

# **BLAENAU GWENT HERITAGE FORUM JOURNAL ©**



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## **COVER PICTURE –Big Pit Blaenavon August 2023.**

### **Photograph by the editor**

Whilst lying just to the west of Blaenau Gwent Big Pit easily falls within the upland ‘Blaenau’ of Gwent an area that spans the present-day Heads of the Valleys. Although a neighbour to Blaenau Gwent we seldom have published anything on that area, so if you have an article of interest, please contact us.

Big Pit is a rare success story. This living museum situated not far from the source of the Afon Lwyd at the head of the Torfaen valley and overlooking the town of Blaenavon welcomes more than 150,000 visitors each year. It is thought that the pit was sunk in 1860 employing mainly local men throughout its working life of 120 years as a colliery; it closed as a working colliery in 1980. The life of the pit was to be extended by not mining coal but mining tourists. In 1983 it became the National mining Museum of Wales enabling visitors the opportunity to visit its underground workings as well as its surface buildings comprised of blacksmiths shop, pit head baths, now an exhibition hall and café, and other surviving buildings such as the ‘lamp room.’ In 1999 a Heritage Lottery grant secured its future as a working museum situated within a World Heritage site. Entry remains free to visitors who have the wonderful experience of descending 300 foot (90m) to pit bottom in its coal / man winding cage and can take a tour of the mine workings before being brought back up to the surface and daylight. The museum is a true ‘jewel in the crown’ of Welsh and indeed British museums.

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## EDITORIAL

It is with great sadness and regret that I start this, my first editorial, with a notice of recent obituaries of three of our past colleagues. It is only fitting that we, The Blaenau Gwent Heritage Forum, remember and celebrate the lives of those who gave their services so freely to make our forum a success for the past 30 years or so. This brief tribute to our three fallen friends, for such they were, appears in the order of their passing.

Mr Ken Davies, (b.1952) needs little introduction in the Tredegar area. Ken passed away suddenly in 2022 leaving behind Meryl, Huw and family. Ken was a keen photographer and avid local historian, who had amassed a large collection of historic photographs of the Tredegar and upper Sirhowy area. We, with his help, were working on a publication recording places of worship in the upper Sirhowy area based on his photographic archive. The publication of his photographic, historic record of such places will be published in the near future by the 'Forum' as a tribute to Ken, where, in the introduction, more of his contribution to the locality will be found.

Dr Colin Morgan, (b.1935 – 2023). Colin was born in Rhymney and was a graduate of Aberystwyth, Cardiff, and the Open University. Since retiring from university teaching, he has pursued his passion for the local histories of Blaenau Gwent and for the Welsh language by way of translating nineteenth and early twentieth century Eisteddfod Welsh history essays dealing with Gwent. Colin took over the editing of the Blaenau Gwent Heritage forum journal when he edited the March edition in 2018. He passed away unexpectedly on the 27<sup>th</sup> February 2023; his passing has left an 'empty space' that will be difficult to fill for all those who knew him. His contribution to the Journals he edited, both as editor and author, took the journal to new levels.

Mr Trevor Jones. MBE. (b.1929 – 2023) 'Trevor the milk' as he was fondly known was a very well-known and deeply respected member of the Tredegar community. Trevor took up the family tradition as a 'Milkman' following his stint of 'national service' in 1949 and was awarded his MBE in 1999, he had been a serving member of the 'Heritage Forum' for many years and contributed to the Journal on numerous occasions, often via a third party to whom he related some of his many tales.

All three will be missed by those who have had the pleasure to know them and call them friends.

The Blaenau Gwent Heritage Forum Journal has passed through the hands of two very able editors during its lifetime; each of which has guided its content with ever increasing goals of excellence. It is a privilege for me to be invited to take over editing the Journal following the two previous editors. I shall endeavour to live up to their expectations and continue to improve the journal. This journal is

the 26<sup>th</sup> to be published by the Blaenau Gwent Heritage Forum and following in my predecessors' footsteps I must acknowledge the hard work that our contributors put in to fill its pages with their and our history and events of the distant and not so distant past. The 'Forum' meets once a month, normally, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Monday of each month and any interested members of the public are welcome to come along to be acquainted with who we are and what we do within the broader Blaenau Gwent area. We are happy to accept articles, long or short, on a broad range of subjects from individuals or established societies, our requirements for contributors are set out below. (Page 70) If you are interested in the heritage and history of the area and feel you have something to give back then please pay us a visit either in person or via our web-site at <http://www.blaenau-gwent-heritage-forum.co.uk>. This journal offers the reader a range of topics from across time and space covering events during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. We are fortunate to be able to include new work offered for our publication by Mr Martin Thomas, a Ph.D. Candidate, now relocated to Hay, as well as a personal journal from WWI, which has never been published until now. A strange case of 'murder' and a complete chapel history along with a 'pub crawl' are all to be found in this, our 26<sup>th</sup> Journal.

## **BLAENAU GWENT HERITAGE FORUM- OFFICERS**

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## **An unusual verdict. The strange case of “*Felo De Se*” in Beaufort.**

Rodger Burchell

The name of Greenland is well known in the Beaufort and Ebbw Vale area, the story as told below is a ‘true story’ based solely upon the recorded facts of the time. The details were originally researched by J. Evans and R. Burchell, this shortened version has been edited by R. Burchell leaving out much of the later family history of the Greenland family.

Our research commenced in 1851 with the National Census for the Beaufort district of Llangattock parish<sup>1</sup> where we read that a certain Richard Greenland was born in 1828 at Dunkerton, Somerset; a small community six miles north of Bath. On his arrival in Beaufort, within the parish of Llangattock, aged 21, he had left behind his widowed father, Albert, and a sister Maria two years younger than himself.<sup>2</sup> At Beaufort he lodges with an elderly couple, also from Somerset, living at number three Needhams Row, Carmeltown.<sup>3</sup> The houses were named after William Needham the mineral agent for the nearby Beaufort Iron Works. Richard chose well for he soon found work in a nearby mine as an iron stone miner, miners, mined iron stone to be smelted in a blast furnace to become ‘Pig Iron’ whereas colliers, in the main, cut coal, although not exclusively, as both coal seams and ironstone veins were often found close together underground.

During this era, apart from work and Chapel, there was little to do entertainment wise, leisure time was spent at one or more of the many public houses, over 40 locally, which were always closed on Sundays, walking the mountains, playing sports or gambling, always frowned upon on a Sunday, were other alternatives. It may have been on such a ‘day off’ that Richard met Sarah Williams; soon to be his wife. Sarah was a servant to William Needham who was the mineral agent for

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<sup>1</sup> 1851 Census HO107; Piece: 2490; Folio: 128; Page: 33. [www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk) Accessed 17/4/2021

<sup>2</sup> 1841 Census HO107; Piece: 961; Book: 5; Civil Parish: Dunkerton; County: Somerset; Enumeration District: 6; Folio: 10; Page: 13; Line: 20; [www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk) Accessed 17/4/2021

<sup>3</sup> The row of 23 houses were named after William Needham the Beaufort mineral agent.

the Beaufort Iron works, a person of no little importance in the community, he lived about a quarter of a mile to the south of Beaufort Iron Works at Church Hill House<sup>4</sup> New-church.<sup>5</sup> So Sarah had secured a good position.

On September 24<sup>th</sup> 1855 Richard married Sarah, a local girl of Beaufort, two years his elder.<sup>6</sup> They marry in one of the two local Mission rooms, it is not made clear which one they chose; however, it is most probable that they chose the mission room located behind the 'Finers Arms' on Beaufort Rise, close to where they both lived.

The Marriage certificate of Richard and Sarah Greenland. Below.

1855. Marriage solemnized at <i>The Licensed Room</i> in the Parish of <i>Aberystwith</i> in the County of <i>Swansea</i>								
No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.	Rank or Profession of Father.
87	Sept. 24. 1855.	<i>Richard Greenland</i>	<i>27</i>	<i>Bachelor</i>	<i>Miner</i>	<i>Beaufort works</i>	<i>Alfred Greenland</i>	<i>Miner</i>
		<i>Sarah Williams</i>	<i>29</i>	<i>Spinster</i>	<i>—</i>	<i>Beaufort works</i>	<i>John Williams</i>	<i>Miner</i>
Married in the <i>Licensed Room</i> according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Established Church, by <i>—</i> or after <i>Banns</i> by me; <i>D. Rice, P. Curate</i>								
This Marriage was solemnized between us,		{ <i>The mark &amp; of Richard Greenland</i> <i>The mark &amp; of Sarah Williams</i>		in the Presence of us, { <i>George Hughes</i> <i>Elizabeth Lewis</i>				

Once married they set up home in a small four roomed house, recently built, near Chapel Road on Beaufort Rise.<sup>7</sup> Here, in 1856, they are soon joined by their first child, a boy, named Alfred after Richard's father.

Next to arrive at their home was Richards's uncle George, who was about 20 years older than Richard. George Screech was born about 1813, and was Richard's mother's brother; he also came from Dunkerton in Somerset and had been working in the Beaufort area for 4 or 5 years as a miner.<sup>8</sup> George had abandoned his wife Hannah and his two daughters, Ann, and Maria, all of whom remained at home in

<sup>4</sup> Now Church-hill Cottage on New Church road.

<sup>5</sup> 1851 Census HO107; Piece: 2447; Folio: 200; Page: 2. www.ancestry.co.uk Accessed 17/4/2021. The house now renamed Churchill Cottage still stand today occupied by friends of myself.

<sup>6</sup> Monmouthshire Marriage and Banns Aberystwith Parish Page 44 www.findmypast.co.uk Accessed 17/4/2021

<sup>7</sup> Now called Wesley Place.

<sup>8</sup> The Welshman. 16 April 1858. Page 4.

## Early 'New Towns' in the Valleys.

John B. Hilling.

The Tredegar Iron Company was one of the most important companies operating in the South Wales Coalfield during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Less well known was its significance in the creation of three 'new towns' according to forward-looking plans.

The first of these 'new towns' was, of course, Tredegar itself, the development of which followed hard on the establishment of the Tredegar Ironworks in 1800. The original plan for the 'new town' can still be seen as an irregular grid of streets of different widths with a circular marketplace or 'piazza' at its centre, where the town clock now stands. In fact, the town had been carefully laid out as a kind of buffer zone between the dirt and noise of the ironworks at the upper end and quiet greenery of the ironmaster's estate (Bedwellty Park) at the lower end.

The exact date when the 'new town' was started is unclear. Whereas Oliver Jones stated categorically that 'no deliberate planning occurred at any time,'<sup>1</sup> Wyndham Scandrett was much more receptive to the idea of the town having been planned. Scandrett noted that 'the plans (it is said) were drawn by a young man who later emigrated to the U.S.A. and was concerned in the planning of parts of New York.'<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, there is no record of who the 'young man' was, or when he made the plans.

Development of the town was clearly well under way in 1813 when a draft of the first Ordnance Survey map of the area was drawn up. The map showed that Stable Lane and Park Row had been completed, thus defining the limits of both Bedwellty Park and the 'new town.' Ebenezer and the new Siloh chapels are also shown, along with the Company Shop. By 1826 – when the Ordnance Survey

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<sup>1</sup> Jones, Oliver. *The Early Days of Sirhowy and Tredegar* (Tredegar, 1969), p. 59.

<sup>2</sup> Scandrett, Wyndham, *Old Tredegar* (Tredegar, 1990), vol. 1, p. 136.



published a new and more accurate map – the layout of the ‘new town’ was already complete, with its streets already fully built-up.<sup>3</sup>

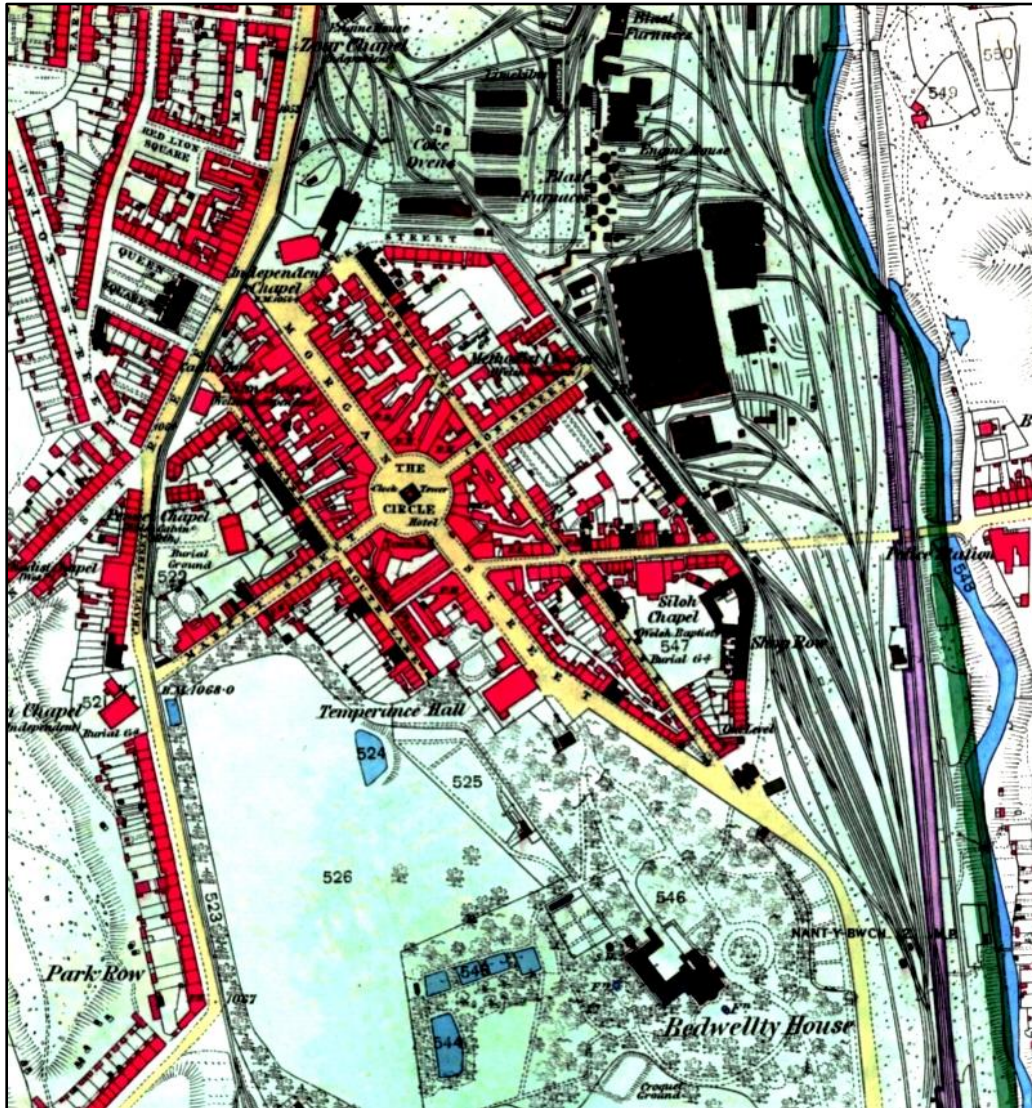
According to Evan Powell’s *History of Tredegar*, The Tredegar Arms had been erected by 1802 and that ‘during 1804-5-6 several blocks of houses had been erected’, ‘a portion of Iron Street [was] erected’ and the Castle Hotel had been built, along with a house in Castle Street during this same period.<sup>4</sup> If this information is correct - and there appears to be no reason to doubt its veracity – then the central components of the town’s street layout had been under construction within a year or so of the ironworks’ initial development. By 1809 a portion of Morgan Street had also been completed and the Cambrian Inn erected.

The fact that both the Tredegar Arms and the Cambrian Inn had been built between 1802 and 1809, shows that The Circle itself must have been planned from the beginning and that it had already been partly laid out. Otherwise, if the central crossing had been originally laid out as a square Market Place, as suggested by Jones and Scandrett, it would have become necessary at some later date to *rebuild* the flat facades of the Tredegar Arms and the Cambrian Inn as curved walls to suit the curvature of The Circle. This, however, seems to have been a very unlikely course of events due to the prohibitive costs involved.

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<sup>3</sup> For a comprehensive understanding of Tredegar’s early town development see; ‘Britain’s First Planned Industrial Town? The development of Tredegar 1800 – 1820’. In- Journal of the Gwent Local History Council. No 94. Spring 2003, pp55-76. By the Author. (Ed).

<sup>4</sup> Powell. Evan, *History of Tredegar* (Newport, 1902), p. 28.



**Map 1.** Tredegar c1877.<sup>5</sup>

Almost a century later, the Tredegar Iron & Coal Company (as the company had become) was involved in the planning of Abertysswg as a self-contained community on a steeply rising site in the upper reaches of the Rhymney Valley. It was built to serve the TICC's newly established McLaren Colliery, the first shaft of which had been sunk in 1897. Although the earliest terrace of twelve houses was erected in 1898 on the right bank of the Nant Tysswg to accommodate the colliery's officials, the planned village itself was built on the opposite bank of

<sup>5</sup> Extract from the Tredegar Iron & Coal Company's Estate maps. Surveyed 1877. Reproduced with thanks to the Tredegar Reference Library. (Ed)

# A FIRST WORLD WAR JOURNEY

The Journal of Corporal Henry Vicks.

## Henry Vicks' first journey.

We can see that Henry's parents, Charles, and Eliza Vicks, were living at May Hill, Aston Ingham, Herefordshire in 1871 with Eliza's father John Sysum who was employed as a carrier at the fine old age of 74. Charles Vicks is aged 30 as is Eliza, Charles is a brickmaker born in Huntley, Gloucestershire; they have 3 children, Charles aged 10, Henry aged 4 and William aged 2; all born at Aston Ingham.<sup>1</sup> By 1881 Charles Vicks and his family had moved to the town of Abergavenny he was still a brickmaker as was his eldest son, also called Charles; the family had grown by one with the arrival of another son seven years earlier who they called Tom.<sup>2</sup> 1891 saw the family move to 42, Merthyr Road, Abergavenny, Charles, now aged 50, became an 'engine driver' of a stationary engine and Henry, who is now said to be aged 26, became a 'fireman,' also of a stationary engine; so it is possible that they worked together. Their youngest son, Tom, was employed as a labourer at a printing works in Abergavenny.<sup>3</sup>

We next meet Henry in 1892, when, on the 13<sup>th</sup> of November, he marries Sarah Ann Probert they both live at Llanhilleth in the Ebbw Fawr valley in the north of Monmouthshire, now a district of Blaenau Gwent. Henry is 23 years old and an engineer, probably looking after a steam engine in the local colliery; his father, Charles is also an engineer. Sarah is 20 years old and unemployed and her father, John Probert, is a collier.<sup>4</sup> In 1898 Sarah and Charles have a daughter, Gertrude May Vicks who was born in the parish of Aberystwith.<sup>5</sup> By 1901 Henry's family had moved to 49 Hope Street, Blaina and Henry is employed as a 'stoker of a steam boiler.'<sup>6</sup> In 1911 Henry, Sarah and 'Gurty' are still at 49 Hope Street; Henry

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<sup>1</sup> National Census 1871. RG10 / 2606. Folio 9, Page 7.

<sup>2</sup> National Census 1881. RG11 / 5234. Folio 88, Page 33. Tom was also born at Aston Ingham.

<sup>3</sup> National Census 1891. RG12 / 4347. Folio 48, Page 7.

<sup>4</sup> Marriage registers for the Parish Church of Llanhilleth. 1892, page 67. There are discrepancies of age throughout all of Henry's records, usually of two years plus or minus.

<sup>5</sup> GRO On Line Indexes, Births, M. Quarter, Volume 11A, Page 65. Accessed February 10, 2023.

<sup>6</sup> National Census 1901. RG13 / 4934. Page 24.

is now working at a colliery as a ‘pumpman above ground.’<sup>7</sup> However, the family were to move house once more to live at 19 Gladstone Street, not many yards (metres) away from Hope Street. So it was from this house that Henry later goes to enlist in the army and start the second journey of his life on the 15<sup>th</sup> of May 1915; a journey which he records in a journal.

### **Henry’s second journey.**

Henry’s journal records the events concerning the movements of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, Rifle Brigade during the First World War, (*WWI*). The original journal still exists and for now is with the owner,<sup>8</sup> for our purposes we have been given a complete typed paper transcript of the Journal to work with. In several places within the text are inserted, *in italics*, or as footnotes any further information we have found that we hope will enable the reader to have a clearer understanding of Henry’s journey. In most cases we have not corrected Henry’s spelling or grammar as this provides an insight into his early life and education and most instances are repeated and identifiable by the reader. It is apparent from Henry’s enlistment papers, Army Form E514, that he had previously served in the ‘1<sup>st</sup> Volunteer Battalion of the South Wales Borderers,’ although called up he never went further than Salisbury Plain<sup>9</sup> also in Army Form E514, his date of enlistment is given as the 10<sup>th</sup> day of May 1915. Henry is ‘signed up’ to serve ‘*for one year or the duration of the war for service in the Territorial Forces of the County of Monmouth to serve in the No5. (supply) Co 1<sup>st</sup> Mon, Regiment.*’<sup>10</sup> He is enlisted as a Private on May the 10<sup>th</sup> 1915 at Newport and *immediately went off for ‘basic training’ this was probably carried out at Newport as Newport barracks were the nearest Barracks, but we do not know for sure.* Henry was a Private for only 11 days for on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of May his records list him as ‘Lc Corpl’ (*Lance Corporal*),

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<sup>7</sup> National Census 1911. RG14 / 31828, Schedule No, 358.

<sup>8</sup> It is planned that the original journal will be deposited in the near future at the Gwent County Archive at Ebbw Vale.

<sup>9</sup> South Wales Gazette, Friday 19<sup>th</sup> May 1939. The South Africa War, 1900 -1902 commonly known as the ‘Boar War.’

<sup>10</sup> WWI Army records – Army Form E514, MIUK1914. Accessed Feb 10 2023.

# **A HISTORY OF TABERNACLE BAPTIST CHURCH**

## **DUKESTOWN TREDEGAR**

### **FROM 1847 TO 1947**

Researched and written by Robert Short.

As Presented by the Church Secretary Mr W.J. Holder. At the Centenary Service June 18<sup>th</sup> 1947. I should like to record my very best thanks to Mrs. Jean Holder and Miss G. Griffiths, Cilfynydd, for their kind assistance in compiling and typing the History.

W. J. Holder.

I have been unable to trace exactly the date when this Chapel was built.

The Estate Office of the Duke of Beaufort were unable to help me because the records were destroyed by enemy action during the War. The 'History of Tredegar' by Powell mentions the building of most of the Churches and Chapels of Tredegar but does not mention the building of Tabernacle, so that we can safely deduce from this that Tabernacle was built before Mr Powell started writing his book.<sup>1</sup>

The late Mr E. M. Pugh who was a noted Welshman informed me that he had read in some old Welsh writings that this Chapel was built somewhere about 1750 upon a site where an old barn used to stand, and where services were held for some considerable time before the Chapel was built. I am sorry now that I did not take more interest in what he told me at the time, but I never thought this task would fall upon me.<sup>2</sup>

#### Its Ministers from 1847 to 1947.

The Church was originally constituted of General or Armenian Baptists, of whom there were a few in Wales in the 18<sup>th</sup> and early in the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, but we have no knowledge of any in the whole of the Principality at present. This

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<sup>1</sup> Powell, Evan. 'History of Tredegar' Tredegar Chair Eisteddfod. 1884. (Ed).

<sup>2</sup> The Religious Census of 1851. A Calendar of the Returns Relating to Wales. Ed's Ieuan Gwynedd Jones and David Williams, University of Wales Press, 1976. Gives the building date as 1833 pp610 - 611.

church was all but extinct in 1844, when Mr James Davies resigned the pastorate of the church at Llangynidr and moved to Tredegar for the sake of his elder children who were employed at the Tredegar Works. He, seeing this cause was in a dying state, undertook to show the few members left the wisdom of them joining the Monmouthshire Particular Baptist Association, and they realizing that differences between the General and Particular Baptist was no longer a reason why they should continue their separate existences, carried out the good advice of Mr Davies, and The Church was received into the Association at its Annual Meeting held at Carmel, Sirhowy, in 1847.

Early in 1848 Mr Morgan Thomas, Assistant Minister in the Church at Siloh, Tredegar, took the oversight of the Church. He was a native of Llantrisant, Glamorgan, whence he removed to Aberdare and thence shortly to Tredegar. He was baptised in 1822 by Pastor D. P. Davies of Tredegar. He commenced to preach in 1825, the same time as Mr. D. Rhys Stephens, and he was ordained in 1844; so that he could be more generally useful. He had rendered excellent service at Siloh before he took charge of this Church, and his labours here, under the Blessing of God, were attended by considerable success during the six years he held the Pastorate. Thirty were added to the membership by baptism and 52 by restoration and by letters from other Churches. He failed to preach in the summer of 1854 by reason of ill health, and on June 30<sup>th</sup> 1856 he died aged 59. Membership when he re-signed was 30, Sunday School Scholars 50, and Teachers 10. He was a good man and much beloved.

In the spring of 1856 Mr. J. Morris removed here from Twynyrodyn near Merthyr, Glamorgan, and took the oversight of the Church. He was originally a member of the English Church at High Street, Merthyr Tydfil whose minister then was Pastor T. Davies - subsequently Dr Davies, Haverfordwest College. Mr. Morris was a Shoemaker by trade. He was here but a short time. Before the Annual Meeting of the Association May 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> 1857, he had