

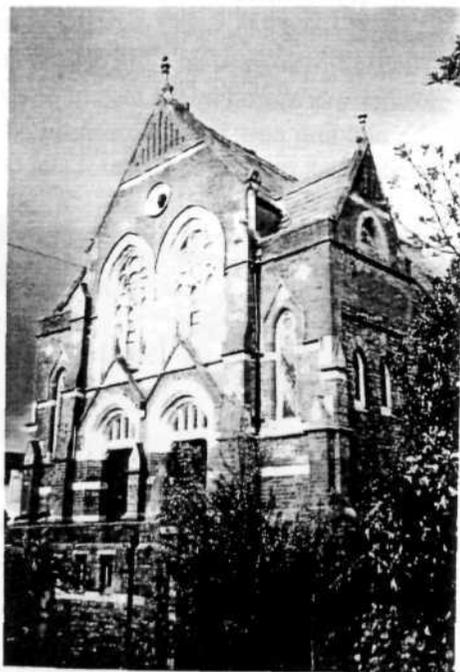
Capel



CYMDEITHAS TREFTADAETH Y CAPELI *THE CHAPELS HERITAGE SOCIETY*

Cylchlythyr / Newsletter 48 Hydref / Autumn 2006

The Spring Meeting this year was held at Abergavenny on 13 May. We met in the Methodist Church in Castle Street where, after enjoying the coffee and biscuits organised by Mrs Dian Cooke, we were given a warm welcome to the town and a brief history of the chapel by the Rev. Stephen Bywater. The church, built in 1829 has remained largely unaltered, though the interior was changed somewhat in the late 19th century.



Former Bethany Baptist Chapel

Mr Gruff Owen, Manager of the Welsh Religious Buildings Trust, and Mr Neil Sumner then gave us a presentation, with slides, of the work, aims and achievements of the Trust from its establishment in 1999. The Trust's main aim is to promote the understanding of the Non-Anglican built heritage of Wales and secure the conservation and repair of redundant buildings of particular significance. It aims to increase its portfolio of acquired buildings by at least one a year, has a close working relationship with Cadw and is supported by grants from various institutions such as the Pilgrim Trust and the Heritage Lottery

Fund.

For lunch we went to the new Priory Centre at St Mary's Church, where we were welcomed by Mrs Hazel Buchanan and had the opportunity to see the famous and recently restored collections of memorials.

We then walked on to the Bethany former Baptist chapel in Market Street but were unable to view the interior as the chapel is on the market for sale. We were, however, able to appreciate John Hilling's comments on the architectural merits of the building. On again to the main Baptist chapel in town, in Frogmore Street, a listed building, erected in 1877 to the designs of George Morgan, where we were warmly welcomed by the Rev. Michael Turnbull, who gave us a full description of its recent history. In 1977 the interior was altered by the insertion of a new floor at gallery level, so that the building now has space on the ground floor for various community needs, such as a nursery school and committee and other meeting rooms.

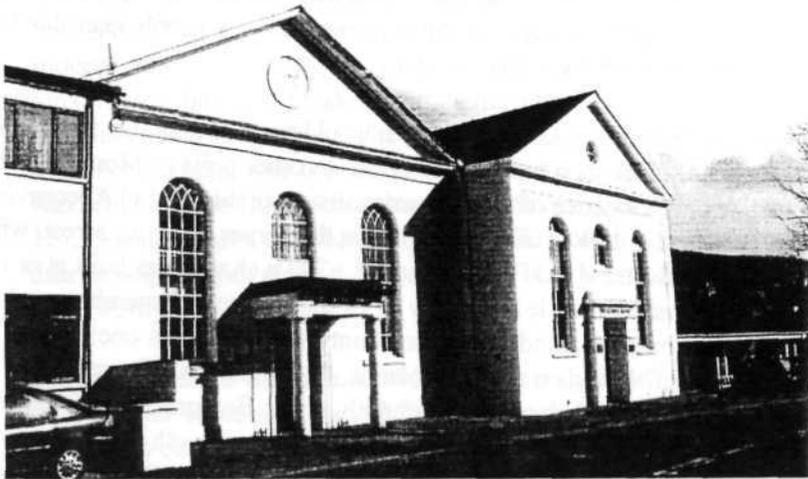


The interior of Frogmore Street Chapel

It had been planned that we should next visit the Pen-y-pound Presbyterian chapel opposite but for some reason no one had opened the building for us. We therefore went back along Frogmore Street to the last building on our programmed itinerary, the United Reformed chapel in Castle Street. Unfortunately this chapel too was closed and we had to be content with the exterior view. To lessen somewhat our members' disappointment, we are glad to be able to publish the following account of the early history of the chapel by a former minister, the Rev. Herbert Hughes.

Castle Street United Reformed Church

It was a disappointment that this church was closed to us during our visit to Abergavenny for it is in many ways an attractive place of worship. It is



remarkably light inside, with two stained glass windows on either side of the pulpit and further windows on the face of the building. It boasts a delightful, small, nineteenth century pipe organ and an early seventeenth century clock of local make. A gallery surrounds three sides and a roomy vestibule welcomes the visitor. It is conducive to worship, as I can testify, following a five year stint as its (part-time) minister.

As we face the building we note that to its right there stands the schoolroom, still designated as such above the entrance. It was sold in 1990 to a firm of solicitors and a day school was accommodated on the ground floor. The revenue acquired was used to renovate the church building. On the other side there is an evangelical church and next to it stands the Methodist church. It could well be called Church Row. Despite having a congregation of mostly elderly members it has a (shared) minister and is young in heart.

The emergence of Nonconformity in these parts dates back to mid-seventeenth century. The first chapel opened for the Independents or Congregationalists was at Llanfaches in 1639 and it is still open for regular worship. The earliest Baptist church was in the Olchon valley over the border in Herefordshire although it would have been Welsh speaking at the time of its foundation in 1633, but it is no more. In this early period the two denominations would have worshipped together; it was only later that their differences led to divisions.

The membership of Llanfaches church would have been drawn from a wide area but it would soon branch northwards to other parts of Monmouthshire and we have evidence of Congregationalists worshipping in Abergavenny in 1672 and in 1690 a chapel was built at the corner of Cross Street, where the George Hotel stands today. Then in 1707 a chapel was built at or near the present site in Castle Street. By 1718 there were 280 members and this included 'men of standing in the county for there was one esquire, 16 gentlemen, 7 living on their own lands, 63 tradesmen'. The members had 13 votes in the County of Monmouth, 3 for Breconshire, one each for Glamorganshire and Herefordshire, 23 for Monmouth Boroughs, 3 for Gloucester and 3 for Hereford. This signifies a widespread membership but also that Dissent had men of substance and social standing in its ranks at this early date.

The fortunes of Dissent were to flounder at a later period and the history of the church fluctuates because of changing circumstances and internal wranglings. One important factor that determined the success or otherwise

of the church was the presence of an academy closely associated with it. The earliest was established by the minister in 1662 (following the eviction of many clerics from the Anglican Church for their refusal to accept the Book of Common Prayer and conform to other demands). The first and only tutor was Roger Griffith, an extremely able scholar and teacher who had been educated at Utrecht, but he caused considerable consternation when he decided to join the Anglican Church.

Another successful period opened in 1757 when the academy which was based at Carmarthen moved to Abergavenny. The academies were highly significant institutions for the training, not only of prospective ministers but also in providing educational facilities for other promising young men. In days when Oxford and Cambridge were closed to Nonconformists and when promising students would have to travel to Scotland or to the Continent for any kind of higher education the academies proved invaluable. They provided for the education of philosophers and scientists; indeed, mathematics and science could not be taught at the older universities but the academies taught both. They were progressive establishments in their day. The principal at this time was David Jardine, a most able scholar who was joined in 1759 by another tutor. The academy was held next door to the church and Jardine acted as its minister until by 1773 it could boast a membership of 400. The academies tended to follow their principals from place to place and in 1782 this academy would move to Oswestry.

The present edifice was built in 1868 and the end of the nineteenth century saw another successful period for the church but the story from 1914 onwards is one of steady decline.

In 1974 Castle Street Congregational Church joined the United Reformed Church. In these difficult times one would wish to pray for the continued life of the congregation and of the church. After all, they have been here for 316 years.

Herbert Hughes

Family History Fairs

In the last few years, CAPEL has had a stand at the Welsh Family History Societies' fairs. This has helped to make the public aware of the work of CAPEL through the exhibitions on display, publications and talking to members of the society.

Our presence at these events clearly provoked an interest in and questions about the chapels connected with ancestors, concern about possible closures, the location of registers and other historic items.

On many of these occasions we have received information from the public about chapels at risk, old photographs, other memorabilia available and previously unknown work already done, such as recording of graveyards. Many have said that they would now look with greater interest at chapels, their work and their architecture.

The CAPEL exhibition has produced complimentary comments. At some fairs, there has been a display about one particular chapel, how it was saved from closure and the work done on restoration. A member attended to explain how this was achieved and to give advice to anyone with similar problems. Another display was about the history of a chapel and more helpful information was obtained from interested visitors.

These occasions are usually very busy for those CAPEL members manning the stands. This year we were able to attend only one F.H.S. fair, in Glamorgan, and we would be very pleased to hear from any members willing to help with these events in 2007.

Dilys R. Glover

Chapels reported to CAPEL

Building Applications and Threatened Sites

List 1.

Major changes or alterations have been proposed to the following chapels, but detailed plans and further information were not available to CAPEL. A written submission to the relevant Planning Authority was not made. Both lists relate to the period from March to the end of May 2006.

Capel Soar, Marsh Street, Llanelli, Carmarthenshire: Extension to existing building to accommodate nursery and play area. No details available.

Former Bethel Church, Beaufort, Ebbw Vale: Proposal for detached house and garage on former chapel site. No details available.

Bethel Chapel, Llansteffan, Carmarthen: Renewed application for change of use to residential house. No details available.

Nebo Chapel, Mynyddcerrig, Pontyberem, Carmarthenshire: Change of use to house with rear and side extension. No details available.

Rehoboth Methodist Chapel, Ladies Row, Tredegar, Ebbw Vale: Redevelopment of redundant chapel into one pair of houses. Full plans not available.

List 2.

Copies of plans and other information were available in the following cases, so CAPEL was able to examine and comment on the proposals.

Capel Bethania, Bontddu, Gwynedd: Conversion of chapel as annexe to adjoining dwelling (Bryn Hyfryd). Insufficient detail to be positive about the external or internal proposals.

Bausley Methodist Chapel, Bausley, Crew Green: Conversion to dwelling with side extension. Very appropriate conversion using matching materials.

Capel Bethal and adjacent (ruined) Capel Dewi, Llandysul, Ceredigion: Conversion by the Methodist Church into two holiday units. Existing chapel will be unaltered externally. A good proposal. (NB later correspondence).

CM Chapel, Pontrobert, Meifod, Powys: Conversion to dwelling. Good sympathetic proposal with no bad features.

Henryd Chapel, Henryd, Conwy: Provision of fire escape doors to chapel and vestry. No objections raised.

Upper Trosnant Baptist Church, Lower Bridge Street, Pontypool, Torfaen: Relocation of churchyard headstones, new vehicular access and replanting. Chapel not affected. No objections raised.

News of Chapels.

Van Road URC, Caerphilly: The 1903-04 Arts and Crafts style chapel by Beddoe Rhys is asking support for extensive external repair and conservation work. Major internal alterations were proposed in 2004. Norman Chang has commented in detail, especially on the decay interaction between the Newbridge sandstone and the Bath limestone used originally - also on the south face concrete render.

Capel Bethlehem, Cwmerfyn, Penrhyncoch, Aberystwyth: Residential conversion refused because of unacceptable residential use in a dispersed rural area. Unsympathetic conversion features would also detract from the value of the chapel.

Capel Carmel, Amlwch Port, Anglesey (Grade II Listed): The chapel with hall, two schoolrooms and other facilities has been sold by auction.

Zion Congregational Chapel, Llanwnnog. This Independent chapel was built in 1826 on land just north of Caersws donated by a local farmer. It

was rebuilt in 1895 and has been used by a small congregation now reduced to five or six members. The decision has been taken to close the chapel with a final Harvest Festival service on 20 September 2006. The chapel is in a good state of repair but the schoolroom is not usable. There is parking for 15 cars.

Rhydwlwym. This, the oldest active Baptist chapel in Wales, founded 1668, has recently received a grant of nearly £5,000 from the 'Awards for Wales Fund', to help the chapel's trustees with a major restoration and development project. The aim is to create a welcome centre for visitors from other churches, schools and colleges and includes the setting up of a museum with an educational and environmental section. An appeal for donations has been launched; more information can be obtained from the treasurer, Mrs Mona Davies, Rhydwlwym Chapel, Mantawel Llantisilio SA66 7TG Tel.01437 563853.

Llanelli. Clywsom fod llyfr ar gapeli Llanelli yn cael ei baratoi gan un o'n haelodau, Huw Edwards. Ni wyddom pryd y bydd y gyfrol yn ymddangos ond mae Mr Edwards wedi cyhoeddi rhai erthyglau ar y pwnc yn y Llanelli Star a rhai cylchgronau enwadol.

The Chapel on the CAPEL Mug

When designing the CAPEL mug we decided to choose a typical Welsh chapel for the front and let members guess which one it was. Eighteen months went by and no one had identified it. Admittedly the colours were not true to life, but we didn't think the chapel was that obscure. Finally a non-member wrote in with the correct name and location, so we can now reveal that it is the Carmel Welsh Independent Chapel in Pennal, near Machynlleth, GR SH69850050. The chapel is particularly striking in that it stands opposite another splendid chapel and both can be seen clearly from the A493. A chapel was first built on this site in 1816 and enlarged in 1833. The foundation stone for this building was laid on 12th July 1870 and the building measured forty two foot six inches by thirty two foot, with a seating capacity of 400. The estimated cost was £1100. It is Grade 2

listed. This chapel in Lombardic Italian style with gable entry is attributed to the Revd. Thomas Thomas on account of its affinities with other chapels by him. It is classical with a 'great arch' in the pediment and Thomas type ball finials.



The two chapels in Pennal (Carmel is on the left)

At present the chapel is in a state of disrepair. It has 24 members and worship is conducted together with members of the Welsh Presbyterian Chapel (now closed) in the Carmel schoolroom. However, plans are afoot to convert the chapel and schoolroom into a Community Centre which will also be used for the united worship and church activities. This will enable members to maintain the fabric of the building and also make the chapel once more a focal point for community activities. CAPEL wishes them well with their plans.

EISTEDDFOD LECTURE

[CAPEL's annual lecture at this year's National Eisteddfod in Swansea was delivered by Dr.Prys Morgan on Friday 11 August. The subject was Dr Thomas Rees (1815-85), one of the leading preachers in the hayday of

sermons and the principal historian of Nonconformity, particularly Congregationalism, in Wales.

The audience was treated to a brilliant, eloquent and humorous account of Dr Rees's life, from his birth in Llanfynydd, his conversion at the age of thirteen, his various ministries, including Aberdare, Beaufort, and Swansea and his hard work throughout, helping to establish and organise the Congregational Union. He wrote and edited religious journals and published two major works on Welsh religious history. He also showed great enthusiasm for establishing new chapels, both English and Welsh. Indeed, he established so many that he has been blamed for the superfluity of chapels in late 20th century Wales and thus may be held partially responsible for the founding of our Society. A shortened version of the talk is printed below.]

Dr. Thomas Rees, Abertawe (1815-85) ac Anghydfurfiaeth Cymru
(Crynodeb o ddarlith Prys Morgan yn Eisteddfod Genedlaethol
Abertawe a'r Cylch)

Roedd Dr Rees, Abertawe, yn un o enwogion Cymru oes Victoria a hefyd yn enwog yng nghylchoedd Anghydfurfiaeth Lloegr. Nid yn unig roedd yn gawr o bregethwr mewn oes a arwrolai bregethwyr, roedd yn hanesydd ei enwad a phrif hanesydd Anghydfurfiaeth Cymru, yn un o brif hyrwyddwyr Undeb yr Annibynwyr Cymraeg yn 1872 ac yn enwog am sefydlu cyfundrefn yr Annibynwyr Saesneg yng Nghymru.

Ganed Thomas Rees yn Llanfynydd, Sir Gaerfyrddin yn 1815 o gefndir o grefftwyr gwledig, a'r teulu yn aelodau yn hen achos Capel Isaac. Cafodd dröedigaeth yn niwygiad 1828, yn 13 oed ac erbyn 1832 roedd yn mynd o gwmpas yn pregethu fel disgybl-bregethwr gyda David Rees, Capel Als, Llanelli.

Yn 1815 aeth i Aberdâr i weithio fel glöwr, ond yn fuan gwelodd ffordd allan o'r llafur caled a oedd yn gas ganddo ac aeth i gadw ysgol. Yna, yn 1836, cafodd wahoddiad i Graigybargod i fod yn weinidog ar eglwys fechan. Priododd wedyn yn 1838 â merch o Fedwellty, a'r ddeuddyn ifanc

dibrofiad yn agor siop fach ym Mhont Aberbargod. Aeth pethau'n fethiant arnynt yn 1839 a Thomas Rees yn beio'r Siartwyr am beidio â thalu eu biliau. Aeth yntau'n fethdalwr a threulio peth amser yng Ngharchar Caerdydd.

Dyma fe wedyn yn 1840 yn cael galwad i fod yn weinidog yn Aberdâr ac yna gwahoddiad gan Rees, Capel Als, i ddod i weinidogaethu ar yr ail eglwys Annibynwyr yn Llanelli, sef Siloa. Yno daeth o dan ddylanwad syniadau Charles Finney, sef bod modd pregethu a chael diwygiadau yn barhaus. Cafodd flas hefyd ar gyhoeddi'r *Diwygiwr* a phapurau eraill ac wrth gyhoeddi cofiant i hen weinidog yn Sir Fynwy cafodd flas aruthrol ar chwimentan i ddogfennau hanesyddol. Yn yr un cyfnod ymddiddorai ym mhroblemau gweinyddu eglwysi'r Annibynwyr, gan edmygu yr Undeb a sefydlwyd yn Lloegr yn 1833. Cafodd flas hefyd ar fynd i Loegr i gael cymorth ariannol gan Annibynwyr cefnog i dalu dyledion y mân eglwysi a godai ymhobman trwy Gymru.

Unwaith eto aeth yn ôl i Sir Fynwy yn 1849, i'r Cendl, yn weinidog ac yno ymafloodd ag un o broblemau mawr yr ardal, sef y dylifiad o Saeson trwy'r cymoedd diwydiannol. Mewn cynadleddau yn 1853 a 1860 sefydlodd gyfundrefn o godi capeli Saesneg yng Nghymru, er bod ei gyfaill mynwesol Dr John Thomas, Lerpwl, yn ei rybuddio yn erbyn amlhau capeli. Gan ei fod wedi ymroi cymaint i gael arian gan Saeson cefnog, aeth ati i sgrifennu clamp o lyfr hanes, *The History of Protestant Nonconformity in Wales* (1861). Cafodd arian gan gyfoethogion hefyd i sefydlu cronfa i helpu hen weinidogion methodig.

Cafodd alwad am y tro olaf o'r Cendl i Abertawe yn 1861, a daeth capel Ebeneser yn un o eglwysi mawr a dylanwadol Cymru dan ei weinidogaeth. Daeth yntau nid yn unig yn bregethwr enwog yng Nghymru, Lloegr ac America ond hefyd yn ddarlithydd poblogaidd ac yn siaradwr dylanwadol ar lwyfannau'r Rhyddfrydwyr. Gweithiodd yn galed i gael Undeb i'r Annibynwyr Cymraeg yn 1872, a daeth ddwywaith yn gadeirydd Undeb Cynulleidfaol Lloegr a Chymru. Cydweithiodd yn ystod yr 1860au gyda'i

gyfaill John Thomas i sgrifennu hanes enwad yr Annibynwyr a ddaeth allan mewn pedair cyfrol swmpus. Pan fu farw yn 1885 ei angladd oedd y mwyaf a welwyd erioed yn Abertawe. Roedd fel petai'n crisialu rhinweddau oes Victoria a'i egni'n ddihysbudd a'i fys ym mhob briwes. Mae'r gyfrol o ysgrifau a gyhoeddodd yn Saesneg yn 1867 yn ddrych o'r meddylfryd a oedd am ddangos i'r Saeson mai cenedl barchus oedd y Cymry, ac y mae gwir gamp ar ei gyfrolau hanes. Yn wir nid oes neb wedi gallu efelychu ei orchest o sgrifennu un gyfrol fawr ar holl hanes Anghydffurfiaeth Cymru. Y drafferth amdano, o'n safbwynt ni, oedd ei fod yn credu'n gryf y dylid achub eneidiau trwy godi capeli ymhobman - dim ond deuddeg o aelodau oedd gydag ef yn ei eglwys gyntaf. I wneud pethau'n waeth, credai y dylid codi eglwysi Saesneg er mwyn cadw'r Saeson rhag mynychu'r Eglwys Wladol. Rhybuddiodd John Thomas y byddai hynny'n codi problemau yn yr oes a ddelai. Gwir y gair - ac amllder yr holl gapeli oedd un o'r prif ffactorau yn gwneud inni sefydlu cymdeithas CAPEL ugain mlynedd yn ôl.

A Message from Matthew Saunders,

Honorary Director of the Friends of Friendless Churches

"As a member of Capel you clearly share a passion for places of worship in Wales. I wonder therefore if you might be interested in our work. The Friends of Friendless Churches, which celebrates its 50th anniversary in 2007 takes into care redundant Anglican churches in Wales too important to be demolished or converted. We are helped in this by a very generous subsidy from Cadw and the Church in Wales which provides 100% of the costs. This provides a budget of £100,000 a year.

Our website at www.friendsoffriendlesschurches.org.uk lists all those churches for which we are now responsible, 20 in England, 19 in Wales. They consist mostly of the evocatively smallscale medieval church set in its landscape. Think of Llanfaglan overlooking Caernarfon Bay with its inscribed stones of the 6th and 10th centuries, Llanelieu with its two-storey one-bay medieval screen with original paintwork (pictured in the Powys Pevsner), Llanbeulan on Anglesey with its extraordinary early medieval "font" with interlacing arcading, and Rhoscrowther, our newest vesting,

with its most unusual ground plan including what W.D.Caroe thought was a hermit's cell and some are more "polite". Last year we took on Henry Wilson's great Arts and Crafts masterpiece of St. Mark's Brithdir in North Wales with a delicate relief of the Annunciation in copper on the front of the altar, not just designed by Wilson but made by him. And that great hero of the Arts and Crafts Movement, Coates Carter, rebuilt the little church at Llandeloy in Pembrokeshire in 1928 which lasted barely half a century before succumbing to redundancy - but we now have it safe complete with all its fittings including the reredos in gesso, again made by the hand of the architect. There is the quiet chapel like Bevel, near Nevern, of 1811, complete with three-decker Georgian pulpit and the bier for the coffin. An exterior almost as modest at Ynyscynhaern in Gwynedd hides a much more lavish late Georgian interior, this time of 1832, to serve the local estate with the farmers' names painted on the pews. Here the three decker is even more dominant and there is a fine chamber organ in the original gallery with its painted front. Two Whitefriars windows of the early 20th century, one of them depicting the elusive St.Ynyscynhaern, embellish what is already a rich interior.

We welcome visitors at all our churches. With some there is no need for a key. Where there is, details of the keyholder are obtainable either on the property itself or by contacting the office.

We operate a joint membership scheme with the Ancient Monuments Society which is also strongly involved in Wales through its role as a statutory consultee on applications for listed building consent to demolish in whole or in part. As a member (standard membership fee £24) you receive an annual volume of *Transactions* with many articles on architectural history and conservation, and three 60 page *Newsletters* giving you updates on events, new books, attractions, and conservation news in general. You would be very welcome to join You can do so either by downloading an application form from the website or writing or ringing the office:

Friends of Friendless Churches, St Ann's Vestry Hall, 2 Church Entry,
London EC4V 5HB ☎ 0207 236 3934

Book review

Thomas Thomas 1817-88: the first national architect of Wales. By Stephen Hughes

Reprinted from *Archaeologia Cambrensis* 152 (2003)

This is a very detailed study of Thomas Thomas's life and work as an architect. It tells us of his background and of the influence that his deacon father had on his life and career. His father had trained him in carpentry and building, all of which no doubt laid the foundation that directed the whole of his future work as a chapel minister in designing buildings and to becoming such a prolific designer of Non-conformist chapels.

The development of his building career is described in great detail, and the strong influence he had on Non-conformist architecture throughout his lifetime. The vast number of buildings he designed are listed and described, many with photographs or drawings. These include Brecon Memorial College, many chapels throughout Wales and also the Welsh Independent Chapel in Southwark Bridge Road, London.

Use has been made of Commander Mortimer's drawings of several chapels in mid and north Wales, and also some of those produced by the Manpower Services funded Job Creation Project organised by the former Mid Glamorgan Planning Department.

Stephen has also included considerable information on the work of other known chapel designers of the 19th century as well as the influence of and contributions made by Welshmen in the field of architecture and design. Apart from Peter Lord's books very little has been written on art and architecture in Wales in the past. This book fills this void and provides a wonderfully analytical description of the development of chapel design. It is a must for anyone interested in the subject. The book covers a gap that has existed for far too long on what has become recognised as the national architecture of Wales, and forms a good base for further study.

Whilst accepting that this is merely a reprint from *Archaeologia Cambrensis* the question arises as to why it has only been produced in the

form in which it has. Could it not have been produced as a proper book? I found it irritating that it did not have a 'Contents' and an 'Index'. The incredible detail Stephen Hughes, as always, has produced would surely justify a better presentation. It is to be hoped that, if Stephen decides to update this publication following further research, this will be possible.

I recommend this publication to all CAPEL members and to anyone interested in Welsh architectural history.

Elizabeth Evans

The Moravian Church

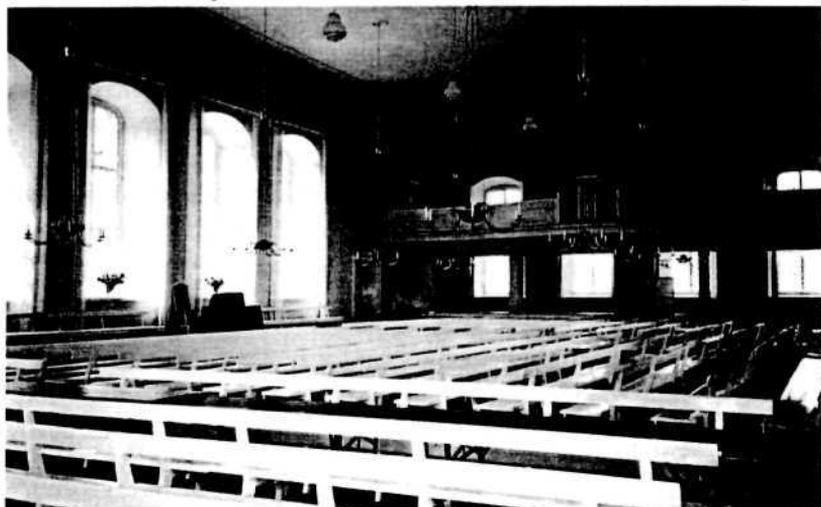
It is with justification that the Moravian Church is included in the CAPEL booklet about the Welsh nonconformist denominations in spite of its minimal representation in Wales. Directly and indirectly its influence has been enormous.

"You are killing a goose, but in one hundred years a golden swan will come to fight the evils of the church". This reported prediction by Jan Hus as he faced the flames at the stake for heresy in 1415 was taken to foretell the advent of Martin Luther, who later accordingly took the swan as his symbol. In the meantime the followers of Jan Hus had not been dormant and these Brethren - the *Unitas Fratrum* - persisted with their reforms. Their community in the Moravian village of Kunwald tried to live a simple, strict Christian life. Severely persecuted, they had three of their ministers ordained by the Waldensians to preserve the apostolic succession and became a separate church. The Moravians printed the Bible in their own language but they were dispersed and their congregations driven from land to land. At the Reformation, Luther, too, regarded the Hussites as heretics, but on studying their principle articles rejoiced 'that we are now gathered into one fold' and was reconciled to their aims.

Three hundred years after the death of Hus the Moravian Brethren were still being driven by persecution until finally the German Count Nicholas von Zinzendorf offered some of their members land on which to settle on his estates at Herrnhut in south eastern Germany. On 17th June 1722 the

Brethren felled the first trees and founded there a Christian Community which, having survived all events including Nazism and Communism still flourishes today.

Zinzendorf himself was a devoted Lutheran and encouraged the colony at Herrnhut to worship within the Lutheran church, but they developed their



Interior of great hall of Moravian church Herrnhut

own liturgy and code of living with Zinzendorf as Superintendent. Gradually the Ancient Church of Bohemian Brethren was reconstituted and became a vigorous, carefully regulated Christian community. From this point on it became known generally as the Moravian Church, although its official title is the Unity of the Brethren (*Unitas Fratrum*). Some difficulties ensued and to escape these the church decided to split up into several colonies, planting establishments in other Christian countries and missions among the heathen. Missionaries were sent to the West Indies in 1732, to Greenland in 1733 and to Georgia (North America) in 1734. In 1735 more Brethren went to Georgia, accompanied this time by John and Charles Wesley. In the same year three Brethren began work in Swedish Lapland. This was just the beginning.

The influence of the Moravian Church on the Wesley brothers was immense. When they were just starting on their life's work the Moravian Church was already almost 300 years old, had its own martyrs and great teachers and a vast experience of faith based on study of the Bible and belief in Christ. No wonder John and Charles Wesley were both convinced that their own faith was lacking. A storm at sea on their way to Georgia caused panic amongst the English, but revealed a deep calm in the Moravian attitude to danger. They were simply not afraid to die, causing John Wesley to say: 'This was the most glorious day which I have hitherto seen'. Back in London in May 1738 after much discussion with the Moravian, Peter Bohler, John and Charles finally came to a point where their insecurity dropped away and John reported that his heart was 'strangely warmed'.

A month later John determined to see for himself the colony which the Moravians had founded at Herrnhut. After a fortnight there he wrote that 'I would gladly have spent my life here' so impressed was he by the fellowship and devotion of the community. Some of the Moravians' ideas for teaching and discussion later reappeared in Wesley's own Methodist Church.

The influence of the Moravian Church was to be seen even more directly in Wales in the work of Howell Harris in Trefecca. In 1742 Howell Harris, inspired by the Brethren's settlements, founded his 'family' - some 120 people committed to living in a virtually monastic style of Christian foundation. Each contributed skills and labour to support an almost totally self-sufficient community, even growing their own flax to provide linen for sheets. The Moravians were frequent visitors there.

But Trefecca faltered and dwindled away when Howell Harris died, whereas Herrnhut retains much of its characteristic Christian community life today, perhaps because the equality of all members was stressed from the beginning. The hand of brotherhood was extended to all who accepted Jesus Christ as Lord, and from there the world-wide mission went forth.

And what do you see if you go to Herrnhut today? The town is set in beautiful rolling countryside with the Czech mountains visible to the south. The name means 'under God's watch' and the whole community centres around the 'Grosse Saal' or great hall. This is the gathering place for worship, but is also multifunctional and is not considered as a sacred space. Built in 1756, the building was destroyed by fire in 1945 and rebuilt between 1951 - 1956. Inside, the ceiling, walls and long bench seats are white, the colour of happiness, which in its simplicity focuses attention on the most important feature, the congregation. The room has no ornamentation and is organised on a transverse axis, allowing closer proximity between those holding the service and the congregation. There is no pulpit or altar and the cleric's robe is worn only for presentation of the sacraments. A green covered liturgical table at the front serves as a work table, lectern, holy communion table and location for baptism. Formerly the women (Sisters) sat on the left of the room and men (Brothers) on the right, but this is no longer the case.

Outside, the streets leading away from the hall are lined with typical German three or four storeyed houses, mostly with rendered and painted walls, and orange or grey tiled roofs with mansard windows. All is beautifully maintained with well-kept gardens. There is a museum with a history of Herrnhut and the Moravian Church. This reveals how very organised and independent the community already was in the eighteenth century, with its own water supply, school, medical services and tradesmen. There were 27 master craftsmen from plumbers to bookbinders, each with his trainees and apprentices. Herrnhut had a successful textile business, postal services, art and culture and its own distinctive style of architecture, to mention just some of the facilities.

Beyond the town a tree-lined avenue leads to the burial ground - Gottesacker - which is perhaps the most striking feature of all. The avenue stops at a stone entrance doorway inscribed 'Christ is risen from the dead'. Inside the graveyard, which is surrounded by beech hedges, the main pathway leads through the centre of wide grass plots, each with its rows of

horizontal grave slabs with name, birthplace and age of the deceased. Each is buried in order of the date of death with no family or private plots, emphasising that all are equal before God, sown as seed in God's Acre. On the Hutberg hill above the graveyard is a small viewing tower built in 1790, where Zinzendorf once held Bible Conferences. The views are magnificent, but the full extent of the graveyard with its 6,000 gravestones is the most impressive sight.

So far everything has related to the setting up of Herrnhut, but the Brethren already recognised its world-wide mission in 1732 and this is commemorated in a remarkable Ethnographic Museum. As they travelled, the missionaries studied the language and culture of the people they visited, recorded their observations diligently, and brought back ethnic souvenirs. They helped to start ethnological science and broaden knowledge of little known people. Other disciplines involved were linguistics, geography, botany and zoology. From this the Ethnographic Museum was founded with exhibits from South Africa (the Brethren were the first to care for the Khoi Khoi, regarded by colonists as non-humans), Eastern Africa, Mongolia, and Western Himalaya. From Australia came Art Objects from the voyages of Captain Cook, with whom they also had contact. Greenland, Labrador and Alaska provided Inuit exhibits including a kayak and dogsled couple. In the Caribbean the Brethren tried to ease the life of slaves and their impact there was reflected in the large increase in the membership of the church in the UK when there was an influx of Caribbean immigrants some 50 years ago. The Brethren researched the culture of the Afro-American slaves and in Surinam (northern South America) they did mission work among the Indian Coastal People. In 1765 work started among the Afro-American Marron with escaped slaves and freedmen. Creoles, Chinese, Indians and Javanese were also cared for in Surinam, and in 1847 the Brethren were working with the Indians of the Miskito Coast in Nicaragua. The Museum preserves early and precious exhibits about many ancient cultures, all the more extraordinary because it is so unexpected in a quiet German country town. But this is no ordinary place!

Why, then, is the church so modestly represented in Wales when its influence as the first international 'protestant' church in the world has been so great? In the Moravians own words they claim that their goal has never been to win members and grow large. They now have some 800,000 members world wide. In Britain they normally went only where there was no other church for the people and concentrated on helping the disadvantaged. The church has always been ecumenical, working to nurture unity among all churches and confessions, and is happy to welcome as members those who also belong to another church.

They have adopted the saying:

In things essential, unity.

In non-essentials, liberty.

In all things, charity.

For many people there are probably three customs of the Moravian Church with which they are quite familiar, although they may not realise their origin : the Christingle Service, the Advent Star in the form of a stellated dodecahedron, and the daily Bible 'Lots', or selected quotations, published each year in over 50 languages.

Sheila Mason

Pulpit Bibles

Of all the things that are left abandoned when chapels close surely the most difficult to know what to do with are the large pulpit Bibles. Every chapel has at least one in either Welsh or English. It is difficult to imagine that most of them can find a new home. How are they disposed of? Are they simply thrown out as rubbish or fed into the paper bank?

I was reading Marilynne Robinson's highly praised novel *Gilead* recently and came across the episode where a Baptist chapel in America is destroyed by lightning and the congregation gather up the Bibles and hymn books and bury them while the minister says a prayer over them. Has any congregation in Wales ever done anything similar with their pulpit Bible, I wonder? If so, I should be very interested to know.

LM

Chapel Furniture

Two CAPEL members, Glenys and Derrick Deane, have recently passed to the Chairman a fascinating hardback illustrated catalogue of school and church furniture manufactured by Harry Gibbon & Sons at the Crwys Steam Joinery Works in Richmond Road, Cardiff. The catalogue is undated but was surely produced early in the 20th century since it prints an open letter from the firm to its customers dated 1909.

The 'List of a few churches and other buildings furnished by us' on page 10 shows clearly that chapels, particularly in South Wales, were a very important part of the firm's clientele. Accordingly, the catalogue includes several large black and white photographs of chapel interiors. There are splendid views of the interiors of Knight Street, Mountain Ash (mahogany and pitch pine), Crwys Road Welsh Calvinistic Methodist, Cardiff (pitch pine), Cathedral Road Presbyterian, Cardiff (white Canadian oak) and Gobaith Welsh Calvinistic Methodist, Cwmdare ('furnished complete in Orham wood'). There are pictures, too, of pulpits and other church furnishings.

Looking through the catalogue reminds one what valuable sources these kinds of material can be. If you have any such items don't throw them out but make sure they are put in safe keeping. The information they contain is invaluable to students of chapel architecture and history.

LM

Gwefan CAPEL

Mae cyfeiriad ein gwefan wedi newid. Y cyfeiriad newydd yw
www.capeli.org.uk

CAPEL Website

We have changed the address of our website. It is now at
www.capeli.org.uk

Cyfarfodydd i Ddod 2006/7

Forthcoming Meetings 2006/7

Fel y gwelwch yn y ffurflen gofrestru amgaeedig, cynhelir Cyfarfod yr Hydref eleni, yn Llanrwst a Threfriw ddydd Sadwrn, 14 Hydref 2006.

Yn 2007 bydd Cyfarfod y Gwanwyn yng Nghaerfyrddin ar 12 Mai a Chyfarfod yr Hydref ym Mae Colwyn.

Gwnewch nodyn yn eich dyddiadur!

As you will see from the enclosed booking form, the Autumn Meeting this year will be in Llanrwst and Trefriw, on Saturday 14 October.

In 2007 The Spring Meeting will be held in Carmarthen on 12 May and the Autumn Meeting in Colwyn Bay. Make a note in your diary!

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(Os ydych am gyhoeddi rhywbeth yn rhifyn nesaf y *Cylchlythyr*, rhaid i'r eitem fy nghyrraedd erbyn Ebrill, cyn canol y mis os yn bosib.

Any item for publication in the next issue of the Newsletter must reach me by April, if possible before the middle of the month)