

Capel



CYMBETHAS TREFTA DAETH Y CAPEL
THE CHAPELS HERITAGE SOCIETY

Newsletter 54 Autumn 2009

Cylchlythyr 54 Hydref 2009

The Chapels of Cwmbran and

This years Spring meeting was held on the 16th May 2009 and consisted of a tour of chapels in Cwmbran and Pontypool. We started in Ebenezer Congregational Hall, Cwmbran where we were welcomed with coffee and biscuits. Reverend Bill Rutter from Abergavenny gave a very interesting lecture on 'Aspects of the Chapel in Society' where he examined the influence of the chapel on the Welsh way of life, its language and politics. He left us with Iorwerth Thomas' powerful image of the chapel as an extinct volcano, adding that perhaps it will erupt once more.



Pontrhydyrun: Crown © RCAHMW

Crane Street Chapel
Crown © RCAHMW



We then had a talk by Rebecca Price from the Gwent Wildlife Trust, who gave a PowerPoint presentation on 'The Gwent Living Churchyards Project'. She outlined the projects aims and showed us how graveyards can be made into sanctuaries for wildlife, flora and fauna using a basic churchyard management scheme and relaxing the cutting regime.

After a lovely lunch at the Ashbridge, Pontrhydyrun, Cwmbran we boarded a couple of minibuses and set off to Tabernacle Baptist Chapel, Penygarn. This is a wonderful early vernacular chapel built in 1727, whose graveyard is part of the Gwent Living Churchyards Project. We then went on to the Classically built Crane Street Baptist Chapel, Pontypool whose fantastic art nouveau interior and etched glass ceiling window contrasted dramatically to the simplicity of Penygarn. The bus then took us to the beautifully proportioned Pontrhydyrun Baptist Chapel in Cwmbran where we lingered in the magnificent graveyard examining the elaborate Victorian gravestones. Siloam Baptist Chapel in Upper Cwmbran, perched on a steep hillside, was the last chapel we attended. It has a thriving congregation and the building has been

adapted to modern forms of worship and multiple use by the community. The afternoon ended back at Ebenezer with a wonderful tea.



Pontrhydyrun: Crown © RCAHMW

Penny Icke

Ethol Cadeirydd Newydd Election of New Chairman

Y llynedd mynegodd Lionel Madden ei fwriad o ymddeol ar ôl deng mlynedd fel Cadeirydd. Wedi meddwl ac ymgynghori'n ddwys bydd y Swyddogion, gyda chefnogaeth y Pwyllgor Gwaith, yn enwebu Meirick Lloyd Davies o Abergele i'w ethol gan y CCB yn Hydref fel Cadeirydd newydd Capel. Dylid anfon unrhyw enwebiadau eraill i'r Ysgrifennydd cyn y CCB, gan gadarnhau bod yr un a enwebir wedi cydsynio â'r enwebiad.

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Last year Lionel Madden indicated that he will be standing down at this year's AGM after ten years as Chairman. After serious consideration and consultation the Officers, with the support of the Executive Committee, will be nominating Meirick Lloyd Davies of Abergele for election by the AGM in October as the new Chairman of Capel. Any other nominations should be sent to the Secretary in advance of the AGM, indicating that the consent of the nominee has been obtained.

Chapels reported to Capel: building applications and threatened chapels

- Tyn-y-celyn Wesleyan Methodist Chapel, Llansaintffraed Glan Conwy, Conwy (Listed Grade II) – conversion for community use. Sympathetic scheme: support offered.
- Capel Seion, Llansaint, Carmarthenshire – revised application to convert to three instead of two apartments. Exterior of unlisted chapel remains unaltered and no objection made (consent granted).
- Cape Pen-y-meini, Llanfihangel y Pennant, Snowdonia – conversion to dwelling. Concerns expressed regarding treatment of west gable and use of uPVC windows in a simple rural chapel.
- Capel Gad, Pontrobert, Powys – conversion to dwelling (revised proposal). Further to our concerns, the pulpit is to be retained and the overall quality of the application is far more sympathetic.
- Minffordd Road Chapel, Llanddulas, Conwy – conversion to dwelling. No objection in principle.
- Mission Hall, Bullmore Road, Caerleon, Newport – conversion to dwelling (Listed Grade II). An interesting lateral-fronted chapel of 1814, altered c.1840 and used by the Anglicans after 1898 (plain later interior). Sympathetic conversion and thoughtfully located new dwelling on adjacent land. No objection.

Closures:

- Hope Calvinistic Methodist Chapel, Merthyr Tydfil (it is hoped that a Christian group may purchase it for themselves).
- Tabernacl, Wootton Road, Liverpool (Annibynwyr) – closed 1st August 2009.

Moriah Chapel, Neath Abbey



After more than a hundred years, worship has ended at Moriah Chapel in Neath Abbey. The Closing Service was conducted by the Rev. Dr. Geraint Tudur, B.D., the General Secretary of the Union of Welsh Independents and the Rev. Gareth Morgan Jones, minister of Zoar Maes-yr-Haf, Neath.

The chapel had just seven members and the decision to close was taken at a special meeting convened for that purpose. The Closing Service was held on Sunday 1st February and the chapel was packed with people who had experienced some connection with Moriah, together with those from other chapels.

A pamphlet was published with the order of service included to mark the event, which carried a brief history and memories of the remaining members. It described how Moriah started life in Taillwyd Road in 1909 with the blessing of Zoar, the mother church. Zoar itself had come into existence after a dispute with Maes-yr-Haf. Fifty-nine members of Zoar who lived in Neath Abbey left to form the first congregation.

Moriah occupied its prominent position high above Taillwyd Road and Neath Abbey village until 1975 when, following a surveyor's report, the decision was taken to demolish the chapel. Following the work the congregation occupied the vestry.

During its history Moriah had two ministers for short periods, Rev. James Phillips and Rev. E. R. Phillips, both at the beginning of the century.

As a five year old child, Phyllis Griffiths remembers being taken to the sisterhood by her grandmother, Jane Hopkins and her great aunt, Martha Jones. At that time there was a well attended Band of Hope, with at least thirty children.

Thomas Davies was one of the founder members of the Chapel's drama group. His granddaughter, Mair Thomas is the current organist, following in the footsteps of another family member; Emrys Davies, who was the organist for many years. Another well loved member was Jean Beynon, who for many years collected the 1p per week towards the organ fund.

Mair Axtell has been a member of the chapel for seventy years. She was Christened and married there. Her maternal grandmother, known to all as Mrs Evans Bryndewi, used to take her twelve children to Moriah every Sunday. She recalls that everyone had their family pews downstairs. Upstairs men and boys sat on the left of the organ and the women and girls sat on the right. Mair remembers that on Whit Monday, the ladies of the chapel would prepare the tea in the vestry and Lance Davies would march the children and younger members of the chapel up Taillwyd Road, firstly to Mrs Evans Bryndewi's home and then on to Mr Meyrick's house to sing for all the family. Afterwards, the children would run back to Moriah for tea and races in the fields behind the chapel. In later years, when the fields became a housing estate the women would prepare packed lunches and the children would be taken on a bus trip, often to Porthcawl.

After Mair's marriage, she brought her children to the chapel. She taught in the Sunday School, following in the footsteps of Ceinwen Stephens who had taught the children for many years. To encourage more children to the chapel, Mair opened a Mother and Toddler group in 1986, which ran very successfully for many years.

When Hazel and Ellis Emmanuel joined Moriah in 1957 it was a particularly busy chapel. The drama group performed regularly and there was an active Sunday School, with classes for the young and older members. At that time there was no resident minister, but there were five deacons. Activities included prayer meetings held on Mondays and Guild on Friday for the teenagers. Preparation for the annual Gamanfa Ganu occupied the minds of everyone to culminate in the magnificent singing festivals held during Easter time.

Michael Williams recalls his time as a teenager in the 1950s in Moriah Chapel, remembering people like Lance Davies, Thomas Griffith Meyrick, Boba Jennet, Albert Jones, Tommy Seth Davies and Mrs Maggie Beynon. Michael attributes his life as a teenager and starting out on a musical career to the influence upon him of the chapel and its members: 'I am extremely grateful to many people for the spiritual and musical guidance received during my teenage years. Firstly to my parents and family who took me to chapel with them and encouraged me to play the piano and the organ. I am also grateful to the members of Moriah Chapel and in particular Lance Davies and Thomas Griffith Meyrick. I was starting my musical career, but their strong support spurred me on to gain experience and confidence as I progressed.'

One of the two deacons, Mr Arthur Davies, opened the final service by welcoming the congregation and thanking the remaining members for the way they had strived over the past few years to keep the chapel open. His tribute was warm and poignant and he credited the remaining members for keeping the chapel open and for their courage in coming to the decision that 'saw us here today'.

Revd. Gareth Morgan Jones stressed in his sermon that buildings come and go 'but God's covenant continues. Neath Abbey is a ruin but the faith continues'. The Revd Dr Geraint Tudur carried out the ceremony dissolving the chapel's covenant and relieving the members of their responsibility. He encouraged those remaining members to seek other churches in which to worship. Mrs Mair Thomas transferred the bible back to the mother Church. Revd. Gareth Morgan Jones accepted it saying he would take it back to Zoar, the mother church and indeed to Maes-yr-Haf, the grandmother church.

The closing of Moriah sees the end of traditional nonconformity in Neath Abbey. Wesley Chapel and Ebenezer closed some years ago. Social change and perhaps more secular lifestyles have taken the place of the Band of Hope, the practising for the nativity play, the Sunday school and the singing festivals. Michael Williams, in his excellent tribute to the chapel, its influence and its members, recalls the hwyl that reverberated in the chapel and echoed outside, causing people on the road to stop and smile and appreciate the chapel's activities.

The back page of the pamphlet carries a picture of the seven remaining members who have carried the life of the chapel to its hundred years: Phyllis Griffiths, Diane Thomas, Minwell and Arthur Davies (Deacon), Mair Thomas (secretary), Hazel Emmanuel (Deacon and treasurer) and Mair Axtell.

How the Ebenezer Cat came to life or How a derelict chapel became the centre of the community

It is the 1990's and Cefn Mawr is in a sorry state; demolition of old cottages has left gaps everywhere in the centre and 75% of the shops are closed. Right at the heart of the main street the Ebenezer English Baptist Chapel, built in 1873 and closed in 1995, has pigeons living in it. But all praise to Wrexham Borough Council who have performed a small miracle and turned things around.

Cefn Mawr gets a closer study and some unique features emerge: the stone quarried here was used to build the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct and the cast iron for this now World Heritage Site came from the foundry in the village. The surviving 18th century cottages are built of local stone and the main street shops, dating back to prosperous Victorian times, are built of red brick. The ready availability of local building materials helped Cefn Mawr to become a historic village. A Townscape Heritage Initiative started in 2006 with funding from many different bodies in Wales and the Heritage Lottery Fund with the aim to restore historic buildings and train people in traditional skills. The Ebenezer Chapel is its flagship: to make it a focal point for the community a public area terrace is created outside the front of the new modern glass and steel entrance, which invites you in to where a café offers drinks, snacks and Sunday lunches. Exhibitions by local artists, meeting rooms for hire, computer classes and supervised after-school clubs for 11-18 year olds give the building new uses for different groups in the community.

Not all is new: part of the original stained glass windows have been repaired and new stained glass windows by Harry White added. The new windows were partly designed with the help of local schoolchildren to illustrate the history of Cefn Mawr.

Local children also helped to illustrate a story book about a cat who lived near the chapel and tells what life used to be in the old days.



Ebenezer Chapel, Cefn Mawr
© Marlies Cope

The Townscape Heritage Initiative aims to raise awareness of Cefn Mawr's unique heritage and to build confidence in its future; and it works. I have seen many inhabitants arriving there to share their old photographs and memories during an exhibition event in the town.

All is not bad news in chapel land!!



Ebenezer Cat Café, Cefn Mawr © Marlies Cope

Ebenezer Cat Café opening times:

Mon – Fri:	9 – 5
Sat:	closed
Sun:	10 - 4

Marlies Cope

Dates for your Diary

The Autumn 2009 Capel Meeting will be held in Holyhead on the 10th October. Details of the meeting, including a programme for the day and a booking form, should be enclosed with this newsletter. Do book early, we're looking forward to a good turn out.

The Spring 2010 meeting will be held at Fishguard in May, the exact date to be

Dyddiadau i'w Gofio

Bydd cyfarfod Hydref 2009 Capel yn cael i'w chynnal yng Nghaergybi ar Hydref 10fed. Mae manylion y cyfarfod, gan gynnwys rhaglen a ffurflen bwcio, wedi eu amgau gyda'r cylchlythyr yma. Gwnewch yn siwr eich fod yn archebu lle yn gynnar. Rydym yn edrych ymlaen at gweld nifer da yna.

Bydd cyfarfod Gwanwyn 2010 yn cael i'w chynnal yn Abergwaun. Mae'r dyddiad union i'w gadarnhau.

New Books

Labour of Love in Liverpool

by D. Ben Rees

Published : Modern Welsh Publications Ltd, 2008.

ISBN : 9780901332905

Price : £15

This book charts the history of the Calvinistic Methodist (Presbyterian) chapels in one part of Liverpool, from an enthusiastic focused beginning in the 18th century to the smaller and more dispersed membership of today - in fact, the story of many a church/chapel writ large. But this story looks set to continue.

From 1770 the influx of Welsh-speaking workers into Liverpool led to the demand for Welsh-speaking chapels. Beginning near the city centre, great courage and determination and the Calvinistic work ethic ensured the success of this Welsh community in creating streets in Liverpool which were like little Welsh villages, culminating in the building of the Webster Road chapel. The revival of 1904 increased the size of the congregations and chapels and a thriving cultural and social life ensued. The chapels were marked by the large number of eminent people in all fields of society from builders to scholars, businessmen and other professional people.

In October 1925 foundations for the biggest chapel were laid in Heathfield Road, further away from

the city centre and from then on capable and gifted ministers led the congregation in manifold activities, worshipping God and serving the population, contributing profoundly to the life of the city to an extent which has perhaps not been fully appreciated.

In 1968 Ben Rees, the author of this book, became minister of the chapel and was to remain there for over 40 years. Inevitably the latter part of the book reflects his many contributions to the life of the chapel and the wider community. Heathfield Road is close to Penny Lane in a residential area of many talented people and a host of activities took place in the chapel and its rooms and schoolrooms over the years - including TV and Songs of Praise programmes. With his WEA and University of Liverpool courses, the new minister strengthened his reputation and influence throughout the area. He led pilgrimages, including 19 to the Holy land, and he even stood unsuccessfully as Parliamentary Candidate for the Labour Party (in Conwy) in 1974 - the only full time Welsh Presbyterian minister to do so in 40 years!

In time, the chapel building developed the usual problems. Damp walls appeared and dry rot appeared in the gallery timbers, a problem never completely eradicated, but the Chapel continued (renamed Bethel) after a struggle to

unite four South Liverpool chapels in 1975, with a good membership. Bethel's catchment area extended to the 'Welsh streets' nearer to the city centre and with this diverse membership it became something of 'an embassy of the Welsh life of Liverpool'. Many visitors have experienced the weekend tours of the Welsh community sites of Liverpool, led from the chapel.

The present volume is the author's 63rd publication since his student days in Aberystwyth, which includes the well-known 'Liverpool Welsh and Their Religion'(1984). Changes in the chapel community led to plans for a new and smaller chapel for the millennium, but which were not successful. Sustaining such a large chapel complex is very difficult and with the chapel house becoming empty and subject to vandalism, and the schoolrooms vacated, there was little prospect of a white knight coming to the rescue. Following Ben Rees' retirement the future of the chapel must have seemed bleak. However, the final chapter of the book informs us that he will remain, for a period at least, as part-time minister of Bethel, Heathfield Road, assuming the title 'Emeritus Minister'. This is surely a not unexpected measure of this exceptional minister.

Furthermore, the reviewer understands that plans are afoot to build a new chapel on a redeveloped site following demolition of the old chapel.

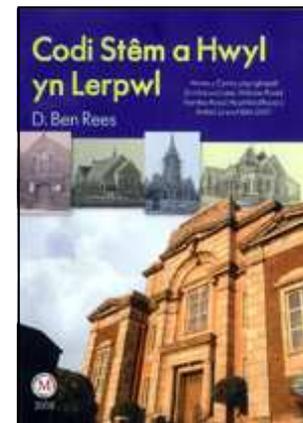
This book, with its many illustrations, is beautifully printed by Modern

Welsh Publications of Liverpool. Typographical errors are rare and we cannot quibble about a report on an exhibition and a One Day School at the chapel to celebrate the 'five-hundredth centenary of the birth of Martin Luther in 1483'. We can only marvel against the enthusiasm of this chapel community!

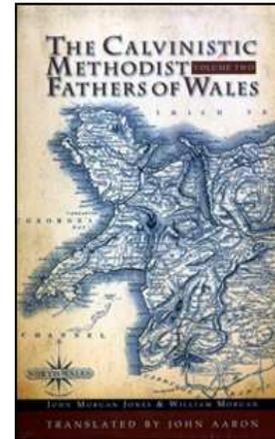
The information included in this 'labour of love' makes it something of a chronicle. The author and the Heathfield Road community are widely known throughout Merseyside and Wales, and many people will relish the details revealed in the book. There are also many appendices with complete lists of, for instance, buildings, chapel members, ministers and other statistics. For those not familiar with the geography of Liverpool, an old street map and a modern A-Z would be handy companions.

Peter Mason

N.B. Gallwch hefyd prynu fersiwn Gymraeg o'r llyfr yma, sef 'Codi Stêm a Hwyl yn Lerpwl'.



The Banner of Truth have now published an English translation of the classic volume, Tadau Methodistaidd by John Morgan Jones & William Morgan. The translation by John Aaron fills two large volumes, and details the Methodist revival that affected Wales between 1735 and 1850. The reference to eye-witness accounts taken from contemporary diaries, journals and letters are particularly useful. Many thanks to Marlies Cope for drawing our attention to this new publication. For those who are interested in purchasing a copy, the ISBN is 9780851519975.



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Os hoffech gyhoeddi rhywbeth yn y rhifyn nesaf o'r cylchlythyr, bydd rhaid i'r eitem cyraedd y Golygydd cyn 30 Mawrth 2010.

If you would like to publish an item in the next issue of the newsletter, it will need to reach the editor by 30 March 2010.

