

Capel

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THE CHAPELS HERITAGE SOCIETY



Taflen Wybodaeth Leol **25** *Local Information Sheet* **Rhyl**

In the late eighteenth century Rhyl was not a town or even a village, although the name Rhyl was in being. The town was Rhuddlan and Rhyl was an area of farms and scattered dwelling houses; it was from Rhuddlan that Methodism came to the area. At that time the area towards Rhuddlan was known as Penisa'r Rhyl and the area towards the sea Penucha, and this distinction in later years affected both the Nonconformists and the Anglicans.

About the year 1780 a man named Robert Owen and his wife came to live in a farmhouse called Pen-y-ddeuglawdd, which although ruinous can still be seen in Pendiuffyryn Road. They were members of the Seiat in Rhuddlan and went regularly to the church meeting every Thursday. Mr and Mrs Owen started holding religious meetings in their home and when they moved away the meetings continued at Edward Jones' house Terfyn, with a very successful Sunday school being held in some of the farmyard buildings. Over time the congregation grew, the work of the Sunday school was a success and as the Calvinistic Methodists had been a separate denomination since 1811 a call was made for a chapel to be built and on 28 September 1824 a lease was signed for the erection of '*a good and substantial edifice chapel or meeting house of stone or brick ... to be used for the worship of Almighty God ... by the Society or Congregation of Protestant Dissenters commonly called the Calvinistic Methodists holding or professing to hold the doctrinal Articles of the Church of England as Calvinistically interpreted*'.

Although there is some doubt, 1826 is generally accepted as the date of the opening of Bethel Chapel. By the early 1840s it was obvious that the building was too small and there was the first sign of disagreement over where the new chapel should be built. Those in favour of remaining on the same site at Penisa were successful over those who wanted to build in Penucha and the new chapel

was opened in 1843. The building still stands and is now the Wellspring Christian Centre in Vale Road.

The Methodists, Wesleyan and Calvinist, were the first to open churches in Rhyl. The Anglicans had to continue to go to Rhuddlan to worship until 1835, when Holy Trinity was opened.

In 1847 the railway came to Rhyl and this formed a more obvious barrier between Penisa and Penucha. In years to come it was Penucha which developed as Rhyl grew as a seaside resort.

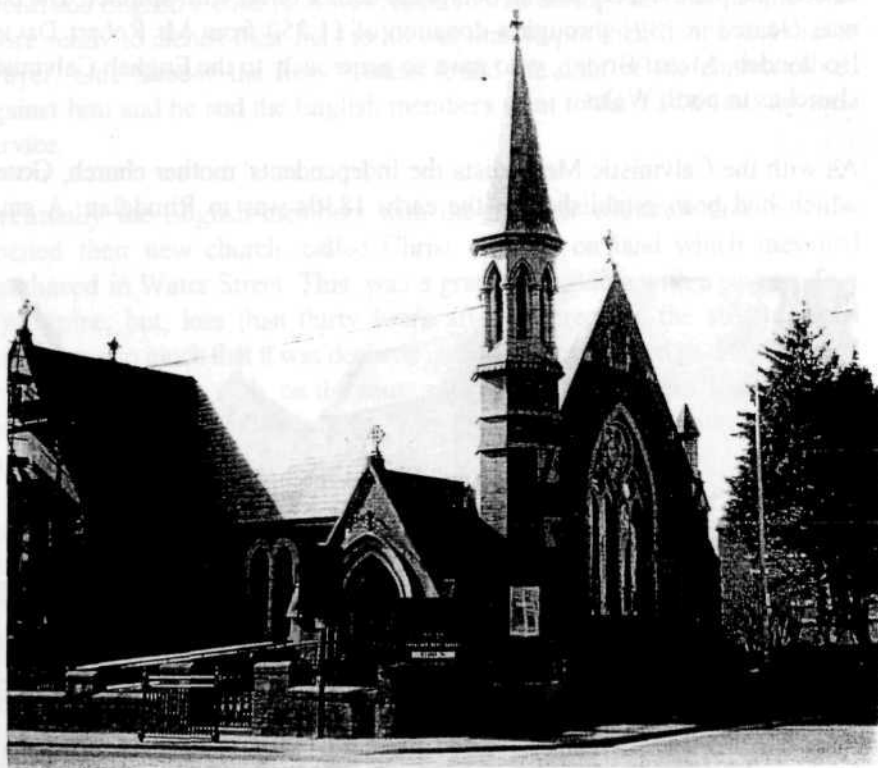


Clwyd Street

Once again a call came for the Calvinistic Methodists to build a new chapel in Penucha and Clwyd Street Chapel was opened in 1855. Bethel was kept open for a Sunday school, prayer meetings and occasional sermons and was reopened as a church in 1867 as there were many who lived in the area who did not feel comfortable in the more fashionable part of town. This problem also affected the Wesleyans and Anglicans who opened in Penisa St Ann's Church.

According to the Vicar "The church was being built here to minister to the wants of the poorer parts of Rhyl".

The Calvinistic Methodists later opened Princes Street (English) church, Warren Road, (now Salem Christian Centre) and two missions, Millbank and Morfa Bach.



Princes Street

Clwyd Street opened in May 1855 and appears to be the only chapel designed by W.Owen of Llanrwst. Thin and simple Gothic, in a hard brick with stone dressings. The extension of 1873 in the same style, containing the schoolrooms, was designed by Richard Davies. Cadw has called it an excellent example of chapel architecture, with a complete, richly detailed interior.

There was a call for provision for English worship and attempts were made to have occasional services in the Town Hall. Two members of Clwyd Street took charge and from 3 June 1877 services were held in the Clwyd Street Lecture Hall - a Sunday school, Band of Hope and mid-week services. In 1881 they were given permission to erect a zinc building on land owned by Clwyd Street for their use. This continued until Sunday 10 May 1885 when the English Presbyterian Church was opened in Princes Street with 52 members. This chapel, also by Richard Davies, is built in red brick with stone dressings, lancets and plate tracery and an octagonal corner turret with spirelet. The debt was cleared in 1891 through a donation of £1,250 from Mr Robert Davies, Bodlondeb, Menai Bridge, who gave so generously to the English Calvinistic churches in north Wales.

As with the Calvinistic Methodists the Independents' mother church, Gosen, which had been established in the early 1830s was in Rhuddlan. A small



Christ Church

congregation came together in Rhyl in 1839 and met in a cottage called Pen y Gyrten. By 1841 they were strong enough to open a chapel in Windsor Street but by 1851 needed a larger chapel and a second one was built in Queen Street and has been called Carmel from 1901. From the beginning the congregation had been a mix linguistically and services were held in Welsh and English but after a new minister, the Rev. Aaron Francis, arrived in 1854 there was a large increase in the English congregation which caused disagreement between the Welsh and English elements. It was reported that during this time people were more ready to clench their fists to hit out than to put their hands together in prayer. One Sunday the Rev. Francis found the door of the church closed against him and he and the English members went to the Town Hall for their service.

Eventually the English members with the minister withdrew and by 1858 opened their new church, called Christ Church, on land which they had purchased in Water Street. This was a graceful building with a seventy foot high spire, but, less than thirty years after its erection, the structure had deteriorated so much that it was declared unsafe. It was decided to demolish and replace the building with, on the same site, the present Christ Church, whose foundation stone was laid in January 1885. Since 1973 Christ Church has been a member of the United Reformed Church.

It is built in a Gothic style with an asymmetrical façade with a short saddlebacked tower between the chapel and the lecture-hall fronts. The architect was Owen Edwards of Rhyl, who also designed the United Reformed (formerly Congregational) Church at Abergele Road Colwyn Bay (also 1885) and St. Thomas Presbyterian Church of Wales, Vale Street, Denbigh, which opened in 1880. The Church was recently restored with a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Carmel Independent Chapel of 1851 also has an asymmetrical front, round arched with circles in the tracery and a small tower with concave-pyramid roof. The Rev. Dr. R. Tudor Jones was one of the children of Carmel and he had the sad task of taking the last service at his old church when it closed in 1992. Most of the congregation joined Clwyd Street. It is heartening that in Rhyl at least, the Baptists, Independents and Presbyterians have faced reality when there have been problems with buildings and have come together to worship as one.

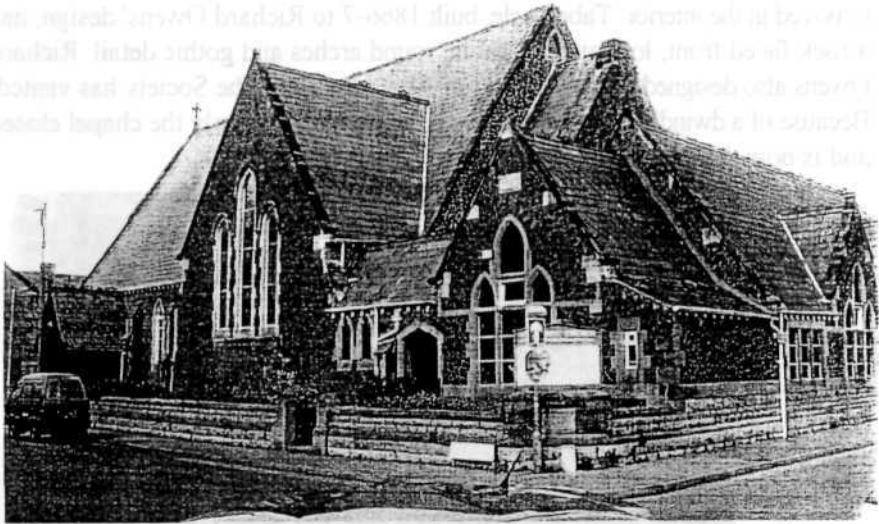
After some heartache, not knowing what would become of their old church, the former members were pleased with the care taken by the new owner when the ground floor was converted into retail use. The former main door was moved from the centre to the tower side of the building and the stonework given a thorough clean.

The Wesleyan presence in Rhyl goes back to 1802 when their first service was held as with the Calvinists at Penydeuglawdd and they met there until 1811. They built a small chapel in 1815 and another in 1836. They also felt the pull to Penucha as time went on and built Seion in Sussex Street in 1853.

Penisa developed with terraces of housing for railway employees; this coupled with the fact that the more elderly members living there found the bridges difficult led to the first Soar Chapel being opened in Sisson Street in 1868.



Carmel



Bath Street Methodist

English Services were also held at Soar for non Welsh Speakers until they moved to Sussex Street. They later moved to Bath Street where the present English Church is situated. This church built in 1867-8 is by C.O. Ellison and has polygonal masonry, with lancets and a spiky timber porch.

Brunswick in Brighton Road, built in 1873-4 for the Welsh congregation, was the largest Methodist church in the area. It was round-arched, the front had a tall pedimented centre.

The final Wesleyan Church to be built was the new Soar in Sisson Street in 1895, the members feeling that the old chapel was uncomfortable and damp. The earlier 1868 chapel still stands in Sisson Street and is now the Apostolic Church.

Because Brunswick faced heavy repair costs it was decided to close it in August 1987 and the congregation joined up with Soar, the united church being called Soar-Brunswick. While we walk from Bath Street to Clwyd Street we will see sheltered housing on the site called Llys Brunswick.

There were two Baptist churches in Rhyl. Sussex Street (English) and Tabernacle (Welsh) Only Sussex Street is still open. It was built 1862-3 and

is of brick with a stone Italianate front, with a two-column porch of giant Corinthian order. The architect was F. D. Johnson. The old fittings have been removed in the interior. Tabernacle, built 1866-7 to Richard Owens' design, has a rock faced front, low pitched gable, round arches and gothic detail. Richard Owens also designed Mynydd Seion in Abergele which the Society has visited. Because of a dwindling congregation who were mainly elderly the chapel closed and is now the Islamic Cultural Centre.



Tabernacle / Islamic Cultural Centre

The Parochial Precinct in Rhyl may be unique in Wales. On one site there are two churches, both of which are still open for services, Holy Trinity of 1835 and St. Thomas's, a major church by Sir Gilbert Scott, the Church House, Vicarage, Curates' House and sheltered housing on what was the site of the old Holy Trinity School of 1842.

These notes have been made with the help of various booklets published to commemorate anniversaries of the various chapels and *The Buildings of Wales - Clwyd* by Edward Hubbard.