

Capel

CYMRITH IAS TRIEFFALDAETH Y CAPEL
THE CHAPELS HERITAGE SOCIETY



NEWSLETTER / CYLCHLYTHYR

3

NOVEMBER/TACHWEDD 1987

EDITORIAL

The alarming rate at which chapels were closing was one of the catalysts which prompted the formation of CAPEL three years ago. Present indications suggest that this trend will continue and indeed accelerate, and that the number of redundant non-conformist meeting houses will increase significantly over the next decade or so. The reasons for chapels becoming redundant are numerous and complex in nature and can vary from such factors as the decline in the Welsh language in a district, to a 'change in life-style' which results in a more apathetic approach to attending services on a Sunday, and a whole host of other contributory factors and 'excuses' which in one way or another hasten the end of a denomination's association with its chapel building. All too often the main stumbling block is one of cost, where a small congregation is faced with a large bill for carrying out essential maintenance or repair works to the building.

There is no simple solution to the problem. Without repairs the buildings will deteriorate further and will often have to be vacated on health and safety grounds. On the other hand, the building once repaired will in many cases be too large for the numbers attending, and heating, insurance and running costs might well prove prohibitive. This is another aspect of the very real crisis facing individual members, chapel congregations and denominations alike.

CAPEL will shortly be preparing an Information Sheet which will attempt to identify not only the problems facing individual chapels, but ways in which such buildings can be 'put to use' for the benefit of the community whilst remaining in use, at least in part, as places of worship.

Chapels were built first and foremost as places of worship. They were erected and paid for by men and women of conviction and dedication; and it was no coincidence that they often commissioned the best architects of the day to design the buildings. When such buildings become redundant then an important part of our national architectural heritage is threatened. Occasionally, they are converted tastefully into dwellings, museum, offices or whatever, with care being taken to preserve and respect the original design and character of the building. But all too often their facades and interiors are vandalised to a point where the building virtually ceases to have any relevance, either symbolically or architecturally.

CHAPELS IN DYFED

Prys Morgan

Bert J. Rawlins, The Parish Churches and Nonconformist chapels of Wales : their records and where to find them. Volume 1 : Cardigan, Carmarthen, Pembroke. 1987, Celtic Heritage Research, P.O. Box 510652, Salt Lake City, Utah, USA 84151-0652. 648pp., price £18.95.

This remarkable book is meant for genealogists and family historians in the first place, especially for those whose ancestors were chapel members, and that means the great majority of people in west Wales from about 1800 to 1920. True there is much on the parish churches here (and especially good illustrations of church buildings) but that is because chapel folk used the parish churches for christening, marriage and burial long after their own 'causes' were founded. The main part of the book consists of a painstakingly compiled catalogue, old county by county, and parish by parish, noting each parish church and its records and their present location, and also each chapel with a brief note of its history, its connexion with its 'mother-church' and its records. The catalogue aims to be complete up to the year of the ecclesiastical census in 1851, and more modern causes only appear by chance. There are many pictures of chapel buildings, though often the quality of reproduction is rather poor. Following this catalogue, there are helpful maps of each hundred, divided into parishes, on which are shown all the churches or causes mentioned and the denomination of each. There is also a well-furnished bibliography on nonconformity in Welsh and English, appendices of addresses of denominational headquarters and of addresses of record offices relevant to nonconformity, and two indices, one general, the other denominational, chapel by chapel.

We tend to imagine that there must have been by 1851 a chapel in every parish in Wales, but this is by no means the case, for there are many parishes, for example in Pembrokeshire, where the church is the only place of worship. A deeply troubling feature of the

survey is the frequency of the phrase 'location unknown' for the chapel records. This confirms what CAPEL members have suspected, that there seems on the whole scant regard for chapel records, and certainly no kind of register for easy access to them. Is this not a sign that CAPEL should do something soon to give help and advice to chapel secretaries or the holders of old chapel records as to the disposal of these records?

This fascinating and painstaking book is the result of an upsurge of interest in things Welsh amongst the Church of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons) in America, and is part of a continuing survey of the whole of Welsh Non-conformity to be carried out by Mr. Rawlins. Members of CAPEL, indeed all Welsh family historians and members of chapels throughout Wales will surely welcome this great work, will want to read it, and make their local libraries purchase copies of this essential reference tool.

WESTERN MAIL

Chapel's survival plan is rejected

MAESTEG funeral director says will appeal to the Welsh Office following Ogwr Borough Council's decision to turn down a survival plan for a local chapel.

Mr Alan Phillips, of funeral directors Owen and Thomas, had applied to the council for planning permission to use the upper floor of Salem Chapel in Piccadilly Street, Nantyllyllon, Maesteg, as a chapel of rest and to develop a car park to the rear, together with a new vehicular access.

Mr Phillips said the chapel was in a state of repair and was the target of frequent attacks by vandals.

Although the chapel was still used, the congregation was small and did not have sufficient funds to maintain the building, he said.

In a letter to the council, chapel secretary Mrs Betty John said they feared that unless they were able to find an appropriate additional user the building would fall into a state of ruin.

Mr Phillips's plan was to use the upstairs for services and as a chapel of rest, owing the congregation to continue use the ground-floor vestry.

As part of the plan, Mr Phillips had

given an undertaking to be responsible for the general upkeep of the building.

But at yesterday's meeting of Ogwr's development control sub-committee it became apparent that the borough council's hands were tied following a direction from Mid Glamorgan highways authority to reject the plan, fearing that the development would give rise to a traffic hazard.

There had also been an objection lodged by the community council because the surrounding areas were primarily residential.

Councillors adopted the recommendation for refusal on the grounds that the use as a chapel of rest would cause distress and material harm to the amenity enjoyed by neighbours, and because the traffic generated by the development would, in their view, prejudice highway safety.

Mr Phillips reacted quickly, saying that he would definitely be appealing to the Welsh Office.

"This decision effectively sounds the death knell for the chapel," he said. "The congregation cannot afford its upkeep and unless this decision is overturned the building will just fall down."

EMPTY chapels have become a problem for Presbyterians in Wales.

Almost a third of the 1,100 Presbyterian chapels in Wales ought to be closed a leading church member told the annual general assembly at Haverfordwest yesterday.

Falling membership in all age groups together with a reduced number of full time ministers is worrying church officials who are now strengthening their effort to attract more young people into the movement.

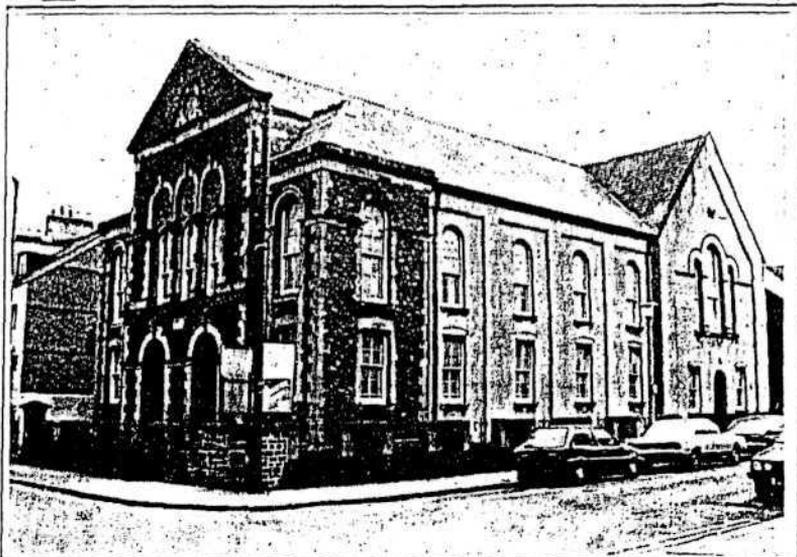
TREASURER

The treasurer of the movement in Wales Mr. Alun Creunant Davies of Aberystwyth, said that many chapels were used only once a fortnight and although there would be reluctance to effect closures they could afford to close at least a third of the underused buildings.

The 200 delegates from all over Wales were told that membership dropped from 68,585 to just over 66,000 last year while Sunday school figures fell by 1,449 from the previous total of 21,148.

Town set to lose a piece of history

THE JOURNAL, AUGUST 26, 1987



Brunswick Chapel in Brighton Road, Rhyl, which is in danger of being demolished to make way for flats.

One of Rhyl's oldest and biggest chapels may be demolished to make way for self-contained town centre flats.

Brunswick Welsh Methodist Chapel, Brighton Road, Rhyl, has been sold subject to contract to a firm of developers who have applied to Rhuddlan Borough Council planning committee for permission to demolish the chapel and build 18 flats.

Although no conservation society's have yet shown an interest in preserving the building, some Rhyl residents are concerned about the possible loss of another of the town's historic buildings and there are likely to be objections.

The chapel built in the 1860's occupies a prime 10,000 square foot site near the centre of town.

The Rev. Cledwyn Parry, of Burns Drive, Rhyl, confirmed that the chapel had been sold subject to contract.

The chapel, which can hold a mas-

sive congregation of 750, had been run down over the years as the Methodists struggled with the upkeep.

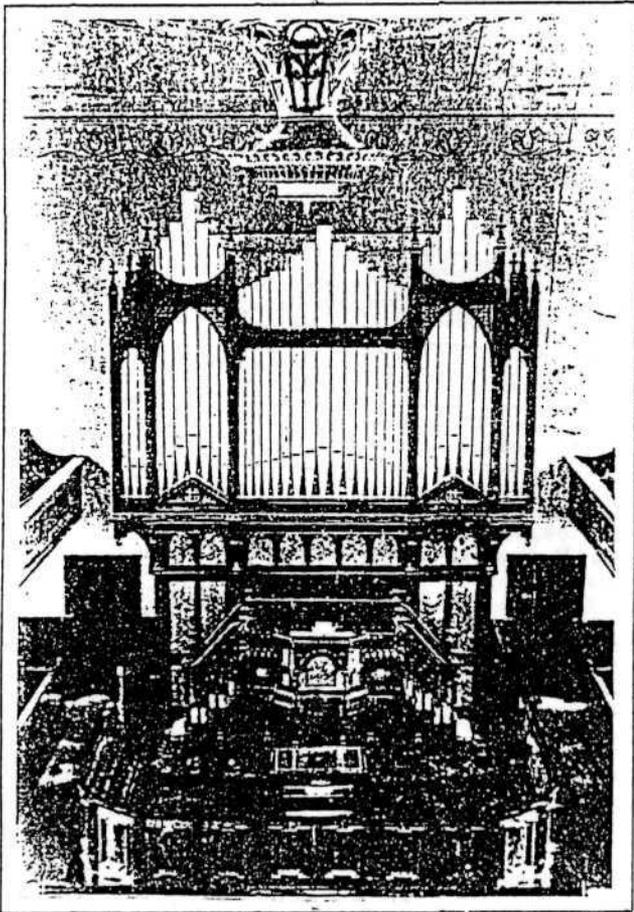
The congregation have now combined with the Welsh Methodist Chapel in Sissons Street, Rhyl, and they have recently carried out improvements and renovation work at the premises.

One concerned Rhyl resident said: "I hope the planners think long and hard over this application. If this kind of desecration is allowed to go on Rhyl will be left without a building of any note or character. The Pavilion has gone, so has the Pier. The War Memorial Hospital went without any protest or challenge.

"Brunswick Chapel is a memorial to some of the finest preachers and orators Wales has ever produced".

CAPEL MAWR, AMLWCH - AN UNUSUAL FEATURE

Built in 1871-72, to the design of Richard Owen (1831-91), Liverpool, architect of over 250 chapels in Wales and England, at a cost of £2081/8/4, Capel Mawr, Amlwch has one very interesting feature, which possibly can be regarded as unique. Having the usual two aisles on the ground floor, the centre of the Set Fawr forming the Pulpud Bach could be removed, the lectern top lifting off and the two middle front panels swung back on hinges. Therefore a central entrance was formed for weddings.



Capel Mawr, Amlwch in the period 1906-22, showing the original Pulpud Bach, the removable lectern top and two middle panels mounted on hinges.

Following the First World War this design was altered somewhat, in that the original panels and lectern were removed, and a memorial pulpit inserted. This pulpit can still be removed when the occasion arises to gain a central entrance.

It would be most interesting to note if any other chapels had a similar design incorporated in the Set Fawr.

As a further point of interest, Capel Mawr can boast of an excellent chapel history 'Llyn y Fendith', published in 1977 as part of its bicentennial celebrations.

ERYL WYN ROWLANDS (Llangefni)

Kenneth Powell and Celia de la Hey, Churches : a Question of Conversion, 1987, SAVE Britain's Heritage, 131pp., A4 size, price £7.50.

Churches and chapels are a familiar element in the Welsh landscape. Indeed so commonplace are the latter in particular that they have become hackneyed into the visual vocabulary of urban and country scene alike. To imagine a south Wales valley townscape without its chapel, or more correctly chapels, would be like seeing Cardiff Arms Park devoid of rugby posts. And yet, this is the very real possibility that faces us, and not just in Wales but elsewhere in Britain. Indeed the crisis facing the Established Church is every bit as real as that facing the nonconformist denominations. Buildings too large for dwindling congregations, soaring repair, maintenance and running costs, and little or no money to meet the bill. A report prepared last year by the British Council of Churches suggested that nearly three quarters of our surviving church buildings could eventually become redundant.

Such sobering, even depressing, statements form the backcloth to this latest study by SAVE - an organisation established in 1975 to campaign publicly for endangered historic buildings. The starting point of the report, which runs to 131 pages and is profusely illustrated throughout, is that all churches and chapels should be maintained as places of worship wherever possible, but that where they are forced to close them some suitable new use should be sought that will not compromise the essential character and historic and architectural integrity of the building.

Many churches have by now been converted for use as dwellings, workshops, concert halls, or whatever, some very successfully so. But all too often an easier, more drastic solution is adopted, namely the demolition of the structure in question, in many cases without fully examining the various options that might be available.

The book identifies some of the root causes of the problem of redundancy, highlights the loss of such buildings in architectural terms and, most importantly, suggests ways in which they can or could have been saved. Six case studies form the central portion of the book - two churches, St. Michael, Derby and St. Luke, Harrogate have been successfully converted to offices and flats respectively; the other four examples cited, the Catholic Apostolic Church, Liverpool; Christchurch, Cotmanhay; St. Paul, Todmorden and Bethesda Chapel, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent, are all threatened with demolition and SAVE has taken the opportunity to show how they could all be converted for new uses which would provide an income for continuing maintenance and in many cases enable part of the building to remain in use for worship. Relatively little is said about Welsh churches and chapels specifically though some are identified and illustrated in the book. Nevertheless, the message is just as relevant to Welsh congregations and architects.

A short but useful section entitled 'Guidelines for conversion' is followed by 38 pages of suggested possible alternative uses for churches and chapels. The book is well-illustrated throughout with plans and photographs (black and white and colour) and represents remarkable value at £7.50.

Gareth O. Watts, Eglwysi'r Bedyddwyr yng Nghymru
Llyfryddiaeth/Bibliography, 1987, Cymdeithas Hanes Bedyddwyr
Cymru, 24pp., price £

This concise booklet lists those books, pamphlets and articles which relate to the history of Baptist chapels in Wales and also those Welsh chapels in England which belong to the Baptist Union of Wales. Wales is sub-divided into ten regions generally identified by means of the old county names, with the entries being listed alphabetically according to the author's name. Where the publication is in Welsh, then the bibliographical entry is also in Welsh, whereas an English book has an English description. At a quick estimate, there must be nearly 500 separate publications listed here all relating to the Welsh Baptist cause. It is interesting to note that many of these pamphlets and books were produced at the time of a chapel's centenary or bicentenary celebrations, and in one or two cases, a 250th anniversary! This booklet will prove invaluable to researchers of chapel histories by directing the student to the sort of material that he might otherwise not be immediately aware of, thus saving hours of possibly fruitless searching. The title is slightly misleading in that it might suggest that the contents are written throughout in Welsh. Non-Welsh speaking chapel historians from Gwent or Radnorshire or wherever need not worry, however, as a lot of English material has been included and is described in English. This is a very welcome publication and Mr. Gareth Watts is to be congratulated on producing a most comprehensive bibliography.

Fight over church for Walker

THE NEW Welsh Secretary of State will have to settle the year-long argument over a crumbling Mid Wales church.

The Methodist congregation at Aberystwyth want to knock down their dilapidated old church and build a new one.

But the historic building watchdogs Cadw are desperately fighting to save the 118-year-old church.

Now the decision on the future of the building lies in the hands of the Secretary of State for Wales, Mr Peter Walker.

Cadw slapped a listing on the Queen's Road church just days before council planners were to give the go-ahead for the £350,000 rebuilding scheme.

And now they have refused the church committee permission to demolish the place of worship — referring the application to the Secretary of State.

It is a bitter blow for the Methodist group, who have already spent £8,000 on fees and surveys.

Convenor of the new church committee Mr Geoffrey Brown said, "I know our members will be profoundly disappointed at Cadw's reply.

"It is sad that the work of the church is being severely impeded by an attempt to confine us to a dilapidated Victorian building

which is no longer appropriate for the needs of the present or the future."

An architect's report has revealed that the church has severe structural problems — including cracking walls, rising damp, rusting windows and water seepage.

Church members have already raised £250,000 towards the rebuilding scheme. Now they are worried that delays will push up the costs.

The congregation has won the support of Ceredigion council planners, who say they have been "offended" by Cadw's last-minute listing.

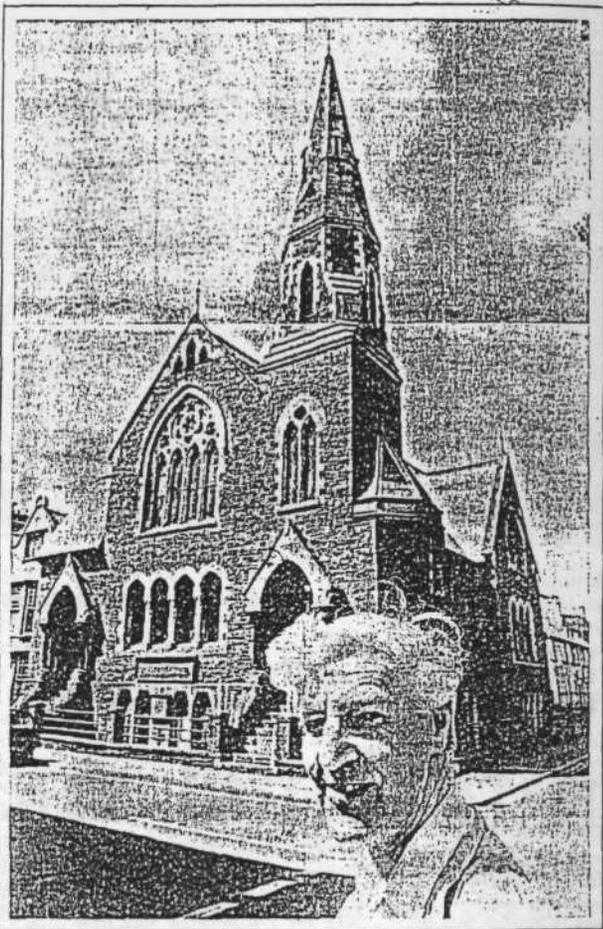
But officers working for Cadw say the church building is of importance and well worth saving.

INQUIRY

A spokeswoman said, "When we heard that the church was in immediate danger of being demolished, we spotted it to allow us time to look at all the issues.

"We feel that the building is worth saving and that the matter needs more consideration."

She added, "In these sorts of cases we refer the applications to the Secretary of State for Wales and ask him to decide. He can either take written representations from all sides or call for a public inquiry."



● Mr Geoffrey Brown, convenor of the new church committee, outside the Queen's Road Methodist Church.

Newsletter No. 4 : Closing date for receipt of articles is 15 January 1988.

- CAPEL -

Ysg. Amrhydeddus, Gerallt D. Nash, Amgueddfa Werin Cymru, Sain Ffagan, CAERDYDD, CF5 6XB
Hon. Secretary, Gerallt D. Nash, Welsh Folk Museum, St. Fagan's, CARDIFF, CF5 6XB ☎ (0222) 569 441
Registered under the Charities Act 1960. Reg. No. 51841



The Rev. Aubrey Martin in the midst of Unitarian history.

Damp locked in at Unitarians' mecca

By STEVE DUBÉ

An appeal is going out on both sides of the Atlantic to save Llwynrhydowen Chapel, near Llandysul, the mecca of the Unitarian faith; and its priceless collection of relics and archives.

Built in 1834 and the scene of the infamous "lock-out" of 1876 when the local squire closed the chapel in an attempt to silence the minister, the chapel on the

crossroads of Rhydowen has dry rot and damp.

It's been used as a repository for the records and relics of Unitarianism in the Teifi Valley since it stopped being used as a village hall in 1959, and it attracts coach parties and visitors from all over Britain and from the United States where many descendants of the early Unitarians now live.

The most famous of these was the late Frank Lloyd Wright, the innovative architect whose great-great-grandfather, the Rev

Jenkin Jones, founded and built the first Unitarian chapel in Rhydowen in 1726.

And the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation is one of the many charities which the chapel trustees hope will contribute towards the estimated £60,000 to £70,000 that will be needed to restore the chapel and its grounds as a study centre and museum.

"It's got a wealth of books, old posters of forced farm sales and other relics", said Mr. Derrick Williams, of the Community Network Pro-

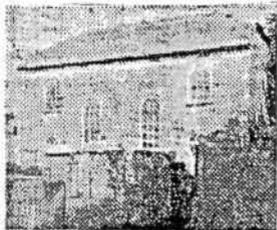
ject established by Antur Teifi. "We are negotiating with the chapel trustees to set up an MSC programme to safeguard this historic listed building".

The Rev. Cen Llwyd, minister of Capel Newydd, Llwynrhydown until a few months ago, described it as "the mecca of Unitarianism".

He said: "The chapel has a strong significance to all Unitarians and is one of the key chapels in Wales but things are deteriorating pretty fast".

The Rev. Aubrey Martin, minister from 1952 until 1980, and author of a definitive history of the old chapel, is the caretaker and guide. He traces many of the problems to the blizzards of 1982 when snow penetrated the roof.

"Quite a few people come to visit and people still give



The chapel: invaded by dry rot and damp.

us things to keep here", said Mr Martin. "We have coach parties from all over Wales, visits from the Ceredigion Society and the Carmarthen Antiquarian Society, and quite-often people from the United States. A student from the Christian University of Texas was here recently doing research".

Among the relics are portraits and belongings of early ministers such as Dafydd Dafis of Castell Howell and Gwilym Marles, minister at the time of the lock-out.

There is even a bust of Lenin, given to the South Wales socialist T. E. Nicholas on a visit to Moscow and donated by him—although Nicholas was not a Unitarian.

The books and records are priceless and include the history of the Great Ejection of 1662 when nearly 120 dissenting ministers were thrown out of their livings.

The books, including the complete library of Gwilym Marles, minister at the time of the lock-out, are most at risk from the effects of damp. The restoration project includes a heating and ventilation system to ensure their preservation.

Support for the scheme has already been expressed by Prof. Anthony Jones, president, of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Illinois.

"I very much support this idea", said Prof. Jones. "Last time I was in the chapel it was possessed of a great history, many books, and a very large barn owl."

Chicago is very much associated with Frank Lloyd Wright, who practised in the city as an architect for many years, and was a life-long Unitarian.

"Wright was proud of his Welsh ancestry and his roots in far-away Ceredigion and even named his architectural firm Taliesen, says Prof. Jones.

Describing Llwynrhydown as "one of the finest examples of chapel architecture" of its period, Prof. Jones said the chapel was also of "social, political and historic significance" in terms of its local, regional and national impact—the area around Llwynrhydown was once known as "Y Smotiau Duon"—the Black Spot—because of the

radical ideas fostered by the local ministers.

"I very much hope that you will be successful in ensuring that it remains as a monument to the great events that surround it and also have a new purpose and life in the years to come," said Prof. Jones.

King of Prussia's medal awarded

BUILDING DESIGN.

May 8, 1987

THE King of Prussia's Gold Medal has been awarded to Cecil Bourne for his repairs to All Saints Church, Landbeach, Cambridgeshire.

The medal is awarded after an annual architectural competition for the best repair of an historic church.

Bourne's work on the church included extensive repairs to roof timbers which were infested with deathwatch beetle, masonry replacement, window repairs and reconstruction of the top of the spire.

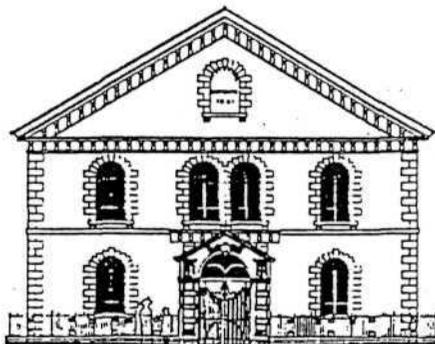
The judges commented on the quality of Bourne's carpentry repairs.

Richard Pedlar of Redland, Bristol was highly commended for his work on the United Reform Church, Middle Lambrook, Dorset which included repairing the roof of the one-time 17th century Presbyterian Meeting House.

The award was presented at Lambeth Palace before the annual meeting of the Historic Church Preservation Trust and the Incorporated Church Building Society.

It was reported at the meeting that last year the Historic Churches Preservation Trust and other like bodies gave grants and loans of one million pounds for repair work.

Pontypridd Town Council



Historical & Cultural Centre

Pontypridd new Historical Centre lies next to the town's famous OLD BRIDGE. The building itself, Tabernacl, was built in 1861 and ceased as a place of worship in 1983. The centre has a wealth of interest for the visitor, with regularly changing exhibitions on Chapels in Wales, local and regional history, and the creative work of local residents and school children. There is also a substantial collection of miner's lamps.

EXHIBITIONS

- | | | |
|---------------|---|---|
| December 1987 | - | Open Art Exhibition
Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust |
| January 1988 | - | Exhibition by local Camera Club |
| February 1988 | - | "Geology of Wales"
South-east Wales Embroiderers Guild |
| March 1988 | - | Crafts Exhibition (Welsh Folk Museum) |

ADMISSION: ADULTS - 20P CHILDREN - 10P

A TOURIST INFORMATION CENTRE IS PROVIDED ON THE GROUND FLOOR

OPENING TIMES

TUESDAYS TO SATURDAYS 9am to 5pm

(and Bank and other Public Holidays)

Light refreshments are available daily between the hours of 10.30 a.m and 3.30 p.m. During summer months, and weather permitting, teas are served on the garden terrace where one can enjoy the view of the OLD BRIDGE.

HOW TO GET THERE

The Centre is about 500 yards from the main A470
(the B4237 Ynysybwl exit)

...6 miles from the M4 junction 32...

For further information please write to:

The Cultural Services Officer, Pontypridd Historical and Cultural Centre,
Bridge Street, Pontypridd, Mid Glamorgan, South Wales.

☎ (0443) 402077