

# Capel

CYMDEITHAS TREFTADAETH Y CAPEL  
THE CHAPELS HERITAGE SOCIETY



NEWSLETTER / CYLCHLYTHYR

14

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## THE CHAPELS OF PENARTH

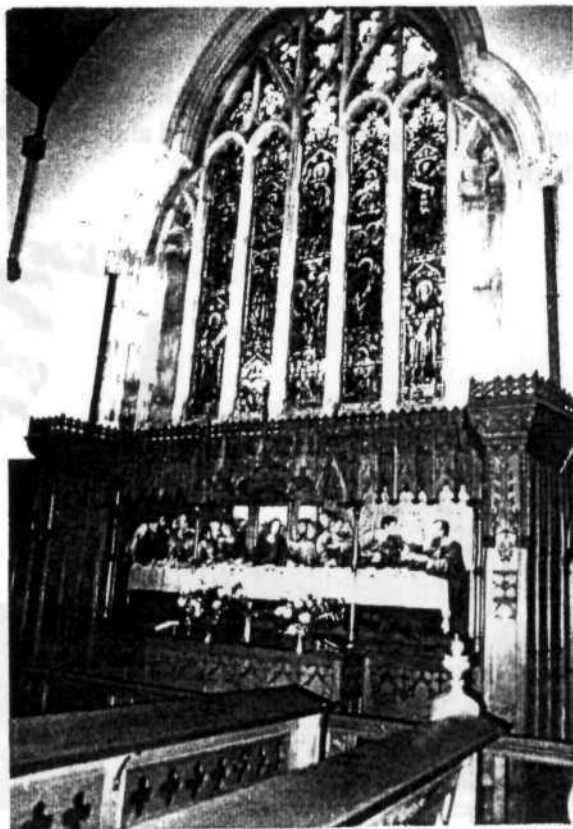
The Society's Spring meeting was held in Penarth on 11 May, but, whether because Penarth is thought of as no more than a suburb of Cardiff with no history or simply because it is situated in the extreme South East corner of Wales, only 28 members turned up for the meeting.

Those members however who did attend had a thoroughly enjoyable and instructive day, with a programme which provided both the historical background to the development of nonconformity in the town and a chance to learn something of the very varied and surprisingly vigorous life of the chapels of Penarth today.



Trinity Methodist Church

The morning meeting was held in the schoolroom of Trinity Methodist church. Mrs Patricia Moore, the Glamorgan Archivist, who had made the arrangements for the meeting and prepared the local information sheet, traced for us the transformation of the quiet village of 1840 into the flourishing port of the turn of the century and the consequent growth of the churches in the town. She was followed by Dr John Gibbs, whose family was closely involved in the growth of Penarth. His talk was in two parts; first he discussed the architecture of some of the Penarth chapels, noting how closely some of the architects had followed standard patterns found in contemporary journals and then, drawing on many years' personal experience with the local Council of churches he gave a heartening account of the cooperation which flourishes between the churches in present-day Penarth.



The Last Supper at Trinity Methodist

After lunch and a view of the exhibition of plans, documents and photographs prepared by the speakers, we were given a guided tour of the principal chapels in the centre of the town - two Methodist, two Baptist, a Gospel Hall, the Kingdom Hall, and two Welsh language chapels. Aside from the unscheduled exposition of the faith of the Jehovah's Witnesses we were given in the sleek new Kingdom Hall, the impression most of us will have taken away with us will have been one of variety, even within one denomination. Trinity Methodist, despite the considerable refurbishment and modernisation of its accommodation, surprised one with its almost Anglican dignity and the beauty of its stained glass, marble pulpit and Last Supper 'altar-piece'. Albert Road Methodist on the other hand seems to have laid all the emphasis on 'outreach' and community work with a very untraditional mural in its basement youth club. Stanwell Road Baptist was quiet and traditional, Tabernacle Baptist, where we were provided with tea, appeared more thrustful and is certainly thriving. Bethania Welsh Presbyterian was closed several years ago and is now in a sorry state of dilapidation. The other Welsh chapel Bethel (Independent) is now the home both of interdenominational worship in Welsh and the Welsh language nursery school.



Disco wall decoration at Albert Road

In all a most enjoyable day, for which we are most grateful to Mrs Moore and the representatives of the various Penarth churches who helped her with the arrangements. Those members who were unable to be there can still obtain copies of the Local Information Sheet (with its coloured frontispiece of the now demolished Christ Church from our Secretary, (price 60p + postage).

## **THE ONGOING LIFE OF THE CHAPELS IN PENARTH** **BY JOHN GIBBS**

The early days of Nonconformity in Penarth and the building of the chapels, largely between 1861 and 1907, has been chronicled by Mrs Patricia Moore.

This paper will deal with the relationships between them, their growth - and in some cases their decline - and their present emphases.

The Minutes of the Penarth Council of Churches between 1962 and 1983, during which time the writer was the Secretary, furnish evidence of their standing and the co-operation between them.

The remarkable thing about the chapels in Penarth is that, except in two instances; Penuel Welsh Baptist chapel and Bethania Welsh Presbyterian chapel, they are still in existence as worshipping and on-going communities.

At their inception, apart from the evangelistic dimension which was a feature of all the chapels, the incomers to Penarth, - and the residents in the 19th century, were nearly all incomers, - brought their denominational allegiances with them and at this stage the denominational aspect of each chapel was strongly marked; friendships and social intercourse existing largely within each communion. The chapels, and indeed the churches, as well, kept themselves to themselves.

Penarth, like other Victorian communities, was a religious town and on a Sunday the streets were 'black' with people at 10.45 and virtually empty for the hour thereafter.

The Plymouth Estate, the ground landlords of the Town, thought it proper to group the chapels together in Plassey Street, but the enormous increase in population, following on the development of the Penarth dock from 1865 and the coming of the Taff Vale Railway in 1878, resulted in an explosion of the town westward and the Baptists and Methodists built their second churches in what was still a largely rural area.

Much later, in 1956, the Presbyterian church of Wales moved even further westward and, leaving Sardis, the oldest chapel in the district apart from the Llandough Baptist church (founded 1859), established St. David's Church in Elfed Avenue. This, in 1985, was happily to provide a home for a new United Church with the congregation of Christchurch, the United Reformed Church which was unable to maintain its prestigious Victorian building in Stanwell Road, demolished in 1989.

It is largely by working in co-operation with each other, and with the four Anglican and one Roman Catholic Church in the town, that they are in good heart.

There is, one would suspect, an element of rivalry between them, in that when one building is modernised or its outreach extended this stimulates the others in their own efforts, but it is much more that Sharing in proclaiming the Christian Faith has kept them together and comparatively strong in comparison with other communities in Wales.

Before 1962, the Penarth Free Church Federal Council and the Penarth Sunday School Union provided a meeting ground for the members of the different chapels. However, in that year an invitation was extended by them to the Anglican Churches in the town to join in a 'Christian Council' or 'Council of Churches'. This was accepted and the Penarth Christian Council came into being with the Rector of St. Augustine's as its first Chairman. It chanced that the town Council was considering the introduction of a town lottery at that time and the Rector's determined opposition to such a step was most endearing to the Free Church element in the new Council and got it off to a good start.

From its inception, the Council set up a vigorous programme, instituting study groups on, for example, social issues and education and entering

upon projects which brought the members of the different churches together: 'The People Next Door', the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, Exchanges of Pulpits, town-wide distribution of St. Mark's Gospel, 'Jesus for Life Campaign', 'The Bible comes to Life' and, most recently, a Christian Arts Festival. The Council established Christian Aid in Penarth.

St. Joseph's, the Roman Catholic Church, joined the Council as a full member in 1968, but the Brethren at Plassey Street Gospel Hall have not felt able to join the Council. The name was changed in 1973 to 'the Council of Churches' to be on all fours with the national Council of Churches.

Almost all the members of the Council have moved into the Covenanting relationship in Wales and this year, Father Tom Nulty, the Priest in charge of St. Joseph's is the Chairman of "Penarth Cytûn - the Council of Churches" as the new Council is to be known.

The Chapels are now in 1991 much more 'gathered' congregations than they were at their inception, all having their particular 'emphases' which attract their members. One chapel may centre on its family life, another on its social outreach whilst another may have a very strong evangelical emphasis. With the demise of two of the Welsh speaking chapels the third has grown and by its vigours life has attracted Welsh speaking Christians from across the denominations.

The Rev'd Kenneth Smith, the Chairman of the Council in 1970, summed up the position then in words that are applicable to the present day.

"Things have been achieved by the Churches acting together which they could not have achieved in isolation. The voice of the Church is more effective when the Churches are joined together; the constituent Churches draw strength from each other. Because of their different traditions, they do not always see eye-to-eye with each other, and this is inevitable. However, points of difference are raised and settled in love. All members have a desire to do the best for the Church and her Lord. I know that the Council has more work to do".

29 Ebrill 1991

Annwyl Olygydd

### Capeli Cwm Rhondda

Fel un o gyn-aelodau Gosen, Treorci, darllenais gyda diddordeb erthygl y Parchedig Lona Roberts yn rhifyn 13 o *Capel*. Efallai bydd y ffeithiau ychwanegol yma o ddiddordeb i Mrs Roberts a darllenwyr y Cylchlythyr.

Roedd yna ddau gapel Cymraeg arall yn Nhreorci a ddymchwelwyd yn ystod yr ugain mlynedd dwethaf, sef Rama (Annibynwyr), lle saif swyddfeydd y DSS yn awr (Capel a galeri 'all-round'), ac mewn stryd gefn, Calfaria (Capel y Methodistiaid Wesleiaidd).

Enw'r capel Bedyddwyr Saesneg y soniodd Mrs Roberts amdano oedd Horeb, ac enw y capel tu isaf i gapel Bethlehem oedd Beulah (yn wreiddiol yn perthyn i'r Bedyddwyr, ond wedi hynny i'r eglwys Apostolaidd) capel â ffenestr crwn ar flaen y capel. Os cofiaf yn iawn, enw'r capel 'ar ochr isaf y safle ddiwydiannol' ar fap Mrs Roberts oedd Glanrhondda, capel yr Undodiaid, ar y ffin rhwng Treorci a'r Pentre (capel un llawr).

Yn gywir iawn

Alun Evans  
Mayals  
Abertawe

## A RASH OF CHAPELS BY KEITH THOMAS

In 1987, I published a list of all the chapels and churches which had existed in Ebbw Vale, in a book "Faces and Places of Ebbw Vale". It showed that when the population of the town was at its maximum of approximately 38,000 in 1919, there had been about 73 separate buildings, of which 59 were still in use at that time. The 14 not then in use had first been outgrown by the size of congregation or later became derelict or the sites used for other purposes. In 1919 then there was one church for every 644 of the population. In 1980, there were fewer churches but the population had dropped to 25,000, so that there was one church for every 423 people. Several more churches have now closed and at present there are 36 churches for a population of 24,000, one for every 667 people.

The surge in Church building began with the large influx of workers serving the ironworks at Beaufort (1780), Ebbw Vale (1790) and Victoria (1837). While the majority of the early residents were Welsh speaking, it was soon obvious that there was an increasing percentage of English-speaking people. The local ministers and others in South Wales formed the Society for the Establishment of English Speaking Churches in Wales. The chief instigator was Rev. Thomas Rees D.D., famous for his "History of Non-Conformity in Wales" and minister at Carmel, Beaufort. He from 1849 to 1861 was assisted locally by his fellow Independent minister at Saron, Ebbw Vale, Rev. Thomas Jeffreys, my great-grandfather.

The result was the duplication of all Independent churches in the area. This policy was followed by the other denominations, chiefly because of the need for education and the accommodation of Sunday schools. As each community was developed, the denominations started another church. The town consisted of eight communities, and, with six different denominations, most of which had English and Welsh congregations, it is easy to see why there was a call for nearly eighty churches.

The seating capacity of the buildings is not really a reflection of the number of members, although there were periods when some churches





English Wesleyan Church  
Ebbw Vale



Carmelton Beaufort

were regularly filled to capacity. There was also in some cases the motive of one-upmanship. In recent years, with the loss of membership, particularly in post-war years, many churches have had to face the fact that a small membership cannot afford the cost of maintaining the buildings and have closed. In a few cases, members have joined other churches, but in many cases they have ceased to attend any church.

In the early days, the elders of the 'mother' church of each denomination bought enough ground to develop a cemetery, but they were soon filled and the Local Boards of Health developed new larger public cemeteries.

Below are lists of the churches and the cemeteries of Ebbw Vale.

Name	Denomination	Built	Approx. No. of Seats 1991	Date Closed
<b>BEAUFORT</b>				
St Andrews	Anglican	1898	250	
Bethel	Presbyterian	1858	70	
Bethel	Apostolic	1932	100	
Siloam	Baptist	1868		1989
Zion	Methodist	1849	200	
Sardis	Welsh Wesleyan			ca 1900
Soar	Baptist	1850		1863
Zoar	Baptist	1863	550	
Bethesda	Presbyterian	1818		1986
Ebenezer	Methodist	1825		1976
Bethel	Methodist	1832, 1851	450	
Kingdom Hall	Jehovah's Witnesses		150	
St David's	Anglican	1892	300	
Carmel	Congregational	1821 '29 '65	600	
Barham	Presbyterian	1857	400	
Beersheba	Apostolic	1934	150	
Rock Mission	Congregational	1911	50	ca 1975
Garnlydan	Presbyterian	1962	250	
<b>EBBW VALE</b>				
Mt Pleasant	Presbyterian	1885	500	
Old Nebo	Baptist	1896		1988
Nebo	Baptist	1826		1988
West End	Congregational	1908	350	
James St	Methodist	1861		
St James	Methodist	1986	70	

Wesleyan Ch	Wesleyan	1825		1865
Bethcar	Welsh Wesleyan	1808		1861
Bethcar	Welsh Wesleyan	1861		1956
Hilltop	Presbyterian	1963	350	
St Teilo	Anglican	1962		1970
All Saints	Catholic	1925	500	
St John's	Anglican	1909	450	
St John's Newchurch		1843		1950
Ebenzer	Presbyterian	1850	350	
Providence	Baptist	1860, 1935	250	
Holiness	Assemblies of God			1970
Gospel Hall		1918	150	
Libanus	Congregational	1862	450	
Bethel	Methodist/Apostolic	1895	450	
Newtown	Primitive Method	1847		1895
Kingdom Hall	Jehovah's Witnesses	1989	250	
Christ Church	Anglican	1859	500	
Bethesda	Presbyterian	1878		1968
Forge School		1877		1920
Old Penuel	Calvinistic Methodist	1823		1829
Penuel	Presbyterian	1865		1986
Zion	Baptist	1867	400	
Brynhyfryd	Welsh Baptist	1853		1967
Mount Zion	Methodist	1874	250	
Tabernacle	Congregational	1908		1978
Tabernacle Br Hill		1843, '77		1908
Synagogue	Jewish	1908		1940?
Saron	Congregational	1837		1968
Noddfa	Welsh Independent	1920?		1940?

## VICTORIA

Park Road	Methodist	1854		1982
Siloh	Welsh C M	1861		1900
St Mary's	Anglican	1900		1975
Zion	Primitive Methodist	1875, 1904		1965

## TYLLWYN

Primitive Methodist	Methodist	1919	150	
St Matthew's	Anglican	1901, '50		1987

## WAUNLWYD

Park View	Methodist	1895		ca 1980
Old Caersalem	Baptist	1838		1936
Caersalem	Baptist	1952	350	

Tabernacle	Presbyterian	1903		1985
Bethel	Congregational	1838		ca 1965
Apostolic		1932		ca 1970

#### CWM

St Paul's	Anglican	1903	350	
Tirzah	Baptist	1895	400	
Mill Terr	Methodist	1896, 1925	550	
Centenary	Methodist	1910		1965
	Presbyterian	1910		1985
	Congregational	1897	300	
	Catholic		200	
	Apostolic	1932	150	
	Spiritualist		100	
	Salvation Army	1889		1966

#### CEMETERIES

	Date Opened	Owner	
Ebbw Vale	1864	Borough Council	In use
Cwm	1911	Borough Council	In use
St John's Old Parish Ch			
Newchurch	1843	Borough Council	Closed
Wesleyan, Beaufort Rd	before 1820	Borough Council	Closed
Nebo Baptist, Beaufort Rd	1826	Borough Council	Closed
Penuel Presbyterian Holland St	1823	Borough Council	Closed
Saron Congtrgational Spencer St	1838	Borough Council	Closed
Tabernacle Congregational Spencer St	1843	Borough Council	Closed
Ebenezer, Meth Primitive Pl	1825	J Davies	Closed
Carmel Congregational			
Carmeltown	1821	Carmel	Closed
Bethesda Presbyterian The Rise	1818	Bethesda	Closed
St David's Carmeltown	1889	Church in Wales	In use

## A REGISTER OF CHAPELS?

The Committee has during the past year approached CADW to find out what assistance CAPEL might obtain from that body. The first meeting was not very encouraging but on 28 September Mr David MacLees came to Aberystwyth to describe to us some of CADW's procedures and criteria for listing buildings. Listing, he explained, is a marker system and can be useful as a holding operation while a search is made for financial help or an appropriate alternative use for a threatened chapel. Grant Aid is possible for important buildings but tends to be 'pump priming' or an enhancement of local money.

For CADW, chapels are not in essence different from other types of buildings and in the past few chapels have been listed, as the emphasis has all been on buildings erected at least as early as the eighteenth century. CADW do not have the staff to evaluate or even compile a register of all the chapels in Wales and would be glad of any assistance CAPEL could give. Of course, CAPEL has even fewer resources but could perhaps play a coordinating role. The Committee felt that we could perhaps produce a register by bringing together work which has been carried out by other bodies.

It was decided to base the register on the list of printed and manuscript records of Welsh chapels which has been compiled by the National Library. That list (described in our *Newsletter* No. 2) will be published by the Library and containing as it does information on some 5,500 causes is clearly the most comprehensive available. But it is almost certainly not complete as some nonconformist causes never preserved or even produced any records; and it does not contain much architectural information on the chapel buildings. Some of this can be added from the surveys of chapels in their areas which have been produced by special projects of the county record offices in Clwyd (*Newsletter* Nos. 1 and 6) and Glamorgan. Computer printouts could be obtained of the chapels in particular localities or parishes and these could be distributed to CAPEL members with local knowledge for verification and supplementation.

Perhaps members might like to comment on these proposals and suggest how they feel we should now proceed.

## WELSH CHAPELS IN AMERICA

In our Summer 1990 issue, we referred to the activities of the Remsen-Steuben Historical Society in preserving early Welsh chapels in New York State. The Society has now written to inform us of the progress they have made in restoring the chapels - Capel Cerrig and Capel Enlli - in their possession. They are also taking legal action to acquire Capel Bethel and are applying for a Technical Assistance Grant from the State Council of the Arts to help with the work of preservation.

### METHODIST RECORDS IN WALES - ADDENDUM

With reference to Gareth Haulfryn Williams's article on "Methodist Records in Wales" in the previous issue of *Capel*, it should also be noted that the Wesleyan Methodist Archives housed at the National library of Wales comprise close on 2,500 manuscripts of Methodist interest. These include a good representation of the whole range of records described by Mr Williams relating to the Welsh Assembly, to the various districts, to circuits and to certain individual chapels. The archive also contains the personal papers of several Methodist ministers as well as a significant amount of denominational printed material. This archive is described in detail in three typescript schedules which are available for consultation in the Department of Manuscripts and Records within the Library.

Dafydd Ifans

*Assistant Keeper (Nonconformist Archives) NLW*

## LIFE MEMBERSHIP

At the AGM at Dolgellau on 12 October it was agreed that Life Membership of the Society should be made available on an instalment plan as follows:

- (i) £14.00 annually for four consecutive years or
- (ii) £8.50 annually for the same period for those over the age of 60.

Members who wish to take advantage of this scheme are requested to contact the Treasurer, who will supply the necessary application form, which incorporates a bankers' order form.

## AELODAETH OES

Yn y Cyfarfod Blynyddol yn Nolgellau ar 12 Hydref cytunwyd y gellid talu am aelodaeth oes dros gyfnod o bedair blynedd. Golygai hyn ymrwymo i dalu tanysgrifiad o £14.00 y flwyddyn am bedair blynedd canlynol (neu £8.50 y flwyddyn am bedair blynedd os ydych dros 60 oed).

Gofynnir i aelodau sydd am fanteisio ar y cynllun hwn i gysylltu â'r Trysorydd i gael ffurflen gais briodol, sydd yn cynnwys hefyd ffurflen archeb banc.

## Pontypridd Historical and Cultural Centre



The history of Pontypridd and its people, told through a variety of exhibits

*Working models.* Including a model railway and a model colliery.

*Objects.* Used at work, in the home and in recreation.

*Recorded voices.* People of Pontypridd telling their own history.

*Archive film.* Important aspects and moments of the history of the town and the valleys.

The Centre is located in a converted chapel whose pipe organ is still used for recitals. A new audio visual programme explains the origins of the chapels and traces the influence of Welsh religious dissent at home and overseas.

There is also full programme of visiting exhibitions on historical, scientific and artistic subjects.

### *Tourist Information Centre*

Open: Tuesday - Saturday 9am - 5pm  
(& Bank Holidays)

Admission: Adults 25p      Children 15p

Bridge Street, Pontypridd, Mid Glamorgan CF37 4PE  
Telephone (0443) 402077/480786

**How to get there:** The Centre is about 500 yards from the A470 -  
Ynysybwl exit (6 miles from M4 junction 32)

At the "Gateway to the Valleys"

## Canolfan Hanesyddol a Diwylliannol Pontypridd