

# Capel

CYMDEITHAS TREFTADAETH Y CAPELI  
THE CHAPELS HERITAGE SOCIETY



---

## Taflen Wybodaeth Leol **18** *Local Information Sheet*

### *Aberhonddu / Brecon*

---

In the 19th century there were eight chapels in Brecon town; the Wesleyans, Baptists, Calvinistic Methodists and the Independents each had a Welsh and an English speaking chapel. Of these only four remain in use as chapels today.

---

### **Watergate Welsh Baptist Chapel**



*Watergate Chapel.*

The Baptists were active in Breconshire in the middle of the 17th century and Brecon town itself was the venue for a meeting in 1656 to launch a campaign to outwit the Quakers, who two years previously had embarked upon a great mission to win converts. A chapel was built at Maesyberllan to the north east of Brecon in 1746 and in 1805 premises were purchased at Watergate, close to the confluence of the Honddu and Usk rivers, for

a daughter chapel to Maesyberllan. It was built and opened for worship on 1st January 1806.

In 1809 the Rev. John Evans, son of the founder, came to Brecon. He opened a Sunday School at Watergate and preached in Welsh, but in 1817 he started

preaching in English on Sunday evenings. The chapel rapidly increased in numbers and posterity and for some six years English and Welsh members were content. Inevitably, friction developed and on 28th January 1823 an English Baptist congregation was formed which, however still worshipped at Watergate, until the following year, when they moved into new premises at Kensington. In time the chapel became too small, so it was rebuilt in 1880 at a cost of £2000 and with the addition of a schoolroom and vestry.

Watergate is a grade II listed building and has group value with the former Watergate Hill and subsidiary building, together with the south wall of the great hall of Brecon Castle and the southern elevation of the Castle of Brecon Hotel.

---

## Kensington English Baptist Church

The first chapel on this site was built in 1844, but by 1877 it became too small to meet the needs of an expanding congregation and a flourishing Sunday school. Also the times demanded something modern and more spectacular, so a new chapel, vestry and schoolroom were built at a cost of £2000.



*Kensington Chapel.*

## The Plough - United Reformed Chapel

Formally the Welsh Independent or Congregational chapel, its roots go back to the 17th century and the early days of persecution, when meetings were held in many places throughout the county, including Aberllynfi - 10 miles north east of Brecon. It was here that the founder members of three chapels including the Plough congregated and the meeting place to which Richard Williams made a



*Plough Chapel.*

bequest of a farm of 100 acres called Tŷ Rhydymaen in Merthyr Cynog so that Aberllynfi could be maintained. This farm was in the possession of the Plough chapel until recently.

It is not recorded when the worshippers at Aberllynfi moved into town since they lived for the most part in or near the town, but it is probable that they moved to Richard Williams' home Gludy, a farmhouse between Brecon and Aberyscir in 1693 before moving to a house in Ship Street. A chapel was built on the site of the Plough public house and was completed on 5 October 1699. This building lasted with a small extension until 1841, when a new chapel was built near to the old one, but between 1874 and 1901 it was enlarged and transformed into the chapel that it is today.

The Plough chapel is a grade II listed building and has group value with Nos. 1 and 2 Lion Street and Watton Mount.

**Former  
English Independent Chapel,  
Glamorgan Street  
(Old Museum)**

This chapel was built by the Rev. David Blow in the grounds of his house in St Mary Street and opened for worship in 1836. It housed the Brecknock Museum from 1927 until 1974.



*The Old Museum.*

This is a grade II listed building and forms a group with the rear wings of the Wellington Hotel and Nos. 11 and 12 The Bulwark. It also relates to Buckingham Place and other buildings and structures on the south side of Glamorgan Street.

## Methodism in Brecon



*Huntington House.*

Methodism in Brecon owed much to the labours of John Wesley, who often preached in the town and made many friends who supported him.

In 1780 a Welsh Calvinistic chapel was built by Lady Huntington in the Struet, opposite the Bull's Head public house. The lease expired in 1800 and the chapel was purchased by a group of friends. It is understood to have been rebuilt in 1820 but this building proved to be too small and the 'Old Lion' premises were purchased in 1859 and Bethel chapel built.

## Bethel Calvinistic Methodist Chapel, Lion Street



*The former Bethel Chapel as it is today.*

Bethel is a stone building in classical style and once contained seating for 800 people. It was at the time the largest in the town.

A grade II listed building but redundant and one of a group of under-used and disused buildings. The area was redeveloped in the mid-90s as a shopping precinct with the chapel being the dominant building and converted to house Boots the Chemist.

---

## Tabernacle Welsh Wesleyan Chapel, The Struet



*Former Tabernacle as it is today.*

In the winter of 1807 the Welsh Wesleyan missionaries came to Brecon, and by 1824 Tabernacle and a minister's house were built in the Struet, opposite George Street. However, in 1871 it was bought by a Mr James, a grocer, who converted it into a shop, which it remained well into the 20th century. It is now a photographic shop.

## Dr Coke's Chapel



*Dr Coke's Methodist Chapel in 1960.*



*Recent photograph showing the replacement building.*

The increasing anglicisation of the borough brought about a decline in the use of Welsh and the need for a proper sanctuary soon arose. A chapel was erected at the corner of Free Street and Little Free Street in 1770. It was revamped in 1815 and was jointly used at that time by English and Welsh Wesleyan societies of the town, but in 1834 a new Wesleyan chapel was built near the birthplace of Dr Coke at a cost of £2,000.

This chapel was provisionally listed grade II, but, sadly, was demolished some years ago to make room for Leo's supermarket.

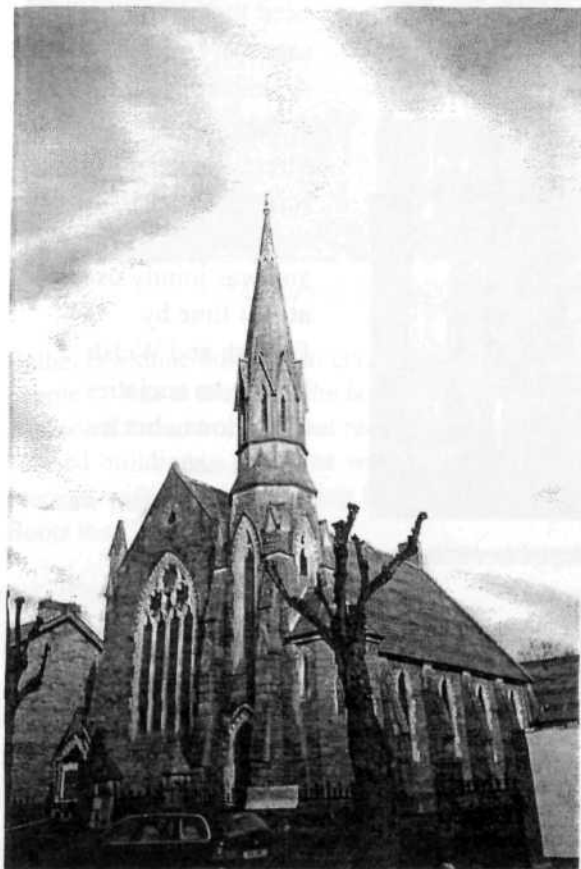


## Presbyterian Church, The Watton

The increase in the numbers of English speakers in the borough also increased the need for an English Calvinistic chapel, so in 1866 the Presbyterian Chapel was built in the Watton at a cost of over £2,300.

It is understood to have been designed by W F Poulton in the gothic style, with gable to the street, and built by local builders Messrs Williams & Sons. It is listed

grade II and has group value with the barracks and other buildings, including the recently demolished former hospital/Council Offices.



*Presbyterian chapel.*

The population of Brecon more than doubled between 1801 and 1851 to nearly 6,000 and the swing to nonconformism in the town was demonstrated very clearly in the Religious Census of 1851, when 37% attended the Church of England and 59% one or other of the non-conformist chapels; the remaining 4% were Catholics.

[ Reference: W S K Thomas, *Georgian and Victorian Brecon: Portrait*