Capel

CYMDEITHAS TREFTADAETH Y CAPELI
THE CHAPELS HERITAGE SOCIETY

Taflen Wybodaeth Leol 19 *Local Information Leaflet*
Caerdydd *Cardiff*

For those who still regard Cardiff as a recent event the religious legacy of the area is astonishingly rich. But really this fact should not come as a surprise for the area now covered by Cardiff and its surroundings has enjoyed a continuous Christian presence second to none amongst British cities. Even in the long distant period before the Norman invasion, when most of Britain had succumbed once again to paganism, there was a strong Christian presence here in the form of monasteries at Llandaf and Llandough. We do not know for certain when these two Celtic monasteries were founded, but it is probable that both had been established before the end of the sixth century. Both became important centres of the Early Christian church in Wales and both have remained religious centres down to this day, although only their ornate crosses remain as visible relics of their Celtic past.

Until the end of the eighteenth century, however, Cardiff was no more than a very small and sleepy port and market town that had hardly changed since the Middle Ages. The town's ancient street layout was still enclosed by walls and was overlooked by the lord's castle. Then, with the opening of the Glamorganshire Canal in 1794 - linking Merthyr Tydfil's burgeoning ironworks to Cardiff's diminutive port - all was to change. The canal ran along the line of the old town ditch outside the town walls, thus helping to preserve the medieval street pattern to this day, and was an instant success. Docks and railways followed. The town's population rose from less than 2,000 in 1801 to 164,333 in 1901. Within a century Cardiff was completely transformed into the metropolis of Wales and the greatest coal port in the world.

Not surprisingly, the parish churches and chapels were soon found to be insufficient for the spiritual needs of the growing population. Initially, it was the Nonconformists who made the most strenuous efforts to fill the vacuum and by 1851, when a religious census was carried out, there were already thirty nonconformist chapels in the Cardiff area, almost all of which were new buildings. Bethany Baptist was the first of the new chapels. It was erected in 1807 on the site of what was later to become James Howell's store. By 1821 it was felt necessary to have separate Baptist chapels for each language group and so Tabernacl was built in The Hayes specifically for Welsh-speaking members. An early