Re-built in 1895, by the local builder, D.G. Price, apparently to his own designs. Alteration to the front steps and schoolroom access were made in 1909. The building received substantial improvements in 1989 to provide easier access and more modern amenities, and to simplify the handsome interior which retains its galleries and ironwork.



Bethel

**BETHEL WELSH CONGREGATIONAL (INDEPENDENT - ANNIBYNWYR), PLASSEY STREET <sup>(8)</sup>**. The cause was first preached by James Thomas, a thresher from Biglis and member of Carmel, Bonvilston, in John Tyler's farmhouse, in 1845, during a preaching tour through the Vale of Glamorgan. He was to return from time to time and, after ordination, became the pastor of the Welsh Congregationalists when they began to meet in 1864 in a stable loft behind Glebe Street. He was their minister when the first chapel opened in 1871 on the corner of Glebe and Plassey Streets. In 1878 the building, which had become too small, was sold and a new and larger chapel, the Bethel of today, was built, and opened in September 1879. Modernisation of some facilities took place in 1981, but in 1988 major repair and refurbishment had to be undertaken, including the taking down and replacement of the ceiling. The ceiling rose, galleries and ironwork have been retained. The pewter communion plate has also been the object of recent care and attention.

Bethel is the only Welsh-speaking chapel to survive in Penarth. It has a membership of about 90. It hosts Ysgol Feithrin Penarth, the town's Welsh-language nursery school, as well as the Penarth Welsh Society and Merched y Wawr.

**PENUEL WELSH BAPTIST, PLASSEY STREET <sup>(9)</sup>** opened in 1877. Two terraced houses were knocked out to one internally to create a chapel interior. It closed in about 1950. The site was later acquired by the Salvation Army, which had been active in Penarth since 1884. The houses have recently been demolished and a new **CITADEL** is now (1991) being built on the site.

**ARCOT STREET WESLEYAN METHODIST <sup>(10)</sup>**. The congregation had outgrown the rooms leased in 1860 by Miss Morgan (later the wife of Lewis Williams, JP) and the chapel was opened in 1864. Galleries were added in 1882. In March 1905 the building burned down. Its stone shell was later sold to St. Augustine's which moved its **ST. PAUL'S MISSION CHURCH** into a restored building, the façade of

which still retains the underlying design of the chapel frontage, differing only in details. Services ceased in 1965. The windows are now boarded up and the building is used as a gymnasium.

**BETHANIA, HICKMAN ROAD** <sup>(11)</sup> was built by the members of Sardis CM who wished to continue holding services in Welsh. The chapel was in being from the 1890s until it closed in 1972. It has since been used by a builder as a store and today stands in ruins, its windows broken, slates sliding off, overgrown by brambles and Albertine roses.

*My thanks are due to numerous ministers, chapel officials and friends who have given me information, and in particular to Mrs. Elsie Parker Jones, Chairman of the Penarth District Local History Society, and a life-long member of Tabernacle ~~CM~~ Baptist.*

Patricia Moore

