

Capel



CYMRDEITHAS TREFTADAETH Y CAPELI
THE CHAPELS HERITAGE SOCIETY

Local Information Leaflet 43: Ammanford Taflen Wybodaeth Leol 43: Rhydaman

Welcome to Ammanford / Croeso i Rhydaman

Saturday / Sadwrn 11 May / Mai 2013



Bethani Presbyterian Church of Wales, Wind Street (NPRN 6645)

The first chapel in Wind Street was opened in 1881 by the inhabitants of the village of Cross Inn, as Ammanford was known at that time; in 1860 it was described as a 'pleasantly situated village in the picturesque valley of the Aman'. The founders were members of Seion church, in the nearby village of Betws, who were eager to build a chapel in a convenient location for the rapidly-growing coal-mining village. The adoption of the English form of 'Bethany' for a Welsh chapel may be explained by the intention to provide for the spiritual needs of the increasing number of English-speakers attracted to work in this area, and possibly by a lack of optimism concerning the future of the Welsh language. One of those brought up in this church was the Rev. J. T. Job (1867-1938), the hymn writer and chaired bard, who later became minister at Aberdare, Carneddi and Fishguard. The third minister of Bethani was the Rev. W. Nantlais Williams (1874-1959), the hymn writer, editor and poet, whose pastorate continued for 44 years after his

induction in 1900. The 1904-5 Revival had a great influence on Bethani, and on Nantlais, who resolved to refrain from competing as a poet in *eisteddfodau* and instead concentrate on proclaiming the Word. He composed a number of hymns, including several extremely popular hymns for children, and was editor of *Trysorfa'r Plant*, the denomination's children magazine, for 13 years.

An increase in membership was responsible for the intention to build a new chapel. After a decade of planning, raising money in a period of depression and poverty, and among the damaging effects of industrial confrontation in 1925 and 1926, a new chapel opened in October 1929. The architect was J. Owen Parry, a member of the church, and the builder was William Evans of Ammanford, who was also responsible for building Gwynfryn, the Welsh Independent chapel. A Classical façade, of stone with ashlar detail and a thin pediment, was placed in front of the 1881 chapel. The interior is simple and dignified, with oak woodwork and a panelled, three-sided gallery on iron columns. Seats were provided for 850, with another 300 seats in the vestry and an organ built by Conacher, Huddersfield was installed. The total cost amounted to £12,000.

Ammanford Evangelical Church [formerly English Methodist Church], Wind Street (NPRN 6652)

The 1851 Religious Census recorded a Wesleyan Methodist Chapel, opposite the chemical works in Pontaman, which had a seating capacity for 72, with 35 attending morning and evening services. The Superintendent, William Morris, was the proprietor of the chemical works, and so the building was also used as a school for children of the factory's employees.

Samuel Callard, credited with building the first English Methodist chapel on Wind Street in 1875, was involved in the management of the chemical works, having moved to Ammanford from Torquay. A memorial tablet in the church referred to Callard as being 'for 32 years, a most faithful worker as Trustee, Church Officer, School Superintendent and Preacher'.



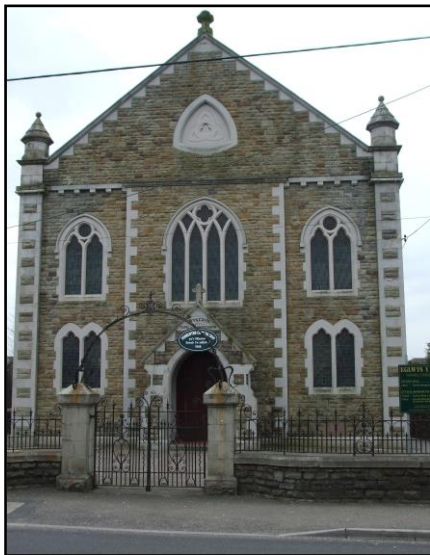
A vestry/ schoolroom had been built to the rear of the chapel by 1906 but this was demolished in 2008. Declining membership resulted in the closure of the church in 1990, and the schoolroom was utilised as an antiques salesroom. The chapel was on the market for several years but was eventually acquired in 2003 by the Ammanford Evangelical Church, which had been established in 1977. The

furnishings of the English Wesleyan chapel have been removed, and whilst some meetings are held there, the size of the congregation has resulted in the use of the Amman Valley School to accommodate the Sunday-morning service.

Gwynfryn Welsh Independent, College Street (NPRN 6639)

The missionary endeavours of Gellimanwydd Welsh Independent Chapel on Hall Street (Christian Temple) resulted in the foundation of the Gwynfryn church in 1903 with 135 members. A plot of land forming part of the Dynevor estate had been acquired in Tirydail, near to Brynmawr Lane where the academy associated with the Rev. Watkyn Hezekiah Williams, 'Watkyn Wyn' (1844 - 1905), the poet, hymn-writer and preacher, had been established. [see *English Baptist Church*].

The new chapel was designed by Henry Herbert, the engineer and surveyor who had been closely involved in the opening of two anthracite coal mines in the Amman Valley. One of the founders of Gwynfryn, he served as deacon and treasurer of the church. He also designed the English Congregational Church, and possibly the interior of Gellimanwydd in 1910. The builder, William Evans, who also served as deacon and precentor, and as a town councillor, was also responsible for building Bethani, Bryn Seion, Glanaman and Capel Newydd, Llandeilo, together with numerous other buildings in Ammanford, including All Saints Church, the county school and Lloyds Bank. The costs of building the chapel, complete with organ supplied by Peter Conacher, Huddersfield, and the vestry, amounted to £2,800. The stone fronted chapel, built with Gothic tracery and seating 550, was opened in August 1903. The first sermon was preached by Watkyn Wyn, the memorial plaque to him on the wall referring to him as 'Athro, Bardd a Phregethwr' (Teacher, Poet and Preacher).



English Baptist Church, Brynmawr Avenue (NPRN 6644)

The revival of 1904-5, and the expansion of a coal-mining industry which attracted a growing number of English-speakers to the area, led to an awareness for the need to establish an English-language Baptist church. Non-Welsh speakers from Monmouthshire were reported to be attending services at Ebeneser, and 20

members were released to form the nucleus of the new English Baptist Church in 1905.

Services were held in a building on Brynmawr Lane known as 'Ysgol y Gwynfryn' or 'Ysgol Watcyn Wyn' in recognition of the principal's renown. This had been founded in 1880 as the Hope Academy, a preparatory school for theological and other colleges, and housed previously in Hall Street and at the Gellimanwydd schoolroom before moving to Brynmawr Lane to occupy a building which seems to have originated as a barn. Following Watcyn Wyn's death in 1905, the Rev. J. Gwili Jenkins [Gwili], the theologian, crowned bard poet and later Archdruid, who had been a student at the Gwynfryn School and Watcyn Wyn's assistant from 1897 until 1905, served as headmaster from 1908 until 1917. The church had originally paid rent to the academy but then, having acquired the building, received a weekly rent from the academy. In 1910 a new chapel was constructed, built in a simple Arts and Crafts style.



A close connection was maintained between the English Church and Ebeneser in the early years, with anniversary and other special services, including baptisms, held at Ebeneser.

The church has experienced financial difficulties over the years due to the small membership and congregation, but improvements were regularly made to the building and a substantial programme of renovation was completed in 1937.

English Congregational Church, Iscennen Road (NPRN 6640)

The employment prospects presented by the growing coal-mining industry had attracted a number of English speakers of Congregational background, largely from Pembrokeshire, and these were among the founders of the English Congregational Church in 1909. The first services were held in Ammanford Council Primary School in College Street, with weekly bible classes and prayer meetings conducted in the vestry of Gwynfryn Chapel, the nearby Welsh Independent church which sought to support the English-speaking Congregationalists.

By 1911, encouraged by members of Gellimanwydd (Christian Temple) and Gwynfryn, they embarked upon the construction of their own chapel, and commissioned the architect Henry Herbert. On the 4th September 1913, the

English Congregational Church, built of red brick in the Gothic style, was officially opened on Iscennen Road by Mrs. W. N. Jones of Dyffryn House, wife of local magnate William Nathaniel Jones who owned a coalmine, tinplate works and gas works in Tir-y-dail.



The debt incurred on the construction of the chapel, which by now was affectionately known as the English Cong, was cleared by 1920, and a vestry/schoolroom was built in 1927, largely through the individual efforts of volunteer members.

Ammanford Apostolic Church, Iscennen Road (NPRN 12744)

The church was built in the Gothic Style, probably c.1913. Members of the Apostolic Church residing in Ammanford had been influenced by the remarkable events centred on the nearby village of Pen-y-groes following the conversion of Daniel P. Williams, 'Pastor Dan' (1882-1947), a coalminer and member of the Independent church at the village, whilst listening to Evan Roberts preaching on Christmas Day 1904. He was ordained an 'apostle' at a convention held at London in 1914, responsible for supervising the meeting houses of the 'Apostolic Faith Church' in Wales.

The connection with the AFC was terminated in 1916 and the Apostolic Church in Wales was established. A convention was held in Pen-y-groes in August 1917, in a marquee with 1,000 seats, which subsequently developed into an international event, with missionaries sent to a number of countries. In 1922 several other Apostolic congregations joined with the Welsh Apostolic Church to form the Apostolic Church, by 1930 there were 150 churches in Wales and 50 in other countries and by 1962 over 2,000 churches belonged to the Church, of which 250 were in the United Kingdom. The Apostolic Temple, seating over 1000, was opened at Pen-y-groes in 1933, and an unbroken series of annual conventions were held at there until 2003 when the location was moved to Swansea, moving again in 2012, this time to Cheltenham.



The education of the Church's prospective leaders and pastors was provided at the Pen-y-groes Bible School established in 1933. A new hostel was opened in 1936, and although closed for a period in the 1970s and 1980s it was reopened in 1988. At present the Bible School is used by students from South Korea.

Ebeneser Welsh Baptist, Lloyd Street (NPRN 6643)

Fifteen Baptists are reported to have met in a house on Field Street c.1848, attending services in the nearest chapels at Saron and Llandyfan. On 14 November 1849 the 15 agreed to establish a church in Ammanford, and the following Christmas a small number (three according to one account, four in another) were baptised in the river Aman. The first chapel, costing £300, was built on the site by Thomas Evans, Llandybie in 1850, measuring 36' wide and 32' long, with a gallery, and was designed by William Thomas, of Llanelli. The 1851 Religious Census recorded 60 free seats, 138 others and standing room for 50, and that 60 were present in the morning and 100 in the evening services. A collection of £30 towards clearing the debt was raised in the first anniversary services held in November 1853.



The chapel was too small by 1877 and new chapel with a vestry was built by Thomas Jones, a member of the church, at a cost of £817.4.3. The chapel was further extended in 1895, to a design by Mr. Tracey, Glanamman. The builder was D. Jenkins, Swansea, and the cost of the changes and furnishings amounted to £814.0.5. A further programme of renovation in 1923 included the extension of the

vestry, remodelling of the interior and installation of a new organ at a cost of £1,700. In the 1960s the demolition of the caretaker's house enabled the provision of a car park. Part of the land forming a car park was bought from the church by the local council in 1990 and a wall built surrounding the buildings, car park and graveyard.

Several churches were established by Ebeneser in the surrounding villages including Bethel Sunday school, Pant-y-ffynnon in 1904 (NPRN 6642) where previous services were in a small shop (1890-1904); the English Baptist church in 1905; Pisga, Pen-y-banc (Sunday school 1893, Chapel 1912) (NPRN 6377) and Seion, 'Zion Zinc', Tir-y-dail in 1913 (NPRN 12738). The ministers of Ebeneser have included E. Llwyd Williams [Llwyd] (1936-1960), the chaired and crowned bard, and hymn writer.

Gellimanwydd Welsh Independent (Christian Temple), Hall Street (NPRN 12737)

There is a close connection between the history of Gellimanwydd (Christian Temple) and the development of the town of Ammanford. The first chapel was built in 1782 near to the site of the present chapel, on a plot of land named Gellimanwydd. Although 'Capel Gellimanwydd' was the official name, the chapel was often described as 'Cross Inn Chapel', referring to the original name of the village which developed into the town of Ammanford.

A chapel was built on the present site in 1834 as a result of a substantial increase in the membership of the church following the Revival of 1829. A memorial stone near the door stated in English that this was the 'Cross Inn Chapel, built in 1782', followed by '*Vox Populi*' and that it was rebuilt in 1836 '*Vox Dei*'. The 1851 Census recorded 280 people present at morning service on 30 March 280, with 172 scholars in the afternoon and 226 at the evening service.



Rebuilt in 1836, the chapel was extended in 1865 with the Rev. Thomas Thomas, Landore, the renowned architect-minister, responsible for designing the

improvements which cost £1,000. It is probable that his façade had two arched windows and arched doors. Another name, 'Christian Temple' was now adopted, and possibly reflects the contemporary negative view with regard to the future prospects of the Welsh language [see also *Bethan*]. This is the name which appears on the tablet on the façade, and this, or an abbreviated version, 'Temple', was widely used by local residents. However, the official Welsh term 'Gellimanwydd' is generally used today.

A vestry was built in 1882, when the church celebrated its centenary, and for a period this was the location of Watcyn Wyn's school. The missionary endeavours of Christian Temple included the foundation of the Gwynfryn church in 1905. Henry Herbert, responsible for the design of Gwynfryn, possibly designed the new interior of Gellimanwydd in 1910, when the chapel was renovated and the heavy pediment, Classical porch and large Gothic window probably introduced. The near-square interior had a strongly-panelled gallery supported on iron columns, similar to that at Gwynfryn, with detail corresponding to that on the *sêt fawr* [great pew] and pulpit. A new organ, built by Messrs. Norman & Beard, was installed and the chapel was formally opened by Caradog Roberts, Rhosllannerchrugog.

Gellimanwydd is renowned for its musical tradition. Gwilym R. Jones, organist and choirmaster 1914-1950, was also conductor of the Ammanford Choir which achieved three successes at the National Eisteddfod. Gellimanwydd has been served by nine ministers, including the Rev. Dr. Tegfan Davies (1915-1965) whose memorial tablet refers to him as a friend to the people of Ammanford. The Rt. Hon James Griffiths (1890-1975), the politician and cabinet minister, and his brother, D. R. Griffiths, 'Amanwy' (1882-1953), the poet and hymn writer, were members throughout their lives and both are buried in the graveyard, together with Watcyn Wyn and the Rev. J. Towyn Jones, another politician associated with the church.

A new hall, Neuadd Gellimanwydd, was opened in 1970, and a number of meetings are held there.

Further reading:

Edwards, Hywel Teifi (gol.), *Cwm Aman* (1996)

Harries, Gwyndaf L., (gol), *Hanesion o Gapel y Gwynfryn, Rhydaman* (2003)

Jenkins, Trefor, *Ebeneser, Capel y Bedyddwyr, Rhydaman, 1849-1949* (1999)

Owen, D. Huw, *The Chapels of Wales* (2012)

Thomas, Rachel, L., *Christian Temple, Eglwys Annibynnol Gellimanwydd, Rhydaman, 1892-1982* (1982)

Walters, W. A., *The English Baptist Church, Ammanford: 1905-2005* (2005)

Williams, J. D., *Bethany, Rhydaman, 1881-1981* (1981)

Entries for individual chapels on *Coflein*, the online database of the RCAHMW (www.coflein.gov.uk), the record numbers denoted by the 'NPRN's above, and relevant websites compiled by Terry Norman including 'Churches and Chapels in Ammanford' on *Welcome to the town of Ammanford* (www.terrnorm.ic24.net).