



Capel

CYMDEITHAS TREFTADAETH Y CAPEL
THE CHAPELS HERITAGE SOCIETY

Taflen Wybodaeth Leol **28** *Local Information Sheet*
Rhuthun *Ruthin*

CAPEL Visit to Ruthin

In a town recognized as having its fair share of architectural gems, members can (amongst other things) visit a chapel whose worshippers were locked up after each service, have lunch in one of its most commanding buildings overlooked by 'Seven Eyes', visit one of the only two remaining round chapels in Wales and have tea in a chapel bearing a name resonant of national significance to Methodists.

Include, in passing, an old courthouse built soon after Owain Glyndŵr set fire to the town, and some famous iron gates, almshouses and the site of a Catholic martyr's execution and I hope you have the ingredients of a very interesting day.

Pendref Independent Chapel, Well Street

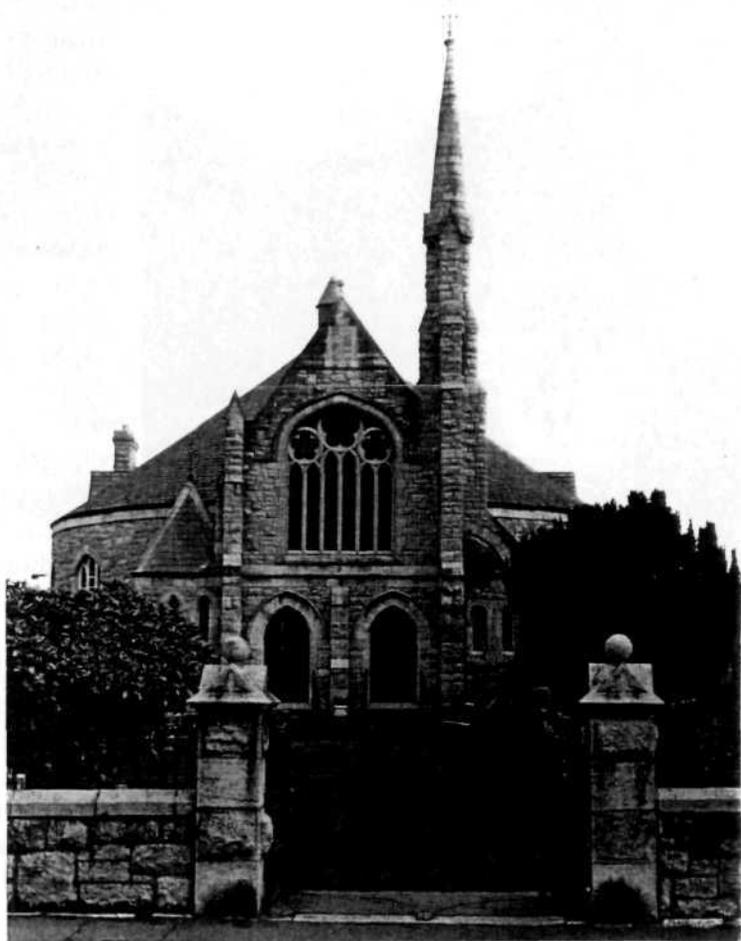
Now the oldest chapel in the town, the present building was erected in 1827 and assumed its present form with its elegant front bow in 1875. This is the period which Anthony Jones describes as one when the chapel architects indulged themselves on 'idiosyncratic conceits'. The new frontage was constructed from large even blocks of stone 'ashlar', punctuated by 'two storeys of round-headed windows and a Tuscan Porch'. The new front and other improvements cost £1,400, double the original estimate.



Pendref Independent Chapel

According to T. Rees and J. Thomas, *Eglwysi Annibynnol Cymru*, (1875), a house was licensed in Ruthin (to a John Roberts) as a meeting-house for the independents as early as 1672 but this cause seems to have died out. Preaching by Independent preachers seems to have begun again in Ruthin at the very beginning of the nineteenth century, led by D. Jones of Holywell and T. Jones of Moelfre, meeting anywhere where they had a welcome - often in a room attached to the Prince of Wales Inn (now vanished) in Upper Clwyd Street. The cause was established formally in 1802 and in 1807 it called its first minister the Rev. Benjamin Evans (later of Bagillt), who had been a student at Wrexham. Previous to the building of the first chapel on its present site in 1827 the congregation met at Porthydŵr (Watergate) which is the group of buildings opposite the river Clwyd end of Ruthin Gaol. The cost of the building of the 1827 chapel for £1.340, although on a good site in the middle of the town, crippled the cause with debt for a number of years. £440 was still owed twenty years later.

Tabernacle Presbyterian Chapel, Well Street



Tabernacle Presbyterian Chapel

According to R H Evans' *Hanes Henaduriaeth Dyffryn Clwyd*, a Nonconformist Sunday School began to be held in Rhos Street (the street that runs towards Mold) around 1788 in an old barn. The boys of the Grammar School are said to have persecuted the worshippers but nevertheless one William Parry purchased land nearby for £20 and Capel y Rhos was built upon it. In 1804 the well-known

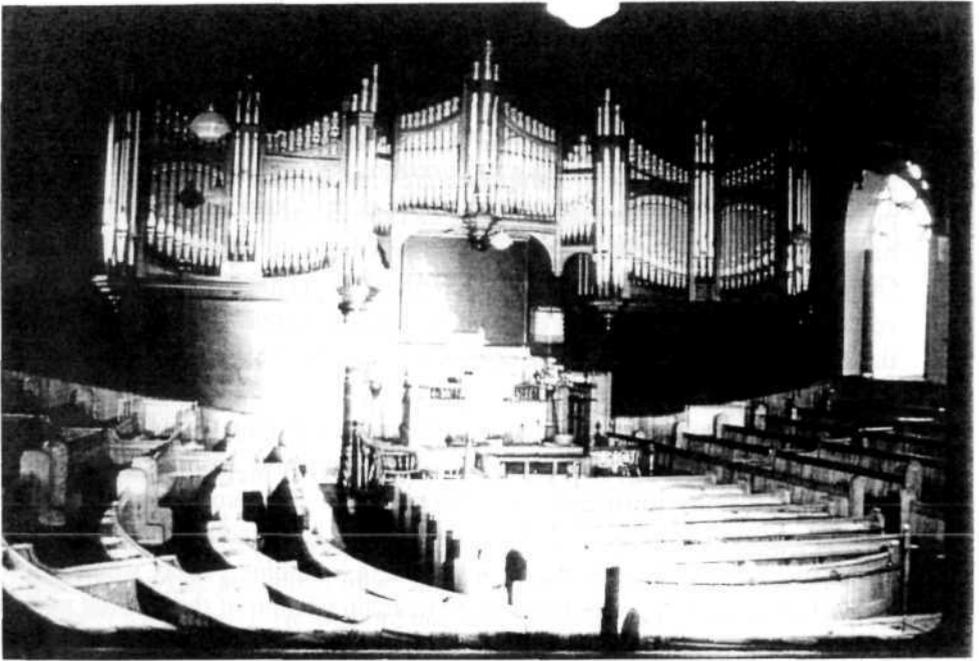


Rhos Street Mission

Rev Thomas Jones (later known as 'Thomas Jones o Ddinbych') took responsibility for the flock for the next five years and it was whilst he was here he made contact with a young English printer named Thomas Gee, father of the eminent publisher and politician of the same name. Later the Rev. John Jones, son of Edward Jones, Maes y Plwm, held a school at Capel y Rhos. Throughout the nineteenth century the chapel attracted worshippers from a wide area around the town. Eight chapels were formed from its congregation without losing the number of

communicants (remaining about 175 between 1855 and 1891). Capel y Rhos later became a 'mission' chapel before its final closure. (It is now a car repair workshop.)

The Rev. Robert Ambrose Williams (Emrys ap Iwan) took a great part in the planning of the present chapel. It was built between 1889 and 1891 at a cost of £1,841, a number of houses having to be demolished to make way for the



Interior of Tabernacle

building. Thomas Williams built it in a style influenced by Emrys ap Iwan's stay in France. It is said to be one of the two remaining round chapels in Wales (although strictly its shape is best described as extended half-round). It is not obviously round from the outside. The outside front is convex. Inside pews are in a semicircle. Otherwise it is the impressive array of organ pipes which dominates. The roof is of broad hammer beams and traceried windows light the chapel. Emrys ap Iwan left Ruthin in 1893. By 1909 there were approximately 200 members and in 1984 the number exceeded 300 for the first time.

English Presbyterian Chapel, Wynnstay Road

There was no provision for English speaking Nonconformists in Ruthin until the 1880s. The nearest suitable chapel was the Vale Street chapel in Denbigh, which opened in 1880. A request had been made at the Vale of Clwyd Presbytery meeting (*cyfarfod misol*) in 1872 for the establishment of an 'achos Saesneg' but nothing resulted.

An advertisement in the Denbighshire Free Press of 8 August 1885 announced the holding of an English Gospel service. Following this the impetus to form a regular congregation of worshippers grew with fund-raising concerts and preaching meetings. The congregation met mostly at the Town Hall. A 'grand bazaar' in 1891 gave profit of £230 towards the building fund. In 1889 Frank Bells, the architect from Mold, drew up plans for a chapel, estimated then at a cost £1,350, a sum that was far exceeded in the end. Samuel Owen of Ruthin was the builder and the chapel was opened on 18 May 1893. At its opening the building was described as follows:

"The new building is distinctly an ornament to Ruthin, being carried out in pure gothic style, and it stands in a charming situation, quite close to the centre of the town and the station and at the same time affording a magnificent prospect of the Vale and its surrounding mountains. The structure is of Eyarth [local] limestone, a hard pink variety which is very effective when used in this case. The main portion of the outside walls is undressed, each stone being tooled only on the edge, while the quoins of the corners and buttresses are dressed and architectural result is excellent. There are a neat porch, a belfry and two transepts ... The pews and pulpit are of modern construction, comfortable to the occupant and at the same time



English Presbyterian Chapel

permitting free circulation of air. The wood throughout is pitch-pine varnished, with the exception of the pulpit which has been constructed of oak ... the basement is converted to a schoolroom. This can scarcely be called a cellar inasmuch as the building stands on a steep hillside and the rear portion of the basement is quite on a level with the surface of the ground. Lofty, airy and well lighted the schoolroom will be admirable for its purpose'.

Bathafarn Methodist Chapel, Market Street

The Reverend Edward Jones of Bathafarn Farm (1778 - 1837) in Llanrhudd parish, about one and a half miles from Ruthin has been regarded as the father of Welsh Methodism. He was ordained in 1802 and in the same year the first Nonconformist chapel was built in Ruthin under his leadership. His zeal for the Methodist cause and its promotion caused him later to be a trustee to many other congregations and he embarked on a number of preaching tours to clear their building costs. Chapels as far away from his home as Carmarthenshire bear the name Bathafarn as a tribute.

The 1802 building in Mill Street (Capel y Felin) was surrounded by dwellings and was said to be dark and unpleasing - 'yn dywyll ac yn anymunol'. It has since been incorporated into the next door building and is now part of the workshop for a garden and farm machinery business.

The present chapel, a memorial chapel to Edward Jones, was built in Market Street in 1869. Market Street was then a recently constructed thoroughfare formed especially for access to the new railway station (where the Ruthin craft centre now stands). According to the 1905 census of chapels there were then 160 adherents.



Bathafarn Methodist Chapel

The chapel was built in the Sub-Classical style to the design of Richard Owen of Liverpool and rebuilt / modified in 1913-14. It is of red brick construction with yellow sandstone details, moulded coping to all gables and rusticated quoins to the façade. It has a central gable entrance through a segmental arched headed doorway, with a semicircular headed surround above the porch, enclosing a four-lobed traceried window above three lancets. It has much simpler side elevations. Its internal features include bold plaster ceilings and a gallery carried on iron columns.