



This is a extract pertaining to Glasbury from an original edition book - courtesy of a local farmer

THE
HISTORY OF THE BAPTISTS
IN
RADNORSHIRE.

*WITH A SKETCH OF THE HISTORY OF
NONCONFORMITY IN THE COUNTY.*

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A SKETCH OF THE HISTORY OF NONCONFORMITY IN RADNORSHIRE.

A NONCONFORMIST is one who dissents from, or refuses to join, an Established Church. The first Nonconformists voluntarily dissented from the Established Church of this country, some because they objected to some of its doctrines or ceremonies, others because they objected to the union of the Church with the State. Some of the first Nonconformists objected on spiritual grounds to the Church of Christ being established by human law and supported by compulsory means. The great majority of those persons who are called Nonconformists have never been members of the Established Church. They can scarcely be called Dissenters from the Established Church, because they have never been members of that Church; they are Nonconformists because they do not join the Established Church.

The Nonconformists of two hundred years ago were divided into different denominations—Presbyterians, Independents, Baptists, and Quakers. Dr. Rees, in his 'History of Protestant Nonconformity in Wales,' says that 'the words "Independent" and "Presbyterian" were for ages used in the Principality as synonymous terms.' The Independents now call themselves Congregationalists. One of the arguments which Episcopalians bring against Nonconformity is that its adherents differ in their opinions and practices. The same argument might be used against the Church of England: there is great diversity of opinion and practice among Church people. There are High Churchmen and Low Churchmen, Evangelical Churchmen and Ritualistic Churchmen. The Church of England is held together not by sameness of doctrine and practice, but by the law of the

land, by which it has been established and endowed. The Independents have several chapels in Radnorshire; some of them are of ancient date. In the statistics of Nonconforming congregations in England and Wales collected by Dr. John Evans in the year 1715, and preserved in Dr. Williams's library, Grafton Street, London, the following Independent congregations in Radnorshire are mentioned: Rhayader, average congregation 400 (in the congregation there were 40 voters); Gyrn, in the parish of Dissersh, average congregation 200 (in the congregation there were 30 voters). I am not aware that there was ever a chapel at Gyrn. I suppose that the meetings were held in the farmhouse. I can recollect my father preaching at Gyrn. There was an Independent congregation at Maesgwyn, in the parish of Beguildy, averaging 300. In the congregation there were several voters; the names of several ministers are given. There was no chapel at Maesgwyn. I have heard that there was a room there in which a week-day school was kept; the school was endowed. The school has been discontinued, and the endowment lost. It is probable that the Independent meetings were held in that room. The Rev. Vavasor Griffiths, of Maesgwyn, was a very eminent Independent minister. He presided over an academy for the training of young men for the ministry of the Gospel. Mr. Griffiths died in the year 1740, in the forty-third year of his age.

There was an Independent congregation at Maesyronen, in the parish of Glasbury, averaging 250; in the congregation there were 20 voters. Dr. Evans mentioned the number of voters in each congregation to show that Nonconformists had among them a number of persons entitled to vote in the election of members of Parliament.

I am sorry that I cannot give the history of the rise and progress of the Congregational churches in Radnorshire. I understand that there is a 'History of the Congregational Churches in Wales,' by the late Dr. Rees, of Swansea. I have not seen that work. If I did see it I could not use it, as I am told that it is in the Welsh language. I give from the 'Congregational Year-Book of 1891' the names of the Congregational churches in Radnorshire, and the date of their formation: Carmel Nantmel, 1821; the chapel at

Carmel was built in the year 1829. Clyro, 1890; the chapel at Clyro was built by Miss Bynam, of Pentwyn House, in the village of Clyro. Hermon, near Painscastle, 1839; Painscastle, 1834; the church at Hermon and the church in Painscastle have one pastor. Llanbadarngarreg, 1831; Aberedw, 1871; the church at Llanbadarngarreg and the church at Aberedw have one pastor. Llandrindod Wells. The old chapel at Caebach, 1720; the new chapel, called Christ Church, 1871; the church which formerly worshipped in the old chapel at Caebach now worships in the new chapel, called Christ Church; there are religious services held occasionally in the old chapel at Caebach; there is a burial-ground belonging to the chapel. Maesyronen, near Glasbury, 1662; the new chapel in the village of Glasbury, 1866; these two chapels are supplied by the same minister; the chapel at Maesyronen is very ancient—I have not been able to ascertain when the present chapel was erected, or whether there was a chapel there before the present one. Rhayader, 1688; the chapel in Rhayader bears the date of 1721; the Congregational Church in Rhayader is said to have commenced at a farmhouse, called Neuaddlwyd, in the parish of Nantmel.

The above list shows that there are in Radnorshire eleven Congregational chapels and ten Congregational churches. The Congregational church which was at Maesgwyn in the time of the Rev. Vavasor Griffiths has become extinct. There is no Congregational church in Radnorshire on the right-hand side of the road leading from Kington to Rhayader, except Carmel. Concerning the old chapel at Maesyronen, I extract the following particulars from the *Hereford Times* of July 4, 1891: 'One of the oldest places of worship in the Principality now stands at Maesyronen, some mile and a half from the village of Glasbury, and not far from Maesllwch Castle. It is stated that Cromwell visited this place, and recorded that Whitfield preached here on more than one occasion. The building, although so old, is now in a good state of preservation; the walls are massive, and the roof well held in by heavy oak girders. The interior presents a quaint appearance, as the old family pews, constructed of the toughest heart of oak, are somewhat old-fashioned in form and style. The walls are covered

with tablets in memory of the pious dead who worshipped there in the remote past. There is also a quiet graveyard adjoining the building, in which, to the present day, some are being buried. A flourishing Sunday-school and regular services are held in the chapel, and the attendance, though not large, is considerable for so scattered a district. An endowment of some £20 or £30 was left to the cause here by a well-wisher some years ago.'

Dr. Rees, in his 'History of Protestant Nonconformity in Wales,' gives the following account of the Rev. Thomas Bowen, who was minister of the church at Maesyronen: 'The Rev. Thomas Bowen, of Maesyronen, Radnorshire, who was a very popular and active minister, used to preach frequently at dwelling-houses in various districts of the counties of Radnor and Brecon. Among other places, he often preached at a farmhouse in the parish of Llansaintffraid, near Brecon. His repeated visits to this parish so irritated Parson Frew that he determined to punish him as far as possible. Finding that the house in which Mr. Bowen preached had not been recorded for preaching according to the provisions of the Act of Toleration, that, consequently, the preacher was liable to a fine of £20, and that he, as an informer, would be entitled to one-third of that sum, on his information, and at his request, Mr. Bowen was summoned to appear before the magistrates at Brecon. On the appointed day he appeared there. The presiding magistrate asked him: "Is it true that you preached in Mr. Frew's parish at the house named in the summons?" "It is," was the reply. "Then," said his worship, "you are liable to pay a fine of £20 and the costs." Without cringing, pleading his poverty, and begging their favour, he paid the money at once, and, gravely bowing to their worships, walked out of the room. A messenger was sent to the door, asking him to return, that the magistrates had something to say to him. When he returned, the chairman said: "Mr. Bowen, we have power to fine you to this amount, but we have power also to reduce it to a nominal sum." He replied: "Never mind, gentlemen, the money is now paid, and the portion of it which will go to the pocket of my accuser may injure him more than the loss will injure me." Six weeks after, Mr. Frew, on his way home from Brecon, fell from his horse on

a heap of stones, and his skull was so fractured by the fall that his brain was scattered over the stones! The tragical end of this persecutor so terrified his clerical brethren that none of them afterwards ventured to annoy a Nonconformist preacher as he did.'

It was in the year 1791 that Mr. Bowen was fined for preaching in an unlicensed dwelling-house. Dr. Rees says that this was probably the last instance of *legal* persecution which a Nonconformist suffered in South Wales.

THE PRIMITIVE METHODISTS.

THE Primitive Methodists were an off-shoot from the Wesleyan Methodists. Primitive Methodism arose from the desire of two persons, William Clowes and Hugh Bourne, to introduce camp-meetings into England such as had been already held in America. The Wesleyan Conference disapproved of camp-meetings, but Clowes and Bourne persisted in holding them. For this they were excluded by the Wesleyan Conference. Primitive Methodism was established by Clowes and Bourne in the year 1810. In the year 1891 the Primitive Methodists had in the United Kingdom 1,049 ministers, 16,317 lay preachers, and 193,658 members. The founders of Primitive Methodism were very earnest, diligent workers in the Lord's vineyard. They were subject to a great deal of rough usage in the villages and rural districts where they preached the Gospel. Probably no denomination of Christians has made more rapid progress in so short a time.

I am sorry that I am able to give but very little account of the rise and progress of Primitive Methodism in Radnorshire. I have sought information from different persons, but have been able to obtain but little. Mr. Joseph Wilding, of Maylord, Llanbister Road, has kindly supplied me with the following account of the chapels in the Knighton circuit of the Primitive Methodists. The first Primitive Methodist chapel in Knighton was built on the ground on which the railway-station now stands. This chapel was

erected in the year 1852, at a cost of £185. The site on which this chapel stood being wanted for the erection of the railway-station, a new chapel was erected in 1861 in Bread Street at a cost of £1,260. The Rev. George Middleton was then minister of the circuit. Brook House chapel was built in the year 1857, at a cost of £105. Lloiney chapel was built in the year 1852, at a cost of £84. At the present time there is a flourishing society worshipping in this chapel, and a Sabbath-school. In the year 1853 a chapel was erected in the village of Llanguillo at a cost of £115. This chapel was built mainly by the exertions of Mr. W. Bubb. A chapel was erected in Bleddfa in the year 1862. The cost was £122. Cwmygaist chapel was built in the year 1863, at a cost of £107. The site for this chapel was given by the late Mr. John Palfrey, of Cyllybothor. Mr. Palfrey also gave £50 at the opening of the chapel, so that it was opened free of debt. In the year 1870 a chapel was built at Llandewy. The cost of this chapel was £220. I was present at the laying of the foundation-stone of this chapel. The site for the chapel was given by the Right Honourable Lord Ormathwaite.

From this account, it appears that there are seven chapels in the Radnorshire part of the Knighton Primitive Methodist circuit. There is also a house called Litton, near Whitton, in which Primitive Methodist meetings are held. In addition to the above account, Mr. Joseph Wilding has furnished me with some further particulars of Primitive Methodism in Radnorshire. He says the Primitive Methodists had formed a circuit in Presteign, and their minister came up to Knighton, and on through Llanbister, some time soon after the year 1826. The minister, the Rev. John Richards, opened a preaching service at Upper Cawailog, in the house of Edward Wilding. Meetings were held regularly in Mr. Wilding's house. Miss Esther Low preached the Gospel in different parts of the county at that time. Meetings were held at Melewillim, Croagy, and at Tinaclay, in the house of Mr. Thomas Oldbury. Tinaclay is now part of Castle Coch Farm. Mr. Meredith, of Cwmllechwyd, gave a site for the erection of a chapel at the Pound. (This chapel is now occupied by the Baptists.) Great earnestness was manifested in those days. Jacob