

Capel



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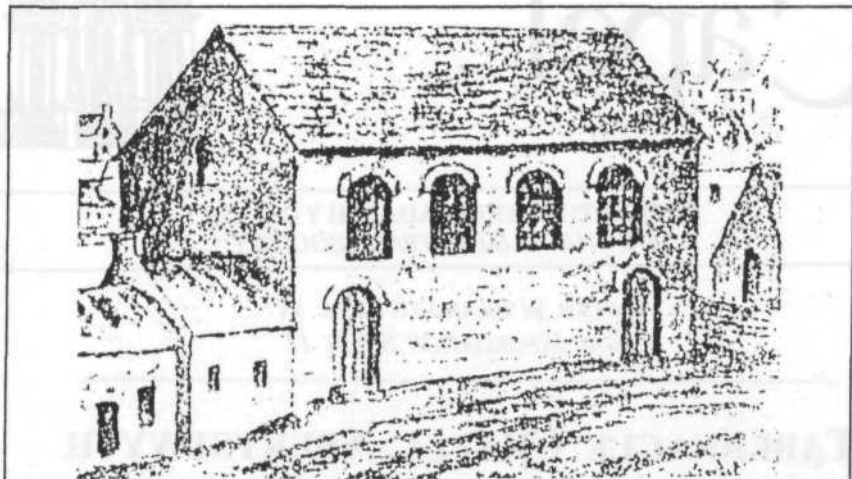
TAFLEN WYBODAETH LEOL 11
LOCAL INFORMATION SHEET 11

TABERNACLE CHAPEL, ABERYSTWYTH



The present Tabernacle is the fourth chapel to have been built on the same site by the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists in Aberystwyth. The first 'Tabernacle' chapel was built in 1785 (facing Mill Street) although at that time it was referred to as 'Capel y Groes' (The Chapel of the Cross). It was the first meeting house (Tŷ cwrdd) for those early Methodists in Aberystwyth who had formed themselves into a 'Society' to further their cause in the town. It should be noted that although the Methodist Revival in Wales is dated from Howell Harris's conversion on Palm Sunday

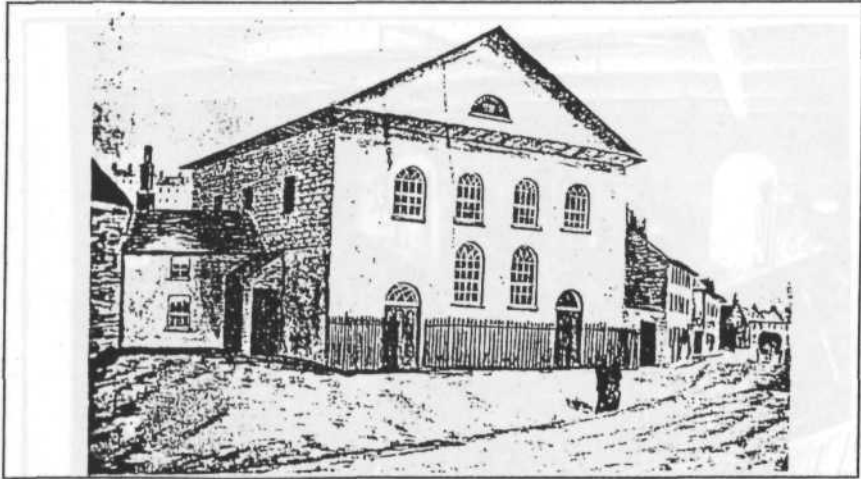
1735, the movement did not secure a foothold in Aberystwyth until 1785.



The first Tabernacle, built 1784-85

The first members of the first Tabernacle were, in fact, members of the Established Church and formed part of a movement within that church whose aim was to inject a spirit of enthusiasm into its religious life. This they succeeded to do in great measure; they went on from strength to strength and their 'followers' had increased to such an extent that by 1819 a second and bigger chapel had to be built - the second Tabernacle.

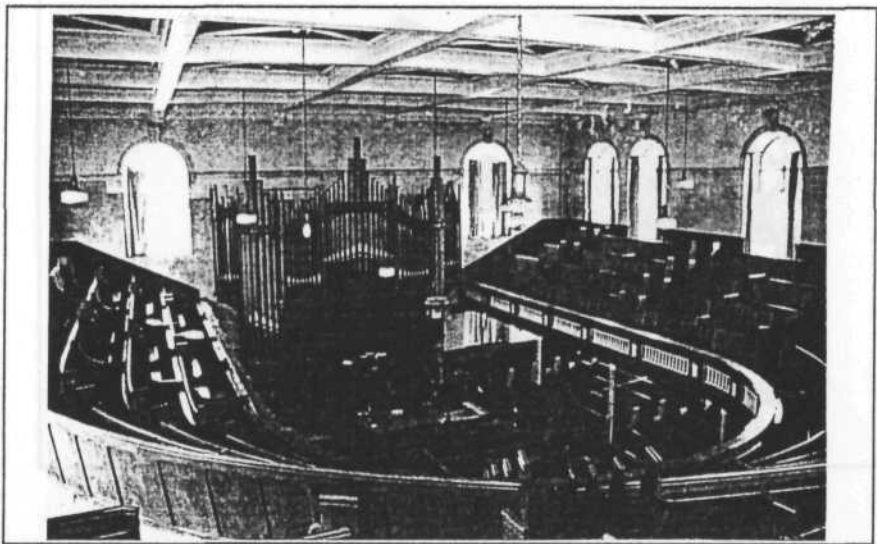
By 1811, however, the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists had left the Established Church and begun to ordain their own ministers. By 1823 they had formed themselves into a separate denomination with its own Confession of Faith. The 'Confession' was read and agreed unanimously at a meeting of the General Assembly held in the second Tabernacle on 13-14 March 1823 and later, in 1826, was incorporated by a Constitutional Deed. Thus the second Tabernacle had played a significant role in the history of Welsh Calvinistic Methodism - a new denomination which the early members of the first Tabernacle had perhaps not even contemplated. Meanwhile, the membership of Tabernacle continued to increase, as did the number of 'listeners' (*gwrundawyr*) - those who attended the services but who were not committed members. Likewise the Sunday School movement in Aberystwyth was rapidly gaining ground and the number of scholars attending Tabernacle Sunday School was also increasing. These developments made it necessary to build yet a third chapel.



*The third chapel, built 1831
(No picture is known of the second chapel, built 1819)*

This third Tabernacle was built in 1831 and was able to seat 1100 people. During the succeeding years the leaders of the church showed a remarkable degree of missionary zeal in providing for the spiritual and educational needs of the inhabitants of Aberystwyth. They were responsible for building Skinner Street Schoolroom in 1839, Saron Chapel, Llanbadarn, in 1842, Ebenezer Schoolroom, Penparcau, in 1848, Siloh Chapel, in 1863, Tan-y-cae Schoolroom in 1877 and Trefechan Schoolroom in 1897.

An important event in Tabernacle's long history took place in 1876 when the Rev. Thomas Levi was invited to become its first salaried minister. He was a dedicated pastor and an effective preacher. He was also one of the foremost Welsh writers of his day. It was he who launched the popular Welsh children's magazine *Trysorfa y Plant* (*The Children's Treasury*) in January 1862 and was its editor for fifty years. In 1878, two years into Thomas Levi's ministry, the membership of Tabernacle had increased to 619 and was still increasing. Consequently, it was decided to build the present Tabernacle, the fourth. In the words of a contemporary observer, the new building '... will contain sittings for 1200 worshippers. It will extend eight feet into Powell Street ... The new edifice will be built in the Lombardo-Italian style of architecture ... In the interior galleries will be erected on three sides of the chapel. All interior fittings will be of pitch pine, wrought clear and varnished,



and the pulpit and deacons' pew will be ornamented'. The fourth Tabernacle was opened on 3-4 August 1880, with its main entrance now facing Powell Street.

Early in 1902, the church leaders set up a committee to enquire into the cost of installing a pipe organ to replace the harmonium in the chapel. After two years it was decided to purchase a three-manual organ from the organ builders Harrison & Harrison of Durham at a cost of £1250, and on 31 May 1905 the organ was officially opened by E T Davies of Dowlais who gave a public recital to mark the occasion. Installing the organ necessitated some alteration to the chapel interior, around the pulpit and the *sêl fawr*.

The Rev. Thomas Levi had retired as minister of the Chapel in 1901 and was followed by the Rev. R J Rees (1903-22), the Rev. J D Evans (1923-36), the Rev. J E Meredith (1937-69) and the Rev. J Elwyn Jenkins (1970 -) the present minister.

The present Tabernacle chapel has stood for 116 years, and during this period there have been few changes in its material structure. But in common with other churches, there have been many changes in its religious life and organisation.

Moelwyn I Williams