



Ymddiriedolaeth Addoldai Cymru Welsh Religious Buildings Trust

NEWSLETTER 2

SUMMER 2007

Welcome to the second newsletter of the Welsh Religious Buildings Trust, it includes some recent news about the Trust and about forthcoming developments.

We hope you will enjoy it!

This edition is being widely distributed free of charge, as was the first. Future editions will only be sent to Friends of the Trust. If you are not yet a member and would like to receive copies of the next newsletter, please become a Friend of the Trust!

If you would like to support us and help us with our work, membership of the Friends is open to all and costs £10 a year: a membership form and bank standing order form are enclosed with this newsletter. Or alternatively contact the Trust's office.

And remember, we as a Trust are merely custodians of the buildings on behalf of the wider community and future generations.

Open Days
see page 2

Can you help?
Libanus needs funds!
see page 4



Bethania April 2007 • photo: Chris Evans, Acanthus Holden Architectcs

Bethania, Maesteg

A programme of works has been undertaken at Bethania to try and safeguard and stabilise the building and stop its condition deteriorating. Repairs have been undertaken to the roof, guttering and leadwork, and front pediment with the aim of stopping water getting into the building, and additional grills and polycarbonate sheeting have been installed to protect the windows, making the building more secure. The cost of the work has been £48,000, supervised by architects Acanthus Holden, and the contractor was Stafford Construction Ltd – whose office is only a few doors down the street from Bethania in Bethania Street. However, this work is merely scratching the surface of what is required at Bethania – the main repairs to the fabric of the building are estimated to be just under a £1,000,000.

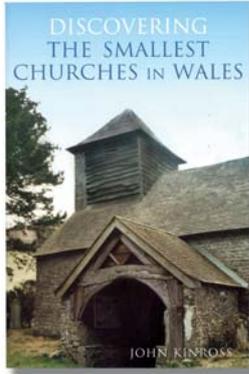
We are also tackling the infestation of Japanese Knotweed *Fallopia Japonica* in the chapel burial ground which will need to be done over three years.



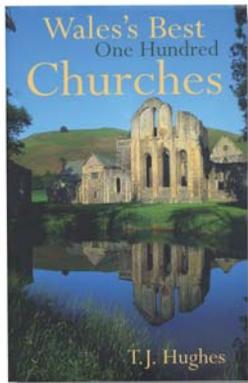
Neil Sumner, Chair of WRBT
having a closer look
photo: Chris Evans,
Acanthus Holden Architectcs

Book reviews

Two new books have appeared in recent months.



Discovering the Smallest Churches in Wales, by John Kinross (Tempus, 2007), a £12.99 paperback, is an illustrated guide to a personal choice of 62 interesting small Anglican churches and chapels in Wales, with the single addition of the Friends' Meeting House at Dolobran. Despite its title, the book includes details of WRBT's activities as an appendix.



Wales's Best One Hundred Churches, by T.J. Hughes (Seren, 2006), a £9.99 paperback, includes 14 nonconformist chapels amongst the author's "best 100". This is a substantial work which deserves to be in a larger format, if only to better appreciate the high quality colour photographs, and Hughes' insightful introduction is a joy to read. Although none of the WRBT's current and imminent acquisitions make the top 100, it is a pleasure to note that all but one are mentioned in the text. At £9.99 paperback or £19.99 hardback, an absolute bargain.

Neil Sumner

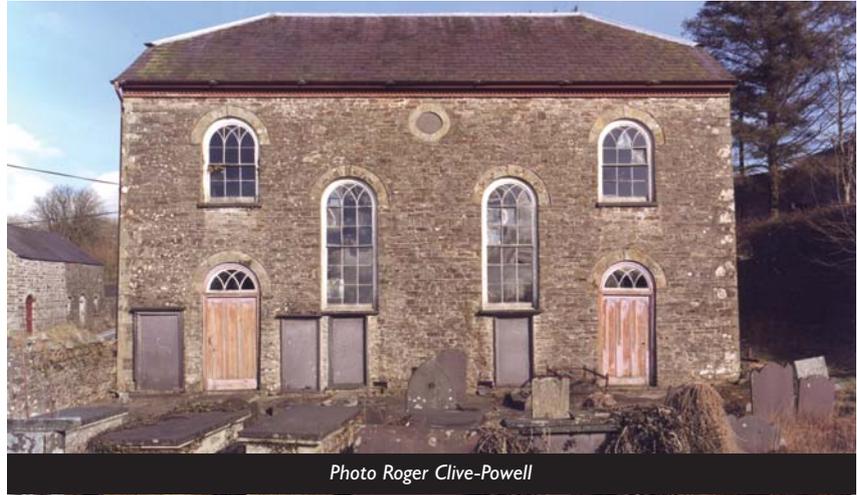


Photo Roger Clive-Powell

Yr Hen Gapel Llwynrhydowen

A new significant acquisition being transferred to the care of the Trust is Yr Hen Gapel, Llwynrhydowen, Ceredigion. Because of its importance to the Unitarian movement in Wales and to the radical cause, this is an outstanding chapel historically, perhaps the most important that has, so far, been brought to the attention of the WRBT. Architecturally, it is also an excellent example of a two-storey, long-wall chapel, so typical of the

early nineteenth century but now surviving in only limited numbers. A Charity Commission Scheme for transfer to the Trust at less than market value is in hand – which is one of the ways in which buildings may be transferred to the Trust.

There will be more on Yr Hen Gapel Llwynrhydowen in the next Newsletter.

Open Doors: European Heritage Days

Two of the Trust's buildings, Libanus (Llansadwrn, Carmarthenshire) and Bethania (Maesteg), will again be open during this year's annual Open Doors days, as part of European Heritage Days.

Libanus: open 10.00 a.m - 4.00 p.m. Saturday 15 September.

Bethania: open 10.00 a.m - 4.00 p.m. Saturday 22 September.

European Heritage Days are co-ordinated by the Civic Trust for Wales. Telephone 029 2048 4606. See www.civictrustwales.org

Preachers Past

'Performing from the Pulpit' – is a project by the School of Welsh at Cardiff University, studying dramatic preaching in 19th and 20th century Wales. The project is collecting material regarding preachers and sermons, and is offering a prize for the best letter presenting recollections of preachers (by 1 October 2007). Please contact: Professor Sioned Davies, School of Welsh, Cardiff University, Humanities Building, Colum Drive, Cardiff, CF10 3EU. Tel: 029 2087 4843. E-mail: DaviesSM@cf.ac.uk

Capel: The Chapels Heritage Society.

Capel's Autumn Meeting will be held at Colwyn Bay on 13 October. Contact: Dr Peter Mason, 61 Brookhurst Ave, Bromborough, Wirral, CH63 0HS, E-mail: peter.mason18@btopenworld.com

Bethania, Maesteg

Bethania, Maesteg, was acquired by the WRBT in 2006, the largest chapel it has acquired to date. Commodious and confident, it was designed by the Cardiff-based architect Sir William Beddoe Rees in a mixture of French Beaux-Arts and Art Nouveau, and completed in 1908 at a cost of £6,000. A Baptist cause, the chapel has a notable baptistry on a raised dais in front of the pulpit; it is still in good working order, but although it drains well after use, we have not yet been able to ascertain whither the water flows! A fine new organ was installed at a cost of £500 augmenting the chapel's rich musical life.

The cause at Bethania dates from the arrival in Maesteg of the Revd. Thomas Hopkin from Hirwaun in 1828, the year of his ordination, to serve a small but growing Baptist community associated with the new ironworks. He hailed originally from Hay; the Baptist cause in Maesteg, therefore, traces its ancestry to the more distant gathered church of Olchon valley Baptists on the Herefordshire/Monmouthshire border rather than that of John Miles at Ilston on Gower. Ministering at Bethania for 17 years, the Revd. Hopkin oversaw the building of the first chapel on the present site in 1832 at a cost of £60 and presided over the enlargement of the chapel in 1840. He lies buried in the churchyard at Llangynwyd.



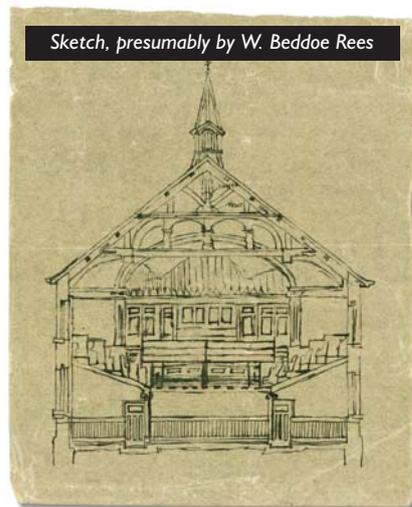
Bethania – newly completed

The Revd. H. W. Hughes (Arwystl) was installed as minister of the recently enlarged chapel in 1848. He was required to devote much time and energy over the next few years to preaching tours in order to pay off the debt incurred by the rebuilding, leaving Maesteg to take charge of a Liverpool congregation in 1851. In that year, the Religious Census recorded 700 attending the evening service on a “boisterous” Sunday at the end of March.

He was succeeded by Revd. Richard Hughes (1820-1885) who had been baptised in the Llynfi at the age of twenty by the Revd. Thomas Hopkin. The baptism took place in the month of November! His ministry witnessed the rapid expansion of the church with successive rebuildings: one associated with the 1859 Revival, and another in 1878. Whit Sunday festivities and preaching festivals became established features of the chapel calendar at this time as did choral and dramatic performances. A volume of the minister's sermons was published bearing the name of the chapel, *Pwlpud Bethania*. Revd. Richard Hughes is buried in the chapel burial ground, currently infested by Japanese Knotweed, a problem that the WRBT is tackling as a priority.

Revd. Edward Jones (Iorwerth Ddu) (1852-1931) came to Maesteg from Troedyrhiw in 1894. (See picture below, inset on picture of Bethania) Ten years following his arrival, Wales was convulsed by the revival associated with the preaching of Evan Roberts. During the 1904-5 Revival 158 new members were baptised at Bethania; in the first twenty years of Revd. Edward Jones' ministry there were 651 baptisms at the chapel. It was in this atmosphere of revival that William Beddoe Rees was commissioned to design the present chapel.

In September 1925, the Baptist Union assembled at the newly opened chapel with its long-serving minister as President. A history of the cause had been prepared for the occasion by Samuel Davies, chairman of the history committee, to which Dr Tom Richards, famous historian



Sketch, presumably by W. Beddoe Rees

of Welsh Puritanism and at that time history master at the local high school, acted as secretary. Baptists from all over Wales flocked to the Union meeting at Maesteg, arriving by bus and train. From the Chair of the Union, Iorwerth Ddu cast a wary eye over the political and social turmoil of the day.

It was that very foment that had



contributed to the 1904-05 Revival that paradoxically, was also to ensure the decline in chapel attendance that accelerated in the years following the Great War, in the course of which many members of Bethania chapel lost their lives.

The late John Ackerman provides an engaging cameo of one of Bethania's ministers, practising his sermons in the garden of the manse, Bethania House, and, on the occasion of the first train excursion to the seaside to

be organised from Maesteg on a Sunday, railing against such sinfulness:

Catching sight of one of his own flock, in a voice of summer thunder before the storm, he spoke: 'If you go on this outing to Porthcawl on Sunday you are going to Hell, Bryn Bevan! To everlasting Hellfire!' 'It's all rightdon't you worry, I've got a return ticket', Bryn confidently replied, as the packed and joyous train departed.

A steady decline in membership,

accelerating in the second half of the twentieth century, led to the closure of the chapel in 2004.

David Barnes July 2007

Further Reading:

John Ackerman *Up the Lamb* (Bridgend, 1998) / Hywel Teifi Edwards (ed.), *Llynfi, ac Afan, Garw ac Ogwr* (Llandysul, 1998). / Geraint H. Jenkins, 'Doc Tom' Thomas Richards (Cardiff, 1999) / *Journal of Welsh Religious History*, Vol 4; 2004.



Capel Libanus - AN APPEAL

Can you help?

Please help us raise money to pay for work at Libanus. We are appealing for funds in order to be able to undertake essential work to the building as soon as possible.

Libanus, located near Llansadwrn, Carmarthenshire, is a simple Baptist chapel with a magnificent interior. Listed Grade II*, the present building

was built in 1841, extended in the late 19th century. It closed its doors in 1998, and was acquired by the Trust in 2003.

We have to meet specific match percentages and thresholds of funds in order to proceed. So far we have raised, or are confident of raising £87,000. Some of the funding schemes can only be applied to retrospectively, some only at tender stage, and most only before work is started. Nobody said it was simple! We need at least another £20,000

to be able to start on the first phase of work – repairs to the roof, doors and windows. Funding applications are still being submitted to various bodies, and replies awaited to others. But the response has been much slower and more patchy than anticipated.

Please help us raise money to pay for this work. All donations of any size will be very welcome! A pound donated by a tax-paying individual could be worth £1.50 as funds are released from other sources – from Gift Aid and recovered VAT (Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme)

Please send your donations to the Trust Manager at the Trust's offices at 10 Heol y Dŵr, Penygroes, Caernarfon, LL54 6LR.

We have not been able to trace any photographs of Libanus before 2000 - strangely enough. If you know of any documentary material - including photographs of Libanus, we would be very grateful to hear from you.

The Trust receives grant aid from Cadw, the Welsh Assembly Government's historic environment division, to support a significant part of its day-to-day running costs. The Trust also currently receives funds from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation towards core costs.

For more information please contact us. We would be very pleased to hear from you!

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