


Capel



CYMBITHAS TREFT ADAETH Y CAPEL
THE CHAPELS HERITAGE SOCIETY

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Cylchlythyr 53 Gwanwyn 2009

Nonconformity in Newtown

The day began with members gathering at the United Reformed Church in New Church Street, where we received a warm welcome and refreshments. Following the AGM, we were addressed by local historian Mr David Pugh. He spoke on Newtown during the nineteenth century, when the town became a centre for the weaving industry, and as a result the population grew rapidly. With the introduction of machine looms during the later-nineteenth century, Newtown began to experience the highs and lows of a boom and bust economy.

Mr Pugh focused on one boom in particular, which took place during the 1870s and 1880s and had a particular effect on the local chapels. During a 7 year period, each denomination re-modelled or re-built its accommodation in what can be seen as a competition for the most impressive place of worship.



*Newtown United Reformed Church
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The race for Newtown's best church or chapel began with the Anglican church of St. David's. A chancel was added in 1874, which inspired developments amongst the nonconformists. The Welsh Calvinistic Methodists were the first denomination to begin building. The congregation in Newtown was established in c.1804, and they built their first chapel in c.1810. It was a brick building, similar to the houses and factories in Newtown at the time, and not at all like the form we expect a chapel to take. Originally Welsh speaking, the congregation split along linguistic lines during the mid-nineteenth century. The English congregation stayed where they were, and

a new Welsh chapel, Bethel, opened in 1876. Built of brick with a facade of local stone, it was designed by the architect Richard Owens of Liverpool. Originally the chapel had two large pinnacles at the front, but these were removed in 1991 as they had become dangerous. The new Welsh Calvinistic Methodist chapel left the 'brick boxes' of the other denominations in the shade, and inspired them to follow suit.

The next denomination to build were the Wesleyan Methodists. The first Wesleyan chapel, a brick building, was built in c.1806. Another simple brick building was built around 1820, but by 1833 the congregation had expanded to c.700, therefore a new site was acquired and a third brick chapel was built in 1838. During the 1870s, the Wesleyans employed local architect Edwin Jones to remodel the chapel. A porch was added along with an extension at the rear, which allowed for the addition of an 'orchestra' and organ loft. This building was later demolished and a new building was erected on the same site, with the impressive stained glass window and organ saved and placed in the new accommodation. Interestingly, Mr Pugh noted that the pulpit was later sold on to a brewery.

The English Congregationalists were the next to enter the race. Originally they met in a building called 'Y Bwthyn', situated at the rear of the Bear Hotel. In 1821, the Congregational College re-located there from Llanfyllin, leading to the building of a new chapel. But by the 1870s the Congregationalists came to believe that this building was dilapidated. A plot was purchased from Lord Soudley of Gregynog, and the Portman company of architects from Reading were commissioned to design the new premises. It opened on 11 April 1878.

Lord Soudely of Gregynog was also involved with the development of the English Calvinistic Methodist chapel. The congregation had built premises at Penygloddfa, now a house in Chapel Street. By the 1870s, this building was deemed 'unsuitable and inconvenient'. Lord Soudely provided a plot of land and Crescent Chapel was built, opening 3 months after the English Congregational Chapel. In 2002, the roof was damaged during a storm and the building was at risk of demolition. It was saved, but much work is still required on the interior and it remains closed for the time being.

The opening of Crescent Chapel inspired the Primitive Methodists to improve their accommodation. They had taken over the old Wesleyan Methodist Chapel of 1838, and in 1881 added a facade, raised the ceiling and purchased ornamental, local-cast railings.

The next denomination to undertake building work were the Baptists. They used the same site for their first three chapels, with each one built larger than the previous, the third boasting capacity enough for a congregation of 900. In 1880, a site was purchased on New Road, and a building was designed by George

Morgan of Carmarthen, apparently based on the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London. Zion was built of brick and sandstone, with impressive pillars at the front and in the interior adjacent to the organ. This marked the end of the competition for the best building; each denomination had tried to outdo the others, but it was accepted that no one would be able to surpass the Baptists, especially as an economic 'bust' came soon after its opening.

Mr Pugh noted that the only denomination not to take part in the race for the best building were the Welsh Independents. They refurbished their building, Capel Coffa, in 1885, and again in 1909. He then went on to summarise further developments in chapel and church building during the 19th and 20th centuries, including the building of All Saints Anglican Church at Penygloddfa in 1890. It was designed by the architect Sir Aston Webb, who was responsible for projects in London such as the Victoria and Albert Museum and additions to Buckingham Palace. It seems he was a cousin to the incumbent's wife, hence his involvement at Newtown. In 1912, the Catholic Church was built, and remained in use until 1947. Newtown also has several places of worship in modern premises, including the Pentecostal Church, Brethren's Meeting House, Kingdom Hall and the Evangelical Church, which was built by members in one weekend! Mr Pugh concluded his talk here, but happily answered questions from members on Newtown's building race, revealing in the process that the Baptist Chapel was erected at a staggering cost of £10,000.

The walking tour of chapels then began, with the first stop at Zion Baptist Chapel on New Road. Members took time to appreciate the impressive exterior, and the large and equally impressive interior. The organ was played as we looked around, and in the schoolroom a large collection of original plans for the building were laid out for us to view. We then made our way to view Bethel, the Welsh Presbyterian Church, from the exterior only.

After a wonderful lunch at the Waggon and Horses, we proceeded to pass by Crescent English Presbyterian Church, currently closed following storm damage. Our next port-of-call was Capel Coffa, the Welsh Congregational Chapel, where we were greeted by member Sioned Bowen who spoke on the history of the chapel. The chapel is named Capel Coffa (Memorial Chapel) as it stands in memory of local man Henry Williams who was influenced by Vavasor Powell, and who suffered persecution for his Dissenting beliefs during the 17th century. It was built on land donated by Lord Soudely. The chapel building is currently used on a Sunday by three congregations: the English Presbyterians hold an English language service, and the Welsh Congregationalists and Welsh Presbyterians hold a united Welsh language service. Today, Capel Coffa has around 80 members, but only about 12 attending service on a Sunday. They have been unable, financially, to support a permanent minister for some time, but dedicated members have kept the cause going.

We then moved on to the Quaker Meeting House. Helen Porter, a member of the meeting, spoke to us about the history of the building. It was originally a medieval hall house situated in Dolgellau, and Owain Glyndwr is known to have used it when signing an agreement with the French. During the 16th century it was owned by Baron William Lewis, MP for Merionethshire, who was killed by the Red Bandits of Dinas Mawddwy. The house later became a row of cottages, and by the end of the 19th century had fallen into a state of disrepair. The Pryce Jones family of Newtown decided to move the building from Dolgellau to their home town. This was done by train from Dolgellau, using 32 trucks, with each piece moved from the station to the present site by hand. Some of the woodwork dates from the early-17th century, but most dates from the late-19th century when the carving was completed by local craftsmen. The floor is made of random end-grain pieces secured by dry plaster. Plans of the original house are held at the National Library of Wales.

The house was used by the Pryce-Jones family as a summer house, and by the military during the Second World War. By the 1950s, it had again fallen into a poor state, and was restored once more by the Pryce-Jones family. It was used as a base by the Girl Guides, and then gifted to the Hereford and Mid-Wales Area Meeting of the Society of Friends. It opened as a Meeting House in 1968. During the last 18 months, the Meeting has moved to Montgomery due to the work required on the Grade II listed building. Members spent some time viewing the building, and photographs showing it as it was in Dolgellau and in 1901, soon after it's restoration.

For the final visit of the day we travelled a few miles out of Newtown to Pentre Llifior, a Wesleyan Methodist chapel which has recently undergone restoration. We received a warm welcome and a much appreciated tea. Capel member Andrew Mathieson, who organised our day in Newtown and is a member at Pentre Llifior, spoke on the history of the cause, which is tied closely to the Revd. James Buckley of the famous brewing family. Pentre Llifior is also one of only two surviving 18th century Wesleyan preaching houses in Wales.



Pentre Llifior Chapel

Our day then drew to a close. Thanks must go to Andrew Mathieson for organising such a successful and interesting visit to Newtown.

Capel AGM 2008

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting, Newtown, 11 October 2008.

1 Chairman's Welcome:

The Chairman welcomed members to the Meeting

2 Apologies for Absence:

Apologies were received from eight members

3 Minutes of the Last Meeting:

The minutes of the meeting held in Carmarthen on 5 May 2007 were accepted and confirmed.

4 Matters Arising:

There were no matters arising

5 Secretary's Report:

The Secretary likened himself to a spider at the centre of a web but added that the anchors at the edges of the web were the Chairman, the Former Secretary and the members and associates of the Executive Committee. The Secretary was able to draw on their immense knowledge and experience when fielding enquiries from a "Web" that was truly "World Wide". The Secretary reported on specific and general correspondence which came to Capel. The Chapels Society, Capel's English sister-organisation, was looking at a possible joint visit in 2010 – either with the Chapels Society in Liverpool or with Capel in Wrexham. There was correspondence from the Charity Commission, the Welsh Assembly and its sub-committees and other organisations, for example, the Churches Tourism Association. The Secretary's time was given to receiving correspondence from enquirers to our Website seeking to trace family members and distant relations, seeking church publications, centenary booklets – even seeking to keep chapels open and alive when human and financial resources were long gone. He received enquiries about photo-databases and photo-archives of villages and chapels, both past and present, and enquiries for assistance in locating Chapels with Biblical names. At the last count some 69 Biblical names were in use. The Secretary recorded his special thanks to Norman Chang and Jonathan Jones who advised on planning applications. He sent notes and cards to Capel Family members and observed that no two weeks were ever the same.

6 Treasurer's Report:

The Treasurer presented audited accounts for the year ending on 31 August 2008. There had been increased expenditure since Capel had both reprinted

the Llandudno Chapel Trail and had published Chapel Trails for Aberystwyth and Llangollen in both Welsh and English. The current balance was a little in excess of £14,000.

7 Chairman's Report:

The Chairman thanked the Officers and members of the Executive Committee – and the members – for their support and help through another busy year. He drew attention to Capel's collection of Christmas and Greetings cards for sale and to the new Chapel Trails for Aberystwyth and Llangollen, adding that the Bangor Trail was at the printers. He reminded the meeting that he had borne the privileges and duties of Chairman into a tenth year and that he was giving notice that he wished to relinquish the office of Chairman at the next AGM.

8 Election of Officers and Committee Members:

The Officers and members of the Committee had agreed to continue in office for a further year. Their offer was warmly accepted by the membership who re-elected the team en bloc.

9 Any Other Business:

There was no further business and the Chairman closed the meeting.

Cyfarfod Cyffredinol Blynyddol Capel 2008

Cofnodion y Cyfarfod Cyffredinol Blynyddol, Y Drenewydd, 11 Hydref 2008.

1 Croeso'r Cadeirydd:

Croesawodd y Cadeirydd yr aelodau i'r Cyfarfod

2 Ymddiheuriadau am Absenoldeb:

Derbyniwyd ymddiheuriadau oddi wrth wyth aelod

3 Cofnodion y Cyfarfod Diwethaf:

Derbyniwyd a chadarnhawyd cofnodion y cyfarfod a gynhaliwyd yng Nghaerfyrddin ar 5 Mai 2007.

4 Materion yn codi:

Ni chodwyd unrhyw faterion

5 Adroddiad yr Ysgrifennydd:

Cymharodd yr Ysgrifennydd ei hunan i bryf copyn yng nghanol gwe, ond ychwanegodd mai'r angorfeydd ar ymylon y we oedd y Cadeirydd, y Cyn-

ysgrifennydd ac aelodau a chyfeillion y Pwyllgor Gwaith. Roedd yr Ysgrifennydd yn gallu tynnu ar eu gwybodaeth a'u profiad helaeth hwy wrth ddelio ag ymholiadau o "We" a oedd yn wirioneddol "Fyd-eang". Adroddodd yr Ysgrifennydd am yr ohebiaeth benodol a chyffredinol a ddeuai i Capel. Roedd y *Chapels Society*, chwaer-sefydliad Saesneg Capel, yn edrych ar y posibilrwydd o ymweliad ar-y-cyd yn 2010 - naill ai gyda'r *Chapels Society* yn Lerpwl neu gyda Capel yn Wrecsam. Cafwyd gohebiaeth oddi wrth y Comisiwn Elusennau, Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru a'i is-bwyllgorau a sefydliadau eraill, er enghraifft, Cymdeithas Twristiaeth Eglwysi. Roedd amser yr Ysgrifennydd yn cael ei neilltuo i dderbyn gohebiaeth gan ymholwyr i'n Gwefan a geisiai olrhain aelodau eu teuluoedd a pherthnasau pell, chwilio am gyhoeddiadau eglwysig, llyfrynau canmlwyddiant - a hyd yn oed ceisio cadw capel ar agor ac yn fyw pan oedd adnoddau dynol ac ariannol wedi hen ddarfod. Derbyniodd ymholiadau am gronfeydd data ffotograffau ac archifau ffotograffau o bentrefi a chapeli, ddoe a heddiw fel ei gilydd, ynghyd ag ymholiadau am gymorth i leoli Capeli ag iddynt enwau Beiblaidd. Ar y cyfrif olaf, roedd tua 69 o enwau Beiblaidd yn cael eu defnyddio. Cofnododd yr Ysgrifennydd ei ddiolchgarwch arbennig i Norman Chang a Jonathan Jones am eu cyngor ynghylch ceisiadau cynllunio. Anfonodd nodiadau a chardiau i aelodau teuluoedd Capel gan nodi nad oedd yr un wythnos fyth yr un fath.

6 Adroddiad y Trysorydd:

Cyflwynodd y Trysorydd gyfrifon archwiliedig ar gyfer y flwyddyn yn gorffen ar 31 Awst 2008. Bu cynnydd mewn gwariant gan fod Capel wedi ailargraffu Llwybr Capeli Llandudno (Darganfod Capeli yn Llandudno) ac wedi cyhoeddi Llwybrau Capeli ar gyfer Aberystwyth a Llangollen yn y Gymraeg a'r Saesneg fel ei gilydd. Roedd y balans cyfredol ychydig yn fwy na £14,000.

7 Adroddiad y Cadeirydd:

Diolchodd y Cadeirydd i'r Swyddogion ac i aelodau'r Pwyllgor Gwaith – a'r aelodau'n gyffredinol – am eu cefnogaeth a'u cymorth drwy gydol blwyddyn brysur arall. Tynnodd sylw at gasgliad Capel o gardiau Nadolig a chardiau Cyfarch ar werth ac at y Llwybrau Capeli newydd ar gyfer Aberystwyth a Llangollen, gan ychwanegu fod Llwybr Bangor yn cael ei argraffu ar hyn o bryd. Atgoffodd y cyfarfod ei fod wedi ysgwyddo breintiau a dyletswyddau Cadeirydd i mewn i ddegfed flwyddyn bellach a'i fod yn rhoi rhybudd ei fod yn dymuno rhoi gorau i'r swydd o Gadeirydd yn y Cyfarfod Cyffredinol Blyneddol nesaf.

8 Ethol Swyddogion ac Aelodau'r Pwyllgor:

Roedd y Swyddogion ac aelodau'r Pwyllgor wedi cytuno i barhau yn y gwaith am flwyddyn arall. Derbyniwyd eu cynnig yn llawen gan yr aelodaeth a ail-etholodd y tîm i gyd gyda'i gilydd

9 Unrhyw Fater Arall:

Nid oedd rhagor o fusnes a daeth y Cadeirydd â'r cyfarfod i ben.

Chapels reported to CAPEL: Building Applications and Threatened Chapels

The number of chapels listed remains low due to the economic downturn.

List 1.

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

Cowell Street Presbyterian Chapel, Llanelli

Proposed access ramp. Capel supported this straightforward proposal.

Bethlehem Chapel, Colwyn Bay

Proposed conversion to residential use. Exterior remains largely unaltered except for UPVC windows (not listed). Supported in principle.

Capel Gad, Pontrobert, Meifod, Powys

Proposed conversion to form additional accommodation to adjacent house. No objection in principle: this attractive little group of buildings is kept substantially intact.

Rhosson CM Chapel, St. Justinians, Pembrokeshire

(Listed Grade II) Proposed conversion of redundant chapel. No objection in principle to the reuse of a 'building at risk'. Interior mostly stripped pre-listing, but reuse of pulpit encouraged.

Tabernacl Welsh Baptist Chapel, Upper Mostyn Street, Llandudno

Proposed reuse of schoolroom as art gallery. Supported (application approved).

Capel Salem (Baptist) Llansilin, Powys

(Listed Grade II) Proposed conversion. No objection in principle to the retention of some internal detail e.g. pulpit and a pew. Powys County Council to pursue and also encourage retention of baptismal pool.

Glanynant Methodist Chapel, Llanidloes, Powys

Proposed conversion. No objection in principle, which retains the character of this simple late chapel.

Llandulas Baptist Chapel, Conwy

Proposed conversion of 1836 chapel. An 'honest' conversion keeping the general form of the façade intact. Retention of an element of interior detail (if it survives) encouraged including submission of survey photos to RCAHMW.

Former Park Place CM Chapel, Tredegar, Blaenau Gwent

Proposed rear extension. No objection in principle.

Former Union URC Chapel, Abergele Road, Colwyn Bay

Proposed change of use to dance/arts centre. Minimal changes which should give new life to the redundant chapel which already has consent for retail use.

Capel Soar, Cwm Llinau, Machynlleth, Powys

Conversion of small, simple 1870 chapel to dwelling, exterior unaffected: no objection in principle.

News of Chapels

Trefin CM Chapel, Trefin, Pembrokeshire

(Listed Grade II) This fine 1830s chapel has closed and Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority is in touch with the Presbyterian Church of Wales.

Bethesda Chapel, Ton Pentre, Rhondda

(Listed Grade II*) Closed and advertised for sale by tender.

Seilo Chapel, Llewellyn Street, Pentre, Rhondda

Closed and advertised for sale by tender.

Nebo Independent Chapel, Merthyr Road, Hirwaun

(Listed Grade II) Closed and advertised for sale by tender.

Mamre CM Chapel, Trecwn, Pembrokeshire

Closed and for sale.

Penffordd CM Chapel, Penffordd, Pembrokeshire

Closed and advertised for sale.

Alun Jones 1927-2009

Trist iawn yw cofnodi ein bod wedi colli un o'n haelodau mwyaf ffyddlon a gweithgar ar ddechrau'r flwyddyn hon. Bu farw Alun Jones mewn ysbyty yn Aberystwyth ar 12 Ionawr 2009 yn 81 oed.

Roedd Alun Jones - neu Peter Alun Lewis Jones i roi ei enw llawn - ymysg y rhai cyntaf i ymuno â Capel pan ffurfiwyd y gymdeithas yn 1986. Roedd ef a'i wraig Celia yn gyson iawn dros y blynyddoedd yn mynychu cyfarfodydd y gymdeithas. Bydd llawer o'n haelodau wedi cwrdd â nhw ar ein hymweliadau â chapeli ym mhob rhan o Gymru.

Roedd gan Alun bob tro ei gamera a'i nodlyfr, a hynny am reswm arbennig oherwydd trwy'r rhan fwyaf o hanes Capel ef oedd yn gyfrifol am olygu'r *Cylchlythyr*. Derbyniodd y cyfrifoldeb yn 1989 a daliodd ati hyd 2008 pan oedd rhaid iddo ymddiswyddo oherwydd afiechyd.

Nid oedd y dasg o olygu'r *Cylchlythyr* yn un ysgafn. Am bron i ugain mlynedd Alun oedd yn annog aelodau i ysgrifennu erthyglau. Alun oedd yn paratoi'r deunydd a gwneud y trefniadau ar gyfer argraffu. Alun hefyd oedd yn ysgrifennu'r disgrifiadau o'n cyfarfodydd ac ymweliadau a ymddangosai ym mhob rhifyn. Ac Alun oedd yn tynnu'r lluniau o'r capeli a welwyd sy'n ychwanegu cymaint at yr erthyglau. Yn ychwanegol at hyn i gyd, derbyniodd Alun yn ddi-gŵyn y cyfrifoldeb dros sicrhau bod y rhaglen a'r Taflen Wybodaeth Leol yn barod ar gyfer pob cyfarfod.

Ganwyd Alun ym Maesteg. Yn rhifyn 7 o'r *Cylchlythyr* yng Ngwanwyn 1989 disgrifiodd y gwasanaeth olaf yng Nghapel Tabor, Maesteg, sef y capel yr oedd wedi'i fynychu pan yn fachgen. Yn nes ymlaen yn ei blentyndod symudodd y teulu i'r Barri lle derbyniodd ei addysg yn Ysgol Ramadeg y Bechgyn. Aeth i Goleg Gonville a Caius yng Nghaergrawnt lle yr ennillodd radd ddosbarth gyntaf mewn Ffrangeg a Sbaeneg. Dysgodd hefyd Eidaleg yn yr ysgol ac yng Nghaergrawnt. Ar ôl graddio treuliodd ddwy flynedd yn y llu awyr ar wasanaeth milwrol cyn cael ei benodi i swydd yn Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru yn Aberystwyth. Arhosodd yn y Llyfrgell trwy gydol ei yrfa gan gael ei ddyrchafu i swydd Ceidwad y Llyfrau Printiedig, sef pennaeth yr adran fwyaf. Roedd ei ddoniau eithriadol fel ieithydd yn amhrisiadwy i'r Llyfrgell. Ymddeolodd yn 1987 oherwydd ar y pryd 60 oedd yr oedran ymddeol am staff y Llyfrgell.

Fel y gwelir o'r dyddiadau uchod, rhoddodd Alun lawer o'i ymddeoliad i

wasanaethu Capel fel ein golygydd. Roedd yn aelod o'r Pwyllgor Gwaith ac yn ffyddlon iawn mewn cyfarfodydd. Roedd Alun yn ddyn tawel ond roedd ganddo egwyddorion pendant ac yr oedd yn barod i frwydro drostynt. Yn sicr roedd pawb ar y pwyllgor yn ei barchu a'i edmygu, er efallai nid oedd pawb yn sylweddoli yn union mor ddisglair yr oedd o ran ysgolheictod.

Yn Aberystwyth mynychodd Alun a Celia Gapel y Morfa, sef capel Cymraeg Eglwys Bresbyteraidd Cymru, lle cynhaliwyd gwasanaeth o ddiolch am ei fywyd ar 16 Ionawr. Mae'n amlwg i'w ffydd fod yn bwysig iawn iddo trwy gydol ei fywyd. Yn sicr, tristwch mawr i Alun oedd dirywiad y capeli a'u dylanwad. Ond pan oedd rhaid iddynt gau eu drysau fel lleoedd addoli roedd yn awyddus i Gapel geisio sicrhau i'r adeiladau gael eu parchu gan eu perchnogion newydd.

Cofiwn gyda diolch gyfraniad enfawr Alun i Capel. Fel cymdeithas, cydymdeimlwn yn ddwys â Celia a'r teulu yn eu profedigaeth.

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We are very sorry to record the death of one of our most faithful and committed members at the beginning of the year. Alun Jones died in hospital in Aberystwyth on 12 January 2009 at the age of 81.

Alun Jones - or Peter Alun Lewis Jones to give him his full name - was one of the first to join Capel when the society was formed in 1986. He and his wife Celia were regular attenders at Capel meetings over the years. Many members will have met them during our visits to chapels in every part of Wales.

On the visits Alun always had with him his camera and a notebook. There was good reason for this since throughout most of Capel's lifetime Alun was responsible for editing the *Newsletter*. He accepted the responsibility in 1989 and continued until 2008 when he had to resign because of ill-health.

Editing the *Newsletter* was no light task. For almost twenty years Alun encouraged members to write articles, prepared the material and made arrangements for printing. Alun also wrote the descriptions of our meetings and visits that appeared in every issue and he took the photographs of the chapels which we visited which add so much to the articles. On top of all this he accepted uncomplainingly the responsibility for ensuring that the programme and the Local Information Sheet were ready in time for each meeting.

Alun was born in Maesteg. In no. 7 of the *Newsletter* he described the final service in Tabor Chapel, Maesteg, which he had attended as a child. Later in his childhood the family moved to Barry where he was educated in the Grammar School. He went to Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge where he gained a first in French and Spanish. He also learned some Italian during his time in Cambridge. After graduating he spent two years in the RAF on military service

before being appointed to a post in the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth. He remained in the Library throughout his career and was promoted to the post of Keeper of Printed Books, or head of the largest department. His exceptional gifts as a linguist were invaluable to the Library. He retired in 1987 because at the time 60 was the retirement age for staff of the Library.

From the dates given above it is clear that Alun dedicated much of his retirement to serve Capel as editor. He was a member of the Executive Committee and was faithful in attendance at meetings. Alun was a quiet man but he had firmly-held principles for which he was prepared to fight. It is certain that every member of the committee respected and admired him, though perhaps not everyone realised how distinguished a scholar he was.

In Aberystwyth Alun and Celia attended Capel y Morfa, the Welsh-language Presbyterian Church of Wales chapel where a service of thanksgiving for his life was held on 16 January. His faith was obviously important to him throughout his life. He was saddened by the decline of the chapels and their influence. But when they had to close their doors as places of worship he was keen for Capel to attempt to ensure that the buildings were respected by their new owners.

We remember with gratitude Alun's enormous contribution to Capel. As a society we send our deep sympathy to Celia and the family.

The Future of Welsh Chapels

Members of Capel who are concerned about the rate of decline and closure of our chapels will be interested in a recent important contribution to the subject. In volume 21 of the annual publication *Contemporary Wales*, which appeared at the end of 2008, there is a fascinating essay entitled 'Out of taste, out of time: the future of Nonconformist religion in Wales in the twenty-first century'. The author is Paul Chambers, a sociologist of religion in the University of Glamorgan who has published extensively on religion and secularisation in Wales.*

Chambers notes that Christianity in Wales is experiencing the most rapid rate of decline within the U.K. The decline is particularly intense in Nonconformist congregations. The essay is in three parts. The first analyses the strength of religion generally in contemporary Wales, including both Christianity and other faiths. The author then looks specifically at the present state of Nonconformity, including both liberal and evangelical congregations. The third and final part of the essay, entitled 'Facing the Future', considers how far Nonconformity is equipped to meet the challenges that now face it. His findings are not encouraging. Ageing and shrinking congregations, shortage of ministers, the gradual loss of a shared memory of religious values within society, and a

general inability to adapt mean that 'with the best will in the world it is only possible to say that the prognosis is not good'. His final sentence offers a bleak summary: 'The challenge for the churches is clear, but how far they can renew themselves to meet these changes with ever-decreasing resources and a climate of growing public indifference to institutionalised religion remains highly problematic'.

This essay is well worth reading by all members of Capel, not least because of its implications for the future of chapel buildings in the next few years. It reinforces very strongly the message in the short piece on 'How many chapels?' that appeared in the Spring 2008 issue of the *Newsletter* and the subsequent correspondence in the Autumn 2008 issue.

Lionel Madden

* *Contemporary Wales: an annual review of economic, political and social research* vol. 21 (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2008). The essay by Paul Chambers is on pp. 86-100.

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Os hoffech gyhoeddi rhywbeth yn y rhifyn nesaf o'r cylchlythyr, bydd rhaid i'r item cyraedd y Golygydd cyn 31 Awst 2009.

If you would like to publish an item in the next issue of the newsletter, it will need to reach the editor by 31st August 2009.

Churches and Chapels of Tonyrefail

Our member Mr Hywel Gillard is currently Chair of the University of the Third Age (U3A) for Tonyrefail and District. On its foundation in 2006 a local history group was formed. The first project of the group was to research and record the history of the local places of worship including both those that still function as religious buildings and those that have closed and have passed into other use or been demolished.

The resulting booklet produced locally by the group is *Chapels and Churches of Tonyrefail*. It provides a fascinating short history in pictures and words of these buildings and the congregations they served. Some idea of the richness of the tradition can be gained from the list of the denominations that have been present in the community. These include Church in Wales, Calvinistic Methodist/Presbyterian, Independent, Baptist, Wesleyan Methodist, Primitive Methodist, Quaker, Salvation Army, Pentecostal, Apostolic - several of them with more than one place of worship to serve the needs of Welsh and English speakers. In all 21 sites of present or former buildings are covered.

The case of Capel y Ton Presbyterian Church which, having been closed and put up for sale, was burnt to the ground by vandals in 2007, highlights the need to record these buildings which have played such an important part in Welsh religious record and social life. We are probably the last generation that has the shared memory to be able to carry out the task. The work done by Mr Gillard and his colleagues is an inspiring example of what can be done.

Mr Gillard has kindly agreed that we can put the booklet on the Capel website. At our request he has also given us a copy to deposit a copy in the library of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historic Monuments of Wales in Aberystwyth.

If any other members have been involved in similar work on the local history of chapels in their area we should be very grateful to hear from them.

Lionel Madden

A School Visit to Hen Dŷ Cwrdd

Mrs Glenys Dean sent the following account of a junior school class lesson held at Hen Dŷ Cwrdd, Hengoed last Autumn. This is an imaginative use of a chapel, which may suggest similar ideas to other members.

You may remember a visit to the old Welsh Baptist Chapel, which stands at the top of a hill at Hengoed, near Ystrad Mynach.

It is a building of some antiquity, surrounded by a small graveyard which is sometimes referred to as a 'history book of Hengoed'.

The Chapel is only rarely used these days, despite efforts by its owner, Bryn Seion Baptist Church; but in true scriptural fashion, it is blessed by its neighbours.

Hengoed Junior School is the Chapel's next door neighbour, and the chapel recently hosted a class of 25 children aged between 5 and 6 years who were being taught, as part of their curriculum, about Christening. Their work in class had included the making of a font, the role of Godparents, and the making of a large, sugar-paper book detailing everything they had learned.

The Chapel itself had come in for a spring clean in preparation for the visit of the class. It was possible, I thought, to catch a look of surprise on the photograph of the Reverend John Jenkins, minister at the Chapel for 44 years during the 19th century, but perhaps that was just imagination.

The 'Big Seat' provided room for the whole class and a large doll, which was dressed for the occasion in Miss Field's own Christening gown, and was to be given the name Annabel Jones.

The parents and Godparents, whose heads hardly reached the sides of the sêd fawr, looked suitably solemn and little lanto, who had been elected as minister, carried out his duty with becoming gravity.

The lesson was soon over and the Christening party had to return to school. I was left to lock-up feeling proud that the old Chapel was there for these children, so sensitively taught and so receptive of the teaching.

Even old chapels have a part to play.

Glenys Dean



Your Letters == Eich Ilythyron

If you have a question or comment for the Editor, the Capel officers or the membership in general, please write to Rhian Phillips, 11 Asgog Street, Cardiff CF24 2AR, e-mail rhanphil@hotmail.com

Dear Editor,

I am trying to find out about an individual who is buried in the entrance of a chapel in West Putford – there is no graveyard as such, this man (and two of his children) are the only people who were buried there.

His name was Joseph Wood, and it appears that he was a Bible Christian minister, who spent a couple of years in Glamorgan. I know that his son was born in Richards Street, Aberavon in April 1856, and from the Cambrian newspaper I see that the Aberavon Chapel was rebuilt in that year to accommodate larger congregations. I have also found a reference in the Cambrian newspaper dated 28th November 1856, where he appeared in the Swansea Police Court and 'took the usual oaths for preaching in the Bible

Christian Chapel, Gam Street'. I presume this was some kind of licensing hearing rather than unruly conduct.

I wonder, have Capel members ever come across a minister called Joseph Wood between the years 1854 and 1856? If so, which chapel was he associated with, and is it still standing? I really am intrigued that he was thought special enough to be interred in our chapel grounds, but nobody now knows who he really was, or why he is there! Any help gratefully received.

Yours sincerely,

Christine Theobald.

Editor – If you have any information for Christine, please pass it to me and I will ensure it is sent on to her.

Dates for your Diary

Capel's Spring meeting will be held on Saturday May 16th 2009 (note—this is a change from the usual second Saturday in May) in Cwmbran and Pontypool. Details of the programme and booking information are included with this mailing.

The Autumn meeting will be held in Holyhead on October 10th, and for our Spring meeting in 2010 we'll be visiting Fishguard.