



CWM DULAIS HISTORICAL SOCIETY CWMDEITHAS HANES CWM DULAIS

Newsletter - Cylchlythyr

September 2020



A Chapel story **Bethany English Baptist Church** Dulais Road – Seven Sisters

by Joy Howells

Over a hundred years ago, there were three substantial, grand looking Chapels in Seven Sisters; all with large congregations. Salem, a Welsh Chapel, had numerous English speaking members prompting the Deacon at Salem to suggest the group needed a chapel of their own.

The English group began holding services in Salem vestry but by 1907 their services were held at the local Miners' Reading Rooms in the village. They persevered there until Bethany Chapel was built in Dulais Road in 1914. This was not a grand looking chapel but it became well loved (see photograph above).

It must have been a glorious day for the group's members to see Bethany doors opening and welcoming all (June 10th, 1915).



An early photograph of the congregation

During this time the Secretary's duties had been carried out by Mr Wm Jones and in the meeting after these Services it was decided that he retain this office.

Mr Aaron had held the position of Treasurer but as he was about to leave the district, Mr Evan Jones was elected.

Three Deacons were also elected by ballot at this meeting, the successful ones being Messrs Wm Jones, E. Hackford and Evan Jones.

Mr Curtis, Town Clerk of Neath, presented the Church through Mr Williams, the

Schoolmaster with a Bible for use in the Services whilst Mrs Evans Bevan gave a beautiful Communion Service. Both were heartily thanked.

A call was given to the Rev. Geo. Hopkins of Crumlin to become the first Pastor of the Church

which he accepted and he commenced his Ministry on July 7th, 1907

Mr Wm Aaron who had rendered many Services to the church was leaving the district and on December 17th he was presented with a pocket Bible for his kindness.

The Members continued to hold Services in the Reading Room until the advent of Rev. A. Hamer as Pastor in May, 1914. His coming created a greater interest in the Church and inspired the Members with more zeal for the cause.

Mr Hamer's enthusiasm and energy for the Master's work permeated to the rest of the Officers with the result that efforts to build a Church were renewed and on November 26th, 1914 the foundation stones for a building of its own were laid.

June 10th, 1915 was a red letter day in the annals of the Church when the new Chapel was opened with many friends near and far contributing in various way to a most inspiring and successful day.

During the pastorate of Mr Hamer the cause flourished; the services being well attended and the Band of Hope, Sunday School and Young People Service all in a very hopeful condition and a source of great strength to the Church.

Unfortunately, for the Church the Pastor was called to a Higher Service having died as he wished doing the Master's work on December 12th, 1917. This was a great loss for the Church and District as he was greatly beloved by everyone in the neighbourhood.

After the death of Mr Hamer, until the following November the Church was without a Pastor. Mr T.G. Rees of Port Talbot was invited to take the oversight of the Church. He consented to do so and laboured there until December 1922.

From that date until May 1924 the pulpit was filled by 'Supplies' from various Churches in the district. The Rev. E.P. Scanes was then invited to become a Pastor and he remained until October 1926 when he left for a Pastorate in Gloucestershire.

Since that time the Church has been without a Shepherd. Like all Churches in industrial areas in South Wales, it has been hard hit particularly owing to industrial decline. However, amidst all its trials and difficulties it has worthily maintained its previous work in Seven Sisters and still continues to support needs in the neighbourhood. The services on Sundays were being taken by 'Supplies' from other Churches in the district who readily came forward to assist whilst mid-week meetings are carried on by the few who have remained faithful.

The present energetic Secretary is Mr Wm Wonnacott with Mr D.J. Davies as Treasurer; the Diaconate consisting of Messrs D.J. Davies, G. Owen, W. Wonnocott and W. Lawrence.

I joined Bethany in 1986 at harvest time. By this time all original members apart from four had passed away. Mrs Webber was the most respected Secretary and it was a foregone conclusion that Mrs Sandra Frost would follow in her footsteps. Sandra had been a member since childhood, was married at Bethany and fortunately was prepared to take on the role.



Butcher's cart & Staff outside Bethany Chapel

At that time most of the speakers were lay preachers; I was surprised that people I had always known were so confident in the pulpit. Some preachers travelled many miles, for example, from Carmarthen and Pontypridd while

90 year old Pastor Sparkes happily drove from Ton-Mawr. He was an enthusiastic speaker, always leaving us with food for thought. In another case some years ago, a preacher walked ten miles from Neath to Bethany, held three services, had dinner with one family, tea with another and then after the evening service walked ten miles back to Neath. That was dedication!

The beautiful Sankey¹ hymns were always sung with much love and praise.

In time, grants became available and improvements were made to the little chapel. A car park was needed at the front; hence the gateway was widened to facilitate access for the many members and visitors who now had cars.

There were lots of activities at the chapel at that time – book sales, coffee mornings, harvest suppers and evening meetings.

In 2003 we had Korean visitors, from the Swansea chapel, who were welcomed whole heartedly. They brought a small orchestra, a small choir and a brand new baby, Erin. The visitors were still visiting the chapel when we celebrated her first birthday! Their evenings with us were a delight. A little later, we received a group of Brazilian youngsters at Bethany. Their testimonies were heart-warming and uplifting as were those of visitors from Italy, Germany, France Spain and St Lucia. How did all these people find our little chapel??? They were joyous times at our chapel.

Unfortunately, we had other problems at Bethany. The old church was feeling her age. Sandra's father, Dyson, was invaluable assisting in the care and repair at Bethany. The Will of God, the capabilities of Dyson and the efforts of Sandra kept Bethany open to celebrate it's centenary. This proved a lovely occasion and the chapel was full.

Eventually, Bethany had to close its doors with its members being cordially welcomed back to Salem Chapel where strangely it had all begun so many years before. Nonetheless, the achievements and endeavours of all those people who contributed to its life and service is greatly to be admired.

Reference

¹ *“During the last three decades of the 19th century, Ira D. Sankey partnered Dwight Moody in a series of religious revivalist campaigns, mainly in North America and Europe. Moody preached, Sankey sang; as part of his musical ministry, Sankey collected hymns and songs, and in 1873 published in England the original edition of Sacred Songs and Solos, a short collection of 24 pages containing some of the favourite hymns that Sankey had introduced during the first Moody and Sankey evangelistic tour of Britain, in 1873–1875.”* (Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_hymns_composed_by_Ira_D._Sankey, accessed 3/10/2020)

Obituaries

It is with great sadness that we report the passing in September of two members of the Society.

Margaret Amrar is fondly remembered as one of the founding members of the Society. As Post Mistress at Dyffryn Cellwen she was well known in the valley and with her local knowledge contributed much information to the Society. From its infancy, as Treasurer, she managed the finances of the Historical Society with dedication and rigour. Margaret will be greatly missed .

David Lewis a more recent and 'younger' member, leaves his contribution to the Club through his well-informed and interesting questions and comments to speakers at meetings. Unfortunately, he had struggled with illness in recent times but will be missed when Society activities revive again.

Our condolences go to family and friends at this sad time.

Quiz answers (From August '20 Newsletter)

1. **Godre'r Rhos**, Treforgan, Creunant



2. **Salem**, Seven Sisters



3. **Onllwyn**. *Set back on Main Road near old Post Office. No further details known.*



4. **The Weighbridge**, Banwen. *Built into footpath opposite former Pant y Ddrainen Hotel (that was). Installed to assist weighing of miners' individual annual 13 ton house coal allowance at 1 ton per lunar month.*

5. **Tabor Chapel**, Penscynor, Cilfrew



6. **Coelbren Church** *Now called Capel Coelbren, with connections to Neath Abbey.*

7. **St. Davids**, Banwen. *Part of Banwen & Onllwyn Cemetery?*

8. **Moriah Baptist Chapel**, Coelbren. *Now a dwelling.*



9. **Church bells**, Creunant (St. Margaret's.) *Connections with Neath Abbey. Formerly known as Capel Creunant*



10. **Roadside wall, of former Sion Chapel & Burial ground**, Seven Sisters.
Very near to former Seven Sisters Hotel (mentioned in August Newsletter article & on map.) At foot of Station (Railway) Terrace, where Club meets in Band Room.



11. **Church bells**, Seven Sisters. (*St. Mary's*)



12. **Salem Chapel**, Creunant.
Brynawel Terrace



I am particularly grateful to George Evans and Eifion Williams for additional details regarding some answers.

Tim Fearnside