



HEBRON

EVANGELICAL CHURCH DOWLAI

City of Refuge Joshua 21:13



The History of Hebron Evangelical Church¹



The Beginning

Caersalem Chapel, the only Welsh Baptist Church in Dowlais, was bursting at the seams by the 1840s, as the population of Merthyr Tydfil swelled thanks to the availability of employment in the booming industries. Dowlais Ironworks was at the time the largest in the world, and one of four in the town, contributing to Merthyr then being the largest town in Wales.

¹ Based largely on an address delivered by Rev Sulwyn Jones in 1996 to mark the 150th anniversary of Hebron.



W.R. Davies – the minister of Caersalem since 1838 – had the idea of establishing branch chapels around the borough. Land was obtained from the Dowlais Iron Works, owned by Sir Josiah John Guest and between 1841-2 Hebron was built at Dowlais Top at a cost of £1300. Caersalem paid £500 of this and released 106 members to Hebron. The opening services were held on 23rd and 24th July 1843. Caersalem remained responsible for Hebron until May 1846 when Hebron became independent. On the 23rd and 24th May 1846, four services were held during the inaugural meetings, with two preachers at each service.³ On the previous Easter Monday of that year, two thousand people sat at a ‘Tea Party’ held to defray the expenses and debts of the new building. £120 was raised.

² Caersalem, Well Street, Dowlais, built 1821, rebuilt 1833 (then again in Pant, 1977).

³ See Noel Gibbard *R.B.Jones Gospel Ministry in Turbulent Times* (Bryntirion Press, 2009) p11 and J. Ronald Williams and Gwyneth Williams, *History of Caersalem Dowlais* (Gomerian Press, 1967) p136.

The first minister of Hebron was the Rev. William Williams from Llanfynach near Brecon.

Y Parch. W. Williams, o Lanfrynach, ger
 Aberhonddu, wedi ymsefydlu yn fagail ar
Hebron, Dowlais.
 Y Parch. J. P. Williams, Pantycelyn, wedi
 cymeryd gofal eglwys Blaenywaun.
 YSTRAD MYNACH. — Cynnalwedd traddad ⁴

The first forty years

An outbreak of cholera in 1849 spread quickly due to large numbers of people continuing to move into the area and living in unsanitary conditions. Death occurred quickly and on a large scale, leading many to seek refuge in the churches in what is known as the Cholera Revival. By September, the minister at Hebron (now John Jones) had baptised 179 people.

HEBRON—DOWLAIS.—Mr. Jones, the minister of the above church, immersed the following numbers, on	
July 15th	23
Do. 29th	31
Aug. 12th	28
Do. 26th	45
Sept. 9th	52
	179

Over 400 people were baptised in the three Welsh Baptist Chapels of Dowlais that year. Caersalem's W.R. Davies died of cholera in 1849 having baptised 150 people over the previous two Sundays.

⁴ Seren Orllewinol (Western Star) 1849

⁵ Primitive Church Magazine 1850

Hebron's minister during this time, John Jones, stayed for only one year. Originally a stonemason from Liverpool, he was dismissed for drunkenness. Like the well-known and recently deceased Baptist minister Christmas Evans (1766-1838) he had only one eye.

John Jones was followed by Hugh Cefni Parry⁶, who answered the call to Hebron at the end of April 1851. He was from Llangefni, Anglesey and due to his short stature was known as 'Parry Bach.' His diary records his ten-day journey from Rhosybol (Anglesey) to Dowlais as follows:

⁶ The Dictionary of Welsh Biography (<https://biography.wales/article/s-PARR-HUG-1826>) provides the following information on Hugh Cefni Parry:

Name: Hugh Parry

Pseudonym: Cefni

Date of birth: 1826

Date of death: 1895

Spouse: Mary Ann Parry (née Harding)

Parent: Ellinor Parry

Parent: Owen Parry

Gender: Male

Occupation: Baptist minister, poet, littérateur, and theologian

Area of activity: Literature and Writing; Poetry; Religion

Born 20 September 1826, in the parish of Cerrig-ceinwen, Anglesey, son of Owen and Ellinor Parry, Tyddyn Sawdwr, Llangefni. He was originally a member of the Congregational churches at Llangefni and Rhos-y-meirch, and was ordained minister at Bagillt 26 December 1848, but seceded to the Baptists at Llangefni 6 October 1850 and held pastorates at Rhos-y-bol (January-May 1851) Dowlais (May 1851-5), Bangor (1855-7), Brymbo and Moss (1857-60), Tal-y-bont, Cardiganshire (1860-4), London (Tottenham Court Road) (1864-7), and Cardiff (1867-70). He emigrated to America in 1870 and spent the greater part of his time there in the pastorate of Dodgeville (Wisconsin) (1885-95), but he returned several times to Wales and was pastor at Holywell in 1884-5. He died at Llangefni, 18 May 1895, and was buried at Rhos-y-meirch. He married (in 1847 or during his pastorate at Rhos-y-bol) Mary Ann Harding of Caernarvon. He was successful in the pryddest competition at the national eisteddfod at Swansea, 1863, and published articles and poetry of a high standard in the Welsh and American periodical press.

May 7th: Entered on board of the vessel for Liverpool.

May 8th: Cross winds. The ship anchored.

May 9th: Winds broken last night: got anchored at Llandudno Bay.

May 10th: Arrived at Liverpool. Boarded the Trambadour.

May 11th: On the sea. Very sick.

May 12th: Arrived at Bristol. Taking a boat for Cardiff arrived there.

May 13th: Staying at Cardiff and preaching there, the night.

May 14th: Train for Merthyr: reaching Dowlais.

He was remembered for his shouting! Indeed, his shouting for some was the reason cracks began to appear in the building within ten years of its construction. Others blamed the damage on the frequent baptisms and the weight of spectators in the galleries, although it should of course be attributed to the mine workings in the area that undermined the building's foundations. The original building was soon demolished and by 1856 a new building had been constructed using stone and wood from the original. The new building came at a cost of £750. It followed the same design as the original but with the addition of a vestibule area.

L.

fyda theimlad
ein darllenwyr
newn ffordd o
wys hon, lawer
isayddiad addas
sis hwn, darfu
evan. hysbysu
oedd yn nghyf-
heidfa barchus
fa wedi syrthio
heidwaid attal
ol, a diwyddo
i. Ilywedwyd
od y gwarch-
gwrthwynebu
ys mewn un-
u yn gwyb od
, y cyneur h-
id i dala 'u
od fod y fi er

fod yr ysgol yma eleni yn fwy llawn nag y gwelsoim hi o'r blaen; ac y nac yn hyfryd ganym allu dweyd. ei bod mewn cyflwr rhagorol o dda, yr hyu sydd yn llewyrchu yn ffafriol iawn ar alluoedd a diwydrwydd yr athraw parchus, Mr. W. George. Llwyddi i'r ysgol.—Un oano yno.

Dowlats.—Ail-ogoriad Hebron.—Cymmerodd ail-ogoriad y capel prydferth hwn yn ar ddydd Sul a dydd Llun, Rhagfyr y 7fed a'r 8fed, pryd y gweinyddwyd gan y Parchedigion J. D. Williams, Bethel; R. D. Roberts, Tabernacl; J. Lloyd, Ebenezer, Meorthyr; J. Evans, Silo; J. Jones, Capel Seion; W. Thomas, Pisu; J. R. Morgan, Llanall; a R. Ellis, Sirhowy. Er fod y tywydd yn hynod o anffafriol, yr oedd y capel yn orlawn o wrandawwyr yn dwyn i'n cof eiriau y bardd:—

"Yn lluoedd deuant i'r raddoldd hebact,
Pob oonol yr iawn—dechrau'r y gwasanarth
Drey gdnau iawel i'r rhyerid mewn gwneirgwydd,
Heb foddol dim sen ddaegs oer gwanerwydd;
Harcenir penodi, ac offrynir gwedd,
Nes byddio pob esau o'r dorf yn toddi."

Yr oedd y pregethau yn gueth a dylanwadol, a gobeithir y bydd effeithiau daionus i ganiyn. Casgwyd dros £70.—
BRAWD.

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In 1854, the Rev. Thomas Roberts became minister. He too was from North Wales and had married the daughter of W.R. Davies, Caersalem. He was clearly an able man having acted as the architect for the new building. His salary was small at just £5 a month and so he opened a shop to supplement his income. When his wage was later cut to just £3 a month, he opened a second shop in Dol-y-gaer.

⁷ *Seren Cymru* 27th December 1856 reporting on the re-opening of Hebron. It notes that although the weather was adverse, services took place on the Sunday and Monday (December 7th & 8th) to a crowded chapel of attentive listeners. The sermons were intense and influential and it was hoped that good effects would follow. Over £70 was collected.

DEATH OF A BAPTIST MINISTER AT MERTHYR.

An inquest was held at the Rose and Crown Inn, Penydarren, Merthyr, on Saturday evening, before Mr. Thomas Williams, deputy coroner, touching the death of the Rev. Thomas Roberts, Baptist minister. The first witness called was deceased's wife, who stated that for the last two months her late husband had been very ill, and a fortnight preceding his death he was coughing very much. He complained of pains in his side and stomach. On Thursday morning the doctor was sent for, and deceased died about nine o'clock. He took a black draught on Tuesday night. There was nothing strange in his manner when he took the black draught (opium), but he was in great pain. John Evans, chemist and druggist at Penydarren, deposed to seeing deceased frequently come to his shop. He appeared a tolerably healthy man. Was sent for by last witness on Thursday morning to see deceased, whom he found in a state of *coma*. Dr. W. A. Byrnes, a surgeon at Dowlais, said he attended deceased professionally. He suffered from neuralgic pains. He extracted a small tumour out of the upper lid of the eye about a fortnight ago. Saw him between eight and nine on Thursday, being sent for. He was *in articulo mortis*. His breath had the smell of laudanum. The pupil of his eye was much contracted, denoting congestion of the brain. Believed apoplexy was the cause of death. Deceased's wife told him he had taken a draught the night before from a bottle marked, "Tr. opii, 1 oz.; æther minims, 9." That quantity would be sufficient to produce insensibility. Richard Lewis Jones, chemist, was next called, and stated that deceased came to his shop almost every other day. He almost always wanted drugs. He used to have æther, opium, camphor, and black draughts frequently. Supplied him on Wednesday by his order with one ounce of opium and ten minims of æther. He always used the Latin terms. After further evidence, the jury returned a verdict of "Death from congestion of the brain, consequent upon taking an overdose of opium by misadventure."

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⁸ *Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian* 20th January 1872 regarding the death of Rev Thomas Roberts

In 1859, John Jones, a Dowlais native, was converted at Hebron. He was appointed a deacon in 1877 and later became secretary of the church in 1884. In 1869, his son Rhys Bevan – more commonly known as R.B. Jones – was born, the family home being 64 Caeharris. R.B. Jones would later become a leading figure in the 1904 revival and in Welsh evangelicalism.



Thomas Roberts was followed by the Rev Owen ‘Waldo’ James¹⁰ in 1865. He arrived at Hebron aged just twenty, fresh from the Baptist

⁹ R.B. Jones

¹⁰ The Dictionary of Welsh Biography provides the following information on Owen Waldo James:

Collage at Llangollen (having been one of the first six students to ever attend). During his time at Hebron, the pulpit was enlarged to become a platform. 'Waldo' was in all likelihood the pseudonym he used for competing at the various eisteddfodau.

Next came the Rev Thomas Trevionydd Davies in 1874. Originally from Pembrokeshire, he came to Hebron as a student from the Baptist College at Pontypool. He became Hebron's second minister to be dismissed for drunkenness leaving after three and a half years. Drunkenness seems have been a feature of these times, amongst both ministers and members. Noel Gibbard writes:

Name: Owen Waldo James

Date of birth: 1845

Date of death: 1910

Parent: Margaret James

Parent: John James

Gender: Male

Occupation: Baptist minister

Area of activity: Religion

Born at Llanfachraeth, Anglesey, son of John and Margaret James, and brother of Edward James, Nevin. His family were Congregationalists, but he himself joined the Baptists at Pontyrrarw during the ministry of John Jones (Mathetes, 1821 - 1878), and he was one of the first six students to enter Llangollen Baptist College. He was ordained at Hebron, Dowlais, 1865, and moved to the Tabernacle, Merthyr, 1872, Ebenezer, Aberavon, 1878, Edwardsdale, Pa., U.S.A., 1887, Rhosllannerchrugog, 1890, and Blaenclydach, 1893. He was appointed secretary and superintendent of the Welsh Baptist Home Missionary Society in 1900, but the Society did not prosper and he resigned. He ministered for a short while to the churches at Barry and Godreaman and in 1905 accepted the pastorate of Bethania, Porth, but his health broke down and he moved to Pen-coed, near Bridgend, where he died 18 July 1910. He was a frequent competitor at eisteddfodau, and his name 'Waldo' is said to have originated as a pseudonym. He was responsible for a South Wales edition of *Yr Herald Gymraeg*, and published *Adnodau Dyrys y Testament Newydd*, 1887; *Blinder Diweddaraf yr Eglwysi ... Anerchiad ...*, 1883; and *Esboniad y Bobl: Yr Efengyl yn ol Marc*, 1895.

In the streets around Caeharris Station lived many Irishmen, a number of whom were lodgers. They were regular visitors to The Red Bull, a public house immediately across the road from Hebron. The chapel and the public house challenged each other for supremacy in Caeharris, doing so with increasing intensity as the Temperance Movement flourished. The Red Bull received support even from some chapel members. There is a story of one member emerging from the Red Bull just as the minister was coming out of Hebron. The latter rebuked his wandering sheep. 'Drunk again, Davy', he said, and received the reply, 'And me too. Lovely isn't it?'¹¹

The next minister was the Rev Griffith Williams, arriving at Hebron in 1879. He was remembered for giving very vivid lectures. Shortly before his departure he gave a lecture on mining methods where he caused a small explosion in order to demonstrate the powder used by miners underground.

It was also in 1879 that the vestry (school room) was added at a cost of £260.



¹¹ Gibbard p12-13

Times of blessing

The first forty years at Hebron were not very auspicious by the standards of the time. This was the heyday of Welsh nonconformity and Wales was still very much enjoying the aftermath of the great eighteenth century revival or “Great Awakening.” Revivals had continued from the middle of the eighteenth century right up to this time and it is said that during this period every seven years, either locally or nationally, there was a great spiritual harvest. Churches were literally bursting at the seams and therefore Hebron’s membership of about 200 was low for the time.

Things changed with the arrival of Rev. W. Ceinfryn Thomas in 1890. Remarkably, he was born in a cottage just three or four hundred yards away from the birthplace of a later minister of Hebron, Rev. Sulwyn Jones, who was born on a farm in remote rural Carmarthenshire. Both men would have attended the same Baptist chapel at Penrhiw-goch. Ceinfryn Thomas had been apprenticed as a tailor to his uncle from the age of 9, but later attended Llangollen Baptist College before accepting a call to Abercwmboui near Aberdare. He was at Abercwmboui for ten years before accepting the call to Hebron in 1890.

By March of 1891, 33 people had been baptised, mainly of the older age group. 60 more were added before the end of the year. He organised classes for the converts in homes in order to instruct and care for them. This care, especially for the young, seems to have been the enduring legacy of his ministry. A Saturday evening Bible class for the young people was a constant feature of his years at Hebron. R.B. Jones had already become a student at the Baptist College in Pontypool by the time Ceinfryn Thomas arrived at Hebron, but Noel Gibbard notes the impression the new minister had upon the young man:

Ceinfryn Thomas impressed him by his personal example and also by his insistence that preaching was the central work of the Christian

ministry. The minister of Hebron was an influence not only upon his own church but upon the whole district.¹²

By the end of the century, Hebron's membership had increased to 324. Hebron was now a full-house every Sunday, morning and evening. Capacity at the time was about 800. Families would have paid seat-money for their pews, a practice that continued well into the twentieth century and remembered by some current members. At the beginning of the century, the congregation had 270 scholars and 35 teachers.

The original debt for the church's construction had still not been paid off and was at this time about £600. There was a real burden to be clear of this, by now, 60-year-old debt. It was referred to as the 'Corff Marwolaeth' (the "Body of Death"). Musical performances were often arranged to raise money for the purpose of clearing the debt. Indeed, eisteddfodau, cantatas and gymanfa ganu were a feature of church life at this time. Once a quarter, services would be led by the Sunday School, and featured various items, including solos and recitations. In June 1902, the debt was finally cleared and Jubilee Meetings were held to celebrate.

¹² Gibbard p16

JUBILI HEBRON, DOWLAIS.

Dyddian Sul a Llun, Mehefin 22ain a'r 23ain, cynnaliwyd yr uchod, a gahwn sierchau darllenywyr y SEREN am y llawenydd cyffredinol a deimlid gan bawb yn yr eglwys a'r ardal wedi cyrhaedd y nŵd hir ddisgwyliedig. Er dathlu yr aungylehiad mewn modd teilwng gwahoddydd y brodyr canlynol i bregethu yn y cyfarfodydd, sef y Parch O. W. James, D.D., Caerdydd, hen weinidog yr eglwys; Parch R. B. Jones, Porth, a'r Parch T. Williams, Pennar; dau frawd a godwyd yma i bregethu, ac nid gormod dweyd ein bod wedi cael gwledd o'r fath orau wrth wrandaw arnynt yn traddodi y genadwri gyda tertih a dylanwad i gynnulliadau lluosog. Da genym ddweyd fod yr eglwys a'r achos mor lewyrebus a llwyddiannus, os nad yn fwy felly nag y bu yn unrhyw gyfnod yn eu hanes o dan weinidogaeth ein hanwyl weinidog Mr Thomas. Traddodwyd annerechiad grymus gan y brawd John Jones, ysgrifeuydd yr eglwys, yn y ewrdd, yn rhoddi hanes yr ymdrechion a wnaed er sylweddoli y Jubili yn nghyd a dangos rhagoriaeth yr egwyddor wirfoddol o gyfranu ar bob cull arall i dalu dyledion capeli.

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1904-5 Revival

The roots of the revival blessing at Hebron perhaps stem from a meeting in 1899 where a member got up at a church meeting and publicly expressed dissatisfaction at the church's spiritual state. Mr Thomas picked up on this concern with the church on the following Sunday. Concerns were expressed by R.B. Jones when he visited to preach in January 1900. His theme was "Needed", where what was needed was another Elijah or Luther. Prayer meetings at the time longed for the Holy Spirit to come in a fresh way upon the church.

In July 1904, the Glamorgan Baptist Association was to be held at Hebron. The prayer meetings leading up to this called for a special outpouring of the Spirit on the forthcoming meetings and there was

¹³ *Seren Cymru* 25th July 1902 reporting the general joy felt by all at having reached the long-awaited goal. Note that both R.B. Jones and his father, then secretary at Hebron, spoke.

great anticipation. When the Association arrived, Charles Davies of Tabernacle Cardiff prophesied that there would be a far greater association before long. The church was longing for more than they had and for God to move in the life of the community. In August, there was a week of prayer meetings, looking forward to the annual preaching festival of the church in September. Again, during these meetings there was a burden for a general awakening and for the salvation of the lost. It was at this time that many backsliders were restored and many were converted. Revival had begun! Before long, Mr. Thomas felt the need to call for assistance, such was the extent of the work, calling upon W.S. Jones, R.B. Jones and Owen Owen of Carmarthen.

Many accounts survive from this time. There is the occasion of when the young people met at the chapel one Saturday in October at 6pm. They were still there at 1am! There is the account of the man who, just across the street from Hebron, was enjoying a pint in *The Antelope*. He felt compelled to leave and crossed the street into Hebron half drunk. As he entered, he could hear his daughter praying for him and was converted that night. Below are some extracts of the unpublished personal memories of Price Davies of 1904 in Dowlais:

T. E. Lewis and I were brought up together on Dowlais Top, and only a few years ago, (not long before he died) while we were standing outside Woolworths Stores in High Street, Merthyr, he related to me how and where he was saved.

Every Saturday night he and his friends spent their time drinking in different pubs until eleven-o'clock Stop Tap; after this they used to take drinks with them to one or another of his friend's homes, and drinking until the early hours of Sunday morning. He told me he never went home until about two-o'clock in the morning. He was going home drunk one Sunday morning alone along Gwernllwyn Road, with a railway along one side of it. This was a lonely road. He told me he was brought down under an awful conviction by God of his sinfulness and guilt; and there alone on the solitary pavement he cried to God for mercy and forgiveness for some time. T. E. Lewis was saved there and

went home a changed and sober young man and became a faithful member of Hebron Baptist Chapel for more than fifty years. He said that the Lord Jesus Christ took that appetite and thirst for drink out of him that night for ever, for it never returned. Praise the Lord. T. E. Lewis was well known as a Coster in Twynrodyn and Merthyr.

Sam Brown, another friend of mine, was converted down in the Colliery – Number two Pit Bedlinog – there alone between two ventilator doors. Praise God!

I had an adopted brother, married and living in Dowlais Top, his hobbies were drinking, gambling and fighting. Many of those he knew, who had lived the same kind of life, were at this time converted and he used to go with them to the meetings in Hebron; but he came out time after time saying “They are not going to have me.” But the more he was coming and going out defiantly, the more an even greater volume of prayer would rise from the congregation to the Throne of God in Heaven that the Lord would have mercy on him and bring him to his feet. Not long afterwards some of the members of Hebron were coming home at midnight one Saturday night after attending a Revival meeting at Pantywain, a village on the mountains above Dowlais Top. Before they came to the houses in Dowlais Top they could hear somebody moaning and groaning on the side of the road, and Glory to God it was him; brought down under awful conviction and crying to God for mercy.

Two of the men picked him up, one under each arm, and took him down past his house to the meeting in Hebron where the meetings were going on all night. There, that night, or rather Sunday morning, D. R. Williams, commonly called “Dai Ruth” was converted. Oh, what a change! He became a member of Hebron Baptist Chapel.¹⁴

At the end of January 1905, Evan Roberts visited Hebron. The church was packed, with perhaps over a thousand in attendance. This crowding, along with the gas jets made the place intolerable and people were beginning to faint. There was a call for the windows to be broken. The *Western Mail* reporter ‘Awstin’ was in attendance and

¹⁴ Extracts from the Testimony of Price Davies, 1881-1966 (with thanks to his grandson, Roy Davies, St Luke’s Campus Librarian, University of Exeter)

apparently encouraged the breaking of the windows, assuring that *The Western Mail* would cover the costs.

The night meeting was at **Hebron** Welsh Baptist Chapel. The large building was crowded to excess, and hundreds were unable to obtain admission. From the commencement it was evident that there would be a remarkable manifestation, for the spontaneity and heartiness evinced were unique. The responses to the missionary's appeal for testimony were innumerable. **Hebron** is the church where the movement has taken the firmest hold in the district, but the results last night exceeded all expectations. The mission at **Dowlais** was thus brought to a glorious termination.

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The Evening Meeting

In the evening the principal service was held in **Hebron** Welsh Baptist Chapel, which was crowded long before six o'clock, and this meeting, bristling with incidents and characterised by peculiar features of its own, formed a fitting climax to the **Dowlais** visit of Mr. Evan Roberts. Here, as at the chapel previously mentioned, the revival "fire" has been burning for some time, and from the commencement the meeting was a glowing one. Reading, testimony, prayer, and praise followed each other in quick succession, the workmen residing in the neighbourhood being the principal participants, but a few others, including the Rev. D. O. Davies, Rochdale, also took part. The singing was magnificent in its power, and the old Welsh hymns which are justly the pride and precious heritage of Welsh congregations carried with them, and in them, as much "fire" as even the powerful prayers which roused and invigorated all. The pastor (the Rev. W. Cynfryn Thomas) several times at intervals reminded those present that it was his desire and the desire of the Church that everyone should feel thoroughly at home, and the invitation was evidently accepted in the same spirit as it was given, for the responses, in solo, hymn, prayer—and especially in the torrents of prayer—were free, frequent, and fervent.

A little after seven o'clock Mr. Evan Roberts, accompanied by the Rev. D. Mardy Davies, arrived, and it was shortly afterwards announced that the young ladies—the Misses Davies—were unable to come in. An appeal was made for a way to be made for them, but Mr. Evan Roberts said: "Go on with the meeting; God will

take care of the sisters." He, however, asked for a little fresh air, or they could not go on very long. One young lady fainted, and was attended to, while many others fanned themselves vigorously.

Gas Extinguished

The gas jets in the gallery were extinguished in order to reduce the heat; but that was insufficient, and at the request of the pastor several window panes were broken. The unrest was promptly stilled. Mr. Evan Roberts went on with his address, and the gas jets were re-lighted. The Rev. W. Cynfryn Thomas, walking along the seats of the pews, managed to go out and bring in the lady evangelists, and it was soon known that they were there, for when Miss Annie Davies and Miss Maggie Davies (Mamleg) sang, as a duet, "O'r eaf Iesu" ("I've Jesus"), a thrill went through the closely-packed crowd.

A Remarkable Scene

Prayers were subsequently offered for the spreading of the "flame" throughout the world, and while this was at its height the majority of those present sang softly in English and Welsh alternately, "For you I am praying." Then, when the "test" for converts was made, and people rose to signify their surrender, the singing of "Dioch iddo" became literally triumphant, and when the enthusiasm grew the singers, hundreds of them, actually clapped their hands with joy, keeping time with the music by the hand-clapping. Handkerchiefs were waved, and the scene formed another feature of this truly wonderful meeting. "Any more to save?" asked the evangelist. "Yes, yes," were the cries, and passionate prayers followed, while some young

¹⁵ Extract from *The Cardiff Times* 28th January 1905 (page 8)

ladies struck up singing "Come, sinner come." Suddenly comes another peculiar feature. A man from the gallery shouted, "A brother here has surrendered. He could not speak, so he has written a note to say he accepts Jesus Christ." "Very good," said the delighted evangelist, and "Dioloh iddo" and "Ar Ei ben bo'r goron" sang the equally delighted congregation. The converts were very numerous, and the meeting from opening to close was one of the most stirring which it has been my privilege to attend.

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As well as the meetings, there was concern to visit the sick and those who had been unable to attend. By 1905, the membership had risen to about 600 with as many Sunday School scholars and 43 teachers.

Strangely, by 1908 the membership was down to 400 and concern was being expressed that there was a spiritual apathy in church life, although the church remained a hive of activity. An amusing note in the church records at this time is the concern expressed at a church meeting in 1908 about the recent change that had taken place to the miners' day, which had been reduced to eight hours. Concern was expressed as to what men would do with all the extra time on their hands!

¹⁶ *Evening Express* 25th January 1905 (page 4)



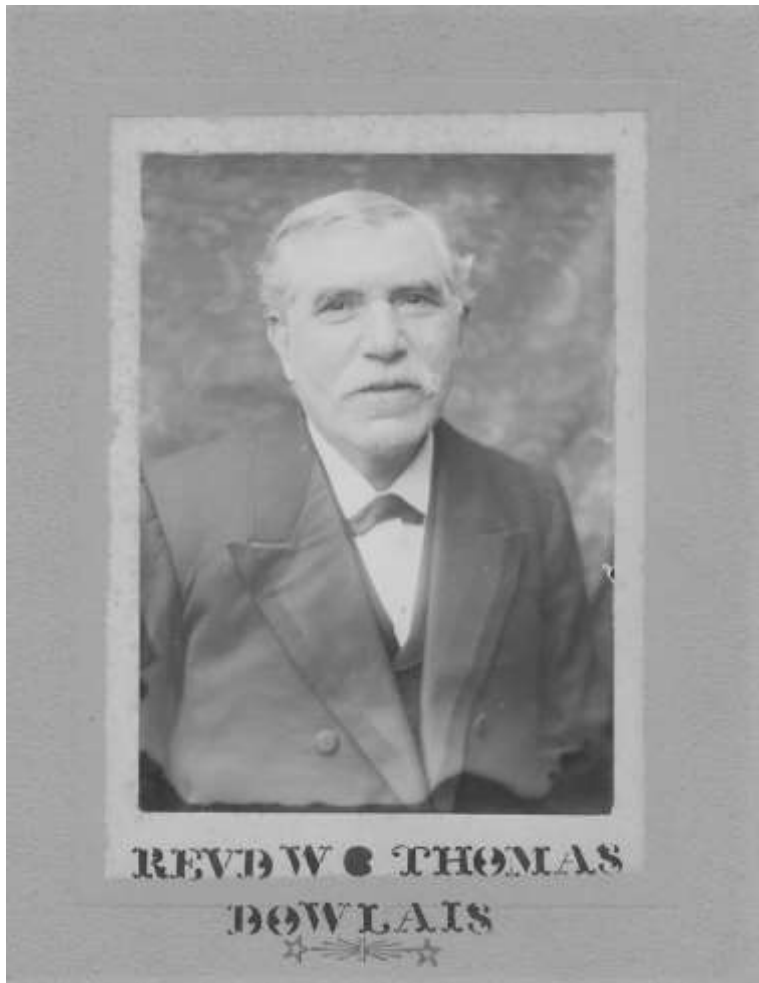
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Church discipline was an important factor during these years. In the previous century, the main reason for discipline had been drunkenness. Now, other issues enter the records. There are instances of gambling, stubbornness, Sabbath breaking, absenteeism from services and a specific instance of women members quarrelling in public. These matters were taken seriously and discipline was exercised. Every year saw a number of ex-communications after due warning and visits had been paid. To be absent from the church's communion for three months without cause was a matter for censure and then, after a further three months, names were removed from the church roll. It should also be noted that there are records of members being reinstated into the fellowship of the church too.

Although a number of men from Hebron were called up to fight in WWI, only one lost his life. Immediately after 1918, there was a clamour in the church for a pipe organ. Such an instrument was deemed necessary in order for Hebron to equal Bethania as a gymnasium facility. A pipe organ required an organ chamber, which was

¹⁷ Sunday School picture from the 1890s.

constructed in 1920. However, it would be another 50 years until a pipe organ was installed.



Ceinfryn Thomas was a revered figure at Hebron and in the community for forty years. Boys were named after him and parents even brought their children to him to be named! A Mrs. Robbins, present at the 1996 150th anniversary service, had named her son Ceinfryn! An able man, he sat on the governing body of the University of Wales. His kindness

to the poor was proverbial and during the lean years of the general strike of the 1920s, he refused on more than one occasion to take his salary. Whilst many ministers at the beginning of the twentieth century were abandoning the gospel, he remained faithful to the end.

If any criticism might be made of him, it was his “pulpit Welsh.” In those days, the Welsh heard from the pulpit would be very different from the Welsh spoken in the home. It was a specialised form of language that ordinary people wouldn’t be expected to understand and a view in the chapels at the time was that if you couldn’t understand a preacher then the sermon must have been good. Some members from this time commented in later years that they had never understood a word he’d preached!

Mr Thomas died in October 1929 after a short illness. Under his ministry, the church had grown to be one of the most respected in the Baptist denomination.

EMYNAU I'W CANU

Eng Agwasanaeth Angladdol y diweddwr

Barch. W. Ceinfryn Thomas

HEBRON, DOWLAIS.

Dydd Llun, Hydref 28ain, 1929.



"Efe oedd gannwyll yn llosgi ac yn goleuo."

Ganwyd ym Mbeurbiwgoch Gorfennaf 29, 1853.
Bu farw Hydref 23ain, 1929.

Bu yn Weinidog yn Hebron, Dowlais, am 40 mlynedd.

Cleddir ym Mynwent y Pant, Llun, Hydref 28ain.

HWYBODA'R "TYST," MERTHYR.

Above - the order of service for the funeral of Rev W Ceinfryn Thomas

1930-1964

By 1930, there were still capacity crowds at Hebron, although nonconformity in Wales was waning. In May 1932, Rev. J.J. Lewis from Llanpumsaint, having studied at the Baptist college in Cardiff, was ordained and inducted with R.B. Jones delivering the charge.



His mother charged the deacons that day, “Look after my little boy.”



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¹⁸ Rev J J Lewis and Hebron Diaconate circa 1930s. Back row (L-R): William John Lewis, David Howells, Stephen Kinsey, Thomas David Morgan, John Davies, David William Davies, John Daniel Lewis
Front row (L-R): John Hughes, Mordecai Williams, Evan Elias, Rev. J.J. Lewis, John Williams, John Morgan, James Davies

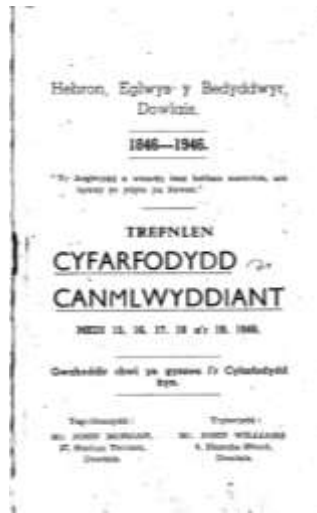
In 1930, the outside baptistry was rebuilt. Stories are told of ice having to be broken before a baptism could take place and church members today have memories of people gathering to watch baptismal services from the railway embankment.



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¹⁹ Men gathered around the refurbished baptistry.

In 1946 the church celebrated its centenary with a week of meetings. It seems that over the five days of meetings, not one sermon was preached!



These were still busy years, but concerns were raised about the number of absentees being carried on the church roll. Mr. Lewis pastored the church until 1949, when he was called to Llandeilo.



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²⁰ Hebron Ladies Guild in the 1940s.

In 1951, the pipe organ was finally installed, before the Rev. E. Dulais Jones was inducted to Hebron in December 1951.

HEBRON BAPTIST CHAPEL, DOWLAIS
SUNDAY, AUGUST 5th at 7.45 p.m.

Dedication of Organ

followed by
Organ Recital
by Mr. W. J. WATKINS, F.R.C.O.



VOCAL ITEMS by CHURCH CHOIR and
SOLOS by MEMBERS of THE CHOIR
Organist: Mr. T. J. Smith Conductor: Mr. D. M. Howells, L.T.S.C.
Chairman: Mr. T. D. MORGAN

Printed 1951-52, Hebron

At the induction of Dulais Jones, he was instructed to use discretion in the use of English. English soon came more and more into the life of the church. By the late 1950s, the Sunday evening sermon was always in English, although every other part of the service remained Welsh.



HEBION, Eglwys y Bedyddwyr DOWLAIS

Eglwys y Bedyddwyr
HEBION, DOWLAIS

CYHILLIR
**Cyfarfodydd
SEFYDLU**

Parch. E. DULAIS JONES

Heim, Ty Ddaewl.

Yn Weinddyg ar yr Eglwys Uchod

**NOF FENCHER a DYDD IAU
ENAGFYR 12 a 13, 1951**

Elysiadau i ddiwedd ymlyniadau cyffwrdd
Dyddwr Burwedd i ddeddfurad.

Diwr yr Eglwys.

Edgwr Lewis, Ysg.,
42, Stryd Tarron,
Dawlish.

Parch. E. Dulais Jones,
8, Cwrs Stanesby W.,
Dawlish.

ELIYH YH UNGGIAD - 1941 1951

Rho dy wylch gwrthi gennad,
Arghybedi swyddu yr holl fydd!
Bodd ac haddod ar Dy gennad,
Bodd Dy iŵr yr hollw'r iŵr.
Nlwy swyddad
Arnd ar yr gennad ynghyd
Hob Dy Allu byddi yn eiddon.
Hob D'nnwnti, swyddu byddi;
Agor iŵr yn eiddon yr iŵr.
-Cand iŵr swyddu ddiwedd yr iŵr;
Hob'i D'nnwnt
Fyddi's ddiwedd swyddu yr iŵr
Cwdd'i swyddu ar Gollwnti.
A'i ddiweddau swyddu yr gennad;
God iŵr hollw'r ddiweddau swyddu
Ar hollw'r ddiweddau swyddu holl.
Ddiwedd iŵr hollw'r
Fyddi's ddiweddau swyddu holl.

(Pencer).



Parch. E. DULAIS JONES

Mr. Jones was an evangelical man after the Keswick mould. He was supported by a group of deacons who had matured during the years of Ceinfryn Thomas.



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²¹ Ladies in chapel

²² Ladies on outing



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1964-2001

In 1964, Sulwyn Jones was inducted as minister. Of his conversion, Noel Gibbard writes:

At Easter 1952 a notable campaign was held in Foelgastell, near Cross Hands, led by a group of young people; among them were Eifion Evans, Gareth Davies and Leslie Jones, three who entered the Christian ministry during H.H. Williams' pastorate. To announce the coming meetings – and at the same time share the good news – they procured an amplifier, connected it to a car battery, attached it to a sledge and dragged it from place to place. The week's meetings were particularly blessed; God's presence was so real that people found it difficult to leave at the end of the service. Even after leaving the chapel, many could be seen sitting on the gravestones enquiring about the way of salvation. One of these was Sulwyn Jones of Penrhiw-goch, Maes-y-

²³ Sisterhood

bont, subsequently minister of Hebron Evangelical Church, Dowlais. With night closing around them, many received the light of the gospel and, in the abode of the dead, experienced the power of the resurrection.²⁴

A number of young people were converted in the late forties and early fifties. Geraint Fielder writes of how:

the fruitful evangelism of the times saw a long-term consequence in the number of men offering for the Christian ministry. There was now a band of theological students who were clearly evangelical and who showed a keenness for academic study. At Bangor were amongst others, Noel Gibbard, Cecil and Dennis Jenkins, Sulwyn Jones, Goronwy Owen, Edmund Owen, Gwylm Humphreys, Denis Young and Hywel R. Jones.²⁵

²⁴ Noel Gibbard, *The First Fifty Years. The history of the Evangelical Movement of Wales 1949-98* (Bryntirion Press, 2002) p38

²⁵ Geraint Fielder, *'Excuse me, Mr Davies – Hallelujah!' Evangelical Student Witness in Wales 1923-1983* (Evangelical Press of Wales Inter-Varsity Press, 1983) p184



Y Parch. E. T. SULWYN JONES,
B.A., B.D.

By this time, although Hebron remained within the Baptist Union, it had become wary of it and more isolationist. By 1972, the church felt obliged to withdraw from both the English and Welsh Baptist Union, although remained Baptist in persuasion and practice.

Of this time in Wales, Noel Gibbard writes:

Many Baptists responded angrily to the declaration made by Principal Michael Taylor on the Person of Christ in his address at the 1971

annual meeting of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland. He stated that God was in Christ as he is in every other person, and that Christ's uniqueness derives from the way he responded to God and the manner in which he operated in the world. In his opinion, Christ could not be both God and man, as was historically believed.

Amongst those who resigned from the Baptist Union as a result of this address were Philip Hill (Llanwenarth), Sulwyn Jones (Dowlais), Owen Milton (Beaufort) and Graham Tolley (Abertyswg). The same step was taken by some churches – that is, by both minister and congregation – among them Townhill and Penlan (Swansea), Mount Pleasant (Maesycwmmmer), Bethel (Cefn Hengoed), Alma Street (now Emmanuel Newport), Caersalem (St Mellons) and Alfred Place (Aberystwyth).²⁶

By 1973, *The Evangelical Magazine of Wales* reported:

HEBRON Baptist Church, Dowlais, and its minister (Rev. Sulwyn Jones) have recently severed their connection with the Baptist Union of Wales. In a statement which they have issued they describe the reasons for their secession as both administrative and doctrinal. They write:

We have been concerned for some time with the increasing trend within the Denomination towards centralization, with more and more interference in the life of the local Churches.

However, we are far more concerned with the doctrinal and spiritual state of the Baptist Union. For years, the boast has been made that the Union is comprehensivist enough to include within itself all shades of theological persuasion, e.g. those who accept and those who deny the Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ; those who thank God for an infallible Guide-book and those who happily take the critical scissors to it; those who say that a Christian is one twice-born and those who say a Christian works his own passage to heaven. We accept that this comprehensivism is all right in a Noah's Ark, but unsuitable for the Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the Truth!

For us, the situation became intolerable, when at the Annual Assembly

²⁶ Ibid p95-96

of the Welsh Baptists at Aberystwyth in 1972, a practically unanimous decision was taken to participate fully with the Roman Catholic Church and others in the 'Wales for Christ' Campaign. Henceforth, therefore, the official trend of the Union will be clearly towards Ecumenism. The same attitude towards Truth will prevail in the Welsh as in the English Baptist Union. (We refer of course to the failure of the English B.U. to discipline the Unitarian Michael Taylor).

We take this step after much deliberation, and in no spirit of bitterness towards our fellow Baptists. However, we feel that in all conscience we must separate from a body that no longer represents the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ-the Gospel of John Myles, Christmas Evans, and C. H. Spurgeon.²⁷

The church sought fellowship with other evangelical churches through involvement with the Evangelical Movement of Wales and later, through its membership of the Associating Evangelical Churches of Wales.

By this time, the majority of those in attendance were English speaking and services were conducted in English. Numbers however had dwindled and by the mid-1980s there were approximately 40 members with worship taking place in the vestry. Demolition was discussed as well as turning the building into flats. Some, however, felt that God had plans. The issue was resolved when the Manpower Services Commission offered to completely refurbish the building, covering all the labour costs. Whilst the work took place, the church met at Gwernllwyn School in 1985. By the time the congregation returned in 1986, the congregation had trebled.

²⁷ *The Evangelical Magazine of Wales* April – May 1973, page 4

The Evangelical Magazine of Wales

April-May 1991

Volume 30

No. 2

85p



The congregation at Hebron Church, Dowlais . . . see centre pages

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²⁸ *The Evangelical Magazine of Wales* magazine front cover April – May 1991



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Speaking at the 150th anniversary of the church in 1996, Mr. Jones described the clear distinctives that undergirded the vision for the church at the time. These included:

- The primacy of the Word of God in preaching and in application to every area of life
- The continued reformation of the church by the Word of God
- Looking to the Holy Spirit to revive His people and His work
- A concern for the lost and seeking every legitimate avenue to bring the gospel to men and women by the written Word, by holy and consistent lives and by word of mouth
- Striving to nourish a warm fellowship of God's people where those who enter in know something of God's own love, concern and protection

²⁹ Men's Sunday School class at Talgarth Church, 16th July 1987

Mr. Jones brought to Hebron an expository preaching ministry with a reformed system of theology where Scripture was applied to every area of life. It is a legacy that remains to the present day.



³⁰

2001-2021

On the 25th September 1999, Gareth Lloyd was inducted as assistant to Mr. Jones. He became minister of the church from July 2001 until May 2004. After a four year period with no pastor, Roy Hamilton was inducted as minister on 27th September 2008.

³⁰ Christmas 2001



Before coming to Wales, Roy had been the pastor of Waterford Baptist Church, one of the oldest Baptist churches in Ireland, established in 1650. He came to Hebron having pastored first in Wales at Calvary, Penybryn.



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³¹ Picture taken at Roy's last service on 7th August 2016

On the 5th November 2016 James Allan was ordained to the Christian ministry and inducted as pastor. The induction service was attended by around 250 people. James had preached at Hebron on occasion from 2007 onwards and had a strong sense of God's call to ministry.

The church continues to try and reach the community, seeking to make the most of every opportunity. The Covid-19 pandemic resulted in Hebron services being live streamed on YouTube for the first time. This continues to be available for members not able to attend in person, as well as reaching unknown viewers all around the world.

For more information or to stay in touch, please visit our web site, follow us on Facebook, or subscribe to our YouTube channel:



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