

This was the pioneering Congregationalist chapel that stood just south of the Llantrisant road near Ty Du. It was 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 church was in existence in the 1760s for we know that Samuel Price of y Parc was a member. Himself, a son of a minister (the Revd. Rees Price of Llangeinor) he belonged to a distinguished family of dissenters, as mentioned elsewhere. The chapel in fact was built on Price's land. He was a mainstay of the meeting house during his lifetime and, after he died (in 1777) it was found that he had left a legacy of £200 to help it on.

In 1829 Taihirion and Llanharan were united under the ministry of one David Jones. The membership at the commencement of his ministry had dropped to twelve. This number prompted John Williamson M.A. (a 20th century religious historian) to comment that the church at that time was, therefore, in apostolic succession in more ways than one – adding the hope that there was no Judas there!

Around 1830 a 999 year lease was secured from Mr Wyndham Lewis, M.P. on a parcel of ground upon which to build a new church. 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 Neuaddlwyd, 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.

The next shepherd was Lemuel Smith a young man who in a very short life was to make a huge impact upon the Congregationalist movement in the area. He was born in 1815, and when still very young he was received as a member in Rehoboth, Brynmawr, where he also started preaching. After working at Dowlais and being a staunch member at Bethania he accepted a call from Taihirion and Bethlehem. Lemuel's short career has been well-documented elsewhere. Here we shall refer to one incident that indicates what kind of a young man he was. In the early months at Taihirion he felt that his labour was not successful, and one morning on his way to the chapel he knelt down beside a stile to ask God what he should do: go back to his old work as a miner, or carry on? To his dying day he believed that he had heard a voice telling him not to despise a day of 'little things' (i.e. small accomplishments). He was encouraged by the answer and for the rest of his short life he was an inspiration to all around him. He died, aged 27 on March 6th 1842 after bursting a blood vessel whilst preaching in a room at Efail Isaf just prior to the building of Tabernacl. He was buried at Groes Wen amid scenes of great sorrow.

Then the Revd J. Davies returned to have oversight of both Taihirion and Llansantffraid-ar-Lai (St Brides). Three years later it was the turn of another Davies, John, from Morryston. This John would become famous locally as 'Davies Taihirion'.

In 1858 Bronllwyn, Pentyrch joined the Congregationalist circle being established by eleven members from Taihirion

Characters reared at Taihirion included 'Jim-o'r-Engine' the converted pugilist – and others who became outstanding leaders of Welsh Congregationalism. One, namely, Job Miles (a shoemaker) was editor of 'Y Tyst' the organ of Welsh Congregationalists and chairman of the Welsh Congregationalist Union.

After the Revd. John (Taihirion) Davies removed from Rhydylfar to the neighbourhood of Efail Isaf, the church suffered tremendously and the cause dwindle to nothing.

The East Glamorgan Welsh Congregational Association took an interest in the situation and some of their members inspected the old place. Desolation! The doors and the windows had gone; there were holes in the roof, and a vixen and her cubs were in possession of the space behind the pulpit. Dr Williamson commented: "There has been a fox in the pulpit before now, and a vixen in the pews ... but this is the first time we have heard of both being in possession of the 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. Mr Thomas undertook to collect the money needed for

repairs, and managed to gather over £70. The building was put in order and services recommenced. The reopening was attended by some 'giants of the pulpit' including the Revs Tawelfryn Thomas (Groes Wen), J. Williams (Hafod), and John Morris (Star Street, Cardiff).

Mrs Thomas of Tynwern continued to work strenuously for years collecting money to maintain the cause, and was supported by the East Glamorgan Welsh Association. The Revd 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 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, but he did what he could. It was said that 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. Then came good news for the church. At the first communion after Mr Beynon's death, a large number of the parents of those children were received into church fellowship, and they kept Taihirion going.

By the end of the first world war there was not only a financial crisis; there was also the language question. The chapels of Pentyrch, Gwaelod y Garth, 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 'history' (as they say), for Taihirion has disappeared altogether. We will probably never learn the reason for it being called 'Philadelphia'!

