

# Capel

CYMDEITHAS TREFTADAETH Y CAPEL  
*THE CHAPELS HERITAGE SOCIETY*



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## Taflen Wybodaeth Leol **27** *Local Information Sheet* **Llanidloes**

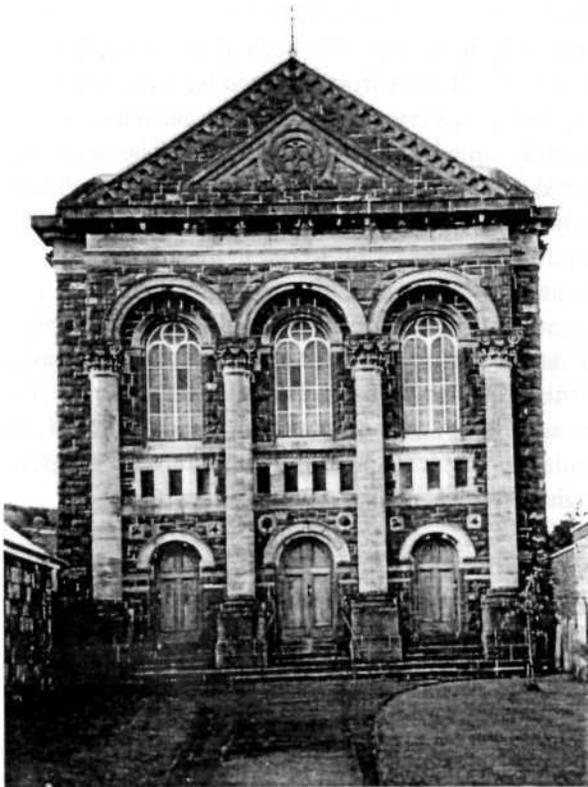
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"Where on earth is Llanidloes?" runs the 21st century slogan on the local T-shirts, and this of a settlement which has probably been an important trading place for almost a millennium. Trackways from east and west led here to an important ford across the River Severn and the motte and bailey castle predates the town of Edward I's time by some hundred years. The new town on its grid-iron plan prospered from the 13th century and grew in importance to become the centre of the wool trade, and increasing wealth allowed the rebuilding of the parish church, founded by St. Idloes in the 7th century. Its extraordinary hammer-beam roof is the last of its kind to be built in this country, and its fine 13th century nave arcade was brought here from Abbey Cwm Hir in 1546 after the dissolution of the monastery. Prosperity increased again in the 18th and 19th centuries with the flannel trade and with the development of the Van and Bryn Tail lead mines on the outskirts of the town. The enlarged population created a centre of cultural and religious activity recognised throughout Wales,

Nonconformity came in the 17th century and some of its earliest buildings still stand, although no longer used for religious purposes. Crawlwm, a farmhouse from the 1770s near the Clywedog dam is said to be one of the first Sunday Schools in Wales, but is probably a Circulating School of the Griffith Jones type. Capel Bethel (CM 1821), where Humphrey Gwalchmai and the Mills family worshipped, was once a centre of congregational singing and is now an ironmonger's shop. The English WM Church (1862) in Eastgate Street closed in 1915 and became a school known as the Crow's Nest. It now awaits conversion to a dwelling.

One of the five splendid remaining chapels, which help to make Llanidloes "one of the nicest towns in Wales" (Richard Haslam), Bethel Street English Presbyterian (1872-3) with seating for 240, closed in 2004. It was the first chapel in town to have an organ in ca. 1886. We shall visit Trinity (J G Humphrey's last chapel) and the Baptist, Wesleyan and Welsh Presbyterian chapels, all by Richard Owen of Liverpool. It is claimed that the chapels can accommodate 3500 people, while the current population is about 2400.

### Trinity Church (formerly Zion URC) 1878



The Congregationalists established themselves in Llanidloes c.1818, and the first chapel on this site was built in 1824 with a small graveyard in front of it. Increased membership led to the construction of the present building in 1878 at a cost of £1,550; being larger, it occupies part of the original burial ground. The chapel reveals itself unexpectedly at the far end of one of the town's 13th century burgage plots. The architect was John Humphrey of Swansea and this was one of the last of his major chapels, with characteristic lofty

unfluted columns standing on large bases. The four columns form three bays with linked semicircular arches and windows, and the façade is topped by a striking pediment which now lacks most of its cimatiuum. It was possibly removed when the front was strengthened in 1936; it does appear complete in an earlier picture of the chapel. The interior is fitted with segmented and raked pitch-pine pews, with a continuous gallery on all four sides and with an organ (fitted in 1934 and overhauled in 1999) located prominently above the pulpit. The church contains the vault of the Jenkins and Davies families and an unusual backless bureau (c.1664) said to have hidden preachers during the 17th century Nonconformist persecutions. The rear schoolroom was built in 1932, with a foundation stone laid by Elfed. Trinity Church was formed in May 2004 from the union of Bethel Street English Presbyterian Church and Zion URC.

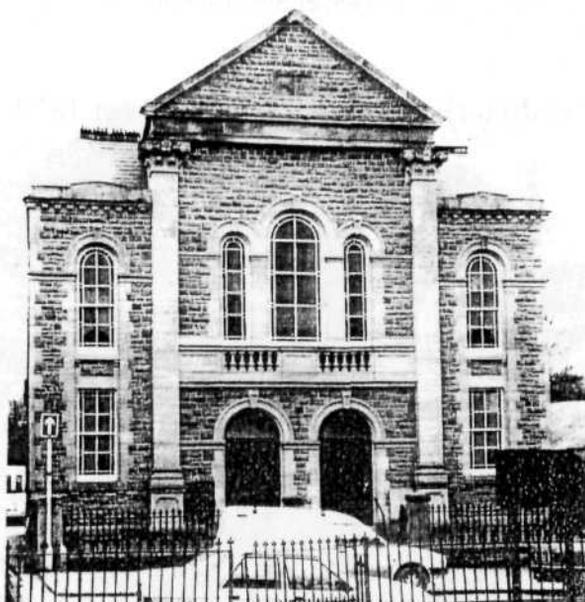
### Welsh Presbyterian Chapel, China Street 1872



This is now the only Welsh language place of worship in the town and the largest chapel, seating 900. The chapel was designed by Richard Owen of Liverpool and built by Rhydwen Jones of Rhyl in 1872 at a cost of £4000. The façade is built of contrasting stonework and the sides have a glazed brick base and are slate hung above. The single storey portico was built in 1873 and contains a memorial to the Rev. Humphrey

Gwalchmai. The interior of the chapel has a gallery on three sides and a fine plasterwork ceiling. The Sêr Fawr and organ are of composite design. The raised schoolroom to the rear (1876) is also slate hung and has a spectacular interior space which was used for many local functions. Donald Soper once spoke here. Unfortunately the ceiling is in a dangerous state and the schoolroom can only be viewed from an outside window. The whole complex of chapel, schoolroom and vestry is Grade II listed.

### **Baptist Church, Shortbridge Street 1876**



The Baptists originally met in dwelling houses and in the Old Market Hall. The present schoolroom was the first church and a small new church was built in 1824. Its dedication stone now stands in front of the present church. Baptisms were conducted in the nearby River Severn. In 1876 the present larger church was built, partly on the site of the old burial ground and can seat 750 people. The baptismal tank is under the pulpit. This church, with an imposing two-storey façade with giant pilasters was also designed by Richard

Owen and is Grade II listed. The building was renovated in 1990. The interior has a gallery to three sides supported on Corinthian headed columns, with an arch flanked by pilasters behind the pulpit. The organ was installed in 1961 and valued then at £4,000. Pews were removed from the gallery to install the organ and from the front of the church to place the console conveniently near the Sêr Fawr. The slightly raked pews show evidence of some slippage of the west wall of the church (on the River Severn side) and the wall required substantial underpinning. Unusually there is a copy of the architect's ground plan for the church with his name at the bottom. This was found by chance in the basement of a chemist's shop in the town, and can be viewed in the vestibule. The plans show which of the old walls were retained and reused for the new chapel - significantly perhaps, the old west wall was the one which had been retained!

### **Wesleyan Methodist Chapel 1878**

Wesleyan Methodists did not begin to prosper in Montgomeryshire until Brecon became the Circuit Town with responsibility for North Wales. By 1800, local members were holding meetings in the market place and by 1802 a new chapel opened on the present site and was looked after by ministers from Welshpool, the Circuit Town from 1799. Welsh was the language at the outset and early ministers included Lot Hughes (1809) and, following the extension of the chapel in 1822, Hugh Hughes (1826-28). The old chapel was replaced by the present building in 1878, the foundation stones having been laid by the wives of two captains at the Van Mines. The old dedication stone from the earlier chapel is in the forecourt of the present building and reads 'The Wesleyan Chapel Erected 1802 Enlarged 1822 God is Love'. The architect was Richard Owen of Liverpool and the façade has the characteristic buttresses and pilasters, topped with obelisks (from which the metal finials have recently been removed on account of corrosion) framing a triple window. They are flanked by prominent gabled stair window features. The use of Aberystwyth blue stone with Grinshill quoins and facings contribute to a striking façade. Attractive pews and a fine gallery give accommodation for 500 people. The red brick Sunday School Hall and meeting room at the rear were built in 1900-1.



Wesleyan Methodist Chapel 1878



Former Bethel CM Chapel (now ironmonger shop)