

# Capel

CYMDEITHAS TREFTADAETH Y CAPEL  
THE CHAPELS HERITAGE SOCIETY



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**Taflen Wybodaeth Leol 19**  
**Caerdydd**

**Local Information Leaflet**  
**Cardiff**

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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

minister at Tabernacl was the great Christmas Evans - one of the giants of the Welsh pulpit during its golden age - who preached there between 1828 and 1832. Two more Welsh-language chapels were opened in the same decade. Seion was erected for the Calvinistic Methodists in 1827 in Trinity Street (afterwards the site of the old Library), and in the following year Ebeneser was built for the Independents on the future site of Debenham's store.

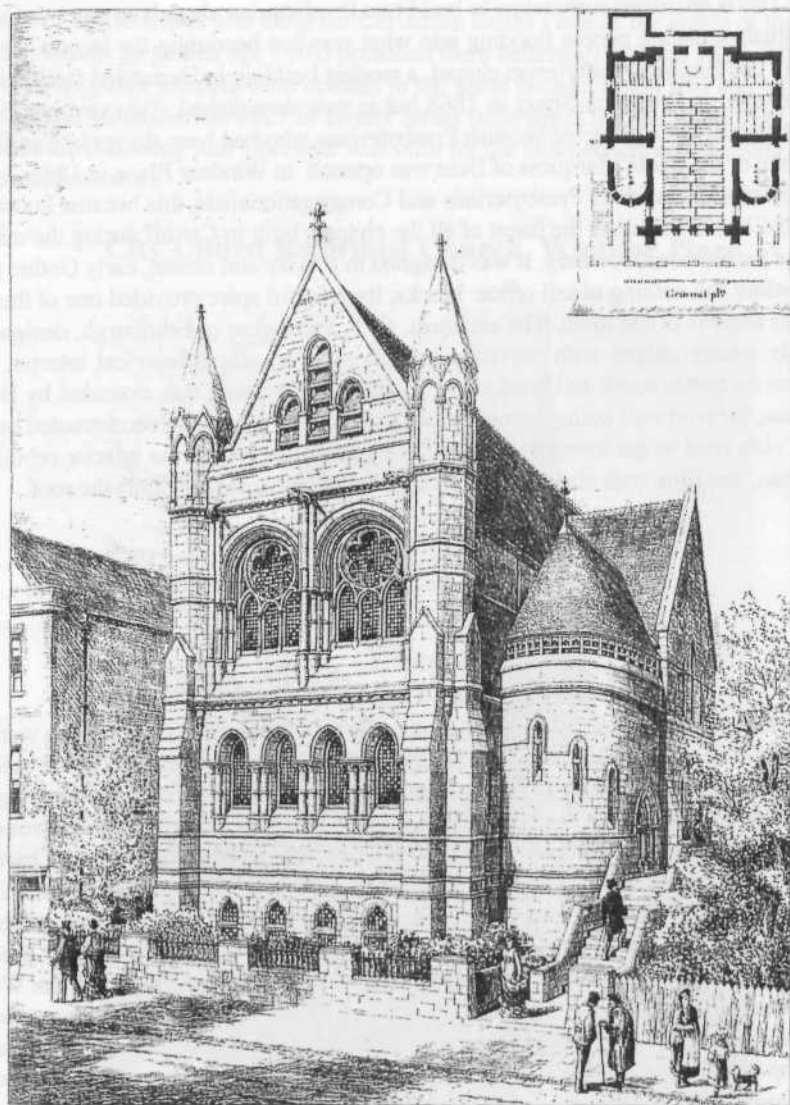
### **City United Reformed Church, Windsor Place**



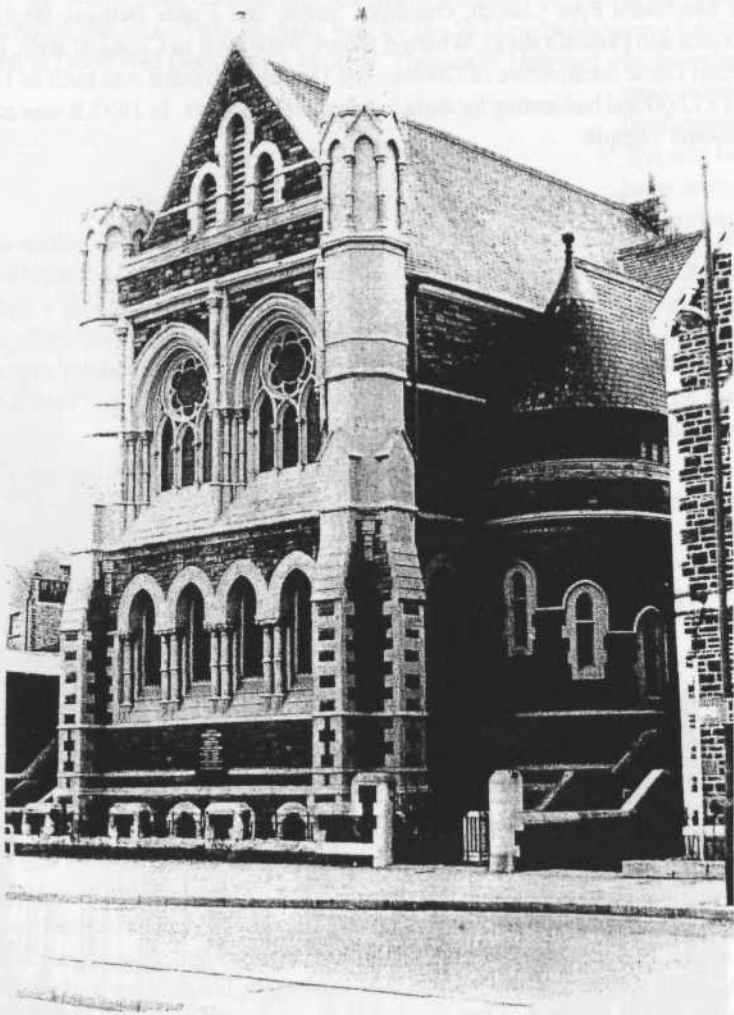
In the 1860s decisions were taken to build two Presbyterian chapels to meet the needs of English-speaking people flooding into what was fast becoming the largest town in Wales. The English Presbyterian chapel, a modest building in Decorated Gothic style, was opened in Frederick Street in 1868 but is now demolished. Two years earlier, a chapel founded by a group of Scottish Presbyterians who had been drawn to Cardiff in the wake of the Scots Marquess of Bute was opened in Windsor Place in 1866. Later, after the amalgamation of Presbyterians and Congregationalists, this became known as the City Church. Probably the finest of all the chapels built in Cardiff during the middle years of the nineteenth century, it was designed in a spiky and ornate, early Gothic style and, before the coming of tall office blocks, its graceful spire provided one of the few vertical accents in the town. The architect, F. T. Pilkington of Edinburgh, designed a roughly square chapel with curved sides, giving it an amphitheatrical interior, and porches on north, south and west sides. In 1893 the building was extended by Bruce Vaughan, the west wall being moved outwards and the west porch reconstructed on the south side next to the tower. It was gutted by fire in 1910 and the interior rebuilt by Vaughan, this time with cherubs and jutting hammer-beams to support the roof.

### **Pembroke Terrace C. M., Churchill Way**

Some of the themes of High Victorian Gothic architecture found echoes in the work of local chapel designers. One such was Henry C. Harris, a Penarth architect who made a notable contribution to Welsh architecture before his premature death at the early age of thirty-four. He designed his first chapel, Bethania, St Mellons, in 1869 when he was only eighteen years old. His best chapel, however, was Capel Pembroke Terrace, Churchill Way, which replaced the old Seion in Trinity Street and was a complete break away from Welsh Nonconformist tradition when it was built in 1877-8. The design was exhibited at the Royal Academy the following year and gained a cheap snigger from *The Builder* which commented that, 'at this rate of progress in ecclesiastical architecture, the Welsh Calvinists will hardly know themselves soon'. The robust French-Gothic front towers above the pavement and is flanked by octagonal turrets and semi-cylindrical stair-towers rising up from the basement. The interior, with its daring (for a chapel) red-brick walls and cream and black diaper-work, is planned in the form of a capital T, with the stairs and lobbies slotted into the angles, instead of the customary box shape. The chapel was converted to an architect's office in 1983.



*Pembroke Terrace chapel as shown in the architect's perspective illustration*



*Pembroke Terrace chapel in a late 20th century photograph*

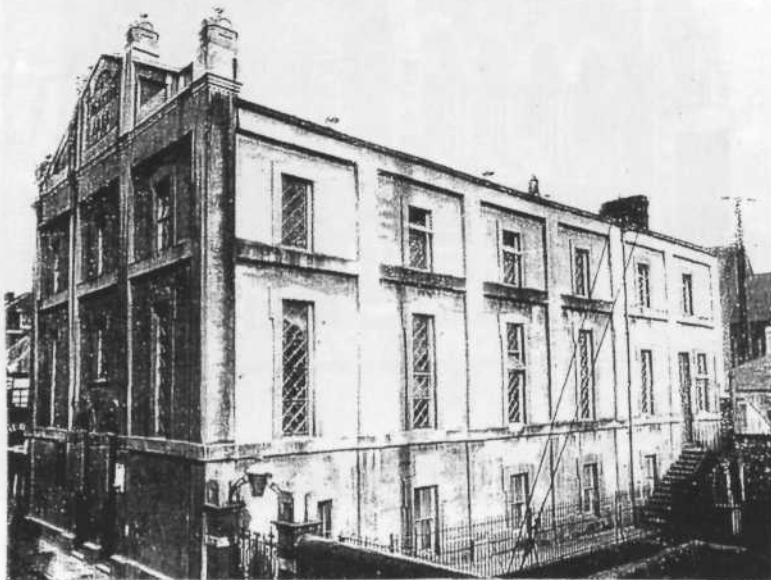
### **United Methodist, Guildford Street**

Cardiff architect John Hartland designed three chapels in the city. Two of these, the United Methodist Free Church, Guildford Street, and a new Bethany Baptist (later incorporated into Howell's store), Wharton Street, were built in Classical style, based on the ancient Doric architecture of Greece. The United Methodist was built in 1863-4 at a cost of £1,600 and had seating for eight hundred worshippers. In 1895 it was converted to a Masonic Temple.

### **Friends' Meeting House, Charles Street**

Towards the end of the nineteenth century the number of religious persuasions in Cardiff became more and more various and this is reflected in the architecture of their buildings. In 1888 the Society of Friends (or Quakers) rebuilt their meeting house in a style utterly different from St David's Roman Catholic Cathedral opposite (opened a year earlier in 1887). The domestic-looking Friend's House, exemplifies the Quakers' opposition to formality so well and fits so neatly and unassumingly into the street facade that it is difficult, at first, to recognise it as a religious building at all.

### **Ebeneser (Annibynwyr), Charles Street**



*The original Ebeneser, demolished in 1976*

Built in 1855 for the English Congregationalists at a cost of £2,400, the chapel was taken over by the Welsh Independents and renamed 'Ebeneser', following the demolition of their original chapel in 1976 to make way for the St David's Shopping Centre. It was designed in Decorated Gothic style by R. G. Thomas of Newport who included a large



west window with flamboyant tracery. The side buttresses have arched bases to prevent water collecting. The building is notable for the variegated collection of stones used in its construction - brought back to Cardiff from all over the world as ballast in coal ships. The school-room was added in 1872.

*The English Congregational church, now Ebeneser*

### **Tabernacl (Bedyddwyr), The Hayes**

This is another of John Hartland's Cardiff chapels. It was built in 1865 in only six months to replace earlier chapels (1821 and 1842) on the same site. Externally it has an agreeable Regency air and remains one of Cardiff's finest and most original chapels despite the lack of columns and pilasters usually found in larger Classical buildings. The rusticated ground floor with its range of four round-headed doorways in the centre and open stone balustrade above forms a podium to the rest of the building. The main part of the upper floor is set back behind the balustrade and has four great windows echoing the rhythm of the doorways below, while the two staircase wings on the same plane as the ground floor are neatly emphasised by small pediments over the windows.



*Y Tabernacl in the early 19th century*



*The present-day Tabernacl*