



Ymddiriedolaeth Addoldai Cymru Welsh Religious Buildings Trust

NEWSLETTER 1

SEPTEMBER 2006

Welcome to the first newsletter of the Welsh Religious Buildings Trust. Our aim is to keep Friends of the Trust and those interested in the Trust informed about its activities. We will provide a little of the history of the buildings in the Trust's care along with news on progress with their repair and on other Trust projects.

It will be published twice a year and will be free to members of the Friends of the WRBT – although the first two editions are being more widely distributed free of charge.

Friends

We are pleased to announce the recent formation of the Friends of the Welsh Religious Buildings Trust. If you would like to support us and help us with our work, membership of the Friends is open to all and costs £10 a year : a membership form and bank standing order form are enclosed with this newsletter. Or alternatively contact the Trust's office.

Open Doors:

European Heritage Days

Two of the Trust's buildings, Libanus and Bethania, will be open during this year's annual Open Doors days, as part of European Heritage Days.



The Open Doors days will give everyone the chance to explore Libanus and Bethania which are not normally open to the general public as they are awaiting repair. The buildings will open between 10.00 a.m and 4.00 p.m on the three Saturdays: 9, 16, 23 of September. Access will be limited in Libanus because of the building's condition. Unfortunately there is very limited

disabled access at Libanus and although at Bethania there are some difficulties most of the ground floor is accessible.

History Matters - Pass it on

History Matters - Pass it on / Hanfod Hanes - I'r Gymru Fydd, is a partnership between the National Trust, Cadw, Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales and the Heritage Lottery Fund, which will continue through to the autumn. More details at:

www.hanfodhanes.org.uk

European Heritage Days

is an initiative of the Council of Europe, and the event is co-ordinated by the Civic Trust for Wales. Full information can be found at:

www.civictrustwales.org or
www.heritagedays.net.

A full listing of events in Wales is also available from the Civic Trust for Wales 3rd Floor, Empire House, Cardiff CF10 5FN tel no 029 2048 4606.

**The Trust's website is
being prepared.**

Look out for:

www.addoldaicymru.org &
www.welshreligiousbuildings.org

Buildings in the care of the Trust

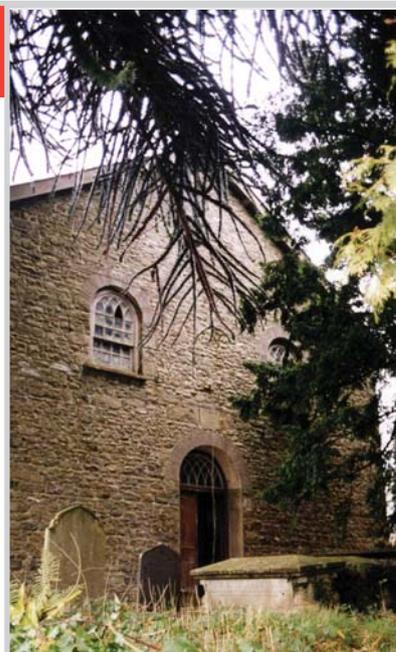
The Trust takes into its care a representative selection of non-Anglican redundant religious buildings that are of particular historic or architectural interest. So far, the Trust has acquired three buildings – Libanus, Hen Dŷ Cwrdd and Bethania, and the transfer of Beili Du is almost complete. The transfer of the noted Unitarian chapel Yr Hen Gapel, Llwynrhydowen, is underway, and the Trust is also actively looking at other buildings.

Libanus

Libanus is a simple Baptist chapel with a magnificent interior, and is situated near Llansadwrn, Carmarthenshire. Listed Grade II*, the present building was built in 1841, and extended in the late 19th century. It closed its doors in 1998. It is a plain but unusually early example of a rural, gable fronted, two storey chapel with a fine and little altered interior with original furnishings. A late 19th-century stable and schoolroom adjoins the main chapel.



Libanus needs extensive repairs and the Trust has drawn up a phased programme working with Alwyn Jones Penseiri:Architects, of Taffs Well. The exterior of the building will be dealt with initially. The Trust is working hard on raising funds for the work. There is strong local interest and support in the Llansadwrn area and a local Friends of Libanus group has been formed.



Open Days

Libanus will be open on the Open Doors days – see page 1

HELP!! - We have not been able to locate any old photographs of Libanus. If you know of any please contact the Trust – even fairly recent pictures will be very useful!



Hen Dŷ Cwrdd

Hen Dŷ Cwrdd is a Unitarian chapel, listed Grade II, at Trecynon near Aberdare. The chapel closed in 1988. The present building is a medium sized chapel, designed by architect Evan Griffiths of Aberdare and built in 1862. Hen Dŷ Cwrdd has a particularly rich inheritance in terms of its historic links and represents the continuity of Welsh Dissenting tradition.

The chapel has been empty since its closure, and although its condition is generally sound, it requires fairly extensive repairs. The immediate priority is to undertake small-scale emergency works. A further study and development work by Page and Dean Consulting will be followed by more extensive repairs

See article on page 4



Bethania

Bethania in Maesteg was built in 1908 on the site of an earlier chapel, and is a prime example of the new-found enthusiasm for chapel building following Evan Roberts' famous religious revival of 1904–05. It is a large, urban, architecturally important Baptist chapel, the work of the well-known Welsh architect William Beddoe Rees, and is listed at Grade II*.

The Trust has commissioned a condition survey of the building from Acanthus Holden Architects and is seeking funds for repairs. Further development work is being undertaken to find ways of making the best possible use of the building for community and other uses once repairs are complete.

Open Days

Bethania will be open on the Open Doors days – see page 1

Treasure trove!

Numerous excellent and interesting papers have been carefully looked after by successive secretaries at Bethania – including numerous minutes books and correspondence from Beddoe Rees and various drawings. They also include the original Specification and Bills of Quantities that contain information that will help our architects plan the repair of the building. The Trust is assessing this material at present with a view to using it as a basis for some of the interpretive material to be produced for Bethania. These papers will be deposited at the Glamorgan Record Office in due course.



Beili Du

Beili Du is a Presbyterian Church of Wales chapel at Pentre-bach, near Sennybridge in the process of transfer to the Trust. The chapel was first built in 1800, and rebuilt in 1868. It is listed grade II and has been redundant since 1998. Beili Du is an attractive and remarkably unaltered example of a once common type of early chapel which is now rare: a small rural, long-wall type with twin entrance doors and, at one end, a stable and room above for the visiting preacher.

The building will require a thorough condition survey followed by a repair programme.



Hen Dŷ Cwrdd

In the early eighteenth century the orthodox Calvinist theology of nonconformist Wales - belief in the 'particular' salvation of the elect - gave way in some places to Arminianism - belief in 'general' salvation.

From the 1740s onwards, Arminianism progressed into Arianism, a theology that was anti-Trinitarian in tendency. Finally, with the ideologically polarising effects of the French Revolutionary Wars, Arianism shifted yet further leftward to become overtly Unitarian. Hen Dŷ Cwrdd (Old Meeting House) at Trecynon experienced these theological convulsions to the full.

Established in 1751, the earliest nonconformist chapel in the Cynon valley, its first minister, Thomas Lewis, was dismissed for his conservative (Calvinist) views and was replaced by an Arminian, Owen Rees. During his ministry, Rees made the transition from Arminian to Arian. The agent of the change from Arianism to Unitarianism in Wales was Thomas Evans, better known to the Welsh as Tomos Glyn Cothi (1764-1833). In 1796, Evans had established the first avowedly Unitarian chapel in Wales near Brechfa in Carmarthenshire. Falling foul of the authorities for his support for the French Revolution, he languished in Carmarthen Gaol for two years. In 1811 he accepted an invitation from Hen Dŷ Cwrdd to serve as Unitarian minister. When Evans died in 1833 he had ministered in Trecynon for more than twenty years. His remains are interred in the chapel's graveyard.

A succession of Unitarian ministers followed Evans, variously active in the



Memorial to Tomos Glyn Cothi (Thomas Evans)

radical politics of their day and exercising an influence out of all proportion to their numerical strength. Men such as John Jones (1802-1863) a minister who openly supported Chartism by contributing a number of articles to the Welsh Chartist newspaper, *Udgorh Cymru* and who founded the politically radical Unitarian denominational magazine *Yr Ymofynydd* in 1847.

The twentieth century saw E.R. Dennis encouraging local music and drama between the wars; he was one of the founders of Aberdare's Theatr Fach. His successor, the poet and pacifist D. Jacob Davies (1916-1974), made a notable contribution to public life in Wales as a journalist and broadcaster. He successfully campaigned for Welsh-medium education in the Cynon Valley and wrote the bicentennial history of Hen Dŷ Cwrdd (1951). The last minister to serve this remarkable congregation was J. Eric Jones who took charge of the congregation in 1962, remaining at Hen Dŷ Cwrdd until it closed as a place of worship in the late 1980s.

David Barnes, July 2006



The Trust receives grant aid from Cadw to support a significant part of its day-to-day running costs. The Trust also currently receives funds from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation towards core costs. Despite this generous support the Trust faces a perennial challenge of raising sufficient funds for its

activities. The Trust would appreciate any help, and would be very grateful for donations, large or small.

For more information please contact us. We would be very pleased to hear from you!

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