

Capel

CYMDEITHAS TREFTADAETH Y CAPELI
THE CHAPELS HERITAGE SOCIETY



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RECORDING WELSH CHAPELS

Reports on Recent and Current Projects

[The Society's committee decided recently that rather than produce three issues a year of the *Newsletter* at irregular intervals, we should publish only two numbers a year but that these should appear regularly in late April and September. This year, since the afternoon session of the Autumn meeting was to take the form of progress reports on a number of chapel surveys, the various speakers were asked to submit brief accounts of their surveys for inclusion in the usual Local Information Sheet but as the information contained in the reports is clearly not merely local it has been decided to publish them as a third issue of the Newsletter for 1994.]

A REGISTER OF CHAPELS

The need for a complete and comprehensive list of chapels in Wales has been recognised for many years, but the means of carrying out such an immense task has been a major problem. Capel, with its wide membership throughout the Principality is seen as a viable tool for such a project.

In 1990 discussions took place between officers of Cadw and Capel concerning the increasing problems of redundant chapels and chapels in poor repair, especially those of significant architectural or historical interest which were not included in the statutory lists and which therefore had no protection from demolition or unsympathetic alterations or conversion; even chapels included on

the statutory lists or in conservation areas have not been fully protected, by virtue of the 'ecclesiastical exemption'. The outcome was an undertaking by Capel to prepare a comprehensive list of every chapel in Wales.

A sub-committee was set up which included representatives from the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales and the National Library to consider the best ways to carry out the project. At that time the National Library had just completed a list of 5,500 chapels in Wales and the Royal Commission was about to embark on an architectural study of religious buildings throughout Wales. This was seen as an opportunity for collaboration at the initial investigation stage which would benefit both the Royal Commission and Capel : The Royal Commission needed to identify initially those chapels most important for recording and Capel wished to identify those to be recommended to Cadw for consideration for listing.

The sub-committee undertook a pilot study on Merioneth District in 1992- 93 in order to establish the best means of furthering the survey throughout Wales. Many partial surveys have been carried out in recent years on chapels in various parts of Wales and after studying these it was concluded that the areas that needed to be studied as a matter of urgency were Caernarvonshire, Anglesey, Carmarthenshire, and parts of Breconshire and Montgomeryshire.

Help is therefore sought from members of Capel to carry out the fieldwork for the preparation of the Register. A questionnaire has been designed jointly by the Royal Commission and Capel and will be most helpful to both bodies in assessing and selecting those chapels which warrant further and more detailed recording as a matter of urgency. Although the questionnaire may at first appear lengthy it is simple and easy to complete and guidelines have been prepared to help participants.

The Royal Commission has kindly offered to supply film and processing facilities for all those prepared to photograph the chapels.

Black and white film is being supplied as this is archivally stable. The film is available from Mrs Hilary Malaws, RCAHM, Crown Buildings, Plas Crug, Aberystwyth SY23 2HP.

If Capel members wish to discuss the project with members of the sub-committee, they are most welcome to do so. Questionnaires are available from the sub-committee chairman, Elizabeth Hall, Monmouth Borough Council, Mamhilad House, Pontypool, Gwent, NP4 0YL, or the editor of the *Newsletter*, Alun Jones, Bro Dawel, Coedlan Iorwerth, Aberystwyth, Dyfed SY23 1EW.

Elizabeth Hall

Experiences of the Pilot Survey of Merioneth

When I was asked to contribute to this leaflet, I glanced back at some notes I wrote in November 1988 for Newsletter No.6. Happily, another 200 chapels later they are still relevant although needing amplification.

Essential equipment includes:

1. Transport
2. Telephone
3. O.S. 1:25000 maps (preferably 1st ed.)
4. Denominational yearbooks
5. 1905 Royal Commission Appendix for county concerned (with cross-references if possible to NLW Index of chapels)
6. Suitable measuring and photographic equipment.

The initial move is to try to identify and locate all chapels which are still operating and then to make contact with chapel officers to arrange access. Armed with blanks of the CAPEL questionnaire and the RCAHM photographic log-sheet, tape-measure and camera a pleasant and rewarding hour or two is then spent exploring each selected chapel. By now it is obvious that the number of separate chapels which can be recorded in one day is strictly limited and depends also upon the distances involved. (My study of Merionethshire averaged 5 chapels and about 120 miles per day).

It is probably worth repeating a warning against accepting without question any casual information you may be given. Although normally

quite accurate, an informant may sometimes inadvertently mislead while trying to be helpful.

A useful point to remember is that your records as they build up provide in themselves a valuable passport to convince chapel officers of your genuine interest. In some places thefts of valuable fittings have led to casual requests to inspect chapel interiors being viewed, justifiably, with suspicion.

Finally, in addition to all the kindness and assistance I have received from ministers, deacons, secretaries, caretakers and members of so many chapels, I am deeply indebted to all those members of CAPEL without whose architectural and historical advice, translation, printing and liaison work I could never have done any of it. In particular I must thank Susan Beckley, Elizabeth Hall, Vernon Hughes, Huw Owen, Dilys Quick and Ann Rhydderch.

A F Mortimer

A FEW NOTES ON DRAWING CHAPELS

Being no architect, I have only reluctantly agreed to describe my (engineer's) method of recording a chapel.

Assuming that an appointment has been made with the minister, secretary, caretaker, occupant of Tŷ-capel or some other guide, then an arrival ten minutes early gives time for a reconnaissance to gain a general impression of the subject.

- 1) Its harmonisation with the surroundings
- 2) Its layout and any ancillary buildings
- 3) Materials (indigenous or alien?)
- 4) Style, finish, decoration
- 5) Signs of modification or enlargement
- 6) Inscriptions and dates
- 7) Physical condition

If the guide is still awaited, the requisite photographs (black and white for RCAHM and colour for later reference for colouring any drawings made) may be taken at this stage.

Once inside, another pause is necessary to absorb the atmosphere and gain a general impression:

- 1) Layout, style and decoration
- 2) Style of pews, pulpit and any other furnishings
- 3) Signs of modification, or enlargement
- 4) Monuments and inscriptions (especially war memorials for completion of Imperial War Museum questionnaire)
- 5) Arrangements for draught prevention, heating, lighting and musical accompaniment (both original and present)
- 6) General physical condition

It is now time to bring out the tape measure and notebook - the guide's interest can be retained by enlisting his or her assistance to hold the end of the tape! As a dimensional sketch plan is built up it is as well to remember such details as wall thickness (internal and external), number of steps in any flight, direction of door opening etc.

Before locking up the chapel, encourage the guide to chat about the chapel and its members in order to amplify your impressions and verify any facts.

Outside again, the necessary sketching and measurement required to provide the basis of any elevation drawings intended completes the task -but later on the same day (while details are still freshly recalled) the rough sketch plan must be worked up into a scale version suitable as the basis for the final plan.

Finally the scale to employ must be carefully chosen. My preferred scale is 3mm to 1 foot - mainly because I cannot cope at home with a drawing board greater than A3 size and that will accommodate any chapel that I envisage recording.

A F Mortimer

**COFRESTRY ANGHYDFFURFIOL CYMRU:
NONCONFORMIST REGISTERS OF WALES**

This book is based on the information gathered by Mrs Beryl Hughes Griffiths of Llanuwchllyn on behalf of the National Library for the database 'Capeli Cymru', which lists the Nonconformist records relating to chapels in Wales which are held by public repositories.

The database contains references to over 5,500 chapels in Wales. Of these, fewer than 25% had deposited their registers in a public repository. The purpose of this volume therefore was to list and locate the registers belonging to the 1300 chapels which had presented their registers of births/baptisms, marriages and deaths/burials on deposit in county record offices, the Public Record Office or the National Library of Wales.

The book contains an historical introduction to the keeping of Nonconformist registers, with mention of the legislation which affected their development and legitimacy. Then, following twelve illustrations of various types of Nonconformist registers, the information is listed according to the thirteen historical counties of Wales, the pattern following as far as possible that of its sister volume, *Cofrestri Plwyf Cymru / Parish Registers of Wales*, published in 1986. The arrangement follows the volume *Royal Commission on the Church of England and other Religious Bodies in Wales and Monmouthshire*, Vol. VI *Appendices to Minutes of Evidence, Nonconformist County Statistics* (London, 1911), in which chapels are arranged by civil parishes or municipal or urban districts. This information was collected in 1905 and its listing of chapels is therefore far superior to the information contained in the 1851 Religious Census.

The name of the parish is followed by the name of the chapel and the denomination it belongs to. Below this is the Ordnance Survey reference to the chapel's location. Finding the eight figure reference to 1350 chapels was quite a task and the National Library is indebted to the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales for its assistance in this respect. The last line

in each entry lists the type of register available, the dates covered by the register and reference to the location at which the register is held.

The parish names as well as the names of hamlets, villages and unusual chapel names are found indexed at the end of the volume.

Dafydd Ifans

MID GLAMORGAN COUNTY COUNCIL CHAPELS REGISTER

A survey of all pre-1918 Nonconformist chapels in Mid Glamorgan was organised by the Planning Department between 1978 and 1981, utilising Manpower Services Commission funding. A young force of nearly 20 undertook measured surveys, took photographs and collected written histories of, in all, 657 chapel buildings.

In each case, a numbered manila file was set up which contains survey notes, black and white photographs and historical material if available. In addition, in most cases, 1:50 drawings of the main elevation and floor plans were also prepared. All of this documentation has now been lodged with the Glamorgan Archive Service at Mid Glamorgan County Hall, where it can be consulted by the public.

Four chapels were selected as pilot subjects for a publication which would reproduce the main elements described. Trial print runs were made for each of the four chapels, but unfortunately this project never materialised through lack of funds.

In 1990, the essential data for all the chapels were entered into a Smart database run on the Planning Department's computer network. This comprises items for each chapel's name, location, OS reference, whether it is listed, denomination, 1:50 drawings, chapel history and a Notes section. This last functions as a miscellaneous notepad for such matters as relevant planning applications, grants awarded, current use and current condition, including whether the building appears to be at risk.

These notes are entered into the database on an ad hoc basis by the writer as the County's Conservation Architect, but since it has proved difficult to keep abreast of changes to so many chapels, members of the South East Wales branch of Capel were asked last year to review specific areas. I am now receiving valuable information which is being entered.

Because the database remains inconsistent in quality, it can only function as a repository of information and cannot yet be analysed. For example, at the present time I cannot with any confidence calculate the number of chapels which still survive after 15 years, or which are still in religious use. I hope that within the next few months the database will have attained a level of consistency and accuracy whereby it could be both a valuable source of information and a tool in the development of policy.

Neil Sumner

CLWYD CHAPELS PROJECT

Since 1976 the parochial records of the Anglican church have been deposited in quantity at the Clwyd Record Office. Enquirers seeking records in order to research a parish's history or to trace their church-going ancestors, or to study the history of the parish churches themselves have found a wealth of sources.

Searchers looking for Nonconformist records on the other hand often left disappointed. Not only did the Record Office have comparatively little original material to show them but also staff were often unaware of any local contacts who might be able to help, whether relevant records were available at another repository, or if a chapel history had been published in a denomination's magazine or *papur bro*.

In 1986 a Manpower Services Commission scheme began at the Ruthin Record Office with the aim of supplying an information sheet on each chapel in the county. The *Report of the Royal Commission on the Church of England and other Religious Bodies in Wales*,

published in 1905 was the starting point, as it was thought that this would contain the most complete record of chapel buildings, relatively few having been built since that date.

The scheme finished in 1989, but work has continued since. The information sheets which contain details of the chapel's location, denomination, archives, and printed history (if any), together with a brief history and contact names have now been computerized. This means that not only visitors to the archives can access at least some information on any of the approximately seven hundred chapels that have existed in Clwyd but this can also be done from main libraries in the county.

The second phase of the scheme provided exterior photographs of the existing buildings, now put to a variety of uses. These, although dating from only 1988 have already proved invaluable, as often much has happened even since that date.

It is now intended that the project's working papers should be available more widely. The photographs, information sheets, and schedules of records held in repositories or by chapel officers will be microfiched and made available to the National Library, the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales and other interested bodies. The Commission already has a copy of the computer database which it used in co-operation with the National Library to provide grid references for chapel locations appearing in the recently published *Nonconformist Registers of Wales*. Purchasers of the fiche will also receive a printout of the database which it is intended to update at intervals.

Kevin Matthias

RCAHMW RELIGIOUS BUILDINGS PROJECT **Progress to Autumn 1994**

The project to make a complete database of Welsh religious buildings has now reached the initial fieldwork stage. The necessary preliminary - a complete listing of all known sites from accessible

documentary sources was completed by July 1993 and a methodology for basic recording was worked out in early 1994.

Two areas have been selected for the first systematic coverage, namely Anglesey and Breconshire. A short pilot study to test the method will be followed up by a full-scale record. At the end of this phase of work it is hoped that there will be a short description and a series of photographs of every surviving chapel building in these two old counties. As long as the method proves satisfactory and funds are available similar exercises will be carried out over the next few years for the rest of Wales.

In the meantime, members of Capel and other interested amateurs continue to send us their most useful notes and photographs. Although in time these will be paralleled by the systematic record, it is vital that the records continue to come in; the pace of redundancy and loss has not decreased and many chapels may have closed before the Commission reaches them.

A J Parkinson

CHAPELS IN CEREDIGION

A Survey made in the mid seventies

In order to provide visual material for adult evening courses on the local environment, photographic transparencies were made of examples of the manmade environment in Cardiganshire during the mid-seventies.

The acquisition of illustrative material developed into a photographic record of nearly all the chapels and churches in Ceredigion as they were in the period 1974-76. The photographic archive includes pictures of chapels which had been converted into dwelling houses and also slides taken of illustrations of chapels found in chapel histories. Some interiors were also photographed.

Examples of this work will be shown under the headings:

- 1) Early chapels
- 2) Changing façades
- 3) Chapel periods
- 4) Conversions into dwelling houses
- 5) Interiors
- 6) Schoolrooms.

The numbers of chapels of the various denominations photographed in Cardiganshire are as follows:

Baptist 29.
Calvinistic Methodist 112.
Independent 66.
Unitarian 14.
Wesleyan 14.
Others 10.

E L James

MONUMENTAL INSCRIPTIONS IN CEREDIGION a Personal Record

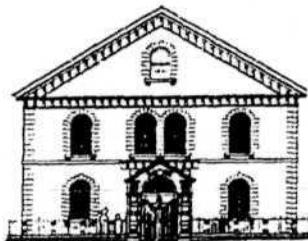
Monumental inscriptions in chapel and church cemeteries have been copied by E L and M A James during the past 25 years. The *factual* content of each inscription has been noted, together with the location of the gravestone and any outstanding characteristics. Some attention has been paid to transcribing englynion. This project is a 'rescue operation' carried out to preserve the information recorded on the monuments and it should prove useful as a basis for any fuller archaeological type of survey.

Arrangements regarding printing and indexing have still to be finalised. Subject to permission being granted by the relevant authorities, it is intended that copies of these records, together with indexes be deposited in a limited number of repositories.

E.L. James

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 a full programme of visiting exhibitions
on historical, scientific and artistic subjects.

Tourist Information Centre

Open: Monday - Saturday (inc. Bank Holidays) 9am - 5pm

Evening group visits by arrangement

Admission: Adults 25p Children & O.A.P.'s 15p

Bridge Street, Pontypridd, Mid Glamorgan CF37 4PE
Telephone (0443) 409512

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 yn Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru
Printed at the National Library of Wales