

# Capel



CYMRITHAS TREFTADAETH Y CAPEL  
THE CHAPEIS HERITAGE SOCIETY

## Local Information Leaflet 37: Fishguard Taflen Wybodaeth Leol 37: Abergwaun

Welcome to Fishguard / Croeso i Abergwaun

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### History of Fishguard

Fishguard, whose English name derives from the Norse 'Fis Garth', meaning the 'place' or 'yard' of fish, lies at the mouth or aber of the River Gwaun, and with a population of over 5000, is the largest town in North Pembrokeshire. It is known to thousands of holidaymakers as a port of embarkation to Southern Ireland, but many visit due to the magnificence of its setting on the Pembrokeshire coast, Britain's only coastal National Park, and its close proximity to the tranquil beauty of the Gwaun Valley which leads to the history laden Preseli Hills.

The town boasts a long and proud history. According to some sources, its links go back directly to the Age of the Saints, as Lewis' *Topographical Dictionary of Wales* (1833) claims: 'In the early part of the fifth century, St. Dubricus, is said...to have lived in retirement at this place, and to have had a school, which

was numerously attended by the inhabitants of the surrounding country.' Tallis, writing in 1860, even claims Fishguard as the birthplace of Dyfrig.

Whether these claims are true or not is a matter of conjecture, but we are on safer historical ground when we say that the Normans came to the area in the twelfth century under the leadership of Martin de Tours. Fishguard formed part of the Barony of Cemais and throughout the Medieval period Newport, some eight miles up the coast, was by far-and-away the most important town in the district. A plague in the sixteenth century which spelled bad news for Newport was the opening which Fishguard had been waiting for and from that point onwards, Fishguard grew and by the beginning of the nineteenth century, it was the second largest town in the County.

The town's chief claim to historical fame is that the area was the setting of the last invasion of the British mainland, when a small French force landed at Carreg Gwastad Point in 1797. The event is chronicled today in the stunning tapestry created to mark the bi-centenary of the event and is now on permanent display in the Town Hall.

Ambitious plans to turn Fishguard into a trans-Atlantic port a century ago came to nothing, but the arrival of the *Mauretania* in 1909 gave local residents a glimpse of the glory that could have been theirs.

The Nonconformist tradition in the town dates back to the eighteenth century, but in common with other places, the great heyday was the early decades of the twentieth century. Chapels in the town had been enlarged and beautified, membership was counted in the hundreds and three 'Princes of the Pulpit' laboured in the town: Dan Davies at Hermon, H. T. Jacob at Tabernacle and J. T. Job at Pentowr.

### Hermon Welsh Baptist Chapel



*Architecture:* This has an exceptionally early (1832) classical façade for Wales and is the earliest known use in the country of the giant arch breaking into an

open pediment, a motif strongly characterizing chapel design from the 1860s. The stuccoed late classicism speaks of an original talent and the chapel is either attributed to Daniel Evans (cf his Bethania Baptist Chapel, Cardigan of 1847) or his father, David Evans, a native of Fishguard. The front is dominated by a broad bracketed open pediment, seated on windowless outer piers. All the main elements are gathered under the wide segmental arch springing from the pediment returns. The façade is divided by a strong first floor cornice, broken forward over the piers which are rusticated below, framing a loggia with a four-bay Doric colonnade. The doors have elegant blind fan-heads and gallery stairs rise neatly each end, rather than from within the chapel. Above are two windows with the same fan-heads, set in arched recesses. The interior is surprisingly plain in contrast, retaining its three-sided gallery with plain vertical panels, and box pews. Fine acanthus ceiling rose. The orientation towards the gable end is rare for such an early date. Complete internal renovation was planned by George Morgan & Son of Carmarthen, a prolific firm patronised by Baptists across Wales. In the event, the chapel was extended to the rear, complete with iron-fronted gallery, wholly at odds with the earlier gallery, which escaped replacement.

*History:* The Welsh Baptists of Pembrokeshire regard Rhydwylym as their spiritual home. In time Rhydwylym begat, amongst others, Llangloffan and Llangloffan begat Hermon – one of a large progeny which the mother scattered throughout North Pembrokeshire and which ensured that the Baptist cause became the largest Nonconformist denomination in the County.

The first proclaimers of the Word in the town in the first half of the eighteenth century often received a rough reception. Those early pioneers used a house in Main Street, known as 'The Dungeon', the home of Margaret John David, as a base. Following her death, the faithful met in the home of Dafydd Bowen, until it was decided to build a proper meeting house. This was achieved in 1776, on a site in High Street or Penucha'r Dref, which is still occupied by the present chapel. The Rev. John Williams of Llangloffan was a prime mover in the erecting of the building with a great deal of financial backing coming from Henry Morgan, Tregroes. Measuring 47' x 27', it was the largest chapel in the County at the time and Morris Jones preached the first sermon. From 1777, communion was administered bi-monthly, and after a year, every month. The chapel was only incorporated in 1807, when 128 members were released from Llangloffan and it was then that it received the name Hermon, instead of Penucha'r Dref.

The ministers in the first decades of the nineteenth century, mighty men such as Henry Davies the elder, John James, James Richards and Zarobabel Davies, were burning with a desire to gain subjects for the Kingdom, so much so that the first chapel was proving inadequate to accommodate the growing numbers. Consequently, in 1832, the building was enlarged, until it measured internally 42' x 40'. Basically this is the chapel that we see today.

The contemporary David Jones described the new edifice as 'y deml haddaf yn y wlad.' More recent commentators have complimented the building by saying of it, 'Remarkable chapel ... with one of the most intriguing facades in Wales.(Pevsner).

A succession of able and vigorous ministers throughout the nineteenth century saw Hermon emerge not only as the largest Nonconformist church in the town but as one of the jewels in the Baptist crown in Wales. Many of the 'Princes of the Pulpit' and stalwarts of the denomination either preached at the chapel or ministered to its members: Richard Owen, James Rowe and William Jones (a personal friend of the renowned C H Spurgeon from the time when Jones ministered in Castle Street, London). During these decades of steady growth, the chapel acquired land on which to erect a vestry, a house in Lower Town to enable it to hold the Sunday School in 'Y Cwm' and land for a cemetery on the Haverfordwest Road. Along with Harmoni, Pencaer, Hermon co-founded Y Goedwig in Goodwick and along with Llangloffan, the chapel co-founded Zion in Scloddau. Bethel, the English Baptist chapel in the town, is also a daughter of Hermon.

Arguably the most influential minister in the chapel's history was Rev. Dan Davies whose ministry of thirty five years (1899 – 1934), saw the chapel reach its peak. Membership rose to 748, despite releasing 35 to form Bethel (1905) and 34 to incorporate Glandwr, (Llanychaer) in 1929. In Hermon alone, it is estimated that he baptised 750 persons, with 92 being done on one day, 15<sup>th</sup> January 1905. Reputedly the reverend gentleman accomplished the task in the River Gwaun in twenty five minutes! It was during the pastorate of Rev. Dan Davies that the chapel assumed its present appearance: in 1906-7, George Morgan & Son was commissioned to extend the chapel once again with the provision of a gallery behind the pulpit and the opportunity was also taken to insert a pipe organ.

From the retirement of Rev. Dan Davies in 1934 to the present, five ministers have laboured in Hermon. Each one, and the present membership, are very conscious of the inheritance which has been handed to them both in terms of architecture and, more importantly, the witness of the past. Building on the very firm foundations laid, they are just as determined to maintain this witness in the chapel's third century of existence.

### **Tabernacle Chapel (Annibynwyr / Independent)**

*Architecture:* 1844-45 possibly by Daniel Evans (the blank fans over the window are similar to those at Hermon). The plan-type sits neatly between the early C19 lateral planning of Pentowr and the gable-end plan of Bethel and is typical of the trend towards square-plan chapels, evident from the 1830s. The façade has three bays under a half-hipped roof; windows to both storeys and central door with fanlight. After this restrained exterior, the interior comes as a real surprise, expensively altered 1915 and 1924, the latter work including the organ gallery,

which matches the detail of the earlier work. Neo-C18 detail with both expensive hardwood and applied decoration in fibrous plaster, imitating carved wood. Gallery front with carved/moulded panels divided by pilasters. Coved ceiling of 1845 with pretty plaster rose by Thomas Rees; plaster ornate fluting to the cove of 1924. Fine pulpit, half-round with columns; pews with classicising bench-ends.



*History:* The Annibynwyr of Pembrokeshire look to the seventeenth century Anglican clergyman, Rev. Peregrine Phillips, as their spiritual ancestor. Ejected from his living as Vicar of Llangwm and Freystrop in 1662, he went on to form Albany Congregational Church in Haverfordwest, the earliest Nonconformist cause in the County. Peregrine Phillips also established a congregational church at Treffgarne Owen and from the latter a daughter church was established in 1724 at Rhosycareau, a few miles outside the town of Fishguard. Rhosycareau is regarded as the mother church of all Annibynwyr in the Fishguard area and it is from that rural outpost that Tabernacle stems.

The Congregationalist received a tremendous boost in 1770 with the arrival of a young ordained minister named John Richards and for the next twenty five years he laboured tirelessly in the district. As a number of the officials of Rhosycareau lived in Fishguard, Mr. Richards organised that he should preach fortnightly in the homes of some of these members, namely that of Alban Thomas, John Edwards and at the house of Captain John Thomas. In addition, a 'Cyfeillach Grefyddol' or Religious Fellowship was held weekly in the Captain's home - so began the physical presence of the denomination in the town.

With such a scattered membership, Rev. Richards was doubtless thankful for the help received from a number of young men, including James Meyler, who would eventually succeed him as minister, and Azariah Shadrack. The latter is remembered today as the author of that well known Welsh hymn:

*'Os gofyn rhywun beth yw Duw  
Atebwn ni mae cariad yw;'*

It was during the incumbency of Rev. James Meyler that the decision was taken to actually build a meeting house in the town. Captain John Thomas provided land at Penwallis on a 200 year lease at a charge of 6d a year. The little chapel was opened in 1796 and it hosted one preaching service a week. Communion was administered in alternate months at Rhosycareau and the Penwallis chapel. The success of the venture can be judged by the fact that the Penwallis chapel had to be extended. 1826 saw the decision being taken that the Fishguard congregation should be formed as a church in its own right, but still sharing a minister with Rhosycareau.

Numbers continued to grow. One of the most pressing issues faced by minister and congregation was the problem of the Fishguard chapel. Not only was it by now too small for the growing congregation, but it was in a bleak and exposed part of the town and the approach up the steep hill that forms Wallis Street was a struggle for more infirm members. It was decided to search for a new, more convenient and central site and in 1841 a plot, in what is now Park Street, was selected. A sum of £60 was paid for the site where stands the present chapel, plus the land occupied by the cemetery, and the whole cost was met by Rev. Thomas Luke.

Despite the generosity of Rev. Luke, these were not good times to embark on a costly building project – the 'hungry forties' was for many a very personal reality. However, with great effort and sacrifice on the part of many, work was begun and in May, 1845, the new chapel, Tabernacle, was opened at a cost of £566 14s 9d. Writing shortly afterwards, Rev. Bateman wrote with a great deal of pride and understandable exaggeration: '*Y mae yn dy hardd a phrydferth iawn: dywed llawer y mwyaf felly yn y dywysogaeth.*' ('It is a very handsome and beautiful house: some say it is the finest in the principality.'). In 1850 a chapel house was also erected. In the middle of the century, Rhosycareau and Tabernacle split, but the latter's attempts to find a suitable minister just for them was not too successful.

Matters settled down then with the appointment of Rev. W. Morlais Davies who was minister for over thirty years and he was followed by the renowned H. T Jacob, minister between 1912 – 1934. (*Jacob Abergwaun*). Famed as a great preacher and lecturer, he also gained respect as a hymn-writer and arguably his most famous composition was:

*'O! na ddoi'r nefol wynt  
I chwythu eto,'*

Plans at this time to overhaul the chapel had to be put on hold due to the outbreak of the First World War, but the scheme was revived once hostilities ceased and the chapel gained its present appearance due to the work carried out between 1923-4.

As with most chapels, the period after the Second World War has not been kind to Tabernacle. Declining membership and the need to join with others to maintain a minister are familiar stories throughout Wales. The old link with Rhosycaerau was rekindled in 1970, along with Ebeneser Goodwick and this survives to this day, but Ebeneser was deconsecrated in 2009. At present there is no minister.

### **Pentowr Chapel (MC)**

*Architecture:* Built 1824 as a typical but substantial lateral fronted chapel with paired round-arched central windows, balancing outer doors with gallery lights over. Old photographs show the chapel before 1889, when it was completely renovated by D. E. Thomas of Haverfordwest (builder William Davies), who livened everything up in stucco for £1200. Originally there were larger main windows and smaller gallery ones, but Thomas made them all of equal size to create a more concentrated façade. The small roundel in the centre and the doors keep their original positions, the latter concealed in the attractive stuccoed porches, which are linked by a verandah. Clearly, there was no room here to reorientate the plan, as was common practice from the mid C19. Deep interior, all of 1889 in pitch pine. The gallery has long pierced cast iron panels; the pulpit with arched panels and balustrading each side. The schoolroom was added in 1890 by Thomas Harries of Trellan.



*History:* Howell Harris, on one of his evangelistic tours of Pembrokeshire, is accredited with being the first to bring the Methodist message to Fishguard when he preached on the Square in 1739. He returned to the area again the next year when he preached at Trehowel Farm, Pencaer, and in the same year William Richard and John Lloyd were appointed to oversee the development of the cause in northwest Pembrokeshire. These early efforts bore fruit as by 1740 around thirty five locals were meeting at Trellan Farm in the Gwaun Valley, the home of the Harries family.

Within around five years, Methodist meetings are known to have been held in the town, at the outbuildings of a place called Penycnwc, which lay, in fact, in close

proximity to the present chapel. The cause flourished and by 1758-59, the local congregation felt confident enough to build the first Pentowr Chapel.

Early ministers, such as John Dafydd (1765), Thomas Davies (1790) and David Jones (1794) laboured successfully in the town – so much so that by 1802, membership had risen to 80 and in the same year the chapel was granted the right to conduct Baptism and Communion services. The first decade of the nineteenth century was especially successful and from the 80 members recorded in 1802, the membership had jumped to 200 by 1810.

Another indication of continued growth and a landmark in the history of the local cause was the founding of Berachah Chapel in Goodwick in 1830.

The 1859 revival had a limited impact upon Pentowr but 30 new members were recorded. Whilst this compares favourably with the 12 new members recorded for Berachah, the new recruits in both chapels are positively dwarfed by the impressive 110 new members recorded at Trefin a few miles down the coast. However, Pentowr felt confident enough to form a satellite Methodist chapel in the Gwaun Valley in 1869.

When Rev. Philip Jones commenced his duties in 1886, membership stood at around 100. During his ministry of fifteen years, the chapel was completely refurbished between 1889-1890 and a vestry built at the same time. Expenditure for the two was £1200 and the builder was William Davies of Tenby. In 1901, a cemetery was purchased, whilst four years later a manse was built at Plas y Fron on land dedicated by E. D. Jones, a future Member of Parliament for the County. Designed by J.J. Harries, Trellan, it was built by John Morgan and remained the residence for Pentowr ministers until sold around 1970.

Between 1917-1938, Pentowr had as its pastor the famous J.T. Job. Renowned as a poet, he won the Chair at the National Eisteddfod in 1897, 1903 and 1918 and the Crown in 1900. He also won the Chair at the San Francisco eisteddfod in 1915. He also gained fame as a hymn-writer and perhaps two of his most famous compositions were:

*‘Arglwydd nef a daear, gariad hollalluog’  
and  
‘Cofia’r byd, O Feddyg da’*

After J.T. Job, a number of less well known, but equally dedicated pastors, ministered to the membership. It was in the middle decades of the century that the famous D.J. Williams (*D. J. Williams, Abergwaun*), was a member at Pentowr.

The history of the chapel since the Second World War echoes what has happened to many chapels: minister sharing (1955 onwards), the appointment of women deacons (c. 1976), selling of the manse (1990), the ending of the Sunday School

(1996). Structural changes have included the removal of the Sedd Fawr and the installation of audio equipment, both in 1989 and a DDA and Health and Safety upgrade around 2005.

Present membership stands around 35.

### St. Mary's Church (Church in Wales)



*Architecture:* The church was entirely rebuilt 1855-57 by Thomas Clarke, member of the wealthy Wiltshire clothing family from Trowbride, who offered his services free to an impoverished parish. Not a trace survives of the earlier building, described as a 'mean structure' in 1811. Stephen Glynne in 1850 noted that the church comprised of nave with bellcote and chancel with all of the windows modernized and shortly before demolition, the building was regarded as a 'very mean edifice for a borough'. This suggests the usual pre-ecclesiastical rebuilding or drastic repair that characterised many north Pembrokeshire churches in the 1820s and 30s. The new church is hardly a model of ecclesiastical correctness and belies the hand of its amateur designer. The plan is of a broad nave with apsed chancel and apsed S vestry, the detail all minimal round-arched Romanesque, a tired and late example of the 1840s Anglican taste for neo-Norman. The dressing are all of yellow terracotta, apparently chosen to withstand the sea air.

Inside, the nave roof impressively spans 40 feet, with deep arch-braced trusses carried on low corbels. The west gallery is archaic – a rarely-seen feature after the 1830s liturgical reforms. In the north wall is a small two-light medieval window apparently salvaged from the lost medieval chapel of Llanfartin nearby. The chancel screen and stalls date from 1919 and much of the stained glass is of the 1920s, all fairly conventional, among the best being the three chancel windows of

1921 by Burlison and Grylls. The east window of 1986 is by John Petts, coloured in dramatic scarlet: the triple west window of 1989 is also by him.

In the churchyard, an incised stone, oddly mixing Celtic and Gothic forms. It has a roughly incised Latin cross with trilobe ends, randomly surrounded by small knotwork patterns and an inscription 'David Medd' (vicar in 1535). Latin inscriptions around the edge, one translating as 'Jesus Christ Anno Domini 1501'.

*History:* It is, perhaps, unusual for Capel members to visit an Anglican Church, but for reasons which will become immediately apparent when one enters the building, St. Mary's has a great deal in common with the Nonconformist places of worship in the town.

It is unknown if the parish has an unbroken Christian history dating from the time of the reputed ministry of St. Dyfrig in the area, but it is probably true to say that the site of the present building has been used for religious purposes since the coming of the Normans, after which the town lay in the Barony of Cemais.

What dimensions the medieval church exhibited are unknown, but by the nineteenth century St. Mary's was in a poor condition. At the start of the century, Richard Fenton described it as a '*mean structure*' and some years later Sir Stephen Glynne used these words when talking of the building:

*'very mean, scarcely distinguishable from the adjacent houses, the walls are so low.'*

It was to this totally inadequate building, with seating for ninety worshippers in a growing town, that the Rev. William Rowlands was appointed vicar in 1854. He decided at once that a new church was needed and commissioned plans from John Pritchard of Llandaff and James Stone of Narberth, but they were deemed too expensive for a poor parish. Undaunted, his prayers seemed to have been answered when a holidaymaker offered a design free of charge! The man in question was Thomas Clark (1819 – 1899), a member of the noted clothier family of Trowbridge, Wilts.

The foundation stone was laid on 19th September 1855 by Sir James John Hamilton of Llanstephan and work was completed by 1857. Designed to accommodate 550, it had cost £1661 to build.

No doubt, the ecclesiastical views of the incumbent were to have a bearing on the designs drawn up by Clark. Rowlands was an extremely 'Low' Churchman and, in consequence, the building which was designed, especially in its internal fittings, bears many features which would be more at home in a Nonconformist chapel: no central aisle, but rather, two side aisles, a balcony, a baptistery and an entrance lobby. The chancel is disproportionately small compared to the wide nave and, as a consequence, the pulpit almost has a central position, and where ever one sits,

a clear view can be obtained of it, emphasising the importance to Rowlands of the Ministry of the Word. Indeed, one's eyes are drawn to it just as much as to the communion table. When one remembers that when built, the church would not have contained any stained glass, no eagle lectern, no pipe organ, no chancel screen, choir-stalls and hardly any ornamentation, its appearance must have been very chapel-like indeed! Virtually every incumbent since Rowlands has tried to 'churchify' the building, but the essentially Nonconformist nature of the structure still shines through, giving Fishguard a very individual and distinctive parish church.

### **Bethel English Baptist Chapel**



*Architecture:* 1906-08 by J. Howard Morgan, son of George Morgan of Carmarthen, seating about 380. Stuccoed gable front with an arch breaking into the pediment, over two arched windows. Some subtlety in the detailing, including the recessions in the vertical plane and channelled rustication framing centre door and outer windows. The interior detail is typical of Morgan, the centre part of the ceiling open to exposed trusses. Typical too, the gallery detail with rows of squat balustrading.

*History:* In April 1905, forty two members of Hermon thought there was a need for an English Baptist church in Fishguard. No doubt, developments in the Harbour and the hopes that the town would develop into a trans-Atlantic port must have had a bearing on this decision.

The leader of the new venture was Mr. John H John, from Llanychaer, a village a few miles outside the town. These forty two members first met for worship at the Temperance Hall, West Street, which is now Theatr Gwaun. The preacher at the opening service in June 2005 was Rev. O D Campbell of Haverfordwest.

After these first meetings, many people were baptised in the River Gwaun, with the first ones being immersed on Sunday, 6<sup>th</sup> August, 1906. The act was performed by Rev. J W Morris of Tabor, Dinas Cross.

The church grew steadily in numbers, and in 1905 a site for a new church building was bought in West Street, just down the road from the Temperance Hall. In 1906, Rev D P David of Mardy, Glamorgan, was called as pastor and it was during his incumbency that the church building and vestry was completed. The architect was J. Howard Morgan and as the only part of the building which would really be visible to the public was that which fronted the street, he lavished most care on this gable. The builder was Mr. Daniel Thomas of Letterston.

The official opening took place on Tuesday and Wednesday, the 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> of April 1908, when the pastor was officially inducted. Three other ministers took part and very large crowds attended and it was recorded that there was considerable religious fervour.

The building was deemed a great success locally, so much so that it was the inspiration for the new chapel at Beulah, Little Newcastle, which was built a few years later by the same builder.

The vestry, which was the home to various religious and cultural activities was taken over by the Military for the accommodation of troops on 19<sup>th</sup> June 1940. Monies raised through providing this accommodation were invested into the building fund and the church was free from debt by 1942. Many years later one of the soldiers billeted at Bethel left a generous donation to the church in his will in appreciation of the kindness shown to him at that time.

In 1975, Bethel hosted the Annual Conference of the Baptist Union of Wales and in 1980 Bethel and Bethesda, Goodwick united to form an united pastorate. Bethesda closed in 2000 and most of its members transferred to Bethel.

In 2009, a new chapter opened in the history of the chapel when they formed a joint pastorate with Thornton Chapel, Milford Haven, and welcomed Rev. Terry Broadhurst as their new minister.

**Richard Davies**