

# Capel



CYMDEITHAS TREFTADAETH Y CAPELI  
THE CHAPELS HERITAGE SOCIETY

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Local Information Sheet  
Taflen Wybodaeth Leol

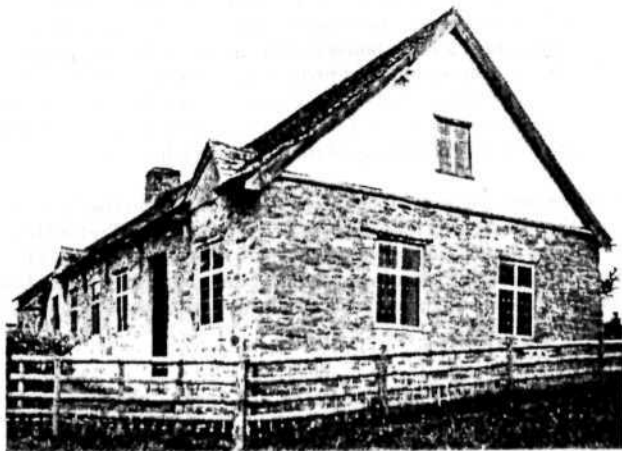
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Glasbury & Hay on Wye  
Y Clas ar Wy a'r Gelli

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## Maesyronnen Chapel, Glasbury

Maesyronnen is reputed to have been formed in 1691 from a sixteenth century farmhouse and barn, the latter becoming the meeting house and the former providing a home for the minister. Its deeds, however, are dated 1714. But be this as it may, its congregation stemmed from Llanigon, where Henry Maurice (1634-82) was the leader of Brecknock Dissent and in its early days flourished, for, if Dr John Evans's famous *List of nonconformist churches* compiled in 1715 is to be believed, Maesyronnen at that time had attached to it some two hundred and fifty hearers.



*Maesyronnen Chapel*

During the eighteenth century the chapel roof was replaced and the beaten earth floor covered with flagstones. Fortunately, the ecclesiastical furniture of the period has survived so that there is a pew and a communion table dated 1727, with three box pews and a pulpit (whose height has since been reduced) of similar date. The box pews have within seats facing each other to accommodate whole families, reflecting the emphasis of the time on the family as a sociological unit. There are also some simple backless benches, evidence that comfort was not a prime consideration for those who came to hear the lengthy sermons of painful preachers.

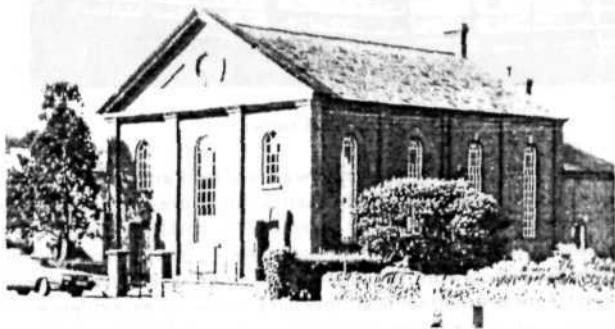
The chapel's mural memorials reflect a local taste for Latin during the first half of the 19th century, when the expectation of life was dismally low and the social status of rural nonconformity steadily rising. 'Life is death to me, and death to me is new life, for it delights me much.' The sober tenor of these words is not surprising: ten memorials between them record the deaths of three children in infancy and of seven others aged 7, 13, 19, 21, 27, 28, and 29. Another of those whose death was recorded was apparently the wife of a clergyman and the daughter of a 'gentleman'. One has to remember, of course, that the term 'gentleman' was rather freely used in Radnorshire.

Despite depopulation and secularization, Maesyronnen still flourishes in a modest way and has even expanded its service to the community so that the minister's house has been repaired and renovated by the chapel authorities as holiday accommodation. But within the chapel itself the original almost domestic character of rural nonconformist worship has survived and some of the pews are set on either side of refectory tables. It is indeed the household of God, simple, hospitable, and welcoming.

### Treble Hill Baptist Chapel

In the early days there was little theological difference between the Independents and the Baptists. But, by the time the Baptists came to build their chapel at Treble Hill in 1866 there were wellmarked differences between them and the Independents of Maesyronnen. Built as it is by the Wye, convenient for baptisms, it replaced a simpler predecessor which was originally a warehouse. The present building in the temple style is numbered amongst Anthony Jones's list of buildings to be 'saved at all costs' and one can understand why. It cost £900 and is a happy and unpretentious combination of brick and stone and round-headed windows and it included a small house for the minister. Inside, designed to seat a congregation of 350, its handsome pinewood furnishings and magnificent but restrained pulpit and minister's stall are equally noteworthy. The ceiling is flat, with ornate cornices and plaster work. In recent years the use of colour on the central plaster ceiling rose and elsewhere has enhanced the overall dignity of this handsome building.

Unlike Maesyronnen, where the worshipper can still look out upon the landscape beyond through plain glass, there is heavily frosted glass in the windows of Treble Hill protecting the congregation from the distracting beauties of nature. The introduction of frosted glass was, of course, also a protection from the hostile and inquisitive, and Kilvert's *Diaries* show how relations between church and chapel were not always amicable in Radnorshire in the 1870s.



Treble Hill Baptist Chapel

### **The United Reformed Chapel**

The United Reformed chapel at Glasbury was built in 1866. Pinnaced and gothic it would look just as much at home in Tunbridge Wells as on the Green at Glasbury and there has been no attempt to preserve any continuity with the vernacular style of its denominational kinsman at Maesyronnen. As Thomas Rees unhappily put it in 1883, 'those generations of mistaken Christians have passed away and have been succeeded by a generation of more expanded ideas and greater sense of propriety',

Inside, the symbolic arch outlined in plaster on the wall behind the pulpit emphasizes the liturgical and doctrinal importance of the sermon in nonconformist worship. But two hymnboards and a harmonium undermine the authority of the pulpit and remind us that such innovations as the introduction, first of the harmoniums and American organs and then of pipe organs often spoil the interior symmetry of chapels not designed to accommodate them.

### **Cwm Bach Methodist Chapel, Glasbury**

In 1818 a certain Richard Hergest, who lived nearby at Skynlais underwent some kind of religious experience. 'One day in the summer of 1818, when crossing a meadow, God spoke to me and said. 'Give that corner of the meadow to the Methodists and build a chapel'. This he did and subscribed liberally, we are told, to its construction. Later he also gave land for a burial ground.



*Cwm Bach Methodist chapel, Glasbury, erected in 1818.*

The result was that the Wesleyan Methodists acquired a small chapel with a characteristically Radnorshire half-hipped roof. Such roofs were often replaced by straightforward gables in subsequent rebuildings. This chapel's pointed windows have an unusually ecclesiastical appearance for 1818 and may reflect the Anglican origins of the denomination's founder and a surviving loyalty to his church. The choice of the site could have been influenced by the three yew trees growing nearby, which are far older than the chapel they overshadow.

**The Hay on Wye Walk-around,**  
starting from the Oxford Road Car Park

1) **Trinity Methodist Chapel.** In 1747, according to the records of the Breconshire Quarter Sessions, 'the dwellinghouse of James Papps, tanner, situate within the borough of the Hay being certified to this court as a fit and proper place for protestant dissenters' was duly registered as such. Then, in 1793 there occurs the first mention of a building in Hay being registered as a chapel. 'Ordered that the building called the Chapel near the turnpike at the town of Hay be registered as a proper place for Dissenters to Assemble for Divine Worship'. This chapel, now a private house, stood on the corner of Brecon Road and St Mary's Road. Another application for a meeting house was made in 1813, but its site remains to be identified.

By 1800 the Methodists had also established a substantial Ebenezer, capable of accommodating 300, in Castle Street. This in turn gave way to their Trinity Chapel in Oxford Road which in due course was refronted and endowed with a handsome italianate tower. The result was a complex building with a small house for the minister at one end. The chapel is now in secular use, the fenestration has been altered to allow for the provision of an extra storey where probably there was only a gallery. A shop occupies part of the ground floor.

2) **The Primitive Methodists** also built their chapel in Oxford Road in 1865, an event commemorated by an intricately undercut stone inscription. It is built of red brick under a slate roof, with stone facings. A gothic window with tracery in the decorated style and surmounted with hoodmoulds finishing in gargoyles stands on either side of the central door. The side windows are also of gothic shape in multipaned cast-iron frames. The front gable is surmounted by a delicate miniature spirelet. It is now Bethesda Evangelical Church.

3) **A Baptist** congregation was established in Hay in 1649 under the leadership of John Miles, a brilliant organiser, who played a prominent part in the early history of the Baptist Church in South Wales and the border, from Hay on Wye to Carmarthen. In 1814 or thereabouts the Baptists of Hay built themselves at the top of the Bull Ring a chapel to which they gave the name Salem. This was rebuilt in stone under slate in simple gothic in 1878 and it may be that the much older and only partially extant building which adjoins was the original 17th century Baptist meeting house. It is not dissimilar in style to Maesyronnen.

4) **The Independents** in 1845 built at the end of Broad Street a handsome chapel which illustrates the meeting house idiom in its grandest domestic style: God is worshipped here as a sophisticated gentleman, in contrast to the homeliness of Maesyronnen. They gave it the name Ebenezer, though the inscription over the door recording this has now flaked into illegibility. Already, however, Classicism was beginning to win the day. Built of dressed stone in the front, where the windows are round-headed and separated by rudimentary pillars, this substantial cube-shaped structure has windowless side walls, though there are two large windows in the rear wall between which the pulpit stands facing the gallery opposite. There is a basement where was held the Sunday School.

5) **The Calvinistic Methodists** built their Tabernacle in Belmont Road in 1829. This was replaced by a stone-built successor in 1873, which cost £700. It was acquired by the Roman Catholics in 1968 and is now dedicated to St Joseph.