

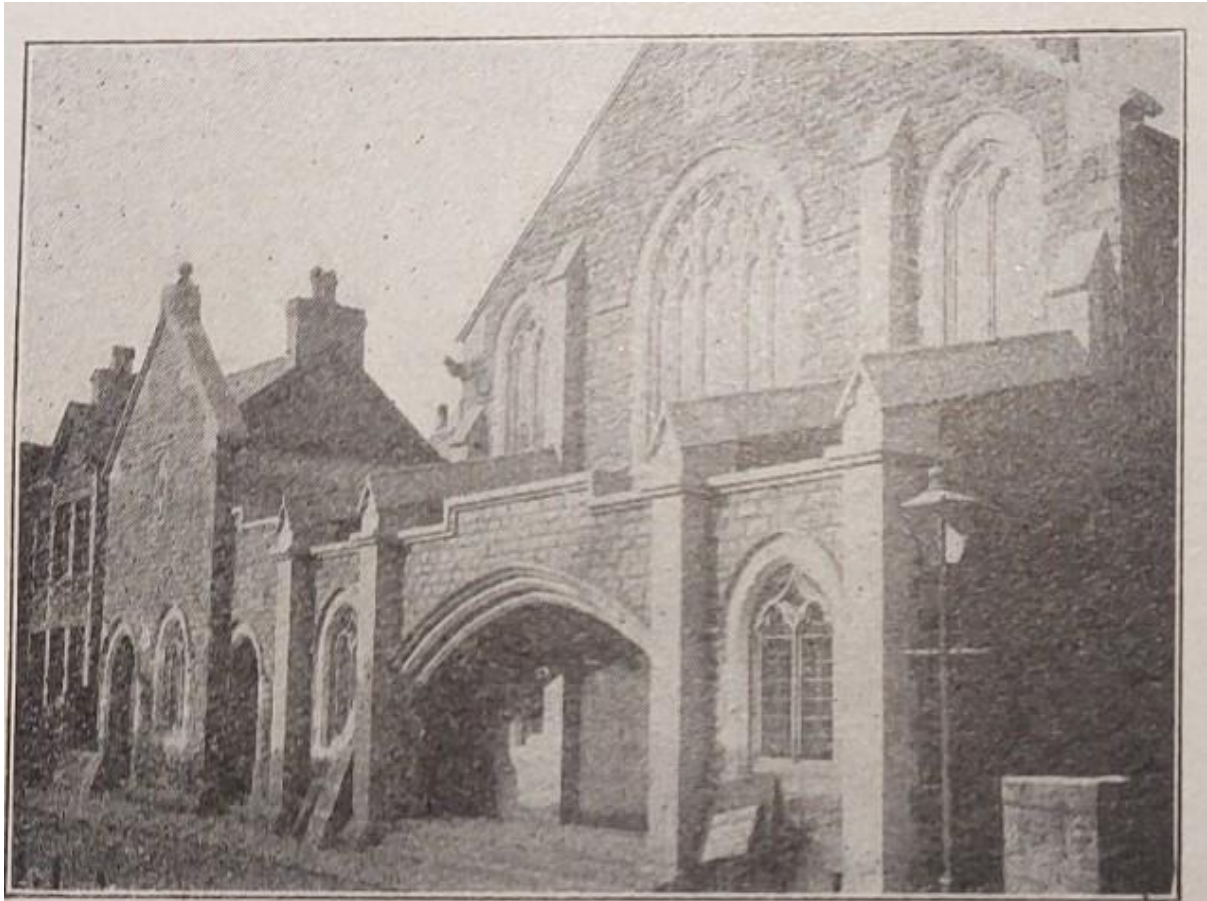
Notable Primitive Methodist Churches.

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By the Rev. John T. Ecob.

Abertillery

Abertillery stands at the wide junction of the Tillery Valley with the valley of the Ebbw Fach at the north—eastern corner of the South Wales coalfield



Its commercial history and growth are Contemporaneous with the development of the coal—mining industry. One hundred and sixty years ago there were only 150 houses in the valley down to Aberbeeg, and thirty of these were situated on the present site of Abertillery In ten years, 1901-1911, the population increased from 21,945 to 35,425.

Coxe (1801) and the Gwent poet, William Thomas(1832-1878), describe the luring beauty of the Blaenau Gwent mountainous district, and this valley approached from the Abersychan mountain.

“Oh where with such variety
Her charms doth nature pour
Or beauties lavish as on thee
Thou world in miniature? “

There are many references to the historical lore commencing with the dauntless Caractacus, and the witness of these mountains to the sturdy Non-conformity from the publication of the Welsh Bible (1588) and the time when Free Church ideals “ran over the mountains of Breckonshire and Monmouthshire as the fire in thatch.”

Gwent, which was derived from a British word meaning "fair" adapted to Monmouthshire, is said to be

"A land of beauty, virtue, and valour. "

The men of the mountains ever were the sons of freedom, and the valleys revival-swept, the River of God has had its seasons of deepening and rushing, and mountain— fed flow, and the valleys have laughed and sung.

The history of our church commenced with the opening of the steam coal seams. Missioned by laymen from Brynmawr, its first home was in the house of the late Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Preece at Cwm Nanty. Our first church was built in Castle Street (1849) about the time the Cwmtillery pits were opened. Our church is said to be the first of the English churches to be established in the town. The great influx of workers from Somersetshire, Herefordshire and elsewhere to the new collieries doubtless ministered to its rapid growth and prosperity. The building was enlarged several times, and 1876 a new church was erected on the slope of the mountain and in a central position.

Below is the black, rushing Tillery, above the peaks which catch the first beams of the new day. It faces the heights and the gates of the morning. From the first it has been a kind of house beautiful and full of melody. It still centres hope, focuses light homes gladness and attracts buoyant youth. It is of light's exhilaration and the ecstasy of song.

The period of the town's expansion was that of enterprise. Chapels were built. all within easy reach, at Six Bells (1896 . Bllaenau Gwent (1903). A new one at Aberbeeg (1901), Newall Street (1906), and a new one at Cwmtillery (1913). They are still centres of activity and scenes of devoted labour.

In 1914 the Central Church was enlarged at a cost of nearly £3,000. Provision was made for 800 hearers and, in the school 800 scholars. It is regarded as one of the best appointed and attractive in the district.

The South Wales churches are largely institutional. From the first they were associated with the manifold life of the people. The weekly programme includes brigades, ambulance corps, singing classes, etc. The Central Church is the venue for philanthropic, educational, and social societies. Primitive Methodism in the valley has ever been public spirited. Its influence is indicated by the young men it sent out, who occupy leading positions: among others, Sir T. W. Allen, Mr .F. Hodges, M.P. (Civil Lord of the Admiralty), Mr. C. W. Davis, M.P. (Australia), the Revs. T. Collins, W. W. Price, T. Morgan, D.D.



Councillor J. Snellgrove is still active in municipal courts. Our church is a Kingdom Church. The economic and social problems are not neglected. It may do violence to certain Puritanic prejudices. hut by no means suffers religiously there-by.

It maintains its testimony to the regenerating Grace of the Gospel. Its emphasis is on the supreme truths for which the Church stands. The Church is an orchestra. The talented and devoted precentor, Mr. Llew Edwards, A.L.C.M., occupies the rostrum with the preacher. He is the Sankey of South Wales. The congregation sings with melody and heartiness. No

pessimism can survive Cwm Rhondda, and

"Death of death and hell's destruction"



MR. JOSHUA CARTER,
Society Steward.

In the clubs there may slumber Bolshevich fires. In the hearts of the people are the songs of Zion. Doubtless the Eisteddfodau contribute to musical and literary culture and influence the worship within the churches. The people sing. We have never met with so many with a musical diploma or a University degree. The musical appeal of the Central Church accounts in no small degree for the large congregations. The Whitsuntide parade of the Sunday schools is like the march of pilgrim bands, with songs of triumph and eyes up-lifted to the mountains. They convert the town into a temple walled in by resonant mountains.

The Sabbath worship reminds one of the Gwent poet:

"Oh hail, all hail the hour

When God reveals himself and like the sun

illuminates every epoch of our being,

And through them all the spirit's path shines clear

From God through nature, back to God again."

It is this temperament and influence that makes P.S.A. so popular, a popularity maintained for over fourteen years. The best artistes are sought and the crowd responds. It is never without Bible reading and Gospel address. The school numbers about three hundred scholars, and the P.S.A., which is regarded as part and parcel of the school, five hundred members.. It was significant that recently a number of young men walked into the school desirous of tuition. Great attention is given to the young people throughout the circuit, We have already nearly eight hundred scholars in the schools.

Wales is reputed a nation of great preachers. From the days of Vicar Pritchard, William Wroth the apostle of Wales, Howell Harris, the friend of George Whitfield, whose eloquence "Loosened Stones in the quarry which other hands trimmed and built with," there has been no lack of pulpit eloquence and fire. The Editor, Rev E McLellan who has visited the church for a series of years, will testify to a large congregation of devout worshippers attentive hearers. Recently in a workers cottage we observed three musical instruments, a pile of music, and on the top of heap of books, Chesterton's St Francis of Assisi This is typical. In economics Marx is studied. In theology, Dr. Peake. We are. in this valley facing social and economic problems in an acute form. Club life increases the difficulty of church life and threatens the sanctity of the home life. We have an ebb tide. Our people are migrating and emigrating. Recently the Church has passed through a crisis. But a new day is on the hills. A great mission is being organised and the River of God will again have a flood tide. The mountain streams are running strong. Like the impassioned challenge of a mighty inquisitor the Congregation ask :

Shall crime bring crime for ever?"

Looking to the mountains the answer is given,

"No say Thy mountains"

We, as a church, have to face towards the morning.