

The Rechabites in Brynmawr

The Independent Order of Rechabites was a Friendly Society established in 1835 as part of the wider British temperance movement to promote total abstinence from alcoholic beverages. Always well connected in upper society and involved in financial matters, it gradually transformed into a financial institution which still exists today and still promotes abstinence.

From the late 18th century a number of Friendly Societies had been set up to help working class people with such things as health insurance, death benefits, etc. Generally these held their meetings in public houses. In the 1830s a group of Manchester Methodists became concerned that by encouraging working men to attend public houses to pay their friendly society dues, then the societies were harming the men's health and financial situation and threatening their moral welfare, rather than helping them. To counter this they set up a new Friendly Society called the Independent Order of Rechabites, named after the nomadic, abstaining Rechabites of the Old Testament. (Wikipedia).

This was a very popular movement and there were many Rechabite Halls around the valleys though sadly many have now been demolished or changed into private houses. There is one in New Tredegar still standing though I am unsure if it is still used as a Rechabite Hall. I often wondered if Brynmawr also had a Rechabite Society and if so where was the Hall situated. I knew there was one in Tredegar and also in Ebbw Vale. It seemed unlikely Brynmawr with its numerous public houses and beer houses, something like 65 in the late 1890 to early 1900 didn't have a strong temperance movement.

In fact there was a very strong temperance movement in Brynmawr and the Rechabites were not the only ones opposed to the evil drink. The town had the Brynmawr United Temperance Association and the British Women' Temperance League. There was the Independent Order of Good Templars, the tenth annual session of the English Grand Lodge of Wales of the Good Templars was held in Brynmawr when over one hundred delegates and visitors met at the Calvinistic Methodist Chapel and Libanus Chapel and in the evening a reception soiree held under the presidency of Mr J. F. Neat.

In Brynmawr the Rechabites met at Neat's Assembly Rooms. Neat had shops on Beaufort Street and probably the Assembly rooms were part of the shops. Neat was a prominent business man in the town and had quite a standing in the community. His shops occupied what used to be Alan's Furniture which is now The Bridal Shop and Furniture Shop.

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