

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

# DISCOVERING CHAPELS IN TENBY

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## Non-conformity in Wales

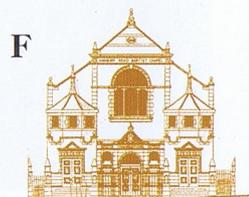
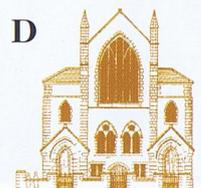
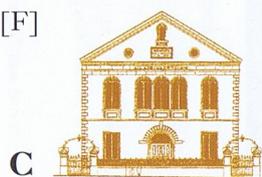
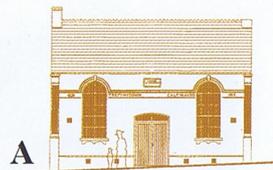
The Reformation in Europe gave rise to a persistent demand for more freedom in worship and in Wales the dissenters gathered secretly from about 1600 to hear the Word of God preached in their own language and without the restrictions of the church ritual. When William Wroth founded the first independent 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, Bryntirion 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]



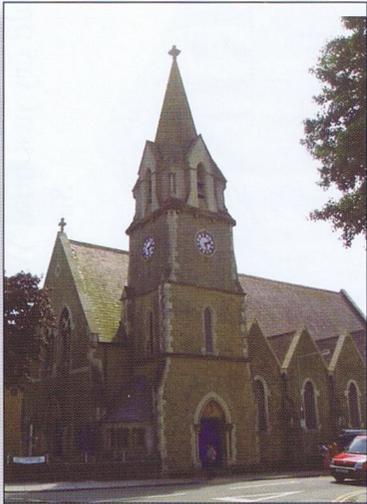
## 1. Wesleyan Methodist

Wesleyan Methodism was the earliest cause in Tenby, founded here in 1761 by Thomas Taylor, who was read the Riot Act for his preaching. John Wesley himself preached in town in 1763. The first chapel was in High Street within the building now occupied by Charney's Restaurant, dating from 1804, enlarged 1842 and 1864.

With the growth of the town outside the medieval walls, post-railway, a new site was obtained in Warren Street in 1877. The chapel was built 1880-81 in a robust Romanesque style, expensively faced in local silver limestone with Bath stone dressings, the entrance with Aberdeen granite columns. The interior had a rear gallery, together with a choir gallery behind the pulpit. The architect was K W Ladd of Pembroke Dock a prolific local designer, this being his best design. The contractor was William Davies of Culver Park and the cost was £3,600.

The fellowship united with the Congregationalists just along the street and in May 1989 the chapel was demolished and replaced by flats.

## 2. St John's United Reformed & Methodist



The chapel was originally Congregational, the cause having been founded at Tabernacle, Lower Frog Street (later the Calvinistic Methodist Chapel - see 4 below) in 1821 and the chapel built in the following year for £480. With the arrival of the railway in 1863 new streets were laid out to the west of the walled town and a prominent plot at the junction of Warren Street and the South Parade was chosen for a new chapel.

The Chapel was designed 1867-68 by Paull & Robinson of Manchester and built by James Rogers for £2750. The style chosen was Early English Gothic, complete with a corner tower built

of local Templeton sandstone with Bath stone detail. Paull & Robinson added matching schoolrooms to the rear, together with the manse in 1872, the whole forming an attractive and prominent group, listed Grade II.

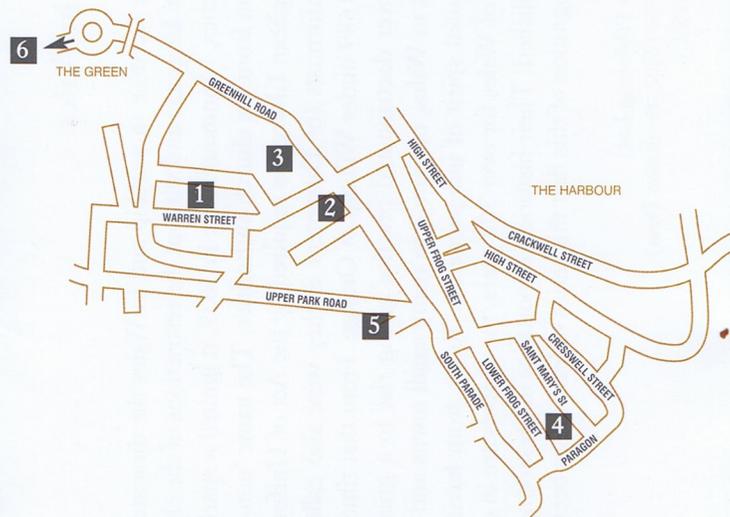
The chapel has a fine interior, the massive arch-braced roof being supported on slender iron columns. The pulpit is the original moveable rostrum and there is a gallery at the entrance end. Many industrialists across England and Wales subscribed to the building fund including Joseph Craven, Titus Salt, Samuel Morley, H O Wills, and Davies & Roberts, the railway contractors. The upper stage of the tower spire was left incomplete until 1908, when it was built to the designs of E Glover Thomas of Tenby by Messrs Beynon for £630. The cause later joined the United Reformed Church and had amalgamated with the Wesleyan Methodists by 1989.

## 3. Deer Park Baptist

The cause began in 1830 with the baptism of William Rees, the town's coastguard, appropriately enough in the sea. A chapel, named Ebenezer, was built in 1830 at Upper Park Road. A split occurred under the ministry of Rev J Griffiths and a number of members built a new chapel on the South Parade in 1845. Eventually the church reunited at South Parade and the chapel was refitted in 1862 by Foster of Bristol. The chapel - which had a large shaped gable - later became the fire station and has since been demolished.



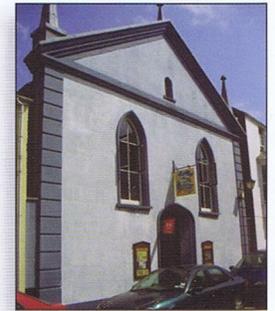
In 1881 a site was obtained at Deer Park and work on the existing chapel began in September 1884. The foundation stone was laid by Richard Cory (colliery proprietor) and Samuel Watson (soap manufacturer). The chapel was opened on 11 August 1885 by Rev Charles Spurgeon and was designed in the Gothic style by George Morgan of Carmarthen, a prolific and able architect, favoured by the Baptist denominations across South Wales. The builder was Joseph Harries and the cost £3,000. The chapel is built of local limestone with Bath stone detail. The adjacent house is part of the original design, built for a caretaker; the manse at the other end of the chapel was never built. The interior of the chapel has a magnificent arch-braced roof and rear gallery; the original pews and recessed pulpit remain intact with fine schoolrooms in the basement. The chapel is Grade II listed.



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## 4. Lower Frog Street Calvinistic Methodist

The contractors of the Tenby-Pembroke Dock railway, which opened in 1863, were David Davies and Ezra Roberts of Llandinam, both important figures in progressing the Calvinistic Methodist cause in Wales. Services for railway workers took place in the town's Assembly Room until 1869 when Sir John Phillips of Southfield purchased the recently vacated Congregational Chapel in Lower Frog Street for the cause.



Repairs were carried out immediately including repewing, but the pulpit and gallery of 1821 were retained. In 1884 the façade was remodelled and provided with a pediment at the cost of £150. In 1892 the adjacent house was purchased as a manse and a rear schoolroom added. Two years later, the interior of the chapel was refitted under E Glover Thomas of Tenby including new pews, pulpit and gallery, along with a fine open timber roof.

Following closure and a long period of decline, the chapel was restored as a children's activity centre, preserving the gallery and roof of the listed building intact.

## 5. Salvation Army Citadel, Upper Park Road

This was formerly the original Baptist Chapel in town, first built 1830 and named Ebenezer. After 1845, the cause settled at South Parade and Ebenezer became used as a Sunday school. By 1854 it was a Primitive Methodist chapel and by 1881 a Mission Hall.



## 6. Marsh Road Calvinistic Methodist

This little chapel was built for £150 in 1880 to serve the western suburb of the town and has been converted to a house.

