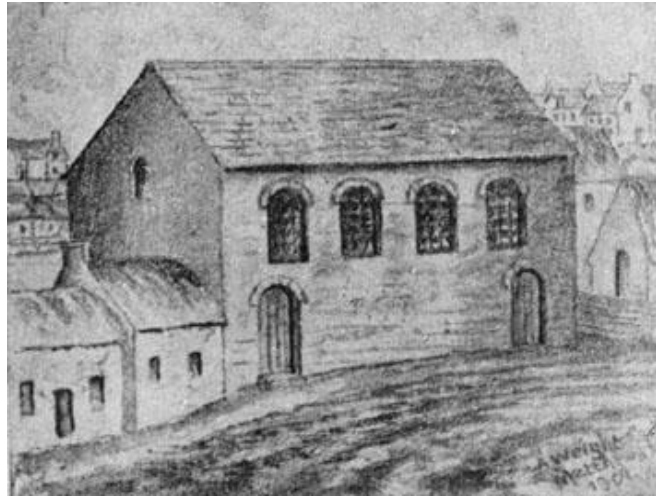


THE ROAD TO MORFA – AND ON TO MORLAN

Several branches of history and tradition have merged to create the church known today as Capel y Morfa, which then led to the establishment of Morlan.

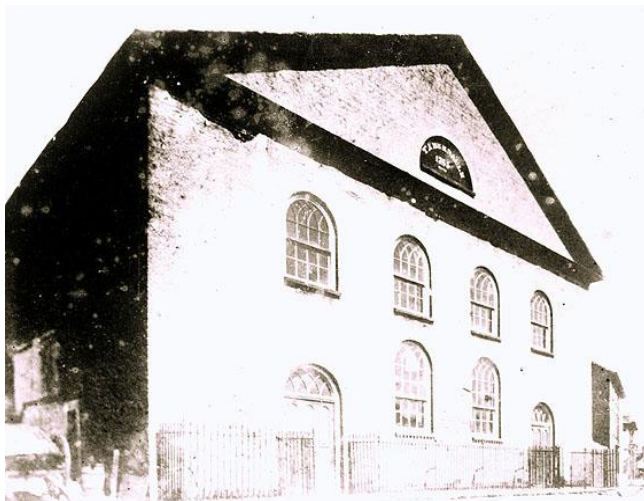


The first Tabernacle (reproduced with the kind permission of the National Library of Wales)

Tabernacle and Ebenezer

The first Methodist cause for the area was established in Rhydyfelin in 1757, and preaching was taking place in Aberystwyth residences around 1771. In 1784 a Rally was held in the town which led to the establishment of a 'meeting house' in 1785 in Mill Street, on the site of what later became Tabernacle Chapel. It was called Capel y Groes (Chapel of the Cross) and, at the time, there was also a thriving Sunday School in Trefechan.

The Methodists remained within the National Church until 1811, with priests serving communion at this meeting house. By 1819, the congregation had grown and a chapel was built on the site. The leaders of the congregation were prominent in the development of the Presbyterian connexion. It was in the home of one of them – Robert Davies – that the Confession of Faith was drawn up in 1823. A stone commemorating this can be seen in Great Darkgate Street.



Tabernacle before 1880 (reproduced with the kind permission of the National Library of Wales).

These were years of growth and, in 1831, another chapel had to be built, one which could accommodate 1200 people! According to the 1851 Census, the congregation of Tabernacle was 680 in the morning and 1022 in the evening.

During its lifetime the building was changed and adapted four times as the circumstances of the congregation and those of the town changed.

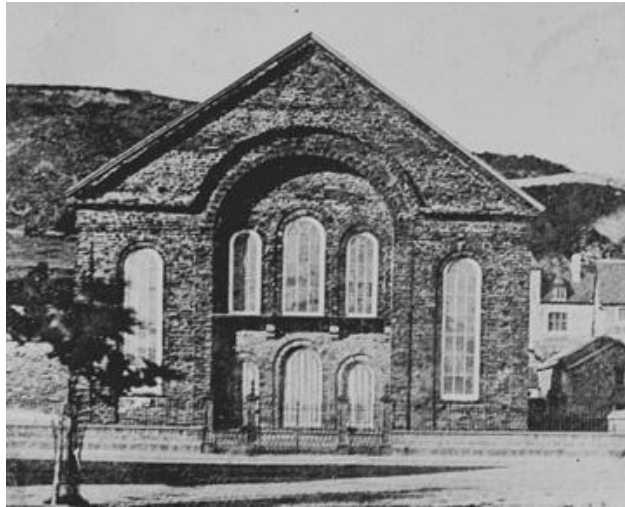
There was no arrangement of established ministers within the Methodists for a long time, and Tabernacle did not get a full-time minister until 1876. His name was Thomas Levi, author, hymn-writer and editor. It was during his time that the building that stood until the fire in 2008 was built. This building was opened in 1880 and faced Powell Street and away from Mill Street (previous buildings had faced Mill Street). Congregations worshipped here until joining Capel y Morfa in 2002.

Things were also happening in the village of Penparcau as early as 1812 when a Sunday School was held in the home of Richard Hugh. A branch of Tabernacle was built in 1848

and called Ebenezer. After 90 years, and in the face of a growth in the area's population, a new chapel was built and the present Ebenezer opened its doors on 14 June 1939.

Seilo

By the start of the 1860s, Tabernacle's congregation had grown so much through the influence of the 1859 Reformation and the growth of Aberystwyth's population following the development of the railway, that it was decided to set about a new chapel – Seilo ('Siloh' was the spelling used most until the middle of the twentieth century) – at the other end of the town.



Siloh in 1863 (reproduced with the kind permission of the National Library of Wales)



Siloh after the towers were built (reproduced with the kind permission of the National Library of Wales)

Seilo's foundation stone was laid in 1859, but the chapel was not officially opened until April 1863. Towers were added to the front of the building in 1867-8 and they remained until the chapel's was renovated for the centenary celebrations in 1963. The dove and bible which could be seen on the top of the building after this renovation have now relocated to Morlan's garden.

The large schoolhouse – which is the heart of Morlan today – was built in 1897 as was the minister's house Beth-seilun ('house of Seilo').

The first minister – Reverend Griffith Parry – was inducted in 1876, the same year as Thomas Levi started out in Tabernacle. Seilo was also responsible for Skinner Street Sunday School (which was first established by the Tabernacle in 1839) and a branch on the Waun, built in 1873. A congregation worshipped at Seilo Chapel for several generations until it merged with Salem to form Capel y Morfa in 1989.



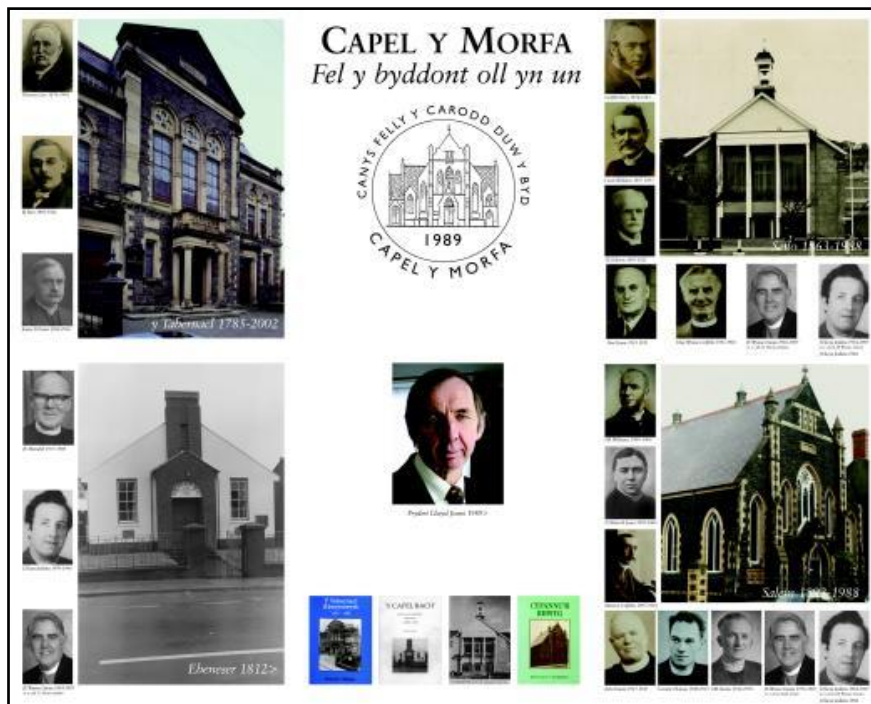
Salem

Sad to say, it was a disagreement amongst elders and congregation of Seilo as to who should fill the pulpit from Sunday to Sunday that led to the building of another chapel

Salem. Despite all attempts at reconciliation, around 100 people went from Seilo to form Salem in 1893 and built the chapel that is Capel y Morfa today.

The chapel was opened in April 1895 (despite the fact that it says 1894 on the outside) and the school house was added in 1898. The original chapel was rectangular but was extended significantly when a transept was built (and the organ put in place) in 1907. Since then several improvements have been made to bring the chapel to its current state.

Capel y Morfa was formed when Seilo and Salem congregation joined in 1989, thus making right the split that had torn the chapel in two almost a century before.



A composite photograph by Arwel Thomas showing the history of the chapel.

The Presbyterian chapels of Aberystwyth have always responded as circumstances changed; they have altered their ritual, their buildings, their links with each other. Changing homes and constructing new buildings is a sign of life, and a willingness to venture. This was the case once again when Capel y Morfa developed the Morlan Centre.

Seilo Chapel was demolished in 1995 but the schoolhouse and manse remained and was still used by Capel y Morfa despite its deteriorating condition. The desire to establish a purpose-built centre also remained – a centre that would act as a bridge between the church and the communities of Aberystwyth and beyond, focussing specifically on the relationship between faith and culture in its broadest sense. It took years of perseverance and dedication but Morlan Centre finally opened its doors in April 2005.

Further information about the development of Presbyterian churches in the area can be found in the following Welsh publications:

- *Y Tabernacl, Aberystwyth: hanes yr achos 1785-1985*, Moelwyn I. Williams (Aberystwyth, 1986)
- *Canmlwydd Siloh, Aberystwyth*, Francis Wynn Jones (Aberystwyth, 1963)
- *Cyfannu'r rhwyg: hanes Eglwys Salem, Aberystwyth 1893-1988*, Brynley F. Roberts (Aberystwyth, 1995)
- *'Y capel bach': hanes capel Ebeneser, Penparcau, c.1812-1989*, Geraint H. Jenkins (Aberystwyth, 1989)