

CITY AND COUNTY OF SWANSEA

LISTED BUILDING	Bethel Independent Chapel, including Sunday School, Bethel Road, Penclawdd, Swansea
Grade:-	II
Date of Notification:-	06.05.00
National Grid Reference:-	SS 5414095640
O.S. 1:10,000 Sheet No.:-	SS59NW
CADW Reference No.:-	23479
C & C of S Reference No.:-	LB:426

Notes:-

History:-

A chapel was built at the site in 1816, facing the road. Its first minister was the Rev Rees Jones, appointed by Lady Barham. A manse at the west of the site was added, called Barnham House, of which a rear wing survives. At the time of the split between the Calvinistic Methodists in Gower and the Independants (1829), the chapel here became Independent. (A part of the congregation subsequently left to become the Calvinistic Methodists at Tabernacle, Penclawdd). A Sunday School was added in 1901 to the south of the chapel.

In 1910 the old Bethel chapel was demolished and the present chapel constructed, facing north, with its side to the road. The architect was Sir W Beddoe Rees of Cardiff, and the builders were Messrs Radford and Grieves of Coventry. It is a close copy of Bethania Baptist chapel, Maesteg, design by the same architect in 1908.

Externally the main recent loss has been the parapet balustrade each side of the pediment on the façade block (a detail dissimilar to Bethania), and the original windows of the side elevations. Internally the set fawr has been slightly enlarged.

Exterior:-

A fine pedimented Beaux-Arts façade in ashlar masonry facing north, with short returns to the east and west sides, in a commanding position on a raised terrace, to which a sweeping path and stairs lead. The sides and rear of the chapel are more utilitarian, in red brick and render. Slate roof hidden by the front parapets.

The front elevation is articulated into three units with great pilasters, the upper storey of the central unit being again divided into three units of fenestration with engaged Ionic columns, carrying a pediment containing a large Diocletian window. The great pilasters are rusticated and each carries a shallow strip pilaster centrally rising to a neo-classical capital. The Ionic columns of the central unit carry an entablature with an architrave of three fasciae, a pulvinated frieze bearing the chapel name and a cornice. This entablature is contained out over the outer units. A top balustrade has been lost.

The Diocletian window in the pediment has a bold archivolt and keystone linked to a string course. In the upper storey the central unit has a very large central window and small outer sash windows, the latter with surrounding architraves and capped by tabletted pulvinated friezes and cornices. In each of the other units, and in the return elevations to east and west,

there are similar sash windows with surrounding architraves but giant keystones, rising to dentilled archivolt, except that the windows in the return elevations have been replaced in uPVC. At ground storey there are double semi-glazed doors centrally flanked by circular windows and double semi-glazed doors in each of the outer units. The windows have bold surrounds each with four keys. The doors penetrate down into a deep plinth, and each has a flight of stairs between low side walls (the one at right has been changed to a ramp). The feature masonry is all smooth ashlar and the common masonry is rock-faced work in small courses.

The side elevations to rear of the façade block are articulated by red-brick piers into bays, each containing two storeys of windows with stone sills and red-brick jambs and arches. The windows are replaced in uPVC. Irregular annexes at rear including organ space, a rear porch and a small side vestry with its gable to the street. The Sunday School building (1901) stands across a small internal yard to the south, and has a two-window front elevation with central door, to Bethel Street, rendered with stucco. To the rear of the remaining fragment of Barham House is a retaining wall capped by a slag coping.

Interior:-

The interior of Bethel is organised as an aisled structure. The main entrance doors lead to the vestibule screened from the main interior and the outer entrance doors lead to lobbies separated from the vestibule by arched aisle openings. The vestibule screen is in pine, glazed full width with art-nouveau obscured and coloured glass, and has double doors at the end. In each lobby is a carved newel staircase in oak leading to the main gallery doors. An additional staircase from the vestry lobby leads to a gallery door beside the organ.

The main interior is divided into a nave and aisles by an arcade each side carried on two storeys of cast-iron columns. W A Baker and Co., Newport, produced the columns, gallery front castings and the exterior ironwork. The nave has a barrel ceiling and the aisles have flat ceilings. The nave ceiling is divided into six bays by large segmental ribs and each panel has a central ventilator and light suspension point. Bold modillion cornice with hanging colonette-corbels with foliage caps. Arcades in 5 bays with round arches, on cast iron columns also with bulky foliage caps. The organ recess is also in a semicircular arch, with a cartouche at top and shallow pilasters.

The main seating is in four blocks of pews with a staggered centreline and two passageways, all planned on a slight curve to face the pulpit. The gallery seating is on three sides, but includes a link across to the rear of the pulpit to form an organ loft. The pews at each level are similar, in pine, with a decorative gallery front in painted cast iron in the form of repeating palmettes. The pulpit is wide with twin staircases and a balustraded front, with tall newels. Its longer stage is panelled. The pulpit centre is advanced and is carried on a single timber colonette bracket. Large set square one step above the general floor level, with detailing similar to the general seating.

Listed:-

Listed notwithstanding loss of some exterior detail as a fine Beaux-Arts chapel of the early C20 religious revival by Sir W Beddoe Rees, based on his earlier design for Bethania, Maesteg.

Reference:-

R N Cooper, Higher and Lower (1998) pp. 109-10

J Newman, Glamorgan (Buildings of Wales, 1995) p. 498

W Beddoe Rees, Architects Plan (copy displayed in chapel)

Inf. from Mr and Mrs Howells, incl. 'Eglwys Annibynnol Bethel Penclawdd, Dathlu Hanner Can Mlwyddiant y Capel' (leaflet, 1960).