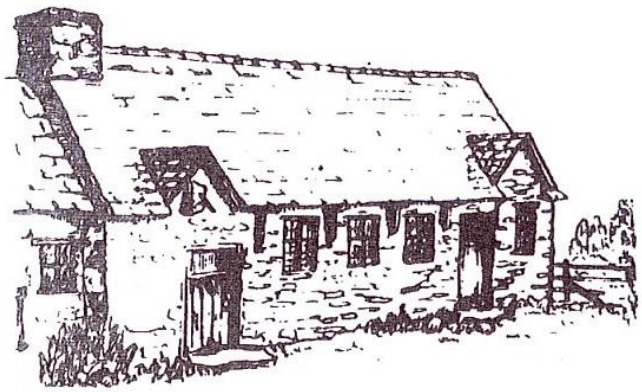
The Landmark Trust

MAESYRONNEN CHAPEL

History Album



Written by Charlotte Haslam, 1989

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KEY FACTS

Chapel built	**1696 (from existing byre)**
House (in present form):	**18th century**
First building on site:	**16th century**
Acquired by Landmark Trust	**1985**
Architect for restoration:	**Andrew Thomas of Jones Thomas Associates**
Contractors:	**Wilden Construction**
Work completed	**1986**

Maesyronnen = Meadow of the Ash-tree

Contents

Maesyronnen Chapel and adjoining cottage.

Summary

This chapel was registered at the Easter Quarter Session of the Assizes at Presteigne in 1697, thus making it the earliest purpose-built Nonconformist chapel surviving unaltered in Wales, and predating other such known examples by nearly 80 years. Minor alterations have been carried out over the centuries, but none have altered the basic rural character of the building. The roof was renewed in the 18th century when the walls were found to be spreading, and the present system of posts and tie-beams was similarly inserted to prevent this. The original earth floor was covered in flagstones in the early 19th century. The simple solid furniture in the chapel, some dating back to the late 17th century, would have been added bit by bit as the congregation could afford it.

The little house adjoining the chapel was probably built in its present form in the first quarter of the 18th century to house a caretaker. Neither chapel nor cottage were built from scratch - both were adapted from a building that already existed and which had probably been used for clandestine meetings of Dissenters following the Restoration of Charles II in 1660 and his subsequent intolerance of any worship outside the Established Church. Tradition has it a 'Beudy' or byre/cow house was used for worship in this area even during the Commonwealth.

Evidence for this earlier building exists in the wall between chapel and cottage, where there is a timber 'cruck' truss formed by splitting a curved oak trunk into two to form a pair. This timber-framed building may have been a 'longhouse', a dwelling house and a byre for the animals built in a single continuous range, with a door leading through from one to the other. This house would have had no chimney, only a central fireplace. Around 1600 a chimney was added and the walls built up in stone. The 'post and panel' partition still visible between the kitchen and the store room may also date from this period but it is not in its original position and its finer side faces the store room. This earlier Jacobean house may also have continued slightly further to the west than the present wall, which is of later masonry.

When the byre was rebuilt as the chapel, the doorway (now under the stairs) between it and the house was blocked up. It is possible that a caretaker was already living there, looking after the secret meeting place and making sure that evidence of it was hidden from the authorities. A caretaker would certainly have been installed in 1697, and in a deed of 1720, a 'little house' is mentioned which implies that today's cottage had already replaced than the quite substantial house which preceded it.

The last caretaker to live in the cottage was Mrs Annie Lewis who looked after the chapel for 52 years. She and her husband George, moved in a few years after their marriage, and she gave birth to 15 children here. The house was obviously too small for all of them, and so when a new baby arrived, one of the older children would be sent away to live with relatives, a practice then quite common in large families. Mrs Lewis had to carry water from a well in the wood until the arrival of a stand pipe at the bottom of the lane. As caretaker she kept the chapel clean, lit the black stove, and opened the door for members of the congregation and visitors.

Mr Lewis died in 1974 and in 1979 Mrs Lewis moved out to live with her sons, until her death in 1985 at the age of 88.

Restoration and Repair

Repairs were carried out on the chapel in the 1960s but by 1980 further work was needed to both it and the cottage, and this was beyond the means of the chapel Trustees and congregation. The Landmark Trust offered to help by taking on and repairing the cottage so that the future of both buildings would be ensured.

Work began in 1985. Derelict corrugated iron sheds and lean-tos that had been built against the outer walls were removed. One of these at the back was to be replaced with a new lean-to containing the bathroom. It is constructed of elm weather-boards.

Some major structural repairs were also needed. The walls of the stable (now store room) were in danger of collapse and had to be completely rebuilt, with underpinning at the corners. The straight joint in the front wall between the stable and cottage was opening up and steel ties were inserted to hold the two together. All walls were then re-pointed with traditional lime mortar.

The roof was stripped of its stone slates and the underlying rafters strengthened were required. Steel brackets and ends were used to give necessary support to the purlins and the main tie beam. A dormer on the front of the cottage was taken down, and two new ones added at the back to light the bedrooms. The slope was slightly altered to take in the new bathroom. Finally the slates were put back with second-hand ones to match, and the ridge tile reused. Several of the doors and windows needed new lintels, and the frames, windows and ironmongery were all repaired or remade in green oak as necessary.

Inside the cottage a partition was removed to make the kitchen/dining room and a new door opening was made between this and the sitting room. The post and panel partition, which had rotted badly at its base was repaired. The flagstones in both downstairs rooms were lifted and relaid on a damp proof membrane.

Upstairs a new partition was put in to divide the landing from the small bedroom and the doorway into the larger bedroom was moved. The roof repairs had all been carefully done so as not to damage the ceilings, which, with their laths and lime plaster, were left intact. The walls have also been lime plastered as this allows any moisture to evaporate gradually - it is not practical or desirable to insert damp proof courses into such thick stone walls. Similarly both the limewash on the walls and the special porous paint on the woodwork, allow the materials to ‘breathe ‘naturally.

In both bedrooms the floors were taken up and a new ‘sandwich’ floor laid: new boards were laid first on top of the joists; then a sheet of thin lead to prevent drafts and to provide sound insulation; and lastly the old boards were relaid crossways, with a few second-hand ones to make up any gaps. When Landmark took on the cottage it still had no running water and only very elementary electrical wiring, and so all pipes ands wires are new, together with the bathroom, kitchen and heating system. New paving stones were laid and a new boundary wall built.

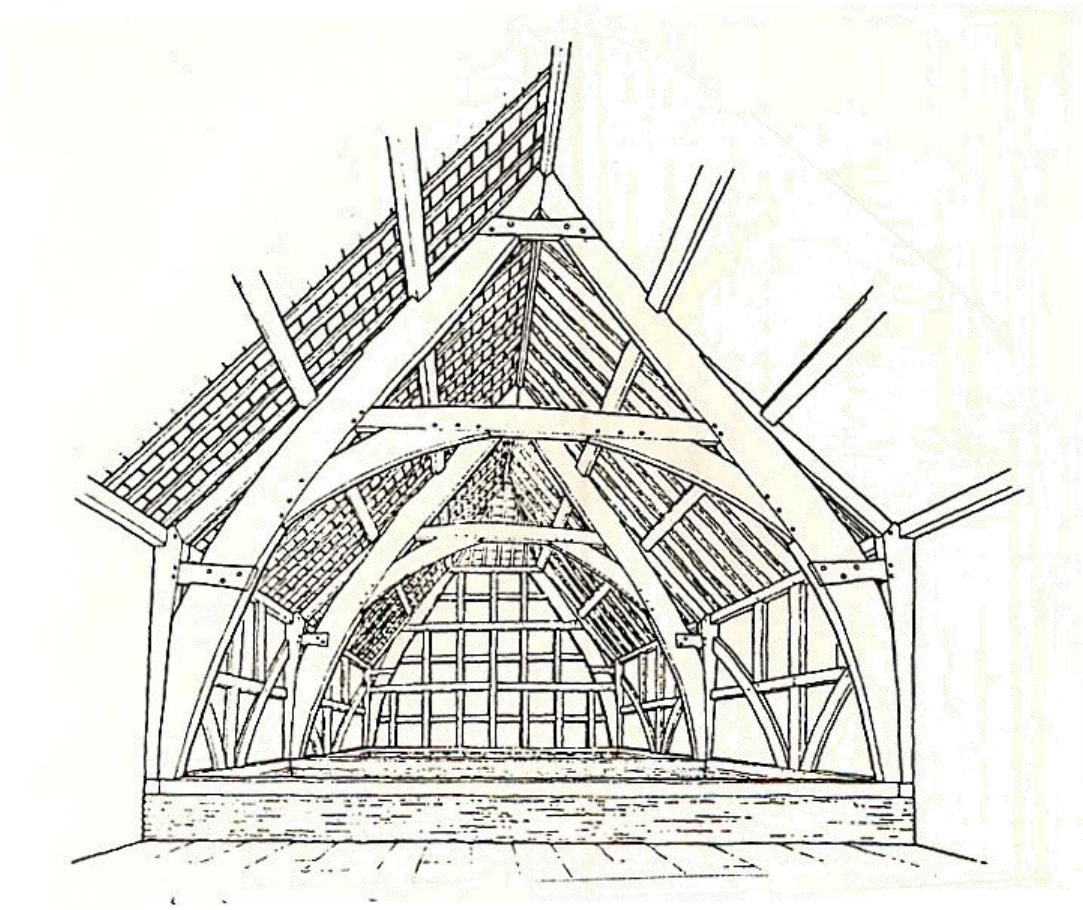
Maesyronnen Chapel – When was it built?

The chapel at Maesyronnen was registered at the Easter Quarter Session of the Assizes at Presteigne in 1697, having been built, probably, during the previous year. It is thus the earliest purpose-built Nonconformist chapel surviving unaltered in Wales, predating other buildings by nearly 80 years (Llanwenarth Baptist Chapel in Gwent was built in 1695, but was rebuilt in the later 18th century; the next earliest survivor is Capel Newydd at Nanhoron in Gwynedd, of 1769).

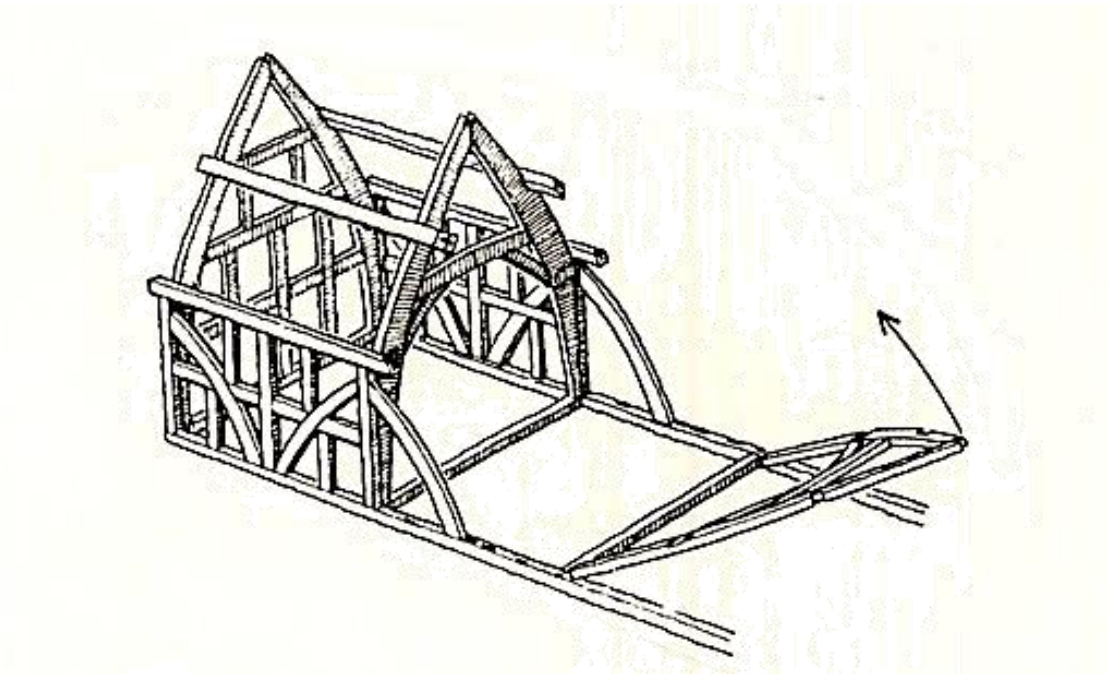
Minor alterations have in fact been carried out at Maesyronnen, but none of them have altered the basic character of the building. The roof was renewed in the mid-18th century, when the walls were found to be spreading, and the present somewhat eccentric system of posts and tie-beams was inserted to prevent this. The original earth floor was covered with flagstones in the early 19th century. Some of the chapel furniture is late 17th-century, and some 18th-century, added bit by bit as the congregation could afford it. In its simplicity and solid workmanship, it evocatively conveys the rural society that the chapel served.

The little house adjoining the chapel, intended for a caretaker, was possibly built in its present form in the first quarter of the 18th century, or soon afterwards.

Neither chapel nor cottage were built from scratch, however, but were adapted from a building that already existed - and which had probably been used for clandestine meetings of Dissenters since the Restoration of Charles II in 1660, and the subsequent intolerance of anything outside the Established Church. Tradition has it that a Beudy or byre (cow-house) was used for worship in this area even during the Commonwealth.



Interior of a cruck-built barn.



Rearing a cruck-framed building.

The evidence for the earlier building stands in the wall between house and chapel, where there is a timber truss of the kind that is called a 'cruck.' A cruck truss was created from a pair of curved upright timbers reaching all the way from the apex of the roof to the ground. They were made very simply, by taking an oak tree with a straight trunk, and a main branch running out at a gentle angle, and then splitting it in two to form a pair. Two or three such pairs were all that was needed to serve as the main framework for a building.

Crucks are certainly one of the earliest types of construction, but because they were so simple they went on being used, especially in country districts, long after they had been superseded in more sophisticated places. They were still commonly used for agricultural buildings in Radnorshire, for instance, in the 18th century. As a result, they are not always easy to date, and the existence of a cruck truss is not necessarily in itself evidence for an early building.

The truss at Maesyronnen belongs to a building of the late Middle Ages or Tudor period - or at least, to a building that was there before the stone chimney was built up against the western face of the truss soon after 1600. It may have been a 'longhouse', a dwelling house and a byre built in a single continuous range, with a door leading through from one to the other. The original cruck building was timber-framed, as was common in the area, and would not have had a chimney at all, only a central fireplace. The addition of a chimney marked a great improvement in living standards.

That there was some money to spend at this time is confirmed by the fact that as part of the same operation the walls of the house were built up in stone. Whether its rooms were already divided by the oak 'post and panel' partition, which now lies between the kitchen and the stable or store-room, or whether this was part of the same round of improvements, is not clear. It is not in its original position, and its finer side faces the store-room, but the crudely carved ogee-shaped head

of the doorway is a simpler version of the kind of thing to be found in the houses of the wealthier gentry in the 16th century.

The previous, early 17th-century house may have continued slightly further to the west than the present end wall, which is of later masonry. One of the beams that supported the floor survives in the store room; it is chamfered and now supports a loft, and like the partition has been moved from its original position. None of the existing roof structure dates from before 1700, all of it probably belonging to the 18th-century rebuilding. A purlin of the first, cruck-built, house can still be seen on the stairs, sawn off when the stone walls were built.

When the byre was rebuilt as the chapel, the doorway (now under the stairs) between it and the house was blocked up. It is possible that a caretaker was already living there, looking after the secret meeting place and making sure that evidence of it was hidden from the authorities. Certainly one would have been installed as soon after 1697 as possible; and from a deed of 1720 by which the chapel was transferred to Trustees a 'little house' is mentioned, which would imply that the existing cottage had already superseded the quite substantial house which preceded it.

Maesyronnen Chapel and cottage before restoration by Landmark.

How the Longhouse at Maesyronnen became a Chapel

General background

To understand why in 1696 a remote and isolated farm building was converted into a Dissenting chapel we must look back to the late 16th and early 17th centuries, to the so-called Puritan Revolution that culminated in the Civil War and the years of the Commonwealth.

After the Reformation, and the firm adoption of a Protestant Church of England (and Wales) during the reign of Queen Elizabeth, there were still many who believed that the rejection of Catholicism and the Pope should have been even more complete, and involved still more radical reorganisation of the Church. Some, who came to be called Presbyterians, believed that bishops should be abolished, and the Church governed by a series of Synods, or committees; others, known as Congregationalists, believed that each church, or religious congregation, should be self-governing, with no higher authority at all.

More radical groups appeared in the 17th century, such as the Baptists and Anabaptists, who believed in baptism for believers only - i.e. for adults and not children - and the Independents, who were basically Congregationalists. What all these Nonconformists shared was a belief in their own salvation predestined from birth, as demonstrated by a godly life (in contrast to the Roman Catholic view that salvation could be achieved by clerical absolution and good works on earth). They also believed in the absolute authority of the Bible, not only in terms of doctrine, but also on matters such as the organisation of the Church, and the ordering of society. Each was considered equal before the Lord, and needing no priest to intervene between the individual conscience and God.

Puritanism appealed especially to the middling classes in both town and country, men and women who responded to its simplicity and democracy, and who at the same time saw little role for themselves in the organisation of the Established

Anglican Church. Bristol and Gloucester were centres of Puritan activity - Dissenting as it was called - and their influence spread over the border into Wales, so that very early Dissenting communities sprang up in the border counties, in Monmouth, Radnorshire and further north in Flintshire, all in existence by 1640.

It was here too that Oliver Cromwell found his staunchest supporters, men such as Walter Cradoc, Morgan Llwyd and Vavasour Powell. It was they who preached the Word to people who were glad to listen, in poor agricultural areas where clerical abuses such as pluralism (the holding of two or more parishes by a priest) and non-residency (drawing the income from a parish while living and working elsewhere) were widespread, often leaving a parish with no priest for several years. These same evangelists suddenly found themselves in power when the Commonwealth government came into existence in 1649 after the execution of Charles I.

Wales during the Civil War had been overwhelmingly Royalist, and during the Commonwealth the majority of the population remained loyal to the Anglican Church. But during these years, in Wales as in England, the Church was to face a major upheaval. In 1650 the Act for the Better Propagation of the Gospel in Wales decreed that all clergy who were not of approved Puritan tendencies were to be expelled from their livings, and replaced by ones who were. Seventy Commissioners, under Colonel Thomas Harrison, were appointed to oversee this task, and without too much difficulty nearly 300 clergymen were evicted, the Vicar of Glasbury among them.

To replace them with an equal number of ‘approved’ men proved more difficult; pluralism and non-residency continued and even increased, and to fill the gap the itinerant preacher was brought into being - and like Dissenting, was to survive as one of the mainstays of Welsh religious life. Over 100 were appointed, some of them distinguished men such as Vavasour Powell, a Radnorshire man who had

been chaplain to the Puritan Sir Robert Harley at Brampton Bryan in Herefordshire. Others were barely educated.

Whatever the problems, the Commonwealth was the answer to prayer for these people, who suddenly had state authority on their side. The parish church was within their control, and under them the first attempt was made at nationwide, state education. About 60 schools were set up in towns around Wales, under Puritan guidelines.

Only ten years later all this was to end with the Restoration of Charles II. It must have come as a traumatic shock to those who had seen their New World unfolding around them; as Professor A.H. Dodd wrote in an essay on the Post-Restoration years in *Wales Through the Ages* (Vol II), it meant the shattering of a dream, 'the dream of a whole society regenerated on a scriptural basis, as they read the Scriptures.'

The backlash was quick to follow. First of all the evicted Anglican clergy of 1649-50 were restored to their livings - and the Puritan incumbents evicted in their turn. Then in 1662 the Act of Uniformity required all ordained clergy to conform to the code of the Established Anglican Church or be ejected - and ejected many of them were, thus branding themselves with the name of Nonconformists. Further retribution came in 1664 with the Conventicle Act, which forbade all meetings of Dissenters.

A reprieve followed in 1672, when the short-lived Declaration of Indulgence permitted the registration of places of worship for Dissenters, and the licensing of Dissenting Ministers - a permission that was withdrawn a year later. Only with the thoroughly Protestant William of Orange did genuine freedom of worship arrive, in the Act of Toleration of 1689.

Inevitably the Dissenting movement suffered a setback during these years of persecution. The number of them in Wales was anyway small - between 6,000 and 8,000 in a total population of 350,000. Many, especially the Quakers, emigrated to America; others 'conformed'; but that still left a hard core of 'unyielding Puritans', meeting in secret in hidden and secluded buildings, forming little communities in market towns and in the countryside. They came mainly from the ranks of tradesmen, farmers and labourers, but sometimes they existed under the protection of a member of the gentry, ready to come into the open when the Act of Toleration allowed them to do so.

It would be a mistake at this time to equate a sense of Welsh nationhood with religious nonconformity, as was to become the case in the later 19th century. In fact the reverse is true in that the majority of the population saw Puritanism as something imposed from outside by the Commonwealth government that they hated, and which they rejoiced to see overthrown. The conduits in Carmarthen ran with wine in 1660, and according to Professor Dodd, most people draw a deep breath of relief at the return of 'rhyddid [a] llawenydd' (freedom and fun), preferring the old familiar order to the rule of the army, the heavy fines and taxation, and civil marriages of the Commonwealth.

But Dissent has always flourished on the failures of the Established Church, and in rural Wales in the late 17th and 18th centuries, as in the industrial communities of the 19th, the Church failed to provide religion to those that needed it and sought it most fervently. Conditions for the most part returned to their pre-Commonwealth state, with the old enemies of pluralism and non-residency continuing unchecked. Erasmus Saunders, writing in 1721 of the diocese of St David's, bewailed the poverty to which the Church was reduced, so that churches were falling into ruin and parish priests, where they existed, were barely able to feed themselves, let alone carry out their duty of guiding their parishioners. In many parishes there was no one even to preach, let alone administer the Communion.

So the Nonconformist movements gradually gained new members, first of all in their established territory of the borders, later in the counties further west. Large numbers of people throughout Wales were ripe and ready for a revival of religious energy.

In the event it was not the older sects of Baptists and Independents that set Wales alight but a new movement that started within the church itself, that of the Methodists. Their effect is best described in an elegy written by William Williams, Pantycelyn, the great hymn-writer (Guide us O thou Great Redeemer) on the death in 1790 of Daniel Rowland, who with Hywel Harris was one of the main forces behind the Revival:

> When dark night covered Britain without a sign of dawn Daniel sounded the clear trumpet of Sinai, shaking solid rocks with its powerful echo. His name was Boanerges, son of the loud, fiery, thunder which shook terrifyingly, the pillars of heaven and earth. In Llangeitho, he began to shout the destruction of the ungodly world, thousands fled thither from South and North, terror, amazement, fear caught the people, great and small, every face lost its colour, Knees trembled with the thunder as if death itself had taken posession of every one in the crowd, and the cry 'What shall we do to save our souls' arose from every side. That is how Daniel began. The sound came over Dewi's hills like a flame consuming flax till it echoed in the rocks of Towy and the old chapel of Ystradffin, where counties congregated in a host of common people without number, at the strong echo of the clear trumpet of heaven's message. They were like the days of Sinai, the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, mist, tempest, smoke and fire, a great mountain intensely quaking and shaking from the depths of the earth, revealing the divine wrath against all manner of sin. It was then that the lively Harris in the great armour of heaven like an unbearable peal of thunder came there to meet him. Those were the days that laid the foundations of hope, the days of the sharp labour and the pains of the new spouse of the gentle Lamb giving birth to her sons. Five Welsh counties heard the thunder and fell in terror like corpses, the wounds were deep and there was no remedy until the ointment of divine water and divine blood was fetched from Calvary. After preaching the tempestuous law for some years

> and wounding a large number he then changed his tune. He proclaimed complete, whole, perfect, full salvation through the Messiah's death on Calvary. The force of his sweet teaching now nurtured faith by revealing the Mediator, the foundation of free Salvation, the man in whom the Godhead dwelt having purchased with his divine blood all the treasure of the heaven of heavens freely for a poor believer.

Thousands answered this compelling call, and travelled many miles to listen to preachers such as these, so great was their thirst. But, again, it would be a mistake to see this as a breaking away from the Anglican Church - indeed it is possible that the success of the revival was due in part to the fact that it was carried out within the Church, to which there was still considerable loyalty. Certainly its leaders saw this as vital, and had no wish to join the ranks of Nonconformists.

Even between the older Nonconformists and the Established Church there was a good deal of cooperation once the initial period of mutual suspicion had settled down in the 18th century. This was especially true in the field of education, as both organisations sought to bring the skills of reading and writing to ordinary people. And while William Williams and Howell Harris had studied at a Dissenting academy, Daniel Rowland actually was an ordained priest, as was Thomas Charles, who took the revival into North Wales.

The great change in the character of Nonconformity, and the emergence of a sense of rivalry between Church and Chapel did not take place until the 19th century, and well into the 19th century at that. The rift that had been marked out in the years of the Commonwealth, and been obscured by common purposes and the small numbers of the Nonconformists during the 18th century, only achieved reality after the Napoleonic Wars; or more exactly in 1811 when the Calvinistic Methodists broke away from the Church of England, to form their own Calvinistic Methodist Church of Wales.

The huge growth in membership that then took place, so that by the middle of the century roughly 80% of the population of Wales adhered to one brand of Nonconformity or another, was a response to a quite different set of circumstances than the rural deprivation of the late 17th century. The Industrial Revolution was in full swing, whole villages and towns had come into existence where there was no ancient church at all - but where there was a great desire for religious activity even so.

This desire the Nonconformists were far more easily able to fulfil. The Anglican Church was not only hampered by lack of funds, but by a whole hierarchy of authority which made the creation of a new parish, and building of a new church, a lengthy business. None of this applied to the Nonconformists; it was a simple matter to start a congregation, in somebody's house to begin with perhaps, and then to expand into a chapel when the funds could be found to build it. Often it was the members of the congregation, builders or carpenters or labourers, who did the work themselves in their spare time.

At the same time the Nonconformists offered a sense of belonging, and of community, to a society that still had to find its feet. Where in the 17th century it was the middle classes who saw Dissent as giving them a chance to influence events, in a way that more truly reflected their values and way of life, it was now the huge working population, with little education and no political voice, that saw an opportunity for both in belonging to the Baptist, Congregational or Methodist Church.

The Nonconformity that we think of today then is largely that of the 19th-century: giving education to the working poor, together with a strict code of moral conduct; acting as a focus in the life of thousands, especially in the industrial south and in urban communities throughout the rest of Wales; providing, perhaps above all, a channel for the Welsh love of oratory, in its preachers, and of singing, in the enthusiastic choirs.

And it built chapels, hundreds of them, all over the Welsh landscape, both urban and rural, so that it is now impossible not to think of the two as a single image: plain, upright buildings with Sion or Bethel emblazoned across their front, and large, round-headed windows, rising above a group of slate-workers' cottages on a remote Snowdonian hillside; elaborate Classical temple fronts giving dignity to a non-descript street in the Valleys. Often the interior is as plain as the exterior, with simple furniture and whitewash; but sometimes a glorious and startling splendour greets you as you swing open the door, to find baroque plasterwork and carved balconies, as rich as anything in a contemporary theatre or palace; and in all of them, whether grand or humble, the gleam of varnished pine.

All this is a far cry from Maesyronnen - although the basic arrangement of the later buildings, with the pulpit forming the central feature, was already established here. But it was natural and inevitable that Nonconformists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, struggling for a different kind of recognition, should look back to those early ‘unyielding Puritans’ who had sacrificed so much in worldly terms for their religious beliefs; and that they should both venerate them and draw comfort from them - and from the building which speaks of them so strongly.

Maesyronnen Chapel before restoration.

Maesyronnen in Particular

Where, into this wider background, does Maesyronnen itself fit? What brought this particular chapel into existence? There was the need of an existing congregation for a permanent meeting place, of course, and a landowner ready to provide them with one, as we shall see. But there may have been more to it than that, and other needs to satisfy; and a look at the history of the parish suggests that this was indeed so.

Glasbury is a large parish divided by the river Wye, so that it falls partly in Radnorshire and partly in Breconshire. The river, with its tendency to flood, must always have been an obstacle to easy communication between the two. There was no stone bridge until the 18th century, and the timber bridges that preceded it were regularly washed away.

The earliest church here was founded by the Welsh St Cynidr in the 5th century; this would have been a small monastery or collegiate church in the Celtic tradition, called a 'clas' - hence Glasbury, or in Welsh Y Clas ar Wy (The Clas on the Wye). It is not known for certain where this stood, but it is thought to have been near to the Well that still bears the saint's name, Ffynon Gynidr (whence Ffynon Gynydd), and the tradition is that he was buried nearby.

The present village of Glasbury was a creation of the Normans, or rather, of a baron named Bernard Newmarch, who had been made lord of this part of the great County of the Marches. Bernard built a castle for himself close to the river, where there was, presumably, an easy crossing place. Then in 1088 he gave the manor (but not the castle itself) to the Abbey of St Peter of Gloucester. The dedication of the church changed at this time from St Cynidr to St Peter, and it is likely that the monks of Gloucester built a new church, close to the castle, and dedicated it to their own patron saint.

The new church, with the castle and later the very fine Vicarage (probably 14th-century) stood on the north bank of the Wye, and so would have served the present Radnorshire part of the parish rather better than the Breconshire part, which therefore had two 'chapels-of-ease' in which services could be held. (The creation of 'Radnorshire' and 'Breconshire' did not in fact take place until the reign of Henry VIII, and for a long time after that the whole of the parish of Glasbury was counted as Radnorshire, although for civil purposes the parish was divided in two from the 16th century onwards).

In the early 17th century (some accounts say late 16th), the situation unexpectedly changed, because the river altered its course, and the church found itself on a new south bank. It was also so close to the river that repeated flooding damaged the building, and by 1660 it was ruinous and had been unusable for several years.

As a result the Radnorshire part of the parish was suddenly left with no church that was easy to get to - and before too long the parish as a whole was similarly bereft. At the same time came the disruption and upheaval of the Civil War and the Commonwealth.

Glasbury was not one of those unfortunate parishes that was left for years without a parish priest. The Vicar at this time, Alexander Griffith, was a local man (his family came from Llowes) and as far as we know was well-liked. He was expelled in 1650 for 'drunkenness and lasciviousness', but in Puritan terms most of the population could be accused of those faults, and there is no reason to think that he neglected his duties. He was, however, an ardent Royalist and more particularly an opponent of Vavasour Powell (he published a diatribe against him in 1654) so was an obvious candidate for eviction.

In 1653 a new Vicar was appointed to the parish, a prominent local Puritan named Richard Powell, who also held the living of Llanigon and later those of Crickhowell and Llangattock as well. He was one of the Commissioners or Approvers under the Act for the Propogation of the Gospel, and was an active promoter of the new Puritan order.

It is here that questions start to arise in relation to Maesyronnen. There is an unfounded, but very strong, tradition that before the chapel was built the congregation worshipped in a Beudy or byre, supposedly that same one out of which the chapel was later formed; and that to this same Beudy Oliver Cromwell himself once came to worship. But if the parish was now under the control of a strongly Puritan minister, it is surprising that it was not the parish church itself that was used by those who were not, during this period, Dissenters but part of the mainstream of organised religion - except that for the time being there was no adequate church.

On the other side of the Wye there were the existing chapels that could be used for services; there is no record of any such chapel existing on the north side of the river, on the site of the ancient Celtic church of St Cynidr for instance. But a tradition of that church might well have survived into the 17th century, and when a place to hold services was needed, it may well be that an empty Beudy (it is hard to imagine services being held among the cows) near to the old well of St Cynidr, and not too difficult of access for the scattered farms of the uplands, was thought of as a temporary place of worship - its owner, perhaps was a Puritan himself.

That there was a group of Puritan supporters in this immediate area is born out by the fact that a letter of 1653 reports that ‘Richard Powell is repairing and scouring his pistols, and so is most of his brethren theirs also, and setting them in order at the smith's in Fynnon Gynydd in Glasbury.’ It seems that Richard Powell,

like Vavasour Powell, was opposed to Cromwell's assumption of the Protectorate, and was prepared for trouble in that cause.

1660 saw the reinstatement of Alexander Griffith, who had apparently remained in the locality all the while, since parish accounts continue to be in his handwriting. His first action was to arrange for the building of a new church, further away from the river on the south bank. A petition was sent to the Bishop, signed by a hundred parishioners. Permission was granted and the new church was completed by 1664. The inaugural service was held in 1665, when the church was officially opened by the Bishop of St Davids.

So the Beudy would no longer have been required by the parish in general. But there were still those 'unyielding Puritans' who wanted nothing to do with the Re-Established Church, and it is more than likely that they continued to meet there in secret during the years of persecution. In addition there was still no church or chapel on the north bank of the river (nor was there to be until 1882 when a second church was built in Glasbury). There may have been parishioners living around Ffynnon Gynydd who thought it more in keeping with ancient tradition, and certainly more convenient, to build a new place of worship there, and when this did not happen, took to joining the secret worshippers at Maesyronnen.
In 1672 the Independents in this area (now quite distinct from the Baptists and Quakers) were given new energy when Henry Maurice became pastor of the 'gathered church' of Llanigon - consisting of Breconshire and part of Radnorshire. Maurice was a former Anglican rector who had been converted to Nonconformity, a powerful speaker and a capable organiser. He came from a gentry family and had been to Oxford, with many useful connections to help him avoid prosecution for his illegal activities - the *Dictionary of Welsh Biography* talks of his 'aristocratic temper.' In a tour of Wales that he made before his appointment in Breconshire, he frequently preached in churchyards, and was apparently surprised that he was not allowed into the churches themselves. This was in 1672, the year of the Indulgence, but he does not seem to have taken much notice of the

renewed restrictions thereafter, and this must have inspired a great sense of confidence among his followers. Their sense of security was no doubt increased, too, by the death of their old opponent, Alexander Griffith, in 1676.

Maurice died in 1682, and it is not certain whether the next bit of good fortune to befall the secret worshippers in the Beudy occurred before or after his death. This was the inheritance of the Maesllwch estate by a Puritan named Charles Lloyd. Maesllwch had belonged to a branch of the Vaughan family, but in the mid-17th century the estate was sold to Henry Havard, who was living there in 1670. Mrs Dawson in her *Notes on the History of Glasbury* in (1918) then says that 'through the marriage of an heiress it afterwards passed to Charles Lloyd', but no date for this is given.

Charles Lloyd was well-known as a Puritan; he had connections by marriage with the strongly Puritan Watkins family of Sheephouse, Hay-on-Wye, and had been a supporter of Vavasour Powell. In 1672 Henry Maurice when on his tour through Wales recorded in his diary that he 'had a long conversation with Mr Charles Lloyd' with whom he stayed in the dower house at Gwernyfed, where he was then living.

We know nothing of the religious sympathies of the Havard family, but if the Beudy was used as a meeting place it is hard to imagine it was done without their knowledge and, at least, their indulgence. Nor do we know exactly how they were connected with Charles Lloyd, but if Mrs Dawson's heiress was the young third wife who outlived him, this would be another reason for suspecting them of Puritan sympathies (and it is interesting to see that a Thomas Havard was Minister at Maesyronnen 1846-59).

Whatever the role of the Havards, Charles Lloyd's was certainly an active one, in encouraging the Independents to meet on his land and under his protection. It is quite possible that as soon as he inherited, he handed the whole farm of

Maesyronnen over to them absolutely, to hold their meetings in the Beudy and install one of their number in the farmhouse as caretaker.

If this was so, the small funds of the congregation and the simple needs of a caretaker would help to explain why a substantial Jacobean farmhouse was rebuilt in the early 18th century as a 'little house.' The farm may even have been unoccupied for some years - which would certainly have made its use by the Nonconformists easier - and the house have been in poor condition when they took it on, so that it actually had to be rebuilt; and again, lack of funds would dictate that this was done on a more humble scale than before.

It is certainly not surprising to find that soon after the Toleration Act made it legal for him to do so, Charles Lloyd saw to, and presumably financed, the erection of a chapel out of the byre at Maesyronnen. In doing this he was simply completing a story which had begun forty years before; and if this little chapel is indeed the nearest place of worship to that early, equally simple, church of St Cynidr, the story could even be said to have begun over a thousand years before.

Later History

Owners of Maesllwch

Charles Lloyd died in 1698. He was succeeded by his so Lewis, who was a wealthy London merchant. Lewis shared his father's religious convictions, and helped to found the London Congregational Fund in 1695, the purpose of which was to give support from the wealthy congregations of the capital to poorer churches in the country. It could well be that one of the first to benefit was the congregation at Maesyronnen itself, and it is certainly possible that it was Lewis Lloyd who financed the building of the chapel.

He also greatly enlarged the Maesllwch estate, but had no son himself, his heir being his only daughter, Theodosia. In his will of 1714/15 however, he made sure that the future of the congregation at Maesyronnen was secure: he laid an injunction on his descendants or successors at Maesllwch, that should any one of them dispose of the land on which the chapel was built, they were to pay a fine large enough to build a new chapel elsewhere.

Theodosia married Humphrey Howorth of Cabalon, who thereby became possessed of her estates. It was he who in 1720 drew up the deed transferring the chapel itself to Trustees - though it appears that the land on which the chapel stands still belongs to the Maesllwch estate to this day.

Theodosia's son, Sir Humphrey Howorth, had political ambitions; he was M.P. for Radnorshire for 33 years and in the process of securing his continued re-election nearly bankrupted himself. He seems to have been extravagant in his personal life too, and not altogether honest, which might be the explanation of the injunction in his grandfather, Lewis Lloyd's, will. He was Receiver of the Crown Rents for Cheshire from 1714 until 1730, when it was discovered that he had put most of these into his own pocket, and owed £3,000 in arrears to the Treasury. As a result he was forced to sell much of the estate to his tenants. This was, in one

way, to his advantage, since these tenants now became freeholders, and so able to vote; and since he still had certain rights over them as lord of the manor he was able to secure their votes for himself.

Financially, the sale does not seem to have done him much good however, since on his death in 1755 he left what remained of his estates encumbered by large mortgages, in addition to the debt to the Treasury, which with interest grew to £8,000. His son, the Rev. Henry Howorth, struggled to pay this off, but in the end the estate had to be sold.

In 1775 for a brief period the estate was owned by Clive of India, who had a survey made showing all the buildings (including the chapel), which is still at Maesllwch. Soon afterwards it was bought by Walter Wilkins, another nabob from an old Glamorganshire family. His descendants changed their name to de Winton and rebuilt the house as Maesllwch Castle (to designs by Robert Lugar) between 1829 and 1850. Most of this was demolished in 1951, but the family still live in the part that remains.

None of these later owners were Nonconformists, so it is interesting, and rather remarkable, that they have all respected Lewis Lloyd's wishes, and allowed the chapel to stand on their land. In the mid-19th century, indeed, when members of the congregation from Glasbury found the steep walk up the hill to Maesyronnen too much for them, the de Wintons offered to build a new chapel in a more convenient place, but luckily this offer was not taken up. The chapel has continued to be a place of active worship, and it still is today.

Chapel members on Christmas Day 1960.

Mrs Lewis in about 1978.

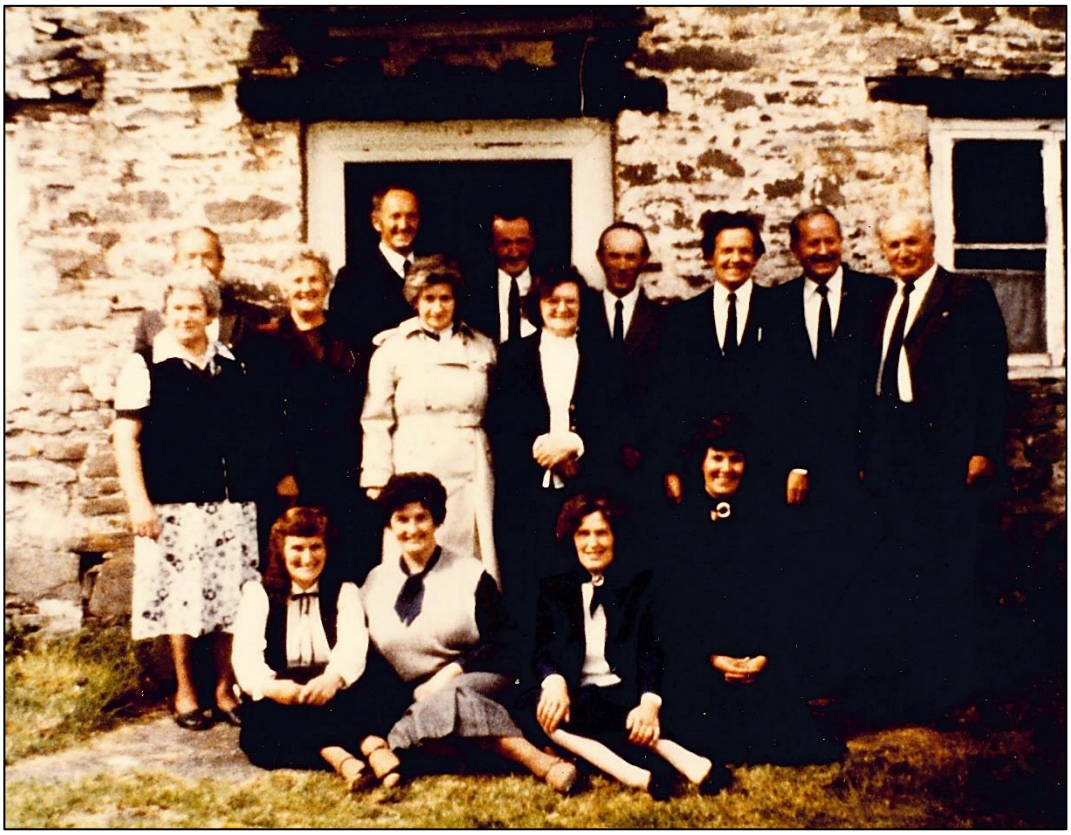
The last caretaker

The last person to live in the Chapel House was Mrs Annie Lewis, who was caretaker of the chapel for 52 years. She and her husband, George, brought up 15 children in the tiny house, 12 of them born there. Space being very limited, when the boys were 12 they were sent to lodge at one of the small farms nearby. From there they still went to school, but worked with the cattle in the mornings and evenings to pay their keep. One of the sons, Bernard Lewis, remembers how they all helped with small jobs like keeping the crows off the corn for the Maesllwch Estate, and how he used to hoe marigolds and swedes, for which he was paid by the hundred yards, all money which helped to pay the bills at home. The older children, once they had jobs, also helped with the bills.

Mr Lewis died in 1974, and in 1979 Mrs Lewis moved out of the Chapel house, to live with one of her sons until her death in 1985 at the age of 88. She is still remembered by members of the congregation, one of whom has written this account of her:

> Mrs Lewis had a hard life but, in spite of her small size, was strong. She had to carry water from a well in the wood opposite for many years, and then from a stand tap at the bottom of the lane about one hundred yards away. Electricity was installed only some twenty years before Mrs Lewis left the cottage.
>
> She was always on hand at the Chapel. She kept it clean and, in the early years, used to light and stoke the black stove in the chapel, and open the door for members and visitors. She and her dog were a familiar sight to many people who went to the chapel over the years, and she was missed very much when she left the house.

Mr and Mrs Lewis with five of their fifteen children in about 1930.



The 15 Lewis children born in the Chapel House.

Mr George Lewis with his youngest daughter on her wedding day.

Maesyronnen Chapel and cottage before restoration.

Restoration and Repair

In recent years the maintenance of the chapel and the 'little house' had proved more and more difficult for the Trustees and congregation of Maesyronnen. Repairs were carried out on the chapel itself in the 1960s, but by 1980 further work was needed, and the cottage too required a great deal of work. None of this they could afford to do, without outside help. This, the Landmark Trust was able to give; at the same time Landmark offered to take on and repair the cottage, so that the future of both buildings would be ensured.

Work began in 1985, and the detail of what was done can be seen on the plans that follow. As so often the first job was to clear away derelict corrugated-iron sheds and lean-to buildings that had been built against the outer walls. One of these, at the back, was to be replaced with a new lean-to containing a bathroom, constructed of elm weather-board.

Lean-to sheds at the back before removal.

The Cottage as it was in 1982, before restoration.

Some major structural repairs were also needed: the walls of the stable (now store-room) at the west end were in danger of collapse and had to be completely rebuilt, with underpinning at the corners. The front wall of the stable was a rebuilding of the original wall in that position, and where it joined the main cottage wall there was a straight joint, which was coming open. Steel ties were inserted, to hold the two together. All the walls of the cottage were then repointed with lime mortar, as it was originally.

The main structural problems lay in the stable/store room, which is a later addition to the main cottage, and poorly constructed. The walls were about to collapse, and had to be almost entirely rebuilt.

Repairs to the roof and front elevation of the stable/store room.

The roof was stripped of its stone slates. As much of the existing structure was retained as possible, with new rafters being fixed to the old to give them extra strength. Where the purlins, or the main tie beam, needed strengthening, steel brackets and ends were bolted onto them to give the necessary support.

Some slight alterations were made: a dormer on the front of the cottage was taken down, and two new dormers added at the back, to light the bedrooms. The slope of the roof at the back was altered slightly to take in the new bathroom. All the roof timbers were treated with fluids made from pyrethroids, which are harmless to bats. Finally the slates were relaid on new oak battens, any broken or missing ones being replaced with second hand ones to match. The ridge tiles were also reused.

The eaves brackets, with their chamfered ends, are a local characteristic. The small roof over the main door had to be renewed, but is an exact copy of the original.

Several of the windows and doors needed new lintels, and the main door frame had to be repaired, with new oak pieced in where necessary. The kitchen windows only needed to be repaired, but new frames had to be inserted into both the windows on the stairs, and into the reopened windows of the stable (green oak being used for these). All the doors, inside and out, are old, though several small repairs were needed, particularly to the ironmongery.

The Cottage interior in 1982, before restoration and during (below).

Inside the cottage a partition was removed to make a kitchen/dining room, and a new door opening made between this and the sitting room. The post-and-panel partition in the kitchen needed some repair to its base, which had rotted badly, but these were kept to a minimum. The flagstones in both downstairs rooms were lifted, in order to lay a membrane beneath them, and then replaced, with a few second hand replacements for those that were broken or missing. The fireplace, with its bread oven and grate, is all as it was found, although the opening to the chimney was reduced slightly to prevent all the heat disappearing up it.

Upstairs a new partition was put in to divide the landing from the small bedroom, and the doorway into the larger bedroom was moved. The roof repairs had all been carefully carried out in order not to damage the ceilings, so these were left in tact, with their lath and lime plaster.

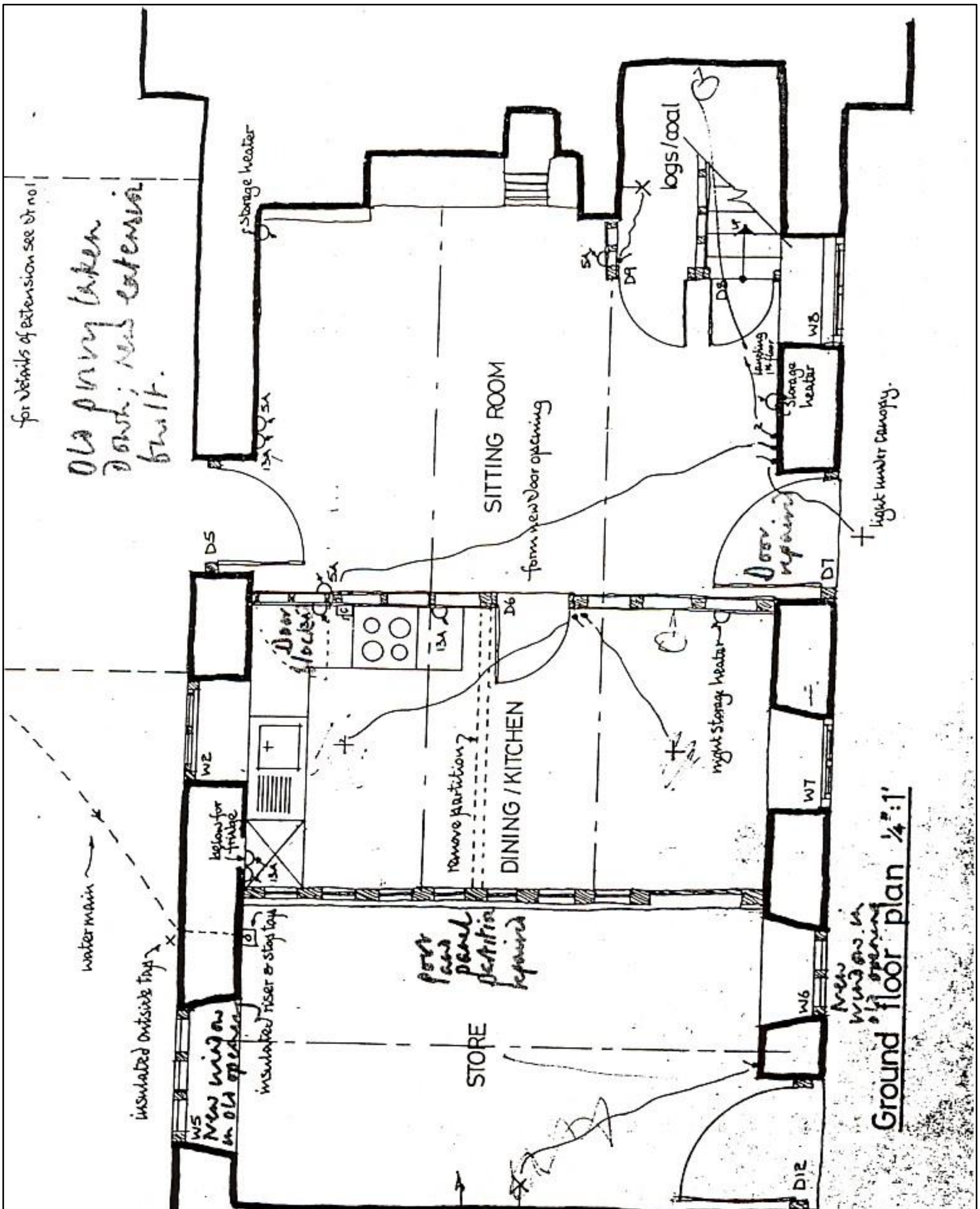
New lime plaster has, in fact, been used on all the walls in the cottage, so that any wetness in the walls can evaporate gradually in the traditional way; the thickness of the walls was such that it would not have been possible - or indeed desirable - to put in a damp proof course. Similarly the walls are all painted with lime wash, and where the woodwork is painted, a special porous paint has been used, the intention of both of which is once again to allow the material underneath to breathe naturally; modern paints prevent this and can do great damage to old timber and old walls.

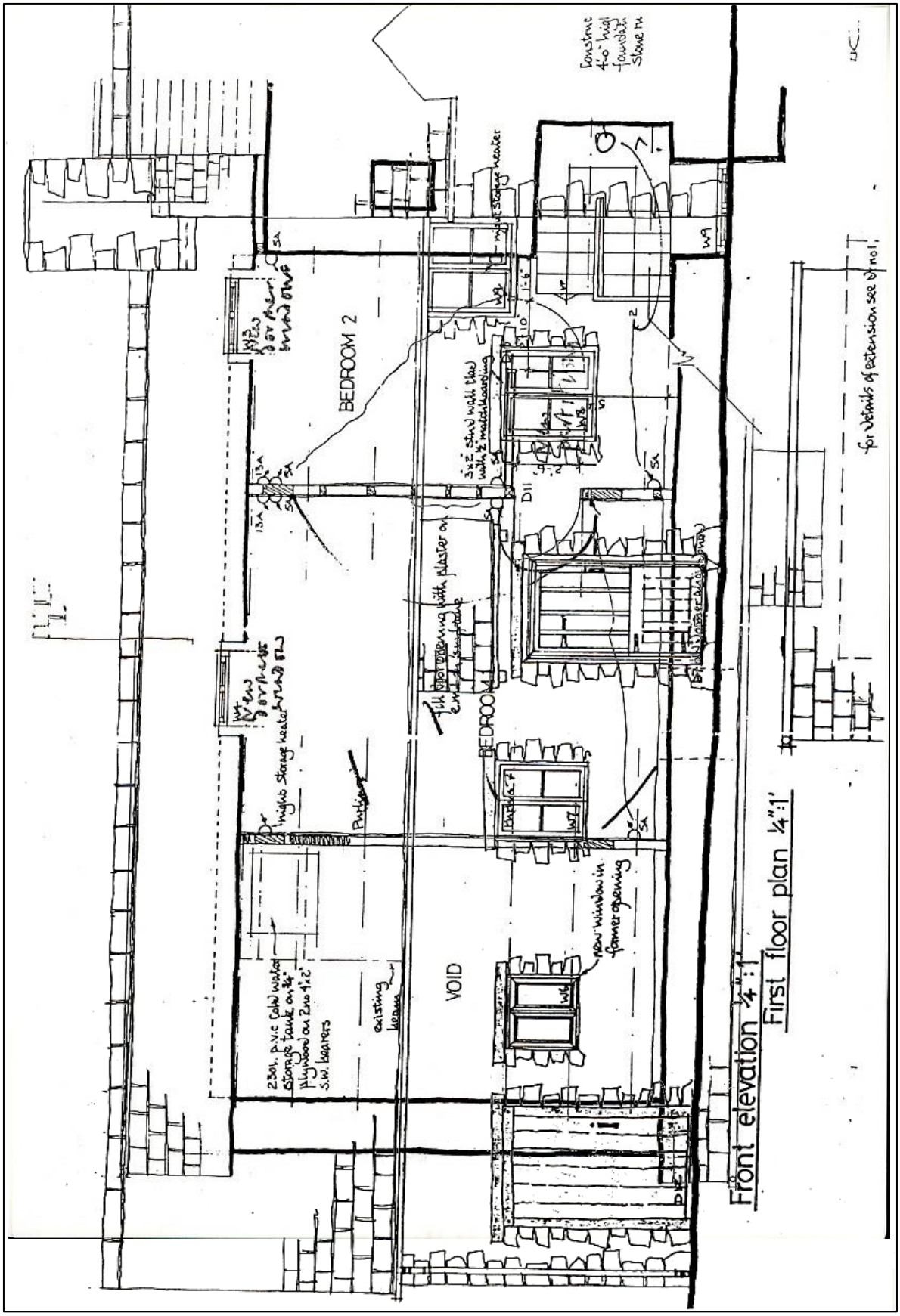
In both bedrooms the floors were taken up, and a new 'sandwich' floor laid: new boards were laid down first, on the joists; then a sheet of very thin lead was laid over them, to prevent drafts and provide sound insulation; lastly the old floorboards were relaid, crossways, with a few second hand boards to make up gaps. On the stairs, in order to be able to retain the old boards, which were very worn, hardboard was laid down underneath to give strength.

When Landmark took on the cottage it had no running water, and only very elementary electric wiring, so all the pipes and wires are new, together with the heating system and, of course, the bathroom and kitchen. The kitchen cupboards are all made from teak.

At the back and sides of the cottage the ground was dug away to improve both the access and the appearance; this was done behind the chapel too, where earth against the walls was causing problems with damp. New paving stones were laid, and a new boundary wall built. At the front the great paving stones, relic of farmyard days perhaps, had been taken up while building work was going on, and these were relaid, and the grass re-sown. In their earliest days the buildings at Maesyronnen, farmhouse and cow-byre, were very much a part of the surrounding fields, as was the chapel that succeeded them, reached on foot after a long walk. The fields no longer come right up to the door, but walking to it over the grass, even from a conveniently-parked car, might just begin to evoke the time when they did.

Charlotte Haslam
January 1989


SITTING ROOM
DINING / KITCHEN
STORE
Ground floor plan 1/4":1'
logs/coal
storage heater
night storage heater
remove partition?
form new door opening
water main
insulated outside tap
for details of extension see dr no 1


BEDROOM 2
BEDROOM
VOID
existing beams
new window in former opening
First floor plan ¼":1'
Front elevation ¼":1'

Further Reading

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Dictionary of Welsh Biography

Maes-Yr-Ownen

‘Though I describe it stone by stone, the chapel
Left stranded in the hurrying grass
Painting faithfully the mossed tyles and the tree,
The one listener to the long homily
Of the ministering wind, and the drylocked doors,
And the stale piety, mouldering within;
You cannot share with me that rarer air,
Blue as a flower and heavy with the scent,
Of the years past and others yet to be
That brushed each window and outsoared the clouds.
Far foliage with its own high canopy.
You cannot hear as I, incredulous heard
Up in the rafters, where the bell should ring,
The wild, sweet singing of Rhiannon’s birds.’

R.S. Thomas

Re-Dedication of Maesyronnen Chapel

On the afternoon of Sunday 30 March 2008, I had the privilege of being invited, together with my husband, to attend the Service of Thanksgiving and Re-Dedication of Maesyronnen Chapel.

Over the last ten months the chapel has been refurbished with a new roof and with the addition of kitchen and toilet.

The congregation consisted of approx 100 people many of us sitting on the original benches (not pews) dating back to the 1600s. It was a glorious spring afternoon with the sun shining and as I listened to the minister I found myself looking through the windows to the mountains beyond, the birds could be heard singing through the open door and I found myself reflecting that this could have been the setting many centuries ago.

The service continued with the Bible being brought into the chapel and placed on the pulpit. Water was poured into the Christening Font. The Service Book was brought in and placed on the Lectern and the Communion Table was prepared with the same cloth that has been used continually since 1863.

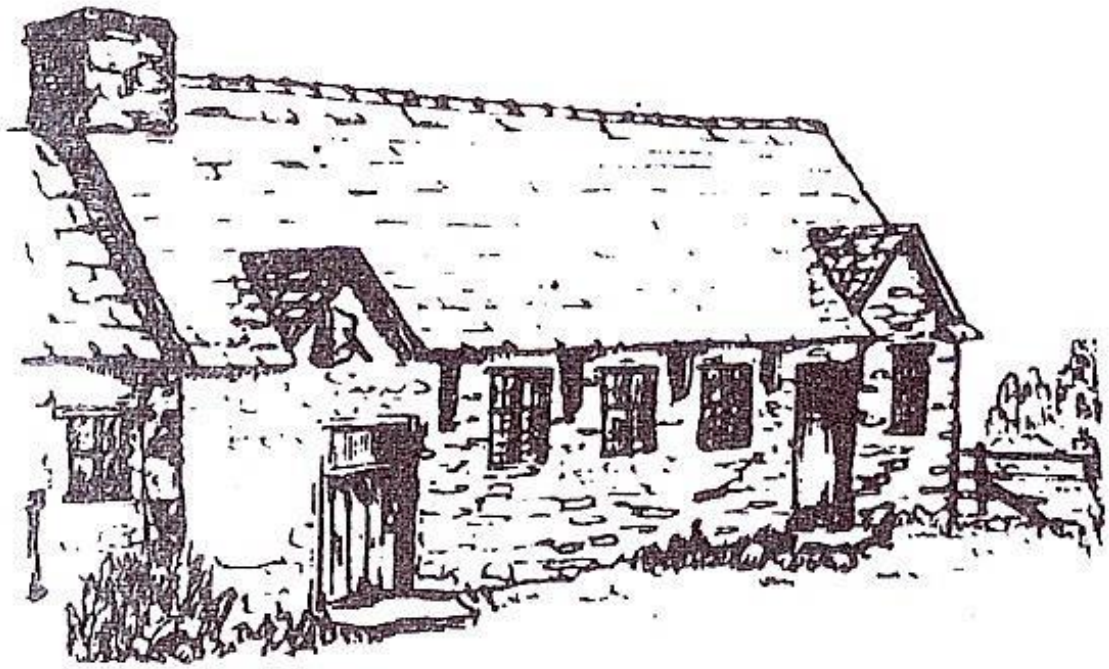
As you would expect, the hymn singing was wonderful, the people so welcoming, and a new chapter in the history of this simple little chapel had begun.

Ruth Davies
Regional Property Manager (South Wales)

Thanksgiving and Re-Dedication Service of the Renovation of Maesyronnen Chapel

A service was held on Sunday 30th March 2008 to rededicate the chapel after 10 months of refurbishment work.

Maesyronnen



A Short History
&
Description

1

Welcome to our lovely place of worship which radiates tranquillity and simplicity. Set in this peaceful rural situation, on the Radnor side of the beautiful upper Wye Valley, the Chapel of Maesyronnen (tr. *Field of the Ash Tree*) has stood for over 300 years. As you stand and look around, you might feel as though you have gone back in time, for Maesyronnen is a real place of antiquity. Since 1696, at least, men and women from this area, and indeed often further away, have come together and worshipped God in this place. It has a long and proud history of service to our communities and it is hoped that this account of its past will help you to understand its story. Should this short account encourage interest and further research we would be delighted. Should it encourage you to come and join our worship, the warmest of welcomes awaits you.

Maesyronnen is a living memorial and witness to the struggle of Nonconformity. The story is one of strife against persecution, achievement against bigotry and a faithful discharge of duty to conscience. To understand the context of this building we must begin at the Reformation and the year 1517 when protests against abuses within the Roman Catholic Church brought Martin Luther and his followers the name of 'Protestants'. The protests spread and, in England, in 1534, the Act of Supremacy appointed the King and his successors 'Protector and only Supreme Head of the Church and Clergy of England'. To a significant number of people of conscience this made life very difficult, for dissent became a dangerous option. Further, a refusal to take the Oath of Supremacy was made High Treason and it was for this cause that Sir Thomas More was condemned and beheaded in 1535. In 1563 the adoption of the 'Thirty Nine Articles' completed the Establishment of the Anglican Church. It was a fledgling Established Church and required the support and protection of the law against those whose conscience opposed it.

2

The Established Church was immediately at odds with Nonconformity for it was the National Anglican Church with one style of religion and organisation, supported and protected by the State. It could not tolerate deviation or opposition and consequently successive Monarchs and Governments persecuted Nonconformity in a cruel and oppressive manner. Examples of this are found in the Corporation Act of 1661 (all Magistrates obliged to take the C of E sacrament); Conventicle Act of 1664 (prevented religious meetings of more than five people outside of the Established Church); Five Mile Act of 1665 (no Nonconformist minister to come within five miles of any town or teach in any public school); and the Test Act of 1673 which excluded all Nonconformists from Government employment. This forced Nonconformity into secret meetings in warehouses, shops, woods, farms and even a boat on the River Thames. In this locality, and in the history of Maesyronnen, the meeting place was the cowshed that was called 'Y Beudy'.

Locally there was a network of 'meeting houses' which came under the general name of the Llanigon Church. This encompassed a wide area comprising Brecon, Radnor, Monmouth, Carmarthen and Glamorgan and it is now generally accepted that there was an organised gathered Church at Llanigon before 1650. The cause of Nonconformism was greatly helped by influential supporters like Charles Lloyd (Gwernyfed and Maesllwch), Thomas Watkins (Sheephouse) and William Watkins (Penyrwrlodd), who was the High Sheriff of Brecknock in 1649. It is believed that some worshippers met regularly at Penyrwrlodd, whilst another local meeting house was at Pipton (Aberllynfi). It was probably from here that sprang Tredustan, the Plough Chapel in Brecon, and, indeed, Maesyronnen itself, for Pipton preceded each of these and quite possibly even 'Y Beudy'. It is this building that was called Y Beudy, which preceded the Chapel of Maesyronnen, that will interest us most.

3

Y Beudy quite literally means 'The Cowshed' and was one of a number of meeting houses used by the Llanigon Church. There has long been a local belief that Oliver Cromwell attended a service here during the Commonwealth and it is also said that Vavasor Powell, one of the more dominant Puritan leaders began his itinerant preaching at Y Beudy. As Cromwell died in 1658 and Powell was imprisoned for his preaching in 1653, it is reasonable to suppose that Y Beudy was at least in existence in the middle of the 17th century.

Commonwealth is a word which might require a little explanation in this context. The Commonwealth is the term used to describe the period of British history when there was no Monarch on the Throne. This was between the years 1649 (Charles 1st was brought to trial by the Rump Parliament, sentenced to death and beheaded in Whitehall) and 1660, a period when Britain was under a republican form of Government with the real power being held by Cromwell and his Army. You will notice from the panels on the front of the pulpit that the first Minister to be appointed to the Llanigon Church was Richard Powell who began his ministry in 1644. During the period of the Commonwealth, a large number of parish priests within the Established Church were ejected from their livings by the Puritans who were now in the ascendancy. Thus it was that the Nonconformist Richard Powell, Minister of the Llanigon Church, became Vicar of Glasbury in 1650 in place of the incumbent, Alexander Griffiths, Minister of the Church of England, who was accused of 'drunkenness and lasciviousness'. Richard Powell died in 1658 and Alexander Griffiths was restored to the living of St Peter's, Glasbury, shortly after the Restoration of the Monarchy in 1660. During the period of Richard Powell's incumbency of St Peter's the Church became ruinous, due, largely, to the River Wye changing its course. When Alexander Griffiths was restored, his first priority became the building of a new Church which was accomplished when he officiated at its consecration on its present site in 1668.

4

The Foundation of Maesyronnen Chapel, the first Independent Chapel in Wales, followed the passing of the Act of Toleration of 1689. This Act has been described as the Magna Carta of Nonconformity and it ensured freedom of worship for all. It must be remembered that congregations, for the most part, consisted of poor people who could hardly afford a Minister let alone find money for a building. Thus it was that the first Minister in charge was also a schoolmaster in his 'day job' as we will see later.

The Chapel was built (or converted) on land belonging to and, at least partly financed by, the aforementioned Charles Lloyd who died in 1698. The Chapel was completed by 1696, and it was registered at the Quarter Sessions at Presteigne in 1697.

The building is a rare and important example of a very early Nonconformist Chapel which has survived almost intact. It consists of a plain rectangular chapel 50ft by 22ft 6ins on an east west axis with a small house attached to the west end. On entering, note the medieval cruck truss of an earlier wooden structure. This was replaced in Elizabethan times by a stone building of two storeys and a doorway was added to the area now occupied by the Chapel for the purpose of a barn or cowshed. The original windows with plain wooden mullions and transoms have survived, but even where there have been alterations it does not detract from the general feeling of antiquity. The box pews are contemporary with the building and although the pulpit has been slightly changed and lowered it fits well with the other furniture. The communion table displays six turned legs and together with the mould on the frame suggests a date even earlier than the date of the building's completion.

Could it be that where we are now is the site where people worshipped before this Chapel existed? The experts tell us that this building was quite probably a cowshed in the Elizabethan period. So, we ask the unanswerable, is this Y Beudy?

5

Maesyronnen was built by men of irrepressible courage, splendid conviction, rugged constitution and strong conscience and there are two names that we must highlight. The first is Henry Maurice who was probably invited by Charles Lloyd of Gwernyfed and Maesllwch and a local notable and elder of the Llanigon Church. Henry Maurice held very high repute amongst the early preachers and our board indicates that he was active as a Minister in this area between 1672 and 1682, having originally been a Minister in the Church of England. After resigning in 1666 from the Established Church he was imprisoned for preaching against it and promptly converted the Jailor and his wife who freed him. He is said to have converted hundreds by his private conversation and hundreds more by his effective preaching. We must never underestimate the difficulties encountered in ministering to a scattered Church and the energy and enthusiasm which Maurice brought to this work has become quite legendary. Indeed, such was his reputation that the Llanigon Church had great difficulty in securing a successor until Rhys Prytherch was ordained.

The second name is the aforementioned Rhys Prytherch, an important and eminent Nonconformist who ministered to the scattered Llanigon Church. He was acknowledged to be one of most learned men of the period and is also said to have kept a celebrated school for over forty years. Rhys Prytherch was ordained in 1688 and became Minister of Pipton, for which he was granted the sum of six pounds per year. He thus became an active Minister to the Llanigon Church between the years 1688-1693 before his death on the 25th day of January 1699. It is of some morbid interest that he is said to have been born, ordained and died on the same day of the month.

It is very unlikely that Maesyronnen would have developed as it did without the active participation of these two great pioneer Nonconformists. It would largely have been the result of their efforts that the local congregation would have had the confidence of embarking on the development and construction of Maesyronnen.

6

Nonconformity and Education have always been closely related. This is best illustrated by picking out two names from the Ministerial Succession board on the front of the pulpit.

David Price was the first Minister to be installed at Maesyronnen (1700-1740?). Quite probably he was the incumbent until his death in 1742, although our board is not particularly clear about that! David Price lived on the opposite side of the Wye valley at Llwynllwyd (tr. *holy grove*) and it was here that he kept a school for young men desirous of entering the Ministry or one of the professions. The old farmhouse still stands and the barn which became a notable and prestigious school is a little distance from it. Amongst the notable pupils of Llwynllwyd was Howell Harris (1728-1730) the great Methodist leader and William Williams, Pantycelyn, (1735-38) who actually came to Llwynllwyd to begin preliminary study for a medical career only to become the musical accompanist to the great revival. In this work at Llwynllwyd David Price was greatly helped by the famous scholar Vavasor Griffiths.

In 1891 the Rev. Daniel Christmas Lloyd became the incumbent at Maesyronnen and, as an extra contribution to his ministry, opened a school at his home at Hampton House in Glasbury. Hampton Grammar School had, in fact, existed previously, having been originally founded by Mr W. Vaughan and continued by Mr Phillips but it had closed down in 1881. The Rev. Lloyd was therefore re-establishing what had been a very successful and respected place of education. Without doubt he enhanced this reputation and there are many who would testify to that first opportunity they received through the Rev. Lloyd. Although he retired from the ministry in 1913 he continued his important work at Hampton Grammar School until he died in 1929. The School eventually closed in 1947 when the Local Education Authority opened suitable alternatives in the area at Clyro Court (for Radnor) and Gwernyfed (for Brecknock).

A Refurbishment of the building began in the summer of 2007 and work was completed early in 2008. The main purpose of the work was to put a new roof on the building, essential in this very exposed position. This also meant a new ceiling on the inside and provided the opportunity to lime wash the walls both inside and out. Additionally a new toilet with wheelchair access has been provided, together with much needed storage space. This work will give the worshippers at Maesyronnen good reason to look forward to the future and to the prospect of further generations of worshippers here

Finally, thank you for taking the time to visit this very special place. We hope that, like us, you will leave acknowledging that there can be few finer places to worship God than here. We, who live here, like to think that Maesyronnen will remain available, for local and visitor alike, for many future generations. With your interest, your help and your donation, this thought becomes more realistic. Thank you.

As Chief Seattle proclaimed when considering God's Land in 1854 and as we might say thinking of Maesyronnen;

And with all your strength,
with all your mind,
with all your heart,
preserve it for your children
and love it
as God loves us all.

DIP 2008.

MAESYRONNEN CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH