

Notes from Local Interest Group Meeting 29th June 2023

Present: Maureen Lloyd, Margaret Evans, Val Price, Edwina Griffiths, Jenny Smith, Gwyn James, John Price, Ann Rees, David & Anwen Price, Sylvia Bigglestone, Roy & Avryl Lloyd, Iris Lloyd, Vicky Gore, Dawn Richards, James & Jenny Martin, Sylvia Illingsworth, Elsa Harflett, Bronwen Jenkins, Victor & Cherry Williams, Helen Barnett, Jacquie Mills, Joan Hughes, Howard & Ann Dean, Chris Lewis, Diana Lloyd, Janet Russell, Marilyn & Mervyn Price, Ifor & Penny Williams, Sue Lawler & Malc Gonnella, Colin & Wendy Powell, Gail Morris .

Apologies: Wendy & Dainis Ozols, Grace Davies, Lucy Trench

Visit to Moriah Baptist Chapel, Penbryn

Maureen welcomed everyone to the chapel and thanked the members for the refreshments they had already enjoyed, as well as all the preparatory work that had been done to both the inside and outside of the chapel. She introduced Margaret Evans, a member of the chapel who, during the lockdown of 2020, had gathered together the known history of the chapel so that she was able to tell its story.

Margaret began by explaining some background to chapel life. Chapel members are people who have been baptised, fully immersed, and the chapel does contain a baptistry which is now enclosed under the platform from where Margaret was speaking. How they got enough water she did not know, although it was pointed out that there was a well in the yard of the cottage opposite. However, it would have been a tedious job carrying buckets of water in order to fill the baptistry, and then it would have to be emptied afterwards. So later on the baptisms took place in the Bachawy brook, either at Cefnig or at Llanbachawy. Another feature of the early chapel was the turtle stove which was under the grating in the aisle. How they got down to light it, or how it did not set the chapel on fire no-one knows. The heater was then moved by the front seat; it would be fine for those sitting nearby, but the congregation at the other end of the building would have frozen!



Tithe map of 1839

Penbryncoch Farm is in plot number 97, Penwern cottage now the Smithy is in plot 34.

The chapel is on the south side of the road in a small triangle fenced off from the field.

In 1824 Robert Edwards was established as Minister at Erwood Baptist Chapel, but many Baptists lived on the Radnorshire side of the Wye and at that time there was no bridge, only a ford or a ferry. Rev David Edwards of The Garth was ordained in 1830, and became Minister of Erwood, and it was he who was responsible for the establishment of Moriah. The Baptists in Llandeilo had no building but held services in various farm houses in the area. The first chapel was built in 1830 by the

Methodists, but there were few members and, being greatly in debt, they were forced to sell it. Benjamin Jenkins from Llangwy (where Erwood station was built) and other members bought it for the Baptists. David Jenkins was the minister. What this early chapel looked like we have no idea, but on the Tithe maps of 1839 it is small, and orientated in a different direction. It looks to be the size of a chicken shed, however it may have been extended before being replaced by the current building in 1884. The Rev Thomas Jones was ordained in 1840; he was the brother of Rev James Jones of The Rock Chapel and Rev John Jones of Llandrindod. Under his ministry there was a revival and, in 1842, there were 40 members. It was during this time that the sister chapel in Painscastle was formed with nine members. Moriah and Painscastle worked together and shared ministers. In 1845 Rev Jones left and was succeeded by Rev Edward Owen of Builth who was a very lively preacher! He stayed until 1855, when the membership was recorded as 87.

Originally the chapel had no burial ground. By the time of the Tithe map of 1839 the chapel sat on a triangular corner of a field belonging to the Rhyn farm. In 1844 the chapel bought a piece of land and a few years later the graveyard was extended. Mr Pugh, The Lane, gave the land and neither the solicitor Mr R Griffiths from Hay nor Mr Gunter the estate agent charged for their work. However, there is a story that Mr Pugh was supposed to receive a Christmas cake for his trouble, but there is no record of who was to make the cake, or whether it was ever given!



Moriah Chapel

In 1867 Rev G H Llewellyn was minister; he came from Ramah and Erwood. He was a man of rare character and a splendid preacher. He became secretary of the Radnorshire and Montgomeryshire Baptist Association. In 1873 William Jenkins from Tredegar took over and it was during his ministry that the first wedding took place in the Chapel on 21st January 1877. This was of Elizabeth Ann Pugh of Llanbwchllyn and John Williams. The first association meetings were held in the chapel in 1878 and later that year William Jenkins left. The new chapel was built in 1884 at a cost of £562. It was built from dressed stone quarried in the area, with Staffordshire blue bricks around the windows and doorframes. The windows have semicircular heads and patterned opaque glass. On the front gable is a circular window. The roof was clad with Welsh slates. It is 35ft by 50ft, with an attractive balcony and a vestry at the back. The chapel will seat about 150 people. It was built of local stone, with outside materials, bricks, etc brought via the railway. The chapel was opened in November 1884.

The Rev Thomas James took over in January 1887 and he was minister for 18 years. At that time there was a Sunday School with about 70 scholars. In those days they walked from the surrounding area, passing farms where others joined; it would have been a real community event walking to and

from Sunday School. They came from the Begwns and areas all around and it would have been the social event of the week. There was a great revival in the neighbourhood with a mission conducted by the Rev W Skinner. Rev James baptized 80 people and 42 came from the mission. Prayer meetings were held at Waterloo and Sunnybank and Mr David Williams, the station master, often helped. Mr James said of Moriah, "It is a loving working chapel and is blessed with two ideal deacons, James Lloyd, The Garth, and Tom Pugh, Llanbwchllyn. They work together in great harmony". When Tom Pugh left for Hereford, Thomas Williams from Pentrefothan took over, but Tom's brother, Evan, still led the singing! Rev James mentioned the Parrys of Llandewi, Prices the Fferm, Merediths, Llwynpenfaen, Williams, Great House, Jones and Williams, Sunnybank and their families who were very active in the chapel.

In 1916 Rev T Morgan became minister and it was during his ministry that Moriah and Painscastle chapels bought the Baptist Manse in Painscastle. A later minister was Rev G O Roberts (whose daughter was actress Rachael Roberts). He was a preacher of great power and passion and he left in 1926. Rev J M Howells followed. He was a great preacher and the membership increased considerably. Apparently, he said that during his years at Moriah some of the best and brightest sons and daughters unfortunately left the area, mentioning one Harry Meredith of Llwynpenfaen who, having graduated with MSc in the University of Wales, went on to get a B.Lit at Oxford University and then worked at Whitehall in London in the agricultural department of the government. In 1936 Rev H B Bromley baptized nine new members. Rev T R Williams became minister in the 1950s and he baptized twelve members in 1954, one of whom was Edwina Griffiths who remembers the event at Cefnig Mill.

He was followed by Rev Islwyn Price who was minister of Moriah, Painscastle and Franksbridge. The last minister was the Rev Harold Jones whose parents, William and Rachael, were from the Perthy, previously at The Garth. They had been very good and faithful members of the chapel and he was minister from 1991 until 1999. Today the chapel continues with supply ministers.

The Sunday School closed in 1971, however the anniversary continues, although it used to be two services, one in the afternoon for the children, and one in the evening for adults, with tea in between. Now it is just one service in the evening of the second Sunday in July.

In 1972 William Meredith from London, formally of Llwynpenfaen, passed away and left £1000 to the chapel. This money was used to replace the vestry with a kitchen and toilet and sometime later the chapel was re-roofed. In 1987, the interior of the chapel was re-plastered, decorated and re-wired. In 2001 the late Henry Williams, Cillia, left the chapel £1000 in his will. There are now just 18 members and several live some distance away and can only attend on special occasions. This year the chapel has been given a grant by the Garth charity, which has enabled electrical work to be done, including a new electrical system and a water heater.

To finance the chapel, the members paid a subscription and in 1985 they decided to make it an annual subscription. Apart from the collections and the members, the main money-making events were the Good Friday concert and the November concert. There used to be a sports event with stalls, and even a cockerel race where a cockerel was let go and whoever caught it won the cockerel! Some cockerels provided more sport by running whilst others did not appear to want to play. After the sports there would be the tea. Big boards were brought down from the gallery and placed along the centre of the chapel, with the food laid on them. Again, the ones sitting closest were the lucky ones! The last sports were held in 1965. That year they decided to hold a special service, called a reunion service, when members who had moved away and others were invited to attend the special service. They took £60 in collection in that first service, a lot easier than running the sports! The

reunion service continues each May every year. The Good Friday concert was discontinued in 1983 but it was re-instated in 1992 and then it became a Sankey evening. The chapel joined with the church to run a fete every other year. First of all it was held at the Skreen, then later at Lower Pentrecaeu in the barn. These were very successful with the money split between church and chapel; the last fete was held in 2010.

Originally, after the Harvest service the produce was given to local people, but then, with changing rules, an auction was held and the proceeds were donated to various charities. Now only non-perishable produce is collected and donated to local food banks.

Several questions and comments were then raised. The question of where the name Moriah come from was ably answered by Ifor and Penny Williams; it is a mountain in the Bible. The congregation is usually about seven or eight and services are held every other week. Jenny Smith then pointed out the embroidery on the wall which had been done by Mrs Davies, Penllwyn, and also the mounted certificate granting the holding of weddings at Moriah. It was also noted that the clock had the name of T Hammond, Builth Wells.

Penbryn Cottage and The Smithy



Maureen then gave some history of the two properties on the opposite side of the road. They were old buildings, possibly going back to the 17th century, but there does not seem to be any written history until the beginning of the 19th century. From the first records, it appears that a Thomas Jones owned Penbryncoch Farm, the one nearest to Llandeilo Graban; it was leased to Benjamin Beynon in 1802 for 11 years and then it was occupied by Williams Griffiths, but by the time of the tithe map, 1839, it was listed as 35 acres and Benjamin Watkins was the tenant. In the 1841 census one of the sons, James, who was only 15, is recorded as being a blacksmith. With each census a different family was farming the smallholding, until 1901, when William Morgan is listed as grocer and shopkeeper. This was the beginning of a family association with Penbryncoch which lasted until

1990. Several people had heard stories of the shop. Cherry Williams said that the schoolmaster, Mr Dakin, head of Llandeilo Graban School, used to send his pupils to the shop to buy cigarettes. Alice Morgan was the last person to run the shop and she was remembered as a little lady who was always dressed in black. David Price purchased the property in 1978 and renovated it.

The Smithy, which is the property nearest to Painscastle, was part of Penwern farm on the Tithe map. At that time a Thomas Williams owned Penwern and David Pugh farmed it. In 1841 Penbrinc, as the Smithy was called then, was occupied by George Thomas who was a blacksmith and it continued as a smithy into modern times, with both properties belonging to the Morgan family. The last blacksmith would have been Alwyn Morgan, who probably took over from his uncle George. Alwyn Morgan also worked at the Crickadarn and the Gwendwr blacksmith shop. Alwyn later kept the pub in Painscastle which had a blacksmith shop attached. The McCreadys bought the 'Smithy' when the Morgan family sold it. It has passed through a few owners. The Bufton family lived there for many years but it has now been sold on. Both properties have been renovated from the original little cottages that they were at first.