

Capel

CYMDEITHAS TREFTADAETH Y CAPELI
THE CHAPELS HERITAGE SOCIETY



TAFLEN WYBODAETH LEOL
LOCAL INFORMATION SHEET

5

RHOSLLANERCHRUGOG

CYFARFOD BLYNYDDOL

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING



Capel Mawr, Rhosllanerchrugog

THE CHAPELS OF RHOSLLANERCHRUGOG

Describing Rhosllanerchrugog, Edward Hubbard in his *Buildings of Clwyd* notes its 'great concentration of chapels'. In the 1905 Royal Commission report on places of worship there were twenty-one: Welsh Wesleyan; English and Welsh Calvinistic Methodist; Primitive Methodist; English and Welsh Congregationalist; and English, Welsh, and Scots Baptist. The population according to the 1901 census was 9,414.

Rhos is a large industrial settlement in the ancient parish of Ruabon which grew to supply labour to local coal mines and quarries and later brickworks. The report of the Education Commissioners of 1847 describes terrible living conditions: 'I have never beheld anything to equal some of the cottages at Rhos at regards confinement, filth and unfitness for human abode'. However, at visits to Sunday Schools they reported them full of 'persons of all ages respectably dressed and well conducted'.

It has been said that the essence of Rhos is to be found not in the place but in its people. Rhos is proud of its distinctive dialect, its tradition of coining nicknames, its working-class institutions such as its 'Stiwt', and the emphasis it places on education, which means that no school seems complete without a teacher from Rhos on the staff. The strength of nonconformity in the village is an important factor in the distinctiveness of Rhos. Methodists founded a cause there in 1765, nonconformity prospered throughout the nineteenth-century, and Rhos was a major centre in the religious revival of 1904-5. A famous line of cynghanedd goes 'Beibl a rhaw i bobl y Rhos' [For Rhos people: a Bible and a shovel].

We shall be visiting five chapels.

Bethlehem, Welsh Independent Chapel, Hall Street (Capel Bychan)

Students from the Independents' academy in Wrexham began preaching in Rhos in 1810 and although there was only a very small congregation were able to lease a house as a meeting place. Their first chapel was built in 1812 on the present site from stone 'of every size and type' with a stone floor and measuring 13 x 10 yards. An increase in members necessitated the addition soon afterwards of a small gallery. The name Capel Bychan dates from this period. By 1836 there were approximately 140 members and a new chapel was built. This was opened in June 1839 at a cost of £950. This was a far larger building of 54 x 45 yards and had a gallery all round. In about 1862 a further extension was needed and an organ installed.

In 1889 it was further reorganised, the front re-modelled, and 200 additional seating places created at a cost of £1,500. It re-opened in September 1890. In 1891 there were more than 1,000 in the congregation with over 350 members and over 600 attending Sunday School.

In 1902 the red brick schoolroom at the rear was built, the chapel having purchased and demolished two houses for access (Ll. Davies, contractors, cost: £3,000). The main room could accommodate 500 with a stage, upper meeting room and three classrooms. In 1926 the chapel was re-roofed and an extensive interior refurbishment undertaken in 1928 when old box pews were replaced by the present ones.

Dr Caradog Roberts was organist here from 1904 until his death in 1935.

Penuel, Welsh Baptist Chapel, Market Street

In 1856, the Baptists, who have long recorded history in Rhos and were associated with other buildings before building a chapel of their own, purchased a plot of land seventy-four yards

square on Rhos Common. Work began on building a chapel with a fund of £180, but money soon ran out and work stopped until 1859 by which time another £500 had been collected. The chapel, measuring 20 x 18 yards was completed in that year at a final cost of £1,250. In 1873 windows damaged in a storm the previous year were replaced, and another floor constructed, making steps from the porch into the chapel necessary. It re-opened in April 1874.

The refurbishment begun in 1889 and completed by 1891 saw the construction of the new front of 'exuberant brick and terracotta facade'. The comment in a chapel history that before this time the chapel looked like a potato market '*marchnad datws*' implies that the new red Ruabon brick front was installed to give the chapel greater dignity. The same refurbishment provided a new front to the gallery. In 1898 the chapel was extended and a schoolroom added. In 1907 an organ was installed under the supervision of Rhos musician and composer, Dr Caradog Roberts. The chapel was again renovated in 1950.

Seion, Welsh Baptist Chapel, Bank Street

This chapel which was formed by members of Seion was opened in January 1884 with a membership of thirty-two who had met previously in a meeting-house converted from two cottages. The cause prospered and a house and land were purchased adjacent to the chapel. In July 1990 many of the congregation assembled with picks and crow-bars to demolish the chapel and clean the bricks for re-building. The new chapel by J G Owen was built by Messrs Jones & Evans, Oswestry. It was re-opened on 16 June 1901 and cost £2,500; it had 166 members. The organ was purchased in 1952.

Bethel, Welsh Presbyterian Chapel, Bank Street

This cause's first chapel was built in 1859 at a cost of £300 although there had been meetings in the neighbourhood previously in the homes of members of Capel Mawr, the mother chapel. It was opened in August 1860, but by 1973 a further £300 was required to extend and refurbish the chapel. In 1893 a complete renovation was required costing £650 and at the same time an adjacent piece of land was purchased to enable future expansion. By 1903 the increase in number of the congregation required a new chapel to be built, and this building, described by Edward Hubbard in *Building of Clwyd* as 'slightly Arts and Crafts', was provided at a cost of £2,500.

Jerusalem, Welsh Presbyterian Chapel, Brook Street (Capel Mawr)

This cause formed a church in 1770 with local members of Adwyr Clawdd, Coedpoeth. They first met in an old building in Stryt y Gof, later in a barn and subsequently in a purpose-built or possibly an adapted building measuring 6 x 5 yards. In 1770 the first chapel on the site was built, measuring 12 x 8 yards. It had an earth floor and a heather-thatched roof. This was demolished c.1785 and a larger chapel built. The cause flourished and by 1824 there were 800 members with a Sunday school attendance of between 300 and 400. By 1830 this had risen to around 800.

In 1837 the chapel was extended to its present size, hence the familiar name *Capel Mawr*. The builder (? and architect) was Revd W Pierce, Holywell, who worked on the chapel during the day and often preached locally at night. By 1842 the membership had increased to 300. Revd J Pritchard, responsible for the alterations in 1863, boasted that the gallery was the steepest in the denomination, and that the *set fawr* was visible from every seat. During a later refurbishment, the chapel took the opportunity of purchasing adjacent land and in 1894 the vestry / schoolroom was built for £1,200.

