

Capel



CYMRITHAS TREFTADAETH Y CAPEL
THE CHAPELS HERITAGE SOCIETY

Newsletter 62 Autumn 2013

Cylchlythyr 62 Hydref 2013

Capel in Ammanford.

Capel Spring Meeting, 11th May 2013

Arriving early on the wonderful 'Heart of Wales' train, I went on my way to find Bethany, the first chapel on our day's programme. I had to ask several local people the way, and had to wonder why, when the chapel is so grand, and situated right in the middle of the town, it wasn't that well known. The explanation came later that day when one of the speakers explained that there are still 21 places of worship (two of which are churches) that hold services in the town centre.

On arrival we were given excellent notes on the day's chapels, written by Huw Owen, the day's organiser. We sat down for our first welcome coffee and tea of the day provided by the ladies of Bethany, Presbyterian Church of Wales, and we all had time to catch up with other chapel enthusiasts.

After a brief AGM presided by Lionel Madden, our president, Meirick Davies, our chairman, introduced speaker Glynog Davies, a senior producer with the Tinopolis television company; County Councillor in



Bethany Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Chapel,
Wind Street (NPRN 6645)
Crown Copyright: RCAHMW

Carmarthenshire, an elder, secretary and organist in his church and a guest conductor at singing festivals.

His lecture was entitled 'A Valley of Song promoted by our Churches' and he explained that "Valley of Song" was the title of a comedy film made in 1953, featuring the rivalry engendered by the choral tradition in a south Wales valley community. He emphasised the major role played by chapels in the creation of a strong musical tradition in the south Wales valleys, and also referred to the considerable competition between choirs in the same town and between choirs from neighbouring towns and villages. Children were taught to sing in the local schools and were told by the teacher that "It is as natural for you to sing as it is for you to speak". Coal miners on their way back from work would call at the school to sing with the children.

The tonic solfa was used to teach choir members the musical notes, and all chapel members were expected to be in chapel by 5.00 p.m. on a Sunday evening for an hour's practice before the 6.00 p.m. service. The choirs gave ordinary working class people across Wales and other strongly nonconformist areas such as the northern towns of Huddersfield and Halifax, opportunities to listen to, and take part in performing, classical music of a high standard. An especially important period for local choirs was between 1890 and 1930. These included an appearance at the 1922 National Eisteddfod held at Ammanford which comprised 350 singers, with the male members predominantly coalminers. Their performance of Bach's *Mass in B Minor*, with the words in Latin, is considered to be the first public performance of the work in Wales. The Brynaman choir was required to perform a 'book' each year (e.g. an oratorio such as the Messiah). The Ammanford and Brynaman choirs were re-formed in 1948 and won many Eisteddfod prizes. The Ammanford Choral Society was successful in the major choral competition at the National Eisteddfod in 1958, 1959, and 1960, and again in 1962 and 1963: it had not been allowed to compete in 1961 because of its past successes!

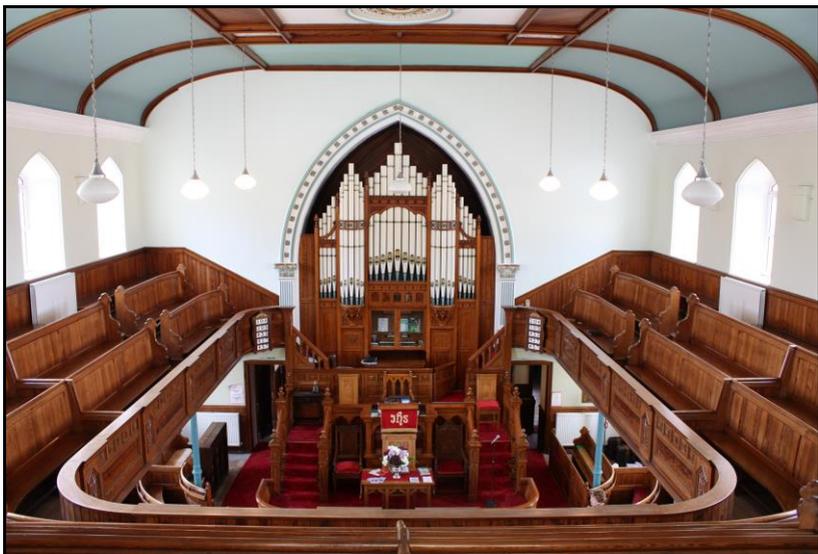
Ammanford was originally known as the village of Cross Inn, its inhabitants earning their living predominantly in agriculture. By the middle of the 19th century the discovery of rich coal seams nearby resulted in it becoming a fast growing mining town, in need of places of worship. The first chapel on the site of the present Bethany opened in 1881, and eminent ministers included the Revd J.T. Job, hymn-writer and chaired bard, and the Revd W Nantlais Williams, an editor, poet, and hymn-writer who served this chapel from 1900 -

1944. We heard that the 1904-5 Revival had such a great influence on him that he decided no longer to compete as a poet in the National Eisteddfod but dedicate his life to preaching and composing hymns.

An increase in membership led to the rebuilding of the chapel at a cost of £12,000. opened in 1929 it seated 850 in the chapel, with 300 in the vestry. This chapel has a stone facade with ashlar details, while the simple interior fitted with oak woodwork, includes a three-sided gallery supported on iron columns. The chapel currently has 40 members.

Along the same street we visited the Evangelical Church housed in the former English Methodist Church, built in 1875. After closure in 1990 it became dilapidated, but was bought and repaired by the Evangelical Church in 2003. At the moment this building is used for smaller meetings, the main Sunday morning service for their 140 members held in the Amman Valley Comprehensive School.

Before any further visits we had a lovely meal in the Red Lion in Llandybie. The afternoon started with a visit to the splendid Gwynfryn Welsh Independent Chapel.



Gwynfryn Welsh Independent Chapel, College Street (NPRN 6639) Crown Copyright: RCAHMW

The chapel was started by 80 members from the Gellimanwydd Welsh Independent Chapel which we visited later in the day. The design was by Henry Herbert and the builder was William Evans who was responsible for many other buildings in Ammanford, including the above Bethany, the county school, Lloyds Bank and All Saints Church. The chapel has a stone front with Gothic details, and the cost, complete with organ, was £2,800. There was seating for 550 and the opening date was August 1903.

We then went on to look at three smaller chapels. The English Baptist Church, whose present building dates from 1910, was previously an academy run by schoolmaster Watkyn Hezekiah Williams, 'WadcynWyn', the hymn-writer, preacher and poet. The English Congregational Church (1913), like the previous chapel, was used to serve the many English-speaking workers from outside Wales who came to work in the coal mines. Finally we looked at the Apostolic Church (1913) built like the previous chapel in Gothic style. The Apostolic Church had 150 chapels in Wales, (mainly in South Wales) and started with the conversion of Daniel P Williams in 1904 in the nearby village of Pen-y-groes.



Apostolic Church, Iscennen Road (NPRN 12744) Crown Copyright: RCAHMW

We walked on to two more chapels. Ebenezer Welsh Baptist chapel was first built in 1850, and extended and renovated several times since. It is an imposing building though with a plain facade. It has an interior with gallery and imposing organ, and two rooms behind used by the children's class and for afternoon services. There are currently 120 members and between 12 and 20 children attend the Sunday School.

Our final visit was to Gellimanwydd Welsh Independent Chapel, often called in its early years 'Cross Inn Chapel', and later 'Christian Temple'. The first built in 1782 and rebuilt, extended and renovated many times since, the chapel is well known for its musical tradition with regular concerts.

The day finished in the church hall, built in 1970, with a very nice tea with cakes. Meirick thanked everyone who had helped to make this visit such a pleasure for those who attended.

Marlies Cope and Huw Owen

Chapels reported to Capel

Yr Hen Gapel, Llechryd, Ceredigion – conversion to residential unit. Further to recommendation of refusal, a revised scheme has been submitted, retaining the gallery/clock, pulpit and Big Seat and the C18 pews. The reinstatement of sash windows is welcomed, although we would recommend that the original Late Georgian design is adopted. Concern still expressed re internal insulation and the loss of part of the attractive forecourt wall/railings.

Mission Hall, Bulmore Road, Caerleon, Newport - sensitive scheme of conversion supported

Salem Baptist chapel, Castle Place, Abergele – conversion to 5 residential units. Scheme preserves the character of the chapel and vestry. Support subject to full photographic survey being lodged with the RCAHMW

Burleigh Mission Hall, Llanthewy Road, Newport – proposed internal alterations. Scheme supported.

Tabernacl, Chapel Street, Conwy – change of use to hotel. External appearance of listed chapel retained intact. Internal layout preserves gallery and main chapel space; some pews retained. This is a well considered application which we are happy to support.

Trinity Chapel, New Dock, Llanelli – change of use to workshop. Support – a preferable scheme to the potential loss of this familiar landmark, which has been redundant for some years. Gallery and organ being retained.

Llyfrau/Books

The Honest Heretique: The Life and Work of William Erbery (1604-1654), John I. Morgans (Talybont, Y Lolfa, 2012), 415pp, paperback ISBN 978 184771 485 5, £14.95.

The Welshman William Erbery was one of the most daring religious thinkers of the seventeenth century. Born in Cardiff and a graduate of both Oxford and Cambridge Universities he was ordained a clergyman in the Church of England. He served as curate in St Woolos, Newport in 1630 and three years later moved to Cardiff as vicar of St Mary's. His Puritan convictions soon brought him into conflict with his bishop and, more seriously, with Archbishop Laud. In 1638 he resigned from the ministry of the Church of England and devoted himself to the formation of the first Independent church in Cardiff. His first book, *The Great Mystery of Godliness* (1639) shows his convictions at that time to be firmly Calvinist and Puritan. In 1643 Erbery, then penniless, secured a post as chaplain in the New Model Army. From then until 1649 he served as chaplain to a succession of regiments. During these troubled years of the Civil War his theological position changed enormously. His ideas became increasingly radical, a tendency which continued until his death in 1654.

Most of Erbery's writings were produced during the last two years of his life. He was a fearless debater and was formally charged with heresy. His response to the charge was later published as *The Honest Heretique*, which John Morgans has aptly chosen as the title for the present work. In this book

Morgans gives a short outline of Erbery's life and an assessment of his thought. The bulk of the book consists of selections from Erbery's writings. Each is preceded by a useful introduction. They show clearly how radical were his views and how much he challenged prevailing orthodoxies on Christian belief and action and also on church government. It is no surprise to read that after his death his family became Quakers, a position to which Erbery himself was surely moving.

Lionel Madden

Adnoddau ar-lein newydd /New Online Resources

England and Wales, Non-Conformist and Non-Parochial Records, 1567-1970 at Ancestry.co.uk

The records of nearly 3 million religious dissenters, spanning 15 generations, have been made available online by the family history website Ancestry.co.uk.

Spanning 450 years, the records form part of the England and Wales, Non-Conformist and Non-Parochial Records, 1567-1970 collection held at The National Archives. The registers detail those who refused to bow to the pressure to join the Anglican Church and feature Methodists, Presbyterians, Baptists and other Protestant Non-conformists, as well as Catholics, Jews, Quakers and atheists. All manner of non-Anglican institutions are represented, from the more established churches to community and international groups like the Reformed French Church and the United Brethren.

Published by Ancestry, the collection is fully-searchable online and features birth, marriage and death records as well as baptism registers, including those of famous religious dissenters such as Florence Nightingale, William Blake and Christopher Wren.

Beginning in **1567**, the records are a unique reminder of the religious diversity that defined British society for hundreds of years, and are of vital importance for those interested in genealogy in the UK. Civil registration of births didn't begin until 1837 and the UK census only survives from 1841, meaning these records allow people greater ability to trace their family line in more detail.

Miriam Silverman, UK Content Manager, from Ancestry.co.uk comments:

“These records are a key staple for those wanting to research their family history prior to the UK’s first census documents.”

“Recording marriages and baptisms outside of the established faith, these Non-conformist registers are also a vital resource that will allow thousands of people the chance to go online and uncover a previously hidden branch of their family tree.

To search the *England and Wales, Non-Conformist and Non-Parochial Records, 1567-1970* collection visit www.ancestry.co.uk

Welsh Newspapers Online/DigiDo, National Library of Wales

Theatre of Memory is a long term programme by the National Library of Wales to digitise and provide free on-line access to printed material about Wales and the Welsh people. The aim has been to digitize as much as possible of the printed material published in Wales, about Wales and the Welsh people and to make it freely available and easily findable to anyone with an internet connection.

Key initiatives to date include:

[Welsh Biography online](#) that holds approximately 5,000 biographies of eminent Welshmen/women who died before 1st January 1791.

[Welsh Journals Online](#) which offers access to a selection of 50 modern periodicals and 300 historical titles in both Welsh and English.

[Welsh Ballads Online](#) that comprises of approximately 4,000 digitised ballads, mainly dating from the 18th and 19th centuries.

[Welsh Newspapers Online](#) which is the National Library of Wales' entire holdings of pre-1910 Welsh newspapers: a magnificent resource of everyday knowledge estimated to contain over 1 million pages and 200 newspaper titles covering every corner of Wales. The beta search currently available gives access to approximately 420,000 pages from 40 newspaper publications

generally up to 1910 and will grow as more publications are added during 2013.

Additionally the library's collections of wills, maps, manuscripts, archives, paintings, photographs and drawings have also been digitised.

The digiDo project is a follow on project by the Library to allow businesses in Wales to make commercial use of these digital assets under a free license. It aims to provide enterprises in West Wales and the valleys with a tailored service that will help them access the largest repository of bi-lingual digital cultural heritage data relating to Wales.

Newyddion/News

Congratulations

Sincerest congratulations are due to *Capel* chairman, Meirick Lloyd Davies, who was inducted as a member of the Gorsedd of bards at the National Eisteddfod at Denbigh (Blue Robe). This was primarily because of his contribution to his local community.

Building Grants

In other news, three chapels are among nine historic buildings set to benefit from £240,800 of Welsh Assembly funding. Announced by John Griffith, Minister for Culture and Sport, the Welsh Government grants will range from £7,000 to £40,000 and will pay for essential repairs and restoration work. He said 'These grants will ensure that some of our most important buildings are restored and maintained for the enjoyment of future generations.'

Distributed via Cadw the nine buildings include:

Saron Chapel, Tredegar which is currently in use as a Community First centre and is set to receive £25,000 towards the removal and repair of external render

Y Hen Gapel, Gwynedd which is still in use as a place of worship and is associated with Michael D Jones, co-founder of the Welsh Colony in Patagonia. Set to receive £30,000 to assist with a range of general repairs

Capel Aberfan, Aberfan which now forms part of the Aberfan disaster memorial. The vestry is in use from time to time, but the chapel is closed due to safety issues. The £39,000 will support repairs which will allow the chapel to be used once again for worship and as a community resource.

St Marys the Virgin, Montgomeryshire's only surviving timber-frame church will also be a beneficiary of a £40,000 grant.

'The future of our past'

On the 18 July 2013, the Welsh Government released a consultation on proposals for the historic environment, 'The future of our past', and invited responses from organisations, groups and individuals with an interest in the historic environment of Wales to respond with comments by the 11 October 2013. This document presents, for public consultation, proposals for improvements to current systems for the protection and sustainable management of the Welsh historic environment and the delivery of historic environment services on the national, regional and local level.

Whether you are a heritage professional, a third sector volunteer or just someone with an interest in Wales's past, your views on the consultation proposals are important.

The consultation document is now available as a pdf from the [consultation pages of the Welsh Government website](#). You will also find a response form there that you can save to your computer and complete at your leisure.

The three-month consultation will close on 11 October 2013. Full details on how to respond are available in the consultation document and on the response form.

Meetings

Members will notice a small increase in the price of our Autumn meeting. The previous figure of £15 has not risen in over 10 years but cost such as meals have risen and we have to be generous in donations to the chapels we visit.

Capel Autumn meeting: Oswestry, 12th October 2013

Capel Spring meeting: North Pembrokeshire and Llangloffan, 10th May 2014

Correction: The spring 2013 newsletter had a photograph on the front page incorrectly labeled as Bethlehem. This was in fact was Peniel Methodist chapel.

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