

HANES EGLWYS TABOR, BRYNMAWR.

The History of Tabor Chapel.

This article is a translation of a report in Seren Cymru dated 13th January 1893.

In the year 1829 a young man by the name of John Edwards from Treffynnon (Holywell) in North Wales came to Hermon Chapel in Nant y Glô and became the minister of the chapel for five years. He proved himself to be hard working and successful in paying much of the debt remaining on the chapel; he was also instrumental in getting many to become members of Hermon.

His wife had a particular inclination for business and she opened a shop in Brynmawr in her husband's name though he had nothing to do with the shop as he did not have much spare time. He would be preaching four or five times a week or about 250 times in a year therefore he had very little time for anything else. Sadly, Mrs. Edwards like many before her (and many after her) went bankrupt. (There's a lovely Welsh saying for this "aeth yr hch drwy'r siop" the sow went through the shop). This caused some resentment between the chapel and John Edwards the minister as they felt that someone who was bankrupt was not worthy to preach the gospels and they threw him out. But John Edwards preached at other chapels and from house to house, something quite common in those days, he also received numerous calls to take over other chapels but he refused saying "No, this is where I fell and this is where I will rise again".

In the meantime about 38 members of Hermon left with Mr. Edwards and this was the start of Tabor Chapel. The first house they held their prayer meetings and for companionship was the home of William Dafis, Pen y Gam. After that they met at the home of William and Mary Evans whose son became the Reverend John Evans in Nant y Glô, William and Mary lived at Waen yr Esgyrn. It was there they held their main meetings and made their plans towards building the first Tabor.

Among the earliest deacons of the chapel were Thomas Morgan William Pugh and Dafydd Williams, a butcher; there was John Richards from Garn Fach, he was the stone mason and John Charles also from Nant y Glô was the carpenter. These were the builders of the first Tabor. The chapel was 42 feet long and 34 feet wide. It held 41 seats and it was considered a big chapel in those days. It cost £511 and to carry the work forward they were loaned £100 from Roger Lewis of the King David and £100 from Crawshay Bailey. They also received gifts from Joseph Bailey (£20); C. Bailey (£10); H. Bailey (£2) and from R. Bailey (£1)

The first sermon was delivered in Tabor by John Edwards on Christmas Day 1835 though the building was not yet completed. Four people came that evening, two of them the parents of Gwilym Llwyd from Nant y Glô. The chapel was opened officially on the 8th and 9th of August 1836 by which time the congregation numbered 100. Numerous ministers from over South Wales preached during the two days among them W. Williams from Dowlais; D. Rees from Llansilin; J. Williams from Troisant; Timothy Jones from Cwmpedol; E. Oliver from Ebbw Vale; D. Evans from Llangorse; W. Jenkins from Dolau and T. Evans from Beulah. The Rev T. Evans took as his text from Salm 89, verse 12:

“The north and the south, Thou hast created them; Tabor and Hermon shall rejoice in Thy name”.

This referred to the two chapels which had been under John Edwards’ guidance.

The chapel was accepted into the Breconshire Assembly that was held at Hay on Wye in 1836. The chapel increased quickly and by 1839 they held a Tabor assembly on land between Brynmawr and Nant y Glô on the area known as “Hen Waenhelygen Lwyd”. (This would be the ground occupied by ASDA today. E. Ll. D.) On the first day at 11 o’clock a large multitude had gathered from near and far. Again numerous ministers preached from as far away as Liverpool, Cardiff, Capel y Ffin, Newtown, Carmarthen and from nearby Tredegar, Blaenavon and Pontypool. During the second day there was a very heavy rain, it had been very dry before the assembly was held and this had caused Nant y Glô iron works to stand down for a term due to lack of water for the bellows etc.

Crawshay Bailey believed that it was the Baptist assembly that had brought the rain that filled the ponds and reservoirs that started the works up again. He thanked the Baptists and he was very kind towards them by feeding the horses of those that had travelled from afar. By now the congregation at Tabor numbered 115 with 100 attached to the Sunday School. In December 1842 Edwards became ill and this caused great concern for him and the congregation but in spite of this he baptised another 22 people into the chapel during the year.

In 1844 another storm broke worse than the first which was when he was declared bankrupt. Edwards and his son Ebenezer went to the Hereford College. He was very fond of travelling the country to preach and this time he was away for three weeks or more and when he returned he was warned to leave and the situation became quite tempestuous at the time. The majority were on the side of the minister but unfortunately the chapel was in the names of some of the congregation and it was those who opposed John Edwards. He was again thrown out. Edwards preached on two Sundays on Davies Street (outside Tabor) and on both occasions he had a large crowd listening to him. The congregation at that time stood at 200 and of those 103 went with John Edwards and that was the start of Seion (Zion) Chapel in Brynmawr.

As Oscar Wilde may have said “To lose one chapel looks like misfortune to lose two looks like carelessness”

In an assembly held at Beulah in 1845 it was agreed that no one would preach at or support the congregation at Tabor, in spite of this they did not become downhearted and went on with the support of God and later in the year they received D. R. Williams as their minister. He stayed for two years then they appointed James Davies in 1847. By now their number had fallen to 95.

Between 1849 and 1850, (the year of the cholera epidemic) 125 were baptised into Tabor and 50 renewed bringing the total up to 271 but quite a few disappeared when the storm abated. In 1857 the old chapel was demolished and a new one built by Rees Price of Brynmawr. It was 48 feet by 42 feet and cost over a £1000. Whilst the chapel was being rebuilt the congregation held their meetings in the Market Hall on Beaufort Street from the 13th April 1857 to the last Sunday in January 1858 and the new chapel was opened in the same year. By now the numbers attending was 150 with 120 attending the Sunday

School. In 1860, James Davies, who had been with Tabor for 13 years, left for America and he died there.

In the same year the congregation called on J. Roberts from Pil to be their minister, he stayed till 1861 when he also left for America and like his predecessor it was there he died. In 1863 Tabor chapel was accepted into the Monmouthshire Assembly and by now their numbers had increased to 170. The congregation called on Morgan Phillips from the Pontypool College and in December 22nd 1862 he was ordained. During the celebrations numerous ministers again preached at Tabor including Nefydd who had been a minister in Liverpool but was now at Salem Chapel in Blaina. (Nefydd was originally from Llanefydd in Denbighshire in North Wales. Nefydd was his bardic name and his real name was William Roberts. Nefydd moved in 1845 to Monmouthshire to become minister of Salem church in Blaenau Gwent now called Blaina. E. Ll. D.)

The chapel was in debt to the tune of £750 so the minister and the congregation decided to make a regular collection and by September 1863 they had collected £102:10s:11p and by March 1865 a sum of £277. By now the congregation had increased to 200 and during the two years and three months of Mr Phillips ministry they had collected £380, baptised 26 into the chapel and held three eisteddfodau during the same term.

Over the years Tabor Chapel held many eisteddfodau, lectures, meetings of local Rechabites and other temperance movements with many of the meetings holding over 1000 people. As an example On July 14th 1860, the Cardiff Times reported that "the church worshipping at Tabor Baptist Chapel held their special services for the benefit of the trust funds. The Rev. Lewis, of Dowlais, and Rev. Roberts, of Brynmawr, preached and on both occasions the chapel, which contains about two thousand people, was filled to overflowing. The sermons were good specimen of apostolic teaching, and were delivered with much zeal and Christian affection. It will be seen at once that the congregations were influenced by pure and philanthropic principles, when we state that the handsome sum of £45 was collected. The church appears to be in a prosperous position, and members are continually being added".

Sadly, Tabor Chapel closed its doors a few years ago and was left empty for some time until the Valleys Family Church bought the building and restored it with Big Lottery funding (sometimes called 'Peoples & Places') to the community hub it is today. Apart from their Sunday meetings, the Hub will offer a Youth Centre, there are meeting rooms available for societies and tea/coffee mornings.

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**Tabor Chapel after
refurbishment in
2017**

