

Capel

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THE CHAPELS HERITAGE SOCIETY



Taflen Wybodaeth Leol 22 *Local Information Sheet* Blaenavon

Before the development of the ironworks in 1788-89 the area of the future town of Blaenavon enjoyed a predominantly rural economy. With the growth of the ironworks however came a large workforce, about 350 by 1798 according to Archdeacon Coxe. The earliest chapel in the area was Capel y Graig or Rock Chapel, established by the Calvinistic Methodists in 1798 in Llanwenarth parish near the Iron Company's office, between its Brickyard and the site of its future Chapel Row. However, because the building was too near the expanding colliery waste, the congregation moved to Penuel, a new chapel in King Street, which was built in 1815 but was closed in January 1968.



Park Street Methodist Church

John Wesley visited Pontypool in 1739. Blaenavon's first Wesleyan meeting place was in converted malt-house but the first purpose-built Wesleyan Methodist church here dates from 1837. Like Capel y Graig it was built to the west of the ironworks, in the middle of a new row of workers' housing. Today's Park Street Methodist Church was built in 1885-6 to the design of John Wills of Derby, who includes Blaenavon in the list of 270 Non-conformist churches and schools erected to his designs, a list which appears in his *Hints to trustees of church property*. At Blaenavon, the site had been leased to the Wesleyans by the iron company in the 1860s, as part of their development of the 'Waun Field'. The school was built in 1871 and the chapel followed later. The buildings have been described by John Newman as 'of grey-green Pennant stone, a bold if coarse Romanesque-cum-Gothic façade with a central rose over triple lancet and to the right a rectangular tower'.



Horeb Baptist Church (Workmen's Hall in background)

The area around Blaenavon has always been strongly Baptist. In 1790 Baptist ministers from Penygarn and Llanwenarth were teaching in the homes of William and Francis James, but there was no chapel until 1823, when the first

Horeb was built in Old James Street on a field boundary. It was a gable façade chapel with three round-headed windows on the first floor. Richard Owen came from Anglesey to be the town's first Baptist minister. The building was later used by the Wesleyans, until they moved to Park Street. It was later also used by the Salvation Army before they developed their own meeting place in Rhydynos Street. The present Horeb was built in Church Road in 1862 at a cost of £1300 in a simple classical style on a T-shaped plan in painted rendered stone with a slate roof. It is said by John Newman to have been built by Thomas Thomas, a civil engineer of Blaenavon, but it may have been designed by the Rev. Thomas Thomas of Landore. The ceiling, for instance, is stylistically similar to the latter's Salem chapels in Caernarfon and Porthmadog and there may be other stylistic similarities.



Bethlehem Chapel, Broad Street

The Congregationalists founded a chapel in 1820 on the Avon Road. It was opened on Christmas Day and appropriately given the name Bethlehem. In 1840 the church moved to its present location, set back off Broad Street, behind Bethlehem Court. It is a simple classical building with porch and later

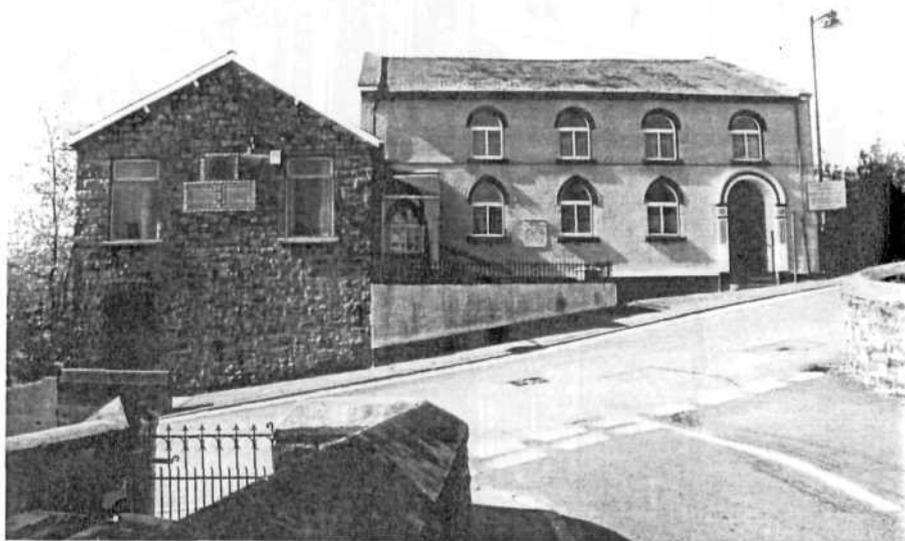
vestry extension. The front gable is rendered and symmetrical, with centre door with flanking and centre round-headed windows, all with rendered stone surrounds. The interior retains late-nineteenth century fittings and has a gallery supported by cast iron columns. The schoolroom is in the extension. The building is listed for its special interest as a mid-19th century Nonconformist chapel.



Broad Street Evangelical Church

The Evangelical Church in Broad Street (now listed Grade II as a prominent later-19th century town-centre chapel) has also been known as Moriah Baptist Chapel and Broad Street English Baptist Chapel. It was established in 1844 and at that time the other Baptist chapels in the district used the Welsh language. The present building is dated 1888. It has a Classical 3-bay gable façade, rendered with stone dressings. Pilasters divide each bay to both

ground floor and gallery and all openings have semi-circular moulded stone arches. There are stained glass windows to either side of the entrance. The centre tri-partite gallery window has a pedimented keystone and above it a decorated panel with the date 1888 and remains of the original name of the chapel, all under a crowning gable. The interior retains many original features, notably the iron columns with gold painted spiral decoration supporting the gallery with its pierced ironwork balustrade, although the seats have been removed. Behind the main building lies the former school-room, of rubble stone construction, with dressed stone quoins; it is now used as a pet shop.



Bethel Baptist Chapel, King Street

Further up Broad Street is the converted Bible Christian or Lion Chapel, dating from 1860, for which the Local Government Board passed plans for an extension in 1861. A few steps up the street is the site of the demolished but formerly impressive Primitive Methodist Chapel. And round the corner in King Street is Bethel Baptist Chapel, which before 1878 was used by the Primitive Methodists.

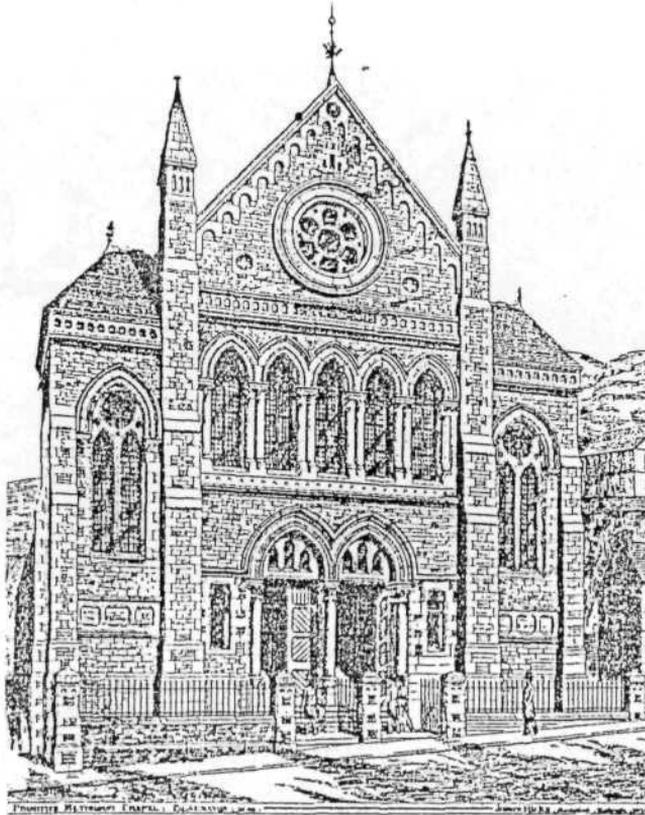
(Sources: Lewis Browning, *Blaenavon: a brief historical sketch* (1906). Malcolm Thomas & John Lewis, *Blaenavon through the years in*

photographs, vols. 1-3 (Abertillery, 1987-93). RCAHMW)

A chapel building which survives but is no longer a chapel is the Bible Christian or Lion Chapel, a few doors up from the Lion Hotel in Broad Street. It is now used by a play group and perhaps other societies.

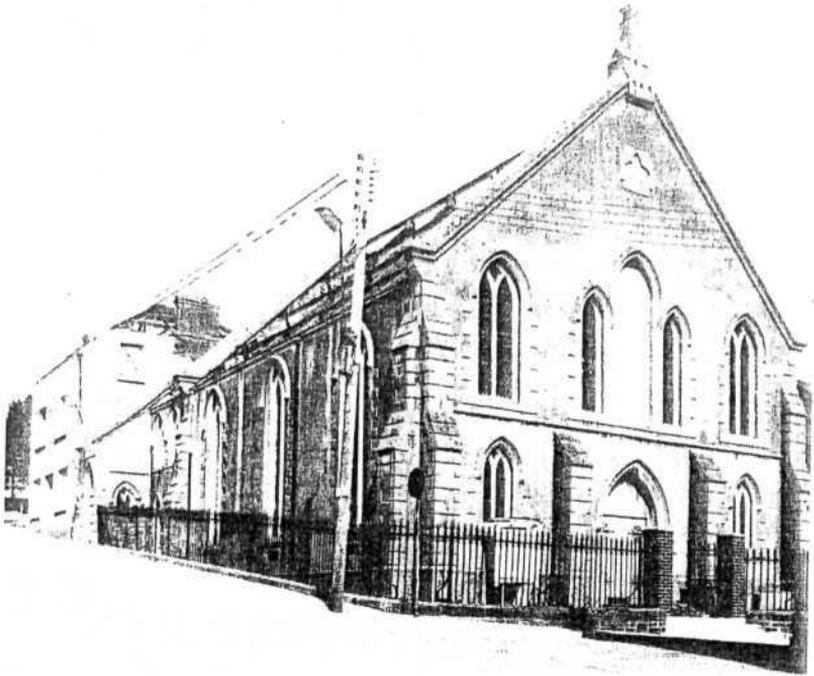
Demolished chapels include:

- 1) the Primitive Methodist Chapel, a few doors up from the Bible Christian Chapel,
- 2) the first Wesleyan Methodist Church,
- 3) Ebenezer Chapel, James Street, (a breakaway from the first Horeb), and
- 4) the Salvation Army Hall in Rhydynos Street.



Architect's drawing of the Primitive Methodist Chapel, now demolished

Lion Street Congregational Church



BLAENAFON WORKMEN'S HALL