



10 Pendref Chapel

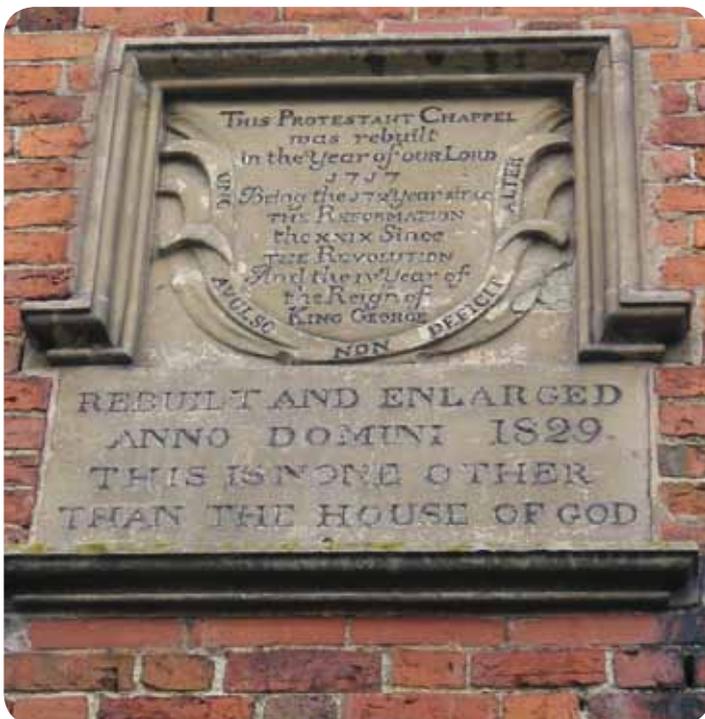
Pendref Chapel is thought to be one of the two oldest Welsh Independent Congregational chapels in the county and has a radical crusading past. It also has associations with the famous Welsh hymn writer, Ann Griffiths.

Exterior

The chapel stands within its small burial ground at the eastern end of Llanfyllin, on the A490. The present red brick building dates from 1829 and is designed according to classical proportions with the widest elevation fronting the roadside. A photograph taken in 1884 shows the chapel with its classical windows and porticos. The proportions of the original classical side elevation were compromised by the addition of late Victorian pressed brick door frames, new windows and a large vestry extension.



A photograph of 1884, before the addition of the brick porticos to the door frames, and the vestry. The original windows can also be seen.



Pendref Chapel around 1900, after the late Victorian additions.

10 Pendref Chapel

Interior

The interior of the chapel remains largely unaltered. The double entrances on the widest elevation lead straight into the front of the worship space, so any latecomers would be seen by the whole congregation! The fittings are typical – the elevated central position of the pulpit emphasises the importance of preaching and teaching of the Bible in the services.



History

The architecture of Pendref is unusual for an Independent chapel, but it has an even more unique and radical history as a pioneer of nonconformity in Wales. The present building is the third to be built on the site. The stone tablet on the front elevation bears a quotation from Virgil and is unusual on a Welsh chapel. The chapel had to be rebuilt in 1717 as the original 1708 chapel was destroyed in 1715. The reason for the destruction lay in the continuation of tensions between Puritans and Royalists that had led to civil war in England sixty years earlier.

The first Llanfyllin Meeting House was built on land given by Nehemiah Griffithes, the son of Walter, in 1708. It was smaller than the present building and entry was via Mill Lane. The death of Queen Anne in 1714 and the Jacobite rebellion of 1715 polarised tensions between high church and dissenters across the country, and Llanfyllin was no exception. The newly built chapel at Pendref was torn apart by a “tumultuous and rebellious” Tory instigated mob over three days in July 1715. Nine of the rioters were indicted at the next Assizes, but their fate is unknown. Damages of £143 were given towards the rebuilding of the chapel. As a result of the lack of law and order in Llanfyllin, the assizes were moved to Welshpool after this meeting.

The new meeting house, complete with memorial stone, was built in 1717 on the site of the present chapel. Access was still on Mill Lane, to the rear of the Griffithes’ property. It is possible that the unusual arrangement of the current building, in which visitors enter facing the pews, resulted from the need to move the entrance to the main road, whilst using the footings of the earlier chapel. After the death of Nehemiah Griffithes in 1738, the freehold of the land on which the chapel was built was given to the congregation.

In 1785, Jenkin Lewis became minister of Pendref and he organised preaching meetings. At one such meeting in 1796, the hymn writer and poet, Ann Griffiths, is reputed to have been convinced of Christianity and converted. On 13th July 1805, Rev’d Jenkin Lewis had the sad task of baptising her baby daughter shortly before the baby and Ann died. Lewis himself died four months later and is buried in the churchyard at Pendref.

By 1829 the Independent congregation at Pendref had outgrown the 1717 chapel, and so the third and final chapel was built. To give an idea of the popularity of the chapel at this time, in December 1833, according to David Hughes,

10 Pendref Chapel



vicar of St Myllin's Anglican Church, 300 people attended St Myllin's, and "the meeting house of the Independents is attended by about 500 hearers". He was aware that the established church was losing touch with "a population whose estrangement is already ripening to enmity", over issues of payment of tithes, education and disestablishment of the Church of Wales.

The first Independent Chapel at Pendref was built at a time when dissenters were politically motivated. This political streak within the Independent movement later influenced Methodism, which by nature was less politically minded. Pendref, along with other Independent Chapels, contributed to the role played by Methodism in the nineteenth century move towards the disestablishment of the Anglican Church of Wales, which finally happened at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Rev'd Susannah (Susie) Rankin MBE MA BD

Above the pulpit is a plaque to commemorate the life of Rev'd Susannah Rankin (née Ellis). She attended Pendref Chapel as a child and went on to be the first female student to gain a Bachelor of Divinity from the University of Wales. In 1925 she was ordained a minister at Pendref Chapel and the following year left for Papua New Guinea to work as a missionary. As well as church work, she was a linguist and translator. She was known as Sinabada (big mother), in spite of being 5 feet tall. She married Robert Rankin and remained in Papua New Guinea for almost half a century. She was awarded an honorary MA by the University of Wales and was made MBE in 1972. She died in 1989.

10 Pendref Chapel



The Meini Bywiol Living Stones Heritage trail consists of 15 churches and chapels in north Montgomeryshire. See the trail leaflet and the website for information about the other sites on the trail www.living-stones.info