

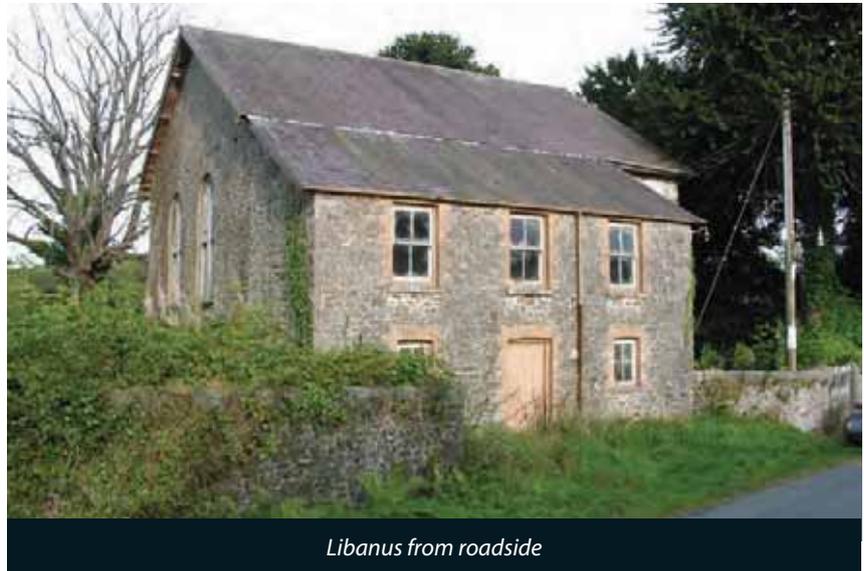


It is a common refrain in this economic climate – that we have to do more with fewer resources – and it is almost an impossible task. As a Trust we have to be so careful where we devote our limited financial and staff resources. Keeping our buildings maintained, tidy and secure is paramount, but do we seek small grants for repairs or do we develop large ‘flagship’ applications? Do we try and seek more core day-to-day funding? Do we invest more time into developing community involvement? Do we seek more publicity for the Trust? Do we try to influence public policy? There is so much to do!

Again, thank you for your support - it is appreciated! We welcome local friends and supporters at all our various projects.

If you are not already a Friend – would you 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. Alternatively, contact the Trust's office. To those of you who are already members – why not pass on the membership form to someone you think might be interested?



Libanus from roadside

Roof repairs at Libanus

A first phase of long awaited repairs at Capel Libanus is commencing in September 2012. Located in the hamlet of Waunclyndaf near Llansadwrn, Carmarthenshire, Libanus is an important grade II* listed redundant Welsh Baptist chapel. Built in 1841 it is an early example of a rural, gable-fronted, two-storey Nonconformist chapel, and has a fine, and little altered interior. The main repairs during this phase will be to the roof, and will include re-slating pitched roofs; renewing defective fascias, barges and soffits; renewing the guttering and downpipes; localised consolidation of the tops of the chapel walls; and strengthening of the ceiling structure (in the roof space).

As a result of the works, we will have a weatherproof building. This first phase will be followed in due course by further phases of work

to the exterior and interior of the building, including any suitable alterations, as funds allow.

The timing of this work has been governed in the last 18 months by having to wait for confirmation of various grants, and by the presence of bats and barn owls in the roof space of the building. Work that risks disturbing bats requires a licence, issued by the Welsh Government.

The work is being undertaken by David A Siggery Ltd, under the supervision of our architects Alwyn Jones Penseiri Architects. Funding has come from Cadw, the Pilgrim Trust, Carmarthenshire County Council (Welsh Church Fund), The Vronhaul Llandinam Charity, the Manifold Trust, the E & G Morgan Trust, the Allchurches Trust and the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme. The Trust is very grateful to all funders.



Ceiling repairs at Hen Dŷ Cwrdd

Major repairs at Hen Dŷ Cwrdd

The second phase of repair works to Hen Dŷ Cwrdd, Trecynon, Aberdare, the Trust's grade II Unitarian meeting house, was completed in September 2012.

The works included extensive repairs to the lath and plaster ceiling, replacing sections of cornice and finding a solution for the badly cracked ornamental ceiling rose, which was consolidated using traditional techniques. The ceiling and sections of the wall were also decorated, and the ceiling light fittings were overhauled. The front gable wall was treated for dry rot, to arrest any further development of the infestation.

Funding, for which the Trust is very grateful, came from Biffa (Biffa Award, Landfill Tax),

Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council (Welsh Church Act Fund), the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme, the Friends of the Trust, and private donations. The contractor was John Weaver Construction, working under the supervision of our architect, Richard Spencer Dean.

Further phases will consist of work to the burial ground and boundary walls, and to overhaul services in the building such as electricity and heating, as well as any changes that will make the building more practical for use by the community. The Trust looks forward to working with local people and organisations to develop the Hen Dŷ Cwrdd project to enable it once again to become an asset to the community.

A visitor to Hen Dŷ Cwrdd

Hen Dŷ Cwrdd received a visit from Miss G. Margaret Edwards, and her nephew, Mr Keith H Edwards, both of Cardiff, in late 2011. Miss Edward's connection to Hen Dŷ Cwrdd is via her parents, Annie Matilda Llewelyn and Charles E. Edwards, who were married at the chapel in 1906. Christine Moore, our Development Officer, had the pleasure of Miss Edwards' and Mr Edwards' company when they called by. Miss Edwards is the granddaughter of Rees Llewelyn (1851-1919) of Bwllfa and Merthyr Dare Steam Collieries (1891) Ltd., who is one of the major figures in the history of coal mining in the Cynon Valley. The Llewelyn family continued to have strong links with Hen Dŷ Cwrdd for many years. It is one more illustration of the network of extraordinary links that Hen Dŷ Cwrdd as a cause has in the area.



Wedding of Annie Matilda Llewelyn and Charles E. Edwards 1906

Book launch at Hen Dŷ Cwrdd

A new book is being published about the history of the cause at Hen Dŷ Cwrdd by the noted local historian David Leslie Davies MA, *"They Love To Be Dissenters" - The Origins and History of Hen Dŷ Cwrdd, Aberdare, 1650 -1862.*

Hen Dŷ Cwrdd (The Old Meeting House) is the oldest Nonconformist place of worship in the Aberdare district. It was established at Trecynon in 1751 as a meeting-house for 'Protestant Dissenters' bearing the designation 'Presbyterian' – a loosely applied term at the time.

The origins of the congregation reach back to the era of the English Civil War during the 1640s, and to the age of the Puritan republic of the 1650s. It grew out of a Dissenter meeting known to have assembled by 1650 at an isolated spot on the mountainside between Aberdare and Merthyr Tydfil.

When this original meeting drew to an end in the mid-18th century, it divided into three successor congregations. One of these established itself at Hen Dŷ Cwrdd, Trecynon.



David Leslie Davies giving a talk at the 2011 Open Doors day at Hen Dŷ Cwrdd

At first, this new congregation was of mixed religious views. From the time of the Rev. Thomas Evans (also known by the nom-de-plume 'Tomos Glyn Cothi'), minister from 1811, the congregation adopted radical religious ideas summed up in the term 'Unitarian'. Thomas Evans is one of several significant figures to have played a part in the history of this chapel - and in the cultural and industrial history of the district and of Wales as a whole. Among these are Owen Rees, head of an influential 18th century family of religious and business leaders; Edward Evan (bardic 'mentor' of Iolo Morganwg); Iolo himself; several Chartist activists; Griffith Rhys Jones ('Caradog'); the historians Rees Jenkin Jones and W. W. Price; and the coal-owning Llewelyn family of Bwllfa.

In this new title – the first written about the chapel in English - David Leslie Davies traces the origins of the congregation to the mid-17th century and concentrates on its history thereafter until 1862, when the cottage-like meeting-house of 1751 was demolished and replaced by the present structure.

This is a natural point at which to 'pause' the story of the chapel since hardly anything has been written in English about its earliest years and the Welsh-language history published in 1951 to mark the chapel's bicentenary focuses mainly on the period after completion of the new building. However, leading figures in the chapel's subsequent history are noted and numerous appendices and photographs illustrate the story of an outstanding place of interest. The book is being launched at an event at Hen Dŷ Cwrdd on Saturday 22 September 2012.

Yr Hen Gapel Llwynrhydowen

The Trust has made the ceiling secure temporarily, and reconnected the electricity supply so that occasional events can be safely held at Yr Hen Gapel, as plans are developed and funds raised for a full programme of repairs. The tradition of holding a candlelit carol service on Christmas Eve was reinstated last Christmas, and will hopefully become an annual event.



Candlelit service Christmas Eve 2011

A public meeting was held at Yr Hen Gapel during the Open Doors event on Sunday 18 September 2011, and the general feeling of the meeting was the importance of keeping the character of the chapel space, with a corresponding interest in interpretation and understanding what the building stands for. Whilst there was support for holding various events and concerts, most enthusiasm was expressed for the use of Yr Hen Gapel to remember and to interpret history, with emphasis on the Smotyn Du and the fight for suffrage and social fairness. The evictions that occurred locally and subsequent emigration was one distinct theme, with an emphasis on looking outwards for links and connections in other places e.g. various USA connections, as well as nearer to home. The well-known links to Dylan Thomas and Frank Lloyd Wright were, of course, mentioned.



Bethania Maesteg © Crown Copyright: Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales

Bethania funding bid

During the first half of 2012, trustees and staff have been hard at work developing a large-scale application for Heritage Lottery funding for Capel Bethania, Maesteg (Welsh Baptist, listed at grade II*). The work has been led by Christine Moore, our Development Officer, and Alwyn Jones of Alwyn Jones Penseiri Architects. The project has been developed with the local community and will include the conservation and repair of the original fabric, fixtures and fittings of the chapel auditorium to the highest standards and to the original 1908 condition. To meet the needs of new users, it will also be sensitively adapted through minimal interventions, including the sensitive incorporation of a removable stage to enable a wide range of performance possibilities.

The attached schoolrooms and ancillary rooms are less architecturally significant and, along with an extension on land to the rear, these will be converted into office space, meeting rooms, dressing rooms, rehearsal rooms, local history society archive, café/bar, bookshop, kitchen, and toilets. A substantial collection of documents and artefacts dating from 1908 together with knowledge and memories gleaned from surviving members of the congregation will be used to interpret the story of Bethania and Nonconformity, the role of the Welsh language, and their place in the cultural, educational and social life of the local area and Wales.

If the bid is successful, development work will be undertaken during 2013, capital works in 2014-5, with the project continuing until 2019. The Trust should know how its first round application has progressed by October 2012.

Future For Religious Heritage conference

A conference will be held in Venice between 14-17 November 2012 on the subject of "Extended Use of Religious Heritage Buildings".

Future for Religious Heritage is a network working to protect religious heritage buildings across Europe. Member organisations include charities, governmental institutions and university departments from over 25 European countries.

FRH acts as a link between practitioners and policymakers and as a platform for communication across countries, cultures and religions, exchanging knowledge and experience of common issues.

FRH is registered in Belgium with offices in London and Brussels, and was established in 2010.

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The Trust receives grant aid from Cadw, the Welsh Government's historic environment division, to support a significant part of its day-to-day running costs.

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

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