

“If the art of architecture could cry just now, Welsh chapels would be its tears”
Sir Simon Jenkins, “The Times”

DISCOVERING CHAPELS IN LLANDUDNO

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Non-conformity in Wales

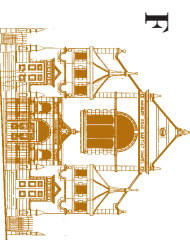
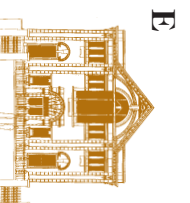
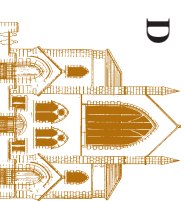
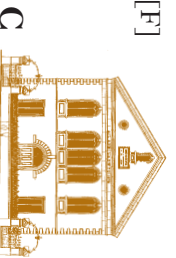
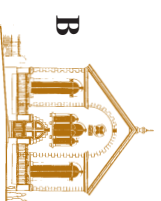
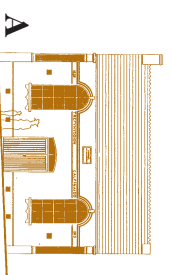
The Reformation in Europe gave rise to a persistent demand for more freedom in worship and in Wales the dissenters gathered secretly from about 1600 to hear the Word of God preached in their own language and without the restrictions of the church ritual. When William Wroth founded the first independent church in Llanfaches, Monmouthshire in 1639, it ignited a spark which ran over the mountains ‘like fire in the thatch’, in spite of severe persecution from the church authorities. The name ‘non-conformist’ was given to those church ministers who refused to conform to the Anglican Liturgy as required by the Act of Uniformity, 1662, and they were evicted from the church. Persecution of these Nonconformists (or Dissenters as they were also called) and the congregations who followed them continued until the Toleration Act, 1689 under William of Orange. From that time on chapels began to spring up all over Wales, the many differences of opinion over doctrine and practice giving rise to a great variety of denominations. Probably upward of 6000 chapels were ultimately built in Wales, becoming in many small towns and villages the heart and soul of the community they served and representing a national spirit of independence. Today, from having been the essence of much of the cultural, political, educational and religious life of Wales for over 300 years, the chapels are in decline, and many stand neglected and forlorn, while others have already been demolished. Their historical importance in preserving the Welsh language and national culture is probably immeasurable and it is in recognition of this that this series of leaflets has been produced.

Further Reading: Anthony Jones, Welsh Chapels (revised edition 1996, Alan Sutton Publishing Ltd)
Gwyn Davies, *A Light in the Land: Christianity in Wales, 200-2000* (2002, Bryntrion Press)
Capel, Welsh Chapels: A Guide to the Denominations (2005 CAPEL)

Styles in Chapel Architecture

In the 17th and 18th centuries the earliest chapels were often converted barns and cottages. The impetus for purpose-built chapels came from the people, and the styles they chose are often considered to represent a unique form of ‘primitive’ art, even though many were also designed by professional architects. These are some of the styles you may encounter.

- 1800: Early purpose-built with long-wall façade or square-plan [A]
- 1830s: Auditorium chapels with gable-end façade [B]
- 1840s: The Classic Style [C]
- 1850s: The Gothic Revival [D]
- c1880: Early Mixture of Styles [E]
- c1890: High Victorian Extravagance [F]



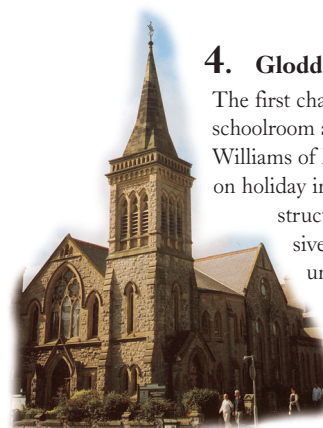
1. Tabernacl Welsh Baptist Chapel

The Baptists, being in 1813 the first Nonconformists to build a chapel in Llandudno, opened Tabernacl in 1875. It was extended in 1902 by G.A.Humphries to incorporate the schoolroom, the ionic- pillared portico and the new main entrance. A splendid classical sandstone building, it boasts several firsts: the first in town registered to solemnise marriages, with the first resident minister and the first Sunday School. Inside it has galleries extending unusually around two transepts and the baptismal tank lies higher than usual above the 'set fawr'. There is an almost unique 'drainage' dressing room for baptismal candidates after their immersion. A former minister, the Revd Lewis Valentine, became well-known as a founder of the Welsh Nationalist Movement, suffering imprisonment for his activities in protest against the building of the RAF bombing school near Pwllheli in 1936.



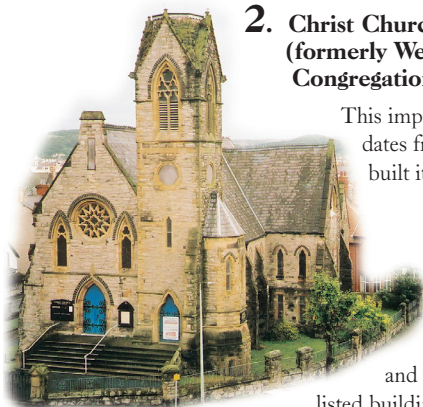
4. Gloddaeth United Church (formerly English Presbyterian)

The first chapel on this site was a 'tin tabernacle' (1880), but as the congregation grew, first the schoolroom and then the present church was constructed in 1891. It was designed by T. G. Williams of Liverpool, copied from a church seen and admired by one of the congregation while on holiday in Italy - the name of the Italian church is now forgotten. This church is a remarkable structure, which is more obvious inside than out. The 58 by 55 foot space beneath the massive conical-shaped roof, which is spanned by interior beams in cartwheel formation, is uninterrupted by any supporting pillars. It has an unusually large pulpit and circular pewing in an 'acoustic' curve. It can still be enlarged to include the schoolroom by rolling back some magnificent wooden roller shutters. The church still possesses the original architect's plans.



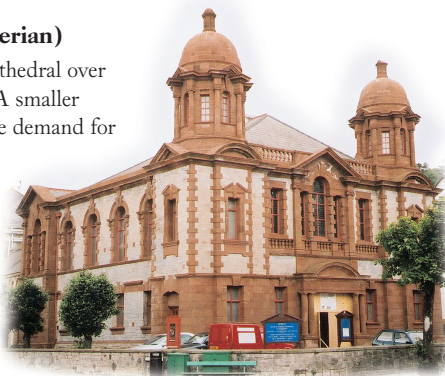
2. Christ Church UR Church (formerly Welsh then English Congregational)

This imposing Gothic style building dates from 1858. When it was first built it was described as 'the prettiest church in town'. Its spire was removed after storm damage. Inside are 18 very beautiful stained glass windows. Its congregation now worships in Gloddaeth United Church and it has recently been sold as a listed building.



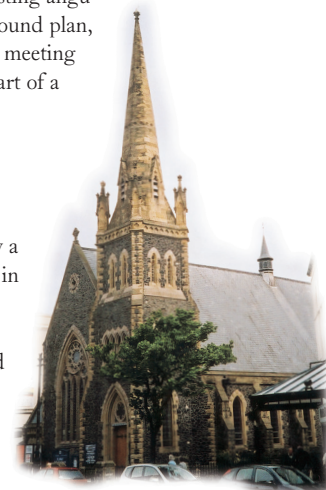
3. Seilo United Welsh Chapel (formerly Welsh Presbyterian)

Seilo, with its huge sandstone cupolas, rises like a great baroque cathedral over the surrounding buildings, although it is not actually much taller. A smaller building on the site made way for this chapel in 1901-5 because the demand for an organ required a larger building. It was designed by G.A.Humphries with a traditional interior including a magnificent gallery. It has two schoolrooms at the back. The total seating capacity of over 1000 makes it a popular venue for large gatherings. It has recently been chosen to accommodate combined services for the Welsh-speaking Nonconformists in Llandudno, leaving some other chapels redundant.



6. St. John's Methodist Church

This church was built by the Wesleyan Methodists in 1866, aided by a grant from the 'Watering Places Fund' which helped build churches in new holiday resorts. The church was renovated in the 1960s when a bricked up window behind the altar was reopened and stained glass fitted. Two windows in the transepts have fine stained glass produced by the Halkyn stained glass studios in North Wales. The western 'Wesley' window is especially noteworthy. The church has a fine original hammer-beam roof.



5. Emmanuel Church (formerly Ebeneser Welsh Methodist Chapel)

This chapel, built 1909 by W. Beddoe Rees, is a round peg in a square hole. At first sight only its domed roof suggests that the inside is circular and was once furnished with exceptionally



fine curved pews - alas, no more. It was one of the most beautiful of chapel interiors, but its recent history has been problematic. Closed when the lease expired in 1972, it was rescued by a businessman to be converted into a cultural centre. The Emmanuel Christian Centre (Assemblies of God) then took over the lease and restored the chapel to its religious purpose. Inside, the original pillars, circular dome and circlet of round windows may still be seen, along with two fine stained glass windows. The unusual round interior leaves interesting angular spaces in the corners of the square ground plan, which serve as passageways, kitchen and meeting rooms. The schoolroom is at the back, part of a previous building.

