

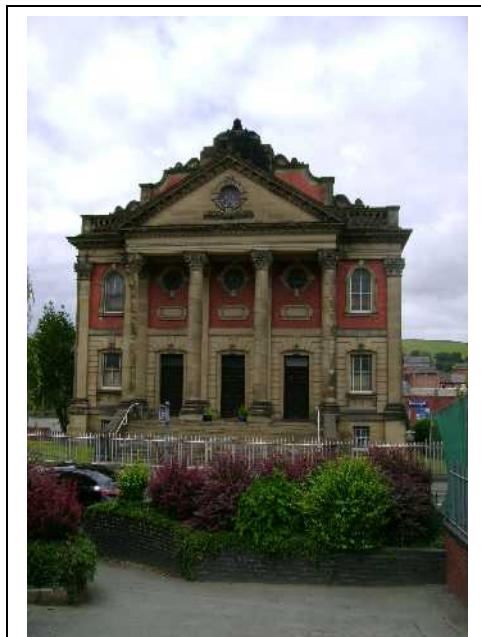
Capel

CYMDDEITHAS TREFTADAETH Y CAPELI
THE CHAPELS HERITAGE SOCIETY



Local Information Sheet 34: Newtown Taflen Wybodaeth Leol 34: Y Drenewydd

Newtown, originally Llanfair-yng-Nghedwain, a medieval village, achieved town status in 1279 after a grant of a market charter by King Edward I. Its grid plan then developed but it remained isolated until the Montgomery Canal reached the town in 1819. The population quadrupled by 1831 and with 1200 handlooms the town became known as 'the busy Leeds of Wales'. It's third renaissance occurred in 1965 when it became a designated town under the umbrella of the Mid-Wales Development Corporation.



Nonconformists were active in Newtown from 1712 and by 1800 the Baptists, Calvinistic Methodists, Congregationalists and Wesleyan Methodists were renting rooms for meetings, either in the Eagles Hotel or above its stable - sadly neither now exist. The Baptists were the first to build a chapel in the town (1801), followed by the Wesleyan Methodists (1806), the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists (1810) and the English Congregationalists (1821). Later, an English Calvinist chapel was opened (1845), as well as a Welsh Congregationalist chapel, Capel Coffa (1863).

Capel Coffa is the only original building of all these denominations to survive. The oldest nonconformist building in the town is the 15th century Cwrt Plas-y-Dre (part of a house originally located in Dolgellau but moved to Newtown in 1885), which was gifted to the Society of Friends in 1966 for use as a Quaker Meeting House.

Newtown United Reformed Church, New Church Street



Known as the English Congregational Church until 1972, the chapel was built between 1876 and 1878 at a cost just under £3,500. The installation of an organ in 1880 cost a further £356

and a schoolroom was added in 1883 for £813. The chapel, with raked seating, and the schoolroom were mainly constructed in the decorated style with two spirelets on the front elevation. The material used was squared random rubble brought to all courses with the roof slated and surmounted by ridged tiles. A beautiful stained glass window depicts the Beatitudes.

Zion Baptist Chapel, New Road



The first Zion was built in 1901, was enlarged in 1814, 1821 and 1836 before being replaced by the present imposing building, one of Wales' finest chapels. Designed by the famous architect George Morgan, and built by Griffiths & Williams of Knockin between 1881 and 1882, this is the most handsome chapel built in the Beaux-Arts Baroque High Classical style at a cost of £8000. A broad flight of stone steps leads to five bays in red brick on an ashlar base surmounted by a giant order of Corinthian pillars above which is a shaped brick and stone gable over which projects a tetrastyle portico and pediment. The inside is equally lavish with serpentine iron gallery fronts, supported on iron

columns with arcades above. A superb organ is contained in a Serliana recess with marble columns. The schoolrooms are below and, at the time of building, it provided accommodation for 1334.

Bethel Welsh Presbyterian Church, New Road

Constructed between 1875 and 1876, this is the third Welsh Calvinist chapel to have been built in the town. Designed by the famous Liverpool architect, Richard Owens, and built at a cost of £2300, Bethel was constructed in the decorated style. The front elevation is in squared masonry and sandstone dressings with a central door and two buttresses to the main gable (from which spirelets have been removed). The remainder is in yellow brick beneath a slated roof to a tiled ridge. It probably seated about 450 people but is now in a sad state of disrepair and was sold a short while ago for redevelopment into flats and/or offices.

Welsh Congregational Memorial Chapel (Capel Coffa), Milford Road



Capel Coffa is an auditorium type chapel with a gable-end facade, typical of the 1830s but built in 1863 on land gifted by Lord Sudeley. It was built as a memorial chapel commemorating the events of 'Cae Bendith', the Field of Blessing which provided for Henry Davies and his family following cruel persecution during the 17th century. Currently three denominations worship at the chapel on a Sunday as, in addition to the Welsh Congregationalists, the Welsh Presbyterians from Bethel (now closed) and the English Presbyterians from Crescent (still under repair following storm damage in 2002) have been made most welcome.

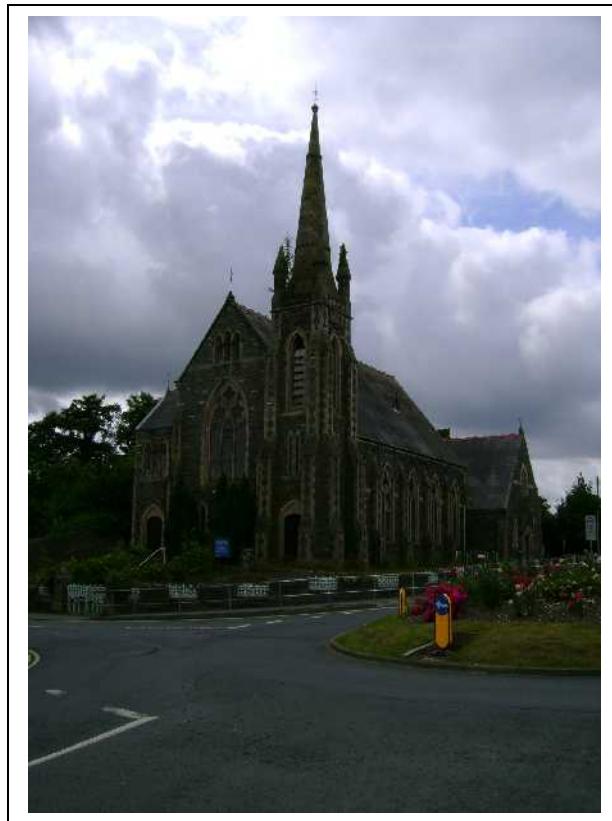
Quaker Meeting House (Cwrt Plas-y-Dre), Milford Road



Cwrt Plas-y-Dre is a small, aisled hall of a much larger 15th century house, removed from Dolgellau in 1885 by Sir Pryce Pryce-Jones for use as a summer house. The exterior is mostly of stone construction with only the gable-ends and front being

timber framed. The external stairway gives access to the gallery. Sir Pryce Pryce-Jones' widow gifted the building in 1966 to the Religious Society of Friends as a meeting house. The house is known as the home of Lewis Owen, Baron of the Exchequer, who was murdered on the Welshpool-Dolgellau road by the Gwylliaid Cochion (Red Bandits) of Mawddwy in 1555.

Crescent English Presbyterian Church, Milford Road / The Crescent



Crescent was built in 1878-79 as a replacement for the first English-speaking Calvinist chapel erected in Chapel Street in

1845, of which no trace now exists. The architect was Richard Owens, who had also built Bethel. He described Crescent as Geometrical Gothic in a planned parallelogram, explaining that with vestries and a school room at the back, it was in the form of a cross. Much of the external elevations are in Penstrowed blue stone from a local quarry, with grinshill stone dressings allied to a roof of Caernarfonshire slate in two colours; the corner tower and 90 foot high spire are a departure from his normal style. The land was given by the fourth Lord Sudeley and the cost of the building was just over £3000. Approximately 450 could be accommodated, with 350 at ground level and 100 in the gallery. Crescent is currently under repair following the loss of its roof during a storm in 2002.

Wesleyan Methodist Chapel, Back Lane

This is the fourth Wesleyan Chapel built in the town, and the second on this site. The original 1835 chapel, built of stone in the classical style with a portico added in 1878, was damaged by floods, and in 1982 was demolished. It was collapsed into its own cellar and a new chapel was built over it in two stages. The new, modern building is a steel-framed structure clad in red brick with blue dressings, with a central glass roof and wings covered in slate. It was constructed between 1983 and 1989, with the worship area opening in 1984 and the hall in 1989, all at a cost of £140,000. The organ and two stained glass windows were salvaged from the old building.

Pentre Llifor Wesleyan Methodist Church

Pentre Llifor is the oldest chapel in the Welshpool and Bro Hafren Methodist Circuit. Built in 1798, it is typical of the late 18th Century being of rectangular shape with rounded gothic windows and of simple appearance. Constructed of locally made bricks it contains a small gallery mounted on two slender cast-iron pillars and has fifteen pews downstairs including the four that partially surround the Set Fawr in front of the pulpit and the

communion table – extra pews were provided upstairs in 1799 by the unusual expedient of reducing/lengthening the original benches and boxing them in.



Pentre Llifor was Grade II Listed in 1953 (one of two in the Circuit, Cil Chapel at Berriew is the other) and currently is the only chapel in the Circuit to be registered as a Methodist heritage site. This is because it is one of just two surviving 18th century Wesleyan Methodist preaching houses in Wales and is linked to a number of John Wesley's itinerant preachers from the 1770s when Brecon was the Circuit town. Ultimately, this should greatly improve its prospects and probably ensure survival for many years to come. At the very least it opens up a number of opportunities and possibilities. In addition, Pentre Llifor is the only church in the Circuit to have issued an historical leaflet.

Andrew Mathieson
September 2008