

Capel



CYMRDEITHAS TREFTADAETH Y CAPELL
THE CHAPELS HERITAGE SOCIETY

LOCAL INFORMATION SHEET 36 : HOLYHEAD TAFLEN WYBODAETH LEOL : 36 CAERGYBI

Overlooking the harbour of Holyhead, stands, on a low cliff, the oldest structure in the town, namely the Roman Fort. Within its walls, during the sixth century, St Cybi was granted permission by Maelgwn Gwynedd to erect a simple wooden church. So, with the passage of time, the place eventually became known as Caergybi, or 'Cybi's fort'. In the age of the Saints a significant number of chapels or cells were built on Holy Island - hence the name. The town's strategic location directly opposite Dublin became significant following the recognition by the Irish Parliament of Henry VIII as King of Ireland in 1542. During the reign of Elizabeth I a post was established, to carry state despatches, '...between the Court and Holiheade...towards Ireland', thereafter the town became a packet port of importance. Early dissent appears to have had little impact on the town, however by 1745 William Morris informed his brother Richard by letter that:

This country, which some years ago might be said not to have six persons within it of any other persuasion than that of the Church of England, is now full of Methodists or Independents or Presbyterians, or some other sect, the Lord knows what.

Great change and development took place in the town during the 19th century. The port infrastructure was built together with the mighty breakwater of 1.5 miles in length. Telford's road was completed in 1826 and the railway reached the town in 1848. The population boomed from 2,132 in 1801 to 8,863 by 1851. This was the century of frenzied chapel building, with chapels being re-built many times, so that by the end of the century Holyhead had 24 nonconformist chapels and mission halls. All of the four main non-conformist denominations were represented in the town, with numerous chapels for each. By 1905 - according to the 1911 Royal Commission statistics - the town's chapels could hold 7,573 people, the adjoining schoolrooms 2,731 and the Mission rooms 815: the population of the town was 10,079 with the chapels having 5,674 adherents. However the 20th century, particularly the second half, was one of relentless decline, with a number of chapels being demolished, while others have been put to a secular use. By way of illustration, in 1956 the membership of the town's Calvinistic Methodist chapels stood at 1,437, with 8 chapels and halls; fifty years later the membership had dwindled to 87, with two chapels remaining.

Tabernacle : Congregationalist.

In 1746 the first Congregational chapel on Anglesey was built at Rhosmeirch, north of Llangefni. Congregationalism came later to Holyhead when John Davies came from Pwllheli, where he was a member of the Congregational Church, to live in the town, in March 1817. In June of that year Davies borrowed the Baptist Chapel to hold a preaching festival, when two independent ministers preached, following the conclusion of the services the preachers encouraged him to form a church and find a suitable venue to hold regular services. The building found was known as Y Parlyrau (The Parlours), which had originally been two parlours converted into one, and had previously been used as a playhouse, and also as a school. The room was small, measuring 29 x 20 feet, and in a very dilapidated condition, nevertheless the building was leased at the sum of £5.00 per annum.

The story of Tabernacle is, for many years, closely involved with the ministry of its first, and very eminent minister, the Rev William Griffith, who held the pastorate from 1822 to 1881. When he accepted the call, at the tender age of twenty, the church membership totalled 13, but, by the time of his death, the membership roll exceeded 400. At first the total number of the adherents did not exceed 40, and accordingly the small church was unable to fully support financially its young minister, so William Griffiths opened a school, which he ran very successfully from 1822 until 1850.

William Griffiths related that only on one occasion did division and strife threaten the church, and that took place during the early years, when they met in Y Parlyrau. The dispute was concerning the type of candles to be used, in particular the method of their manufacture, with some wanting the *dipped* variety, whilst the other faction preferred those made in a *mould* !.

Under his ministry the church blossomed, and after only two years they decided to erect their own chapel, which measured 45 feet x 39 feet, with a gallery all round. William Griffith was the first settled minister in the town. The church experienced periods of revival in 1832, 1840, and 1848. This substantial increase in numbers required more room, so in 1845 the floor of Tabernacle was reconstructed, with a spacious vestry built under the gallery. In 1856 the chapel was again enlarged, by extending its length by 21 feet with additional seating for between 200 to 300 people.

However, the revival of 1859-60 had a profound effect on the church, with the church membership increasing from 350 to 650. Soon after the revival it was decided to plant a new church in another part of the town, and 100 "volunteers" were asked to go and form a new church, in the event some 80 members agreed to leave, and Tabernacl Newydd was opened in 1866. Tabernacle was closed for a period in 1885, when further substantial alterations were carried out. William Griffith also had the oversight of forming a new church, on the outskirts of the town, for those engaged in constructing the breakwater, and a new chapel, Tabor was opened in 1848.

A new facade was added in 1913, when the chapel was enlarged with a seating capacity for 800, and a Pipe Organ installed, all at the cost of £3,600. The substantial vestry and adjoining rooms were destroyed by arson on 8th November 2002. A new smaller vestry has been built and most appropriately named " Y Parlyrau".

Brynhyfryd : Congregational > Pentecostal.

The Congregational churches of Wales were bitterly divided by the "Battle of the Two Constitutions", as it became known, which lasted from 1877 to 1885. The dispute was between those who favoured the "old" constitution for the denomination's Theological College in Bala, and those who wished to adopt a new one. R. Tudur Jones describes the dispute as one which rocked Congregationalism to its foundations, with animosity, at times, on a personal level. Tabernacle was deeply affected by the dispute, and in 1882 a large section of the membership left the church, and met on a temporary basis in the Town Hall. A new chapel was built, and was opened in March 1884 with some 200 members, the new church prospered, so that by 1897 the membership had grown to 450. The new chapel was only a short distance down the hill from Tabernacle, to a design by Owen Morris Roberts.

S.J.Griffith (*Morswyn*), author of the hymn "*Arglwydd Iesu, arwain f'enaid*", was one of those who left Tabernacle, he became a deacon and precentor at this church, until his untimely death in 1893, at the age of forty three. The adjoining schoolroom was added in 1906.

When, by 1970, the membership had dwindled to 46, the members decided to bring the cause to an end, with the final service of the church taking place in November that year. Thereafter, the building was transferred to the Elim Pentecostal Church, who have used it ever since. Pastor George Jeffreys - the founder of the Elim Pentecostal denomination - held a tent Gospel campaign in the town during 1935, and a result of that a church was formed in the town, and the Bethel Temple was built. When major repairs were needed to that building the church moved to a former Calvinistic Methodist Chapel in London Road, before moving finally, to Brynhyfryd.

Bethel, Glan y Mor : Wesleyan Methodist

John Wesley visited the town on at least sixteen occasions, while on his way to Dublin, and made his last visit on 27th March 1789 at the age of 86. His Journal records at least eight occasions when he preached in the town. On one infamous occasion he was pursued by a drunken mob, led by Captain William Griffith (of Cefnamwlch and husband of Sydney Griffith), who forced his way into the house where Wesley was lodging, and struck the owner of the house and kicked his wife. The daughter of the house responded by pouring a bucket of water over the Captain, and, eventually, peace was restored. By the start of the 19th century the Wesleyans were holding their services in the Calvinistic Methodist Chapel. Thereafter there followed a period of holding meetings in private houses, but, in 1808, land was purchased by what was then the sea shore [Glan y Mor = By the Sea], and the first chapel was built. Much of the materials were supplied at reduced rates. The first Bethel could hold 300 persons, and cost £800.00. In time this chapel proved too small, so the chapel was enlarged, with the building work costing £700.00. In May 1848, the chapel was reopened with seats for 450 persons. A third building was erected in August 1866 at the cost of £1,253.00.

The first chapel for the English Wesleyans was built near the harbour and was opened in May 1836, with seating for 200 people. However due to the lease of the

chapel expiring in 1910, together with structural problems, a new chapel was built in another part of town, and opened in 1910. Messrs Wilcock of Woverhampton built the new chapel, which could hold 260, at the cost of £1,625.00. In the late 1960's the schoolroom was demolished and the chapel divided in two with a smaller worship area in one half, and in the other part a hall.

There is another connection between Holyhead and John Wesley, as in 1829 Captain Evan Lloyd, an elder at Hyfrydle, called at Bristol with his ship, and returned to the town with one of Wesley's pulpits. It was used in various Calvinistic Methodist chapels in the town before finally coming to Bethel. In 1999 it was decided to return the pulpit to its original home, and today it can be seen in The New Room, Broadmead, Bristol.

On the night of the 9th April, 1941 the chapel was destroyed as a result of a German air raid on Holyhead. However, the town had a miraculous escape that night, as only a few yards away in the railway sidings was a full ammunition train, which had just been loaded from a Canadian ship in the harbour. The church was given temporary sanctuary, for six years, to hold its meetings at Brynhyfyd Chapel. Before the close of the war, some 213 members of Bethel signed a declaration confirming that they wished to have a new chapel built as soon as possible. During the summer of 1945, the Government confirmed that funds would be made available promptly, so that the schoolroom could be re-built first. This was done, and between 1947 and 1955 the church held its services in the schoolroom. In 1955 the work of rebuilding the Chapel, Schoolroom and chapel house were concluded, at the cost of £10,000.00, and the congregation commenced worshipping in the new chapel in January.

By the 1990's the membership of the church had declined, and it was decided to sell the chapel, with the schoolroom being adapted to be the new chapel, which was opened in October 1991. Likewise, the English Methodist Church did not consider it viable to continue to keep their chapel, which was sold, and, since Easter Sunday 2002, the English church have held their services in Bethel.

Bethel : Baptist.

William Roberts, the first known Baptist to live in Holyhead arrived in 1782, and by 1786 the number of Baptists' in the town had risen to 8. They remained as members of the mother church in Llangefni, but would hire a room at sixpence a time to hold services. On 24th December 1786, the first baptism took place, when the Rev Thomas Morris baptised three in the sea before a large crowd, with many observing from boats, roofs of houses and from nearby rocks. Thomas Morris left Anglesey, and was replaced as minister by Christmas Evans in 1791.

Anglesey's Baptist structure was unusual at this time, as the island's Baptists formed one church only, centred at Ebeneser Llangefni, but with 9 or 10 other meeting places, with Holyhead being one of them. As Evans described it, 'We are one church although we meet in different places'. It appears that Christmas Evans had a dictatorial streak, and was loath to grant church status to these branches. In Holyhead progress was slow at first, but between 1808 and 1810 the first chapel was built, and by 1817 the

was held in Hyfrydle chaired by John Elias, and he found that all the members had, in some way or other, been involved in handling tobacco and cotton from the wrecked ship, he then excommunicated each and every member of the church, who duly walked out of the chapel leaving Elias all on his own sitting beneath the pulpit. All were readmitted to membership, about a month later, after public confession of sin and repentance.

Methodism in the town grew apace with the boom in the population, the 1851 Religious Census recorded that 577 persons were present in the morning service on census day, with an evening congregation of 1,038. In 1847 the chapel was demolished and a new chapel erected, and it was thereafter enlarged in 1856. Hyfrydle was the mother church for all the other Calvinistic Methodist causes in the town, all of which have by today been closed, save for the English Presbyterian Church. By the 1880s' it was considered that a new building was needed, so the freehold of the chapel together with four houses in Thomas Street/Mill Street were purchased, this enabled the new chapel to be built facing the main street. The new chapel was opened in 1888, cost £3,511 (including the cost of the land), and, with a seating capacity of 1,000, is Anglesey's largest chapel.

For some generations the settled ministry was alien to the Calvinistic Methodists, and it was not until 1880 that the church had its first full time minister, in the Rev W. R. Jones (*Goleufryn*). Old style hymn singing involved the reading aloud of the hymn in parts, then singing, and so on - it is interesting to note that that tradition must have survived quite late, as it was in 1882 that the church purchased a stock of hymn books for the congregations use. A pipe organ was installed in 1949, at the cost of over £5,000. The composer W. Bradwen Jones was the organist of the church from 1952 to 1970.

Holyhead's links with Dublin also included the Welsh Chapel in Talbot Street, in the centre of the city. John Roberts, an elder at Hyfrydle, visited Dublin to arrange the purchase of the land and the chapel was opened in 1838. As late as the inter war period Calvinistic Methodist ministers from the town would regularly travel over to Dublin to conduct Sunday services.

Ucheldre : Open -air services > Roman Catholic > Arts Centre.

Ucheldre, as the name indicates, is situated above the town, and for generations the fields at the Ucheldre were used to hold large open-air religious gatherings. Two services, are even today, still remembered, the first being the Calvinistic Methodist Gymanfa held in October 1824. During the morning service, which had started at 10.00, one sermon had already been delivered, but, before the second preacher commenced, John Elias got up to speak to plead the cause of sobriety, and to ask for suitable behaviour from the crowd.. That many drunks were present, so early in the day, shows the extent of the alcohol problem at that time. Owen Thomas (himself a native of Holyhead) relates the events in his biography of John Jones Talsarn. Elias spoke with great power against drunkenness, and its inappropriateness during a religious service. He proceeded to offer up the drunks for sale, by way of public auction, and he went one

by one to the various de-nominations in turn seeking for bids, but none were forthcoming. Dramatically, the devil said that he would take them, but, they were purchased by a last minute bid from Jesus Christ. Elias's words had a most profound effect on the large crowd.

The second notable occasion was during the revival in 1905, when Evan Roberts held a series of services at the Ucheldre during June. Services held on three days in a row had attracted large crowds, but the final service on the Friday drew a crowd of ten thousand. In the middle of the service Roberts was overcome by emotion, and wept uncontrollably, which had a profound effect on the crowd, he regained his composure, and proceeded to speak with great power. The response of the crowd was dramatic and varied, hats and handkerchiefs were waived in the air, some clapped their hands, others fell to their knees in prayer, and there were many shouts of 'Hosanna' and 'Hallelujah'.

In 1907 the Ucheldre Estate, comprising a fine house and grounds, was purchased by a French teaching order of Roman Catholic Nuns. The arrival of nuns in the town caused consternation as the nuns house diary recorded:

The inhabitants of Holyhead, nearly all Protestants, seemed to have a detestation of all that was Catholic. The first time the children caught sight of us, they threw stones at us, shouting "Nuns, Nuns !".

The existing house became the home for the nuns and between 1909 -10 the convent school was built, which would dominate the skyline of the town, until it was demolished in 1988. Work on the convent chapel started in 1934. Progress was slow and spasmodic due to a number of reasons, one being problem of communicating with the Welsh speaking builders, another was due to the Pavonazza marble being kept on the quayside in Livorno for months on end due to the Italian invasion of Ethiopia. Eventually, it did arrive, and the marble altar was installed by Italian craftsmen. The Chapel was designed by Professor R. M. Butler of Dublin, in a modernized Romanesque style. Today, all that remains of the convent is the chapel, which has been very successfully converted into an Arts Centre.

David Puleston Williams. August 2009

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chapel had 85 members. The chapel was enlarged in 1817, with a gallery added.

William Morgan was the church's first minister, he was a native of Pembrokeshire, and came to Bethel in April 1825, at the age of 24. It was not until June 1826 that the church at Ebeneser issued a letter of release, so that Bethel became a church in its own right. Morgan's ministry would be a most influential one, only ending with his death in 1872. However, his first few months proved to be difficult, as he was accused of Sandemanianism together with other faults, perhaps due to his inexperience he over-reacted, and excommunicated his accusers, including one who was a trustee of the church and the keyholder - the result was that William Morgan had the unenviable experience of being locked out of his own chapel !.

Church debt was a problem that troubled the Anglesey Baptists for many years, even Christmas Evans conceded that perhaps too many chapels had been built on the island. William Morgan was obliged to go on lengthy preaching tours to raise money to other parts of Wales, and further afield, to England, Scotland and Ireland. By 1835 Bethel was debt free. By the middle of the century the chapel had become too small, and it was demolished. A new chapel was erected, at the cost of £900.00, and was opened in April 1851. A new chapel was built in Llaingoch, on the outskirts of the town, called Seilo, much of the seats etc from the old Bethel were recycled and used in this new chapel. By 1861 the church numbered 444 members, with a Sunday School roll of 655. The chapel was further enlarged, but after a fairly short life was demolished, and the present chapel was built and opened in 1888.

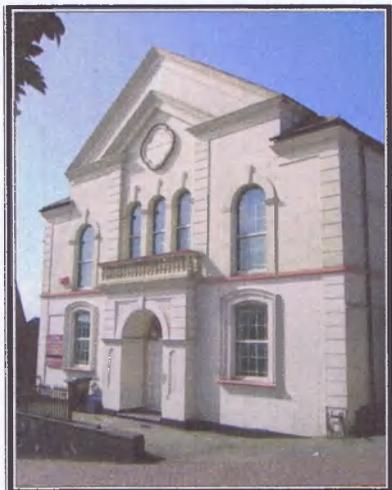
Hyfrydle : Calvinistic Methodist. (Presbyterian)

At first the Methodists held their meetings on the fringes of the town to avoid persecution. Thomas Ellis the vicar of Holyhead, from 1739 to 1759, was ardent in his opposition to the new movement. Many of the Methodist leaders visited the town, and tradition has it that Williams Pantycelyn composed his hymn, "*Mae'r iechedywriaeth fel y mor, yn chwyddo byth i'r lan*", after seeing the tide come in at nearby Porth Dafarch. By 1749 services were being held regularly in private houses. The first meetings in the town were held in the home of Richard Jones, who became a leading figure in Methodism locally. It was at his instigation that the congregation purchased an empty house called Ty'n y Llidiart, and adapted it as a meeting house. In 1808 the first chapel was erected, which was small being only 12 x 9 yards in size. Hyfrydle was the name chosen for the chapel, but, it was also known for many years as Capel yr Allt, or Capel Mawr. The chapel was enlarged and improved in 1815.

Shipwrecks were common off the coast of Holyhead during this period - *Lloyds Shipwreck Index* records twenty six for the first decade of the 19th Century alone. Helping oneself to items washed up on-shore was almost universal practise in coastal areas, and it appears that, in this, the members of Hyfrydle were no exception. Sometime during that decade, a complaint was made to the Anglesey Presbytery that members of the church had helped themselves to cargo washed ashore, and none other than the Rev John Elias was instructed to investigate, and was granted full powers to excommunicate those he found guilty. According to Elias's biographer a church meeting

landmark (Rodney's Pillar on the nearby Breidden Hills) this 'Prim' chapel is of a striking appearance when approaching Welshpool. Built mainly of red brick but with seven courses of blue bricks on the gable and it also has the arches to the door, windows atb each side and an upper round window outlined by some decorative blue and yellow bricks. The windows are quite unusual and not what are normally found in a Primitive Methodist chapel.

Pentre Llifior Wesleyan Methodist Heritage Chapel ,Berriew
Nine miles from Welshpool and situated halfway between Berriew and Bettws Cedewain on the B4389, Pentre Llifior is the first Wesleyan chapel to have been built in North Wales and the society established at the nearby Pentre Farm in the 1760's can also claim to be one of the oldest if not the first established in the North. Built in 1798 in a simple rectangular style with red brick laid in a Flemish bond. There are round headed windows on all four sides, two on each of those on the roadside protected by shutters. It has preserved its box pews and original gallery mounted on two slender pillars. Currently listed Grade 11 it has recently been comprehensively restored and the ugly lean-to addition (1964) replaced by an elegant Georgian style porch .The stable across the road has also been restored and extended to include a toilet, kitchen and meeting room/cum mini museum and parking for up to ten vehicles . It is included in T.J.Hughes's "Wales's Best One Hundred Churches" and since 2003 has been a registered Methodist Heritage Site.



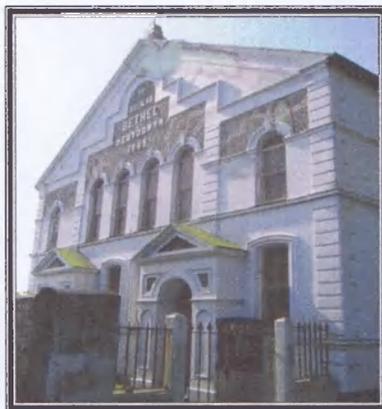
Brynhyfryd



Hyfrydle



Tabernacle



Bethel

Bethel Glan y Mor



Ucheldre

