

PENRALLT BAPTIST CHURCH

HISTORY OF OUR BUILDING

Origins

This building was originally known as Capel Twrgwyn. The name derives from the Cae Twrgwyn (Twrgwyn Field) in which much of Upper Bangor was constructed in the 1800s. Twrgwyn means “White Tower” but there is no consensus as to the existence or purpose of any white tower in the area.

This plot of land was bought for the construction of a Calvinistic Methodist (Welsh Presbyterian) church by the members of the Capel Tabernacle in the centre of Bangor. Tabernacle had been the first Calvinistic Methodist church in Bangor. As Bangor expanded a Sunday School was set up in the Upper Bangor area around 1850, in the workshop of John Parry, a builder. However, at a meeting of the Tabernacle church members it was decided that a chapel was needed to house this school. Capel Twrgwyn was inaugurated on 7 May 1854. Although Twrgwyn chapel did not initially employ a minister, Rev. John Phillips (*after whom the J.P. Hall is named*) was the most prominent character behind the establishment of the chapel.

Modifications

The Vestry at the rear of the chapel was added in 1856. This was soon to house the Normal College, founded in 1858. Before the College was built (the building that is now called Hen Goleg) the twelve students who were in the first intake (all men, of course!) lived in private lodgings and had their lectures in Capel Twrgwyn. John Phillips was greatly involved in this arrangement.

In 1864 it was decided that the chapel should have a gallery, and the plans of an architect called Mr Kennedy, were accepted in 1865, which extended the length of the building and included a new frontage. Twrgwyn was reopened after its refurbishment in 1866. Here's an extract from the NW Chronicle of October 20th, 1866:

The alterations, which have been designed in the Italian style, consist of an entirely new front, towards the Holyhead Road, divided into two stories vertically, and three divisions horizontally. The first storey consists of the entrance doorway, in the central division, flanked by circular-headed recesses, intended for the reception of gas standards. The jambs of this doorway are ornamented by columns, the shafts of which are of Anglesey marble, polished. In each of the divisions there are two windows, lighting the entrance lobby and staircases which are nine feet wide, and the whole width of the chapel, and an addition to the length of the building, which was formerly entered by side porches; this extension has been further utilised, by placing therein the staircases running right and left to the new galleries. The dressings and mouldings throughout being of Anglesey limestone, which we can safely say are worked in a manner rarely to be met with.

The galleries referred to, which are supported on iron bronzed columns, are entirely new, and double the accommodation of the chapel, and have a substantial and satisfactory appearance, the work of staining and varnishing, having been done with judgment. The seats

on the ground floor have been entirely remodelled, in unison with the new works. A new pulpit of polished mahogany, worked as carefully as cabinet-maker's work, is a success in every respect; and the ironwork for the stairs, and in front of the deacons' pew, appear to us in excellent taste. Five new crystal gasoliers have been provided by Mr. R. Jones, plumber, and give abundant light, beside being ornamental.

The works have been carried out by Mr. W.T. Rogers, of Penparc, builder, under the direction of, and from designs by, Messrs Kennedy and Rogers, of Bangor and Albion Chambers, 11 Adam Street, Adelphi, London, architects.

Around 1898 a Peter Conacher organ was installed, and Capel Twrgwyn grew until its heyday when it would be packed with students and families every Sunday.

Subsequent History

The members of the Tabernacle church eventually joined the Twrgwyn congregation in 1968 when the Tabernacle closed. More recently, when Capel Berea Newydd (off Penrhos Road) was built the Twrgwyn congregation, now down to about 100 people, moved to it and this building became redundant. We subsequently bought it for £130,000 in 2003 having outgrown our old building on Penrallt Isaf and being forced to meet in the school hall of Ysgol Tryfan on Sunday mornings. Half a million pounds was spent on modernizing the building. The organ was donated to a Trust in Belfast which refurbished it and rehoused it in the Lutheran Church of Jölster, Norway. By coincidence the move received advice from an ex-Bangor music student, Tim Rishton who wrote:

I never did play the Twrgwyn organ when it was in Bangor, but I've followed closely its progress from Ireland to Jölster. I do quite a bit of organ consultancy, and Rune (who in the normal Norwegian way of things is the brother-in-law of one of our best friends and in fact played the organ at our son's funeral a decade ago) contacted me for some help.

The refurbishment project received a sympathetic reception from Cadw who are keen to see these old buildings modernized and used for community and religious purposes, rather than fall into the hands of property developers. We have retained as many of the features as possible. The modern lighting is designed to throw 20% of the illumination onto the grade 2 listed ceilings. The pews (ordinary pine stained to look like pitch pine) have been retained in the balcony for now. The art deco memorial window is still on view in the porch. We have added modern toilets with disabled access in both the Vestry and the main chapel, underfloor heating in the chapel, a new kitchen in the Vestry, and a prayer room in the main chapel. Access for the disabled has been ensured by the installation of ramps and the raising of some floor levels. We remodelled the area outside the main doors with limestone to give better access, and added glass inner doors to complete the new appearance. The building was re-inaugurated on January 29th 2005.

The Vestry, re-named Canolfan Penrallt, functions as a community centre and is managed by a committee set up jointly with church members and community leaders. The building is open and in use every day of the week, throughout almost all the year. Penrallt is a growing church which attracts a good number of families, students and young adults. Considering that the building grew out of work with young people in the 1850s, we consider that we are continuing the tradition.