

# Capel

CYMDEITHAS TREFTADAETH Y CAPELI  
THE CHAPELS HERITAGE SOCIETY



Taflen Wybodaeth Leol

16

Local Information Sheet

## CAPEL ALS



The townspeople of Llanelli are justifiably proud of their industrial heritage. The town's staple industries - steel, copper and tinsplate - were founded on the base of the coal mines which dotted the area and it was these industries which account for its rapid growth, particularly during the nineteenth century.

When David Rees was inducted as minister of Capel Als in 1829, his chapel was at the very hub of this industrial activity, being situated between the Box and Bres collieries. The railway which brought laden waggons from the collieries passed close by and continued through the present-day Als Street on its journey to the docks. In fact all the traffic of the town passed Capel Als, for the nearby Wern Road was the main road connecting the town to the old district known as Sea-side.

Since 1780, when the church at Capel Als was first established, the building has been much extended and enlarged. The founding minister was the Rev. Evan Davies of Llanedi, who also established the Independent causes at Kidwelly, Pembrey and Ammanford. A marble inscription on the wall of the outer vestibule at the entrance to Capel Als records the various stages of rebuilding and extension, together with the names of the early ministers. On the front wall of the chapel, to the left of the pulpit, a memorial stone to David Rees has been erected. His gravestone is less than a mile away, for he was buried in the Llanelli and District Cemetery.

David Rees was one of the great radical leaders of nineteenth century Wales, a stout defender of the cause of Nonconformity, and renowned as editor of *Y Diwygiwr*, which became the vehicle for the expression of his radical principles. His ministry at Capel Als lasted forty years and during this time, 'without rancour or dispute' his missionary zeal found expression in the building of chapels at Park Street (1839), Siloa (1841), Y Bryn (1842) and Dock Chapel (1876). It was during the ministry of his successor, Dr. Thomas Johns, that Tabernacle was built, the first service being conducted there on Easter Sunday 1875. The architect was John Humphreys of Morrision. Quite simply, Capel Als, at that time had become too small to house its congregation. Gwylfa Roberts commented that "The hive was too small to contain the swarm and so a new hive was called for".

Thus, even after the erection of the new building at Tabernacle, the problem of housing the congregation at Capel Als had not been completely solved and in 1894 the present chapel was built at a cost of £4995. It was not a complete rebuilding, for the shell of the old chapel of 1852 was preserved. It seats over 1100 persons, and some would say that it represents Nonconformity at its grandest. Its frontage is in semi-classical style, with a plain rendered finish, in contrast to the warmth of its fine interior, with its decorated plasterwork ceilings and a restrained use of stained glass windows. Its pulpit is very different from the one in which David Rees stood to deliver his fiery message in 1852. A photograph of the former pulpit is included in Iorwerth Jones's fine biography of David Rees. The old pulpit was in the 'witness-box' tradition. The 1894 pulpit is more stage than witness-box and the gallery which overlooks it begged to be filled with choir and orchestra. And so it was.

Dr Johns' ministry (1870-1914) marked the demise of the church's building ambitions. True, a project was mooted during the Rev. D J Davies's ministry (1916-58) which involved erecting a Sunday Schoolroom to serve the needs of the Dafen area. A parcel of land was bought for the purpose in Capel Road, but the land was sold for £634 in 1961 during the ministry of the Rev. Iorwerth Jones (1959-75). During the Rev. Maurice Loader's ministry (1975-94) many thousands of pounds were spent on repairs to the roof timbers at the front of the chapel, where, hidden behind the parapet, the insidious action of rainwater over many years had caused serious rotting of the main supporting roof-trusses.

The present minister of the church, inducted at Capel Als in 1996, is the Rev. Iwan Vaughan Evans. The chapel is a Grade II listed building.

### PARK CHURCH

The first English language Congregational Church in Llanelli was built in 1839 in Park Street, but for some years prior to this an English service had been conducted in Capel Als by the Rev. David Rees.

In view of the need to enlarge and modernise the church building, it was intended to rebuild on the old site at Park Street, but certain difficulties arose and the members had no option but to seek a site elsewhere. The site found was in Murray Street where the present building stands.

The new building was opened in October 1865 and the schoolroom was built in 1889. Between 1891 and 1898 the Rev. H Elvet Lewis (Elfed) was the minister before moving to King's Cross, London.

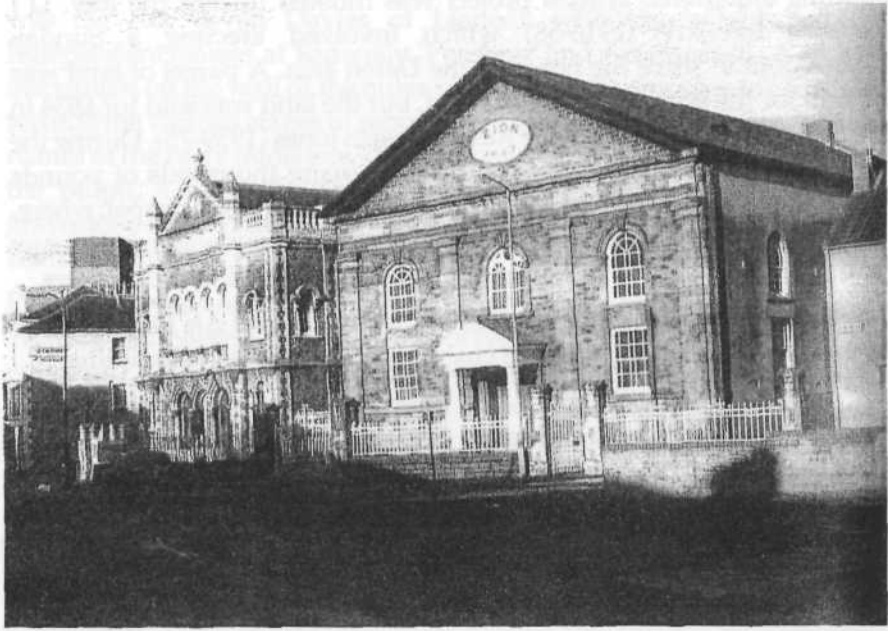
Since 1972 the Church has been part of the United Reformed Church.

The chapel and vestry are a Grade II listed building.



PARK CHURCH.

## SEION (SION, ZION)



Before 1766 the Baptists who were residing in the town worshipped at Adulam Felin-foel, but between 1766 and 1822 they met in a house converted for worship, situated opposite where the Town Hall stands today. The first chapel was built in 1822 and remained a branch of Adulam. After moving to new premises a request was made to become independent of the mother church but on that occasion it was refused. In February 1831 a further request was made and on this occasion the church at Adulam granted the request and agreed to release 161 members.

The original chapel became too small for the growing congregation and in 1857 a new chapel was built to seat 1000. In 1912 -13 the old vestry and the houses which were owned by the Church were demolished and the present vestry built.

Two of Seion's ministers became 'giants of the pulpit' - John Rhys Morgan (Lleurwg) and Jubilee Young.

The chapel and vestry are a Grade II listed building.

## MOREIA (MORIAH)



Moreia was built during the period when there was a great demand for chapels. The Baptists had already built a number in the area - Bethel (1840), Greenfield (1858) and Bethania (1869).

Seion had become too small for the growing congregation and there was need for another place of worship. Moreia was opened on Easter Sunday 1872. The system adopted was for those members who wished to go and start the new church to go voluntarily, but as this did not work out it became necessary to request members to transfer and 180 members were finally released.

In 1913 the building was enlarged and a new organ installed. The vestry is situated under the chapel and occupies as large an area as the chapel itself.

Since the commencement of the cause, the present minister is only the fourth minister of the church.

The chapel is third in a series of four stone pedimented Baptist buildings in Llanelli, following Seion (1857) and Greenfield (1858) and preceding Caersalem (1893). It is a Grade II listed building.

## SIR JOHN HUMPHREY'S TABERNACLE

During the ministry of the Rev. Thomas Johns at Capel Als, the congregation became too large for the building and on Sunday 4 February 1872 the Rev. Johns stressed that it would be best for the congregation to be divided into two and for a new chapel to be built on the Pembrey side of town.



The foundation stones were laid on Good Friday 1873, witnessed by a crowd of 6000 and on Easter Sunday 1875 the first sermon was delivered from the pulpit of the new building. Over 300 members of Capel Als formed the nucleus of the new church.

This is another fine example of John Humphrey's distinctive style in chapel building and probably the most elaborate chapel in Llanelli. It is a Grade II\* listed building.

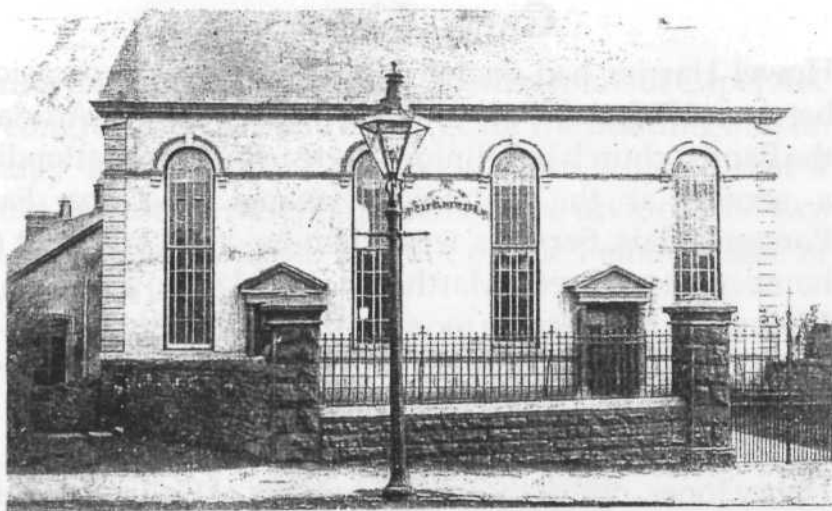
## CAPEL NEWYDD

Howel Harries had visited Llanelli on several occasions between 1738 and 1766. In 1780 two members of Adulam, the Baptist church in Felinfoel, were expelled for attending a service at the Calvinistic chapel at Gopa Fach, Pontarddulais. Services were then held in Llanelli at the home of an adherent, Martha (*society Martha*) and then, in 1766, when this became too small, at a house leased in Gelli Onn. This was visited by Thomas Charles, who established here the first Sunday School in Llanelli.

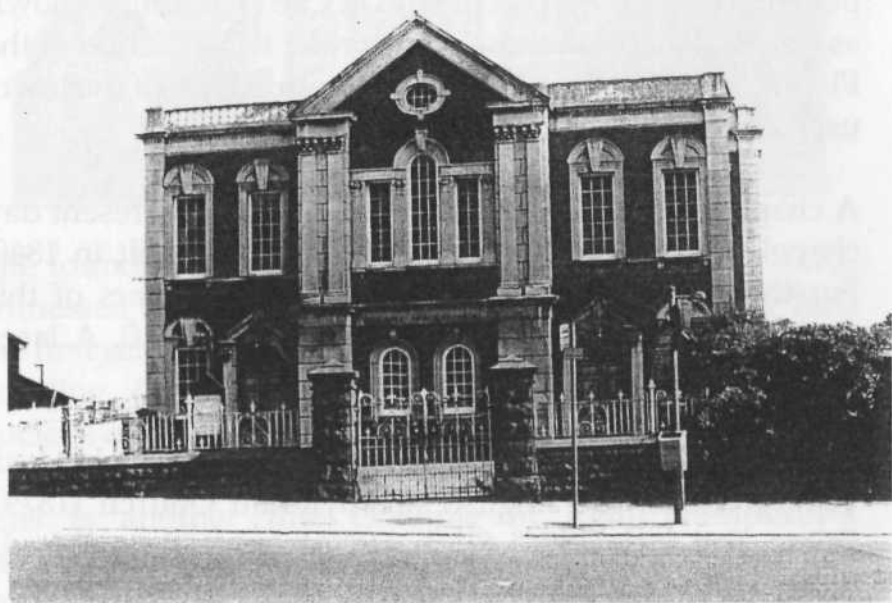
Henry Jones, one of the early members of Gelli Onn, was a blacksmith employed at Alexander Raby's furnace at Cwmdyche (present-day Furnace). He also tended the horses of the local squire at Stradey Castle, whom he persuaded to lease a plot of land at Cae Halen, also known as Cae Watch. [Both these names refer to the period of the Plague, with the land, located on the outskirts of the town, used as a market-place.]

A chapel was built in 1809 on the site of the present day chapel. This was renovated in 1821 and rebuilt in 1840. Further re-building occurred in the early years of this century and the chapel was re-opened in 1910. A large vestry was built in 1901.

A number of churches were subsequently established: Trinity (1858), the English Presbyterian Church (1879), Salem Feli-foel (1876) Siloh (1876) [now demolished], Saron (1901) and Glenalla (1909) [now converted into a community centre].



Capel Newydd as on a postcard of 1905



Capel Newydd in the 1990s