

Capel

CYMDEITHAS TREFTADAETH Y CAPEL
THE CHAPELS HERITAGE SOCIETY



CYLCHLYTHYR / NEWSLETTER

16

GWANWYN / SPRING 1992

⊕ LLANFAIR PENRHYS ⊕



PENRHYS UNITING CHURCH

BUILT 1992

Llanfair Penrhys is the name that has been given to this new church that finds itself 1,500 feet above sea level on a hill dividing the Rhondda Valleys into Rhondda Fawr and Rhondda Fach. The name is not a flight of anyone's imagination because on the housing estate it is to serve there is an ancient Celtic well and a Marian shrine, both of which date back to the early Middle ages. For those with a more detailed knowledge of South Wales the estate lies between Tylorstown and Ystrad Rhondda. It has been described as set on a hillside where it seems to rain horizontally.

A service of thanksgiving for the opening was held on Saturday, 29th February 1992 and there were present representatives of many churches and organisations who had made financial contributions to the project. The service included a call to worship sung by Beverley Humphries, readings and hymns in English and Welsh, an address by Father Robert of Caldey and evening vespers sung by two priests of the Orthodox Church, the Very Rev. Abbot Father Deiniol and the Very Revd. Archimandrite Father Barnabas.

The story of Llanfair Penrhys is one of ecumenical effort to serve an isolated community with few shops, few recreational facilities and high unemployment. Though a church had been promised, it was never built. At best there was a small group who gathered for worship in the disused shop of the Community Centre and a few Pentecostals who met in a flat.

In 1971 the eight member churches of the Council of Churches for Wales recognised the needs of the people of Penrhys and established a presence on the estate. It took nine years to establish that presence and in 1980 Malcolm Hill, an ordained minister began work there. He was succeeded by Pat Parish and in 1989 the third incumbent John Morgans followed on. In that year the pastorate became vacant, John Morgans was leaving his office as Provincial Moderator for Wales of the U.R. Church and he and his wife Norah chose to take up the work in Penrhys. At the time the number of people who worshipped in that disused shop could be counted in single figures. When last the shop was used the place was packed to the gunnels with over 50 people, 50 children had to meet separately.

A plan for a Christian centre for worship, learning and helping with social problems was conceived, to house a stipendiary minister, a full-time voluntary worker, a youth volunteer, a theological intern student and a community worker to specialise in literacy. The help and interest of many organisations and individuals was recruited and in the final analysis Churches, individuals, trust funds and statutory authorities were drawn in and the foundation stones for the chapel and the community building were laid on the 14th May 1992.

The Rhondda Borough Council already involved in the programme of housing refurbishment, were persuaded to donate a block of eight maisonettes. Planning permission was secured to add a worship centre. Then it was necessary to raise £600,000 to convert and build. This was done and Llanfair Penrhys has become a reality. The chapel is octagonal in shape and the scheme includes the block of flats which contains a creche for working mothers, a launderette, a coffee bar and a workshop with knitting machines, a 'nearly new' clothing shop, a literacy room as well as residential accommodation for the Minister and his family, and accommodation for the other staff.

Incorporated into the foundations of the chapel are eight stones arranged in the form of a cross. Each stone came from a redundant or disused chapel of each of the sponsoring Churches and represents their commitment to the work and witness.

The contributions of money and know-how to this project has involved so many that names must be named, though it poses the risk of omitting one or more. Reliance on group titles will reveal the extent of the generosity and the goodwill abroad. The eight sponsoring Churches are those represented on the Council of Churches for Wales and they amongst other things are responsible for the minister's stipend. The Rhondda Borough Council already named was effective through their former deputy Chief Executive, Tony Roberts. Laing was involved in a number of ways, providing links through John Farrow, with 'Business in the Community' and local business leaders and through their Cardiff office with a team from the Welsh Area of Laing South West, which undertook construction work, some of it of a very difficult nature. The Welsh Office grant came through the Borough Council, which added to funds provided by numerous private trusts, businesses, charities and over 100 individuals. Laura Ashley has provided for the community worker, the Haywood Trust financed the laundry and the Huggard Trust the purchase of knitting machines.

Under the leadership of the Rev. Dr. John Morgans, described by John Farrow as a 'very effective community entrepreneur' developments are going ahead. The Russian Orthodox Church in Wales has presented Llanfair with an icon and the monks of the Roman Catholic Cistercian Monastery of Caldey have presented a church bell. The Cistercians of Llantarnam ministered at Penrhys in the Middle Ages. Arrangements have been made with the Roman Catholic Church for mass to be celebrated at the chapel on an occasional basis. In two years the work and influence of the church at Penrhys has grown dramatically and many people have found a new dignity and pride.

The Rev. Bill Wright in an article about the pioneer work writes "Before building work could begin a Sharing Agreement had to be signed by the eight sponsoring denominations. Anticipating the length of time this could take, a group from the church set off by mini-bus to visit each denomination's central office, and after a long day were able to return to Penrhys with all eight signatures - that I am sure, is a fact worthy of an entry in the Guinness Book of Records".

It is reported that the (agnostic) estate manager of Penrhys said "What this place needs is a soul". It does seem that the need has been met.

Graham Rosser

REGISTER OF CHAPELS IN WALES

A Sub-Committee has been set up to prepare a complete and comprehensive Register of Non-conformist Chapels in Wales, with co-opted representatives of the National Library of Wales and the Royal Commission on Historic Monuments in Wales.

This followed a meeting of representatives of Capel with Cadw - Welsh Historic Monuments - in February 1991 when the ways in which Capel could make a more positive contribution to the protection of Chapel buildings throughout the Principality were discussed, together with the means of the recording of redundant chapel buildings at risk.

Several and varied surveys have been carried out on chapels since the Royal Commission survey of 1905 including:-

1. The Mid Glamorgan County Council survey of Chapels in 1978/79.
2. The Glamorgan Records Office survey of historical information on chapels.
3. Clwyd County Council's detailed index and photographs of chapels in Clwyd.
4. National Library of Wales - over 5,000 chapels were identified based on extractions from the Denominational year books.

It is known that other survey projects are being carried out by individuals and / or groups of people and it has become apparent that the various survey works must be co-ordinated and identified in order to avoid unnecessary repetition and to provide an authoritative base for further survey work.

Capel has been identified as a suitable body to take on this role. In view of the obvious risk of the complete loss of the architectural integrity of a building, the information gathered is to include as a priority details of the building but is also to include information on historical records and / or their location.

It was considered essential that this work be based on an as accurate as possible complete list of Welsh Chapels and at its meeting on 23rd November 1991 Capel Executive Committee agreed to establish a Sub-Committee specifically to concentrate on the setting up of a Register of Chapels.

Since that time 2 meetings of the Sub-Committee have been held and a decision taken to experiment with a pilot study on Merioneth District.

A questionnaire has been produced together with explanatory notes which is to be sent in the first instance to the Secretaries of Chapels in Merioneth.

This questionnaire includes questions on the building, date of foundation, architects / builders names; presence of schoolroom, Chapel house, graveyard, and details of building materials used, both externally and internally. It is to be bi-lingual and a request made for a photograph if available.

It is considered that this information, whilst proving to be a substantial base record, will also provide the means of selecting those buildings of more architectural / historical interest and quality, the protection of *which should be sought and also, importantly, identifying the chapels that are most at risk through redundancy and / or neglect.*

The initial survey on Merioneth will be an exploratory work which it is envisaged will be extended in time to cover the whole of Wales. It is envisaged that Capel members will be supportive and will take an active part in due course in the vast task that the Executive Committee has set.

Initially information on survey works other than those mentioned above would be invaluable and members are requested to send brief details of such surveys to Cdr. Mortimer who is acting as Secretary to the Sub-Committee.

NONCONFORMITY IN NINETEENTH CENTURY SWANSEA

A successful - if sparsely attended - meeting of the West Glamorgan branch of Capel was held on 25 November 1991 at Bethesda Baptist Chapel, Swansea.

The choice of venue was appropriate. This historic and imposing chapel is in severe difficulties, and the congregation, like so many others in Wales, feels that it has reached crisis point.

For this reason the first half of the meeting was given over to a discussion of the chapel's difficulties and an exchange of ideas about possible ways forward for its members. The discussion ranged over alternative uses for the building in the event of its ceasing to be used as a place of worship; the safe keeping of the remaining chapel records; and the need **to make a full recording of the graveyard.**

The representatives of Bethesda who were present at the meeting expressed their appreciation of the ideas put forward, and felt that the meeting had been of practical help to them.

The latter part of the meeting consisted of an informal talk by Mr Colin Williams of Dinas Noddfa Chapel, Plasmarl, Swansea. His subject was non-conformity in Swansea in the nineteenth century, concentrating on the type of material which is available to the researcher and where it can be found. By means of carefully chosen quotations from his various sources Mr Williams was able to paint a lively picture of chapel life in the last century, and the place of the chapel in the community as a whole.

All in all this was a productive and informative meeting. It was felt that it would be useful to hold some further meetings in other chapels experiencing difficulties, in the hope that the society could be of some practical help on an individual basis.

As a postscript to the meeting, the following sad report appeared in the South Wales Evening Post on 25 February 1992.

It is hoped that this fine and important listed building together with its historic graveyard (Christmas Evans is buried there) can yet be saved.

Sad end as city chapel is shut

A SWANSEA chapel which once attracted 1,000-plus people to its congregations is closing because regular worshippers have dwindled to fewer than 20.

The faithful few who remain at Bethesda Baptist Chapel in Prince of Wales Road, Hafod, will reluctantly close the doors forever after the final service on Thursday.

Vandalism, the rising cost of upkeep at the huge building and a fire 10 years ago have all contributed to the decision to close.

"It's very sad indeed. Some people have been going there for 60 years and it's been a problem reconciling them to the situation,"

By Rebecca Mosley

said Mr Vincent Jeffrey Rees, secretary of the chapel.

The building dates back to the early 1830s but the chapel itself has been meeting for nearly 350 years.

Value

"The chapel will seat about 1,200 people and I have heard that in past days unless you got in early you wouldn't get a seat," said Mr Rees.



The Bethesda Baptist Chapel at Prince of Wales Road, Swansea.

The building — listed of special architectural and historic value — suffered bomb damage in the war and a fire in the early 1980s caused nearly £250,000 damage.

Now it is hoped that the Welsh Baptist Union will take it over so that it can still be used for occasional commemorative services.

The last regular minister, D Carey Garmon, left in 1979 and since then visiting preachers and lay readers have conducted the services.

Worship

"To build it up to its former glory will take a lot of money. It's a special chapel which was the mother church to many others in the area," said Mr Rees.

But he added: "Wherever you go it's the same Lord you worship. This is a bit like moving house to a strange place. There is a feeling of

NO MUSEUM OF NONCONFORMITY FOR GWYNEDD: COUNTY HAS TO REFUSE GIFT OF CHAPEL

An offer of a chapel - Rhoslan Congregational Chapel, near Cricieth - was made to Gwynedd County Council recently. The trustees of the chapel resolved on 10 December 1991.

"To offer the entire property free of charge, to the care and trust of Gwynedd County Council, or to a trust including representatives of Chapels belonging to the Congregationalists and other religious denominations in Llŷn and Eifionydd with a view to establishing and creating a centre to keep and exhibit religious documents and relics relating to the history of religion in Llŷn and Eifionydd".

The property consists of the chapel, the chapel house and about two acres of land. The trustees feel strongly that since many chapels have closed in Llŷn, this building provided an opportunity to establish an interpretive centre to explain the importance of non-conformity in the history of this part of Wales. In a letter to members of Gwynedd Culture and Leisure Committee Mr Guto Ellis Roberts said that:

"It would be an easy, trouble-free task for us to sell the chapel, house and grounds but we feel it is our duty to save them because of... traditions... and because the building is an example of the simple architecture of the non-conformist chapels which speckled the rural areas in the past..."

A surveyor's report on this 1877 chapel showed that repairs costing about £42,000 would have to be made to the chapel by the County Council - the roof and 10 windows need replacing and some rendering and plastering work has to be done. To add to this the authority had to consider the costs of running and staffing a museum. Much to the regret of Gwynedd County Archivist and Museum Officer that in times of cutbacks the county simply did not have the resources to finance such a project.

NOTELETS

Many members may have heard of the Society's notelets but not seen them. For this reason, the Committee has decided to include a complimentary set with each copy of this Newsletter. Further sets may be obtained from the Treasurer at 80p per packet of six (including postage), and if members wish to have sets portraying only one specific chapel, this can be arranged on request.

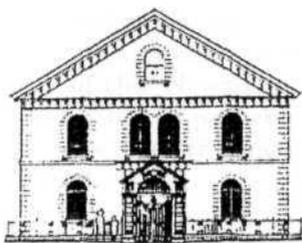
DARLITH / LECTURE

DR. MALCOLM SEABORNE will lecture on SOME EARLY FLINTSHIRE CHAPELS in the Vestry of Bethesda Welsh Presbyterian chapel, New Street, Mold, on Thursday 30 April at 7.30 p.m.
Admission free. Parking is available in the nearby New Street car park.

TAFLENNI GWYBODAETH INFORMATION SHEETS

Included with this issue of the *Newsletter* is CAPEL Information Sheet No. 3 *Graveyard Recording*. This has been prepared by Mr V.H. Williams, who represents the Association of Family History Societies of Wales on the Society's Executive Committee. Additional copies may be obtained from the Secretary, on receipt of a stamped addressed envelope.

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

Argraffwyd gan wasg Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru
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