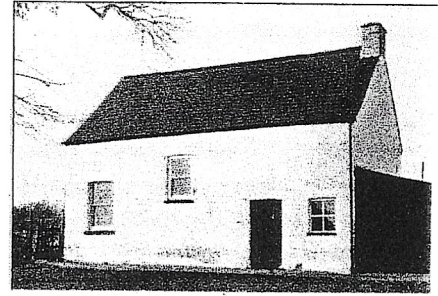


Taihirion

Since Dr Bill Linnard brought our attention in issue no. 23 to Lemuel Smith a one time minister of Taihirion who sadly passed away at a young age, we have been asked several times as to what and where was Taihirion. Well, it was an early Congregationalist chapel which stood just south of the Llantrisant Road and the main meeting place for 'Independents' from the Garth area before Bronllwyn, Bethlehem and Tabernacl were built. Growing up in Pentyrch we were aware of the 'soft spot' older residents had for the old chapel. We never learned however, why it was known to some as 'Philadelphia'.



The following is a well-written, surprisingly 'bright and breezy' article that I found in the 'History of Congregationalism in Cardiff and District' by John Williamson MA, published in 1920. Ed.

We are apt to forget our indebtedness to small causes. We look at quantity very often instead of quality. We forget that a cupful of cream is worth a gallon of skimmed milk. The small country churches are the feeders of our large churches. They give them the best type of members – men and women of sturdy character – who prove to be loyal and faithful to their churches through thick and thin. The majority of our leaders are men who have come from these little wayside Bethels, and consequently, when the history of Congregationalism in this district is told, the things that Taihirion has done must be recorded as a memorial of the Church.

It is believed that there existed a church here as far back as 1760 – a man by the name of Samuel Price was a member of it. He was a minister's son – another proof, by the way, that ministers' sons are not as bad as they are painted. But Cardiff Congregationalism has killed that myth, for four of our ministers today are sons of the manse, and another is a son of a well-known lay preacher.

This Samuel Price was the son of Rev. Rees Price, of Bridgend. He lived in The Park, and proved to be the mainstay of the church during his lifetime, and after he died, it was found that he had left a legacy of £200 to help it on. He died on 18th July 1777.

In 1829, we find that Taihirion and Llanharan united under the ministry of David Jones. The membership of the Church at the commencement of his ministry was twelve; the Church was, therefore in apostolic succession in more senses than one. Let us hope that there was no Judas among the number!

About this time a lease was secured from Mr Wyndham, Lewis, M.P., on a parcel of ground (to use Scriptural language) upon which to build a new church. It was a lease for 999 years. I suppose the folk reckoned upon the fact that the millennium would then dawn and then – well - the whole earth would belong to the people of God.

The new chapel was eventually opened and the preachers who took part on the opening day were the Revs. Griffith Hughes, Groes Wen; R Morris, Tredegar; B. Moses, New Town; T. Davies, Cymmer; W. Jones, Bridgend; and others. Some of these were the shining lights of their day.

In 1834, the church at Taihirion extended a call to Mr. John Lewis, a home missionary, and he worked there for a short time. He was followed in 1837 by a Mr. David Davies who came from the noted school of Neaddlwyd, and the Revs. Isaac Harries (Mynydd Bach), W. Griffiths (Llanharan), L. Powell (Cardiff), S. Griffiths (Horeb), and J. Davies (Swansea), took part in the ordination services. He was followed by Lemuel Smith, a young man of talent, who possessed the preaching gift; but alas, he was cut down at the early age of 27, and buried amid signs of great sorrow at Groes Wen.

Afterwards, Mr. Davies, the former minister, returned for a short time and had oversight, this time of Taihirion and Llansantffraid-ar-lai, (St Brides) until he accepted a call from the Welsh Church at Bristol, whither he went in 1848.

Three years afterwards, the Rev. John Davies came from Morrision, to take charge of the Church. He was well-known among Welsh Congregationalists. He was a keen politician, a good preacher, a man possessing a fine presence and a splendid character. "Dafis Taihirion" still lives!

In 1858, eleven members went out to establish a church at Bronllwyn, Pentyrch, a church that is still in existence and doing good work.

Taihirion was never a large church, but in spite of that fact she was missionary enough in spirit to sacrifice on behalf of the Kingdom. She established four churches in different parts of this district. They are Bethlehem (Gwaelodygarth), Tabernacl, Efail Isaf, Lansantffraid-ar-lai and Bronllwyn, Pentyrch. Would that our town churches had manifested the same courage and spirit! We would have had a different story to tell as Congregationalists today.

The cause was never strong, but characters have been reared at Taihirion. "Jim-o'r-Engine" – the converted pugilist – was a member here, and a part of his story is told in the memoir of Griffith Hughes, Groes Wen. It was at Taihirion that the Revs. Wm. Russell, afterwards of Whitchurch, and Job Miles, afterwards of Aberystwyth, were received into church membership, and the latter became one of the foremost preachers of his day, and one of the leaders of Welsh Congregationalism. He was the editor of

“Y Tyst”, the organ of the Welsh Congregationalists, for years, and he also occupied the chair of the Welsh Congregationalist Union.

After the Rev. John Davies removed from Rhydlafer to the neighbourhood of Efail Isaf, the church suffered tremendously, and the cause dwindled to nothing.

The East Glamorgan Welsh Congregational Association was then interested somehow or other in the place, and some of the members inspected it. Alas! They found nought but signs of desolation. The doors and the windows had gone, there were holes in the roof, and a vixen and her cubs in possession of the cupboard or space underneath the pulpit. There has been a fox in the pulpit and a vixen in the pews, but this is the first time we have heard of both in possession of a whole building!

The father of Mrs Thomas, of Tynwern – Lewis Morgan – was a member and deacon at Taihirion during the time he lived at St Nicholas, and when the news reached Tynwern that the old chapel was in such a plight, Mr and Mrs. Thomas were deeply moved, and Mr. Thomas undertook to collect the money for repairing it. He gathered together a sum of over £70, and the building was put in order and services recommenced. At the opening the Revs. J. Williams (Hafod), H.M. Hughes (Cardiff), Tawelfryn Thomas, (Groes Wen), John Morris (Star Street, Cardiff), and others took part.

On the old lease there were two names: “Thomas Jenkins, Collier” and “Job Miles, Shoemaker.” The former became afterward the Rev. T.G. Jenkin, Llwynypia, and the latter Rev. Job Miles, Aberystwyth. Mr. Thomas, of Tynwern, worked strenuously for years collecting money to maintain the cause, and was supported by the East Glamorgan Welsh Association. The Rev. Wm. Owen (late of China) was put in nominal charge, and he worked hard for some years securing preachers, etc., but eventually for health reasons, was compelled to give it up. During his time and afterwards, the chief worker was a man by the name of Beynon. He entertained the preachers; he was the doorkeeper, the lamplighter, the senior deacon, if not the only deacon, the precentor, the Sunday school superintendent, the band of hope leader – he was everything. He was not intellectually or musically gifted; still he did what he could. He had a big soul.

Beynon worked with the children, but the membership of the church did not increase. Still, he did not despair. He lived for the Church. He toiled for the future. The revival broke out; but alas! Beynon was taken seriously ill and died. But the children he had taught to sing – though he could not sing himself – went about singing the hymns they had learnt at Taihirion; and lo! at the first communion after his death, a large number of the parents of those children were received into church fellowship, and have kept the church going. Though God buries his workers, He carries on His work.

Beynon’s story is not known. He sowed in an out-of-the-way field, far from view of the public eye, but to those who knew it, it is the most inspiring story in the history of the churches of this district during recent years, and if a tablet were erected to his memory, no more suitable words could be engraved upon it than those of P.J. O’Reilly:-

“Down the furrow strides the sower
From his hands the live seeds leap:
In his heart the hope of harvest
Little knowing who will reap:
Harvest comes in teeming, teeming
Golden stalk and laden ear –
But the sower’s sleeping, sleeping,
In the earth he held so dear

So through life, if I am sowing,
What to me the toil or gain?
If my brothers reap the harvest
I shall not have lived in vain.”

After Beynon’s day, Mr. W.J. George of the Pontypridd Academy, had the oversight of Taihirion for a short period, but he resigned and the Church had to depend upon supplies, and as it was not financially strong, it had, in a sense, a precarious existence.

By the end of the first world war there was not only a financial crisis; there was also the the language question. The chapels of Pentyrch, Gwaelodygarth, and Efail Isaf remained totally Welsh, but Taihirion by then had to face the fact that most of its congregation came from an area to the south of the Welsh language strongholds. Steps were taken to secure its future, including changing the language of its services to English and becoming affiliated to the English Congregational Association. That is now all ‘history’ (as they say), for Taihirion has disappeared altogether. We will probably never learn the reason for it being called ‘Philadelphia’.
Ed.