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**Hanbury Road English Baptist Church**

**Bargoed**

**1896 - 2010**

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries a cultural transition accompanied the industrialisation of the coalfields of south Wales. Rapid industrial growth generated massive immigration from largely rural areas of both Wales and England. While the Anglican church was considered by some as an alien influence, by the late nineteenth century Nonconformity was the main religious affiliation of both lower and middle classes in Wales.

The Baptist chapels were evenly represented across the entire dimensions of the south Wales coalfield. It should be recognised that the Baptists were the most responsive to the religious demands of the population through whatever language was felt necessary, either Welsh or English. Studies have shown that there was a transition from totally Welsh services to bilingual ones, the decline of both, and the expansion of English-only chapels.

In autumn 1896 a well-attended meeting was convened in Bargoed in order to found an English language church and Sunday school. The nearby Caersalem Welsh Baptist chapel in Aberbargoed had refused provision for services in English. Subsequently, the church members met in a room adjoining the Plasnewydd Hotel, where the Sunday School held its first service on 27 September 1896. The first open-air baptism took place near the viaduct in Bargoed on 20 December 1896. The church was established on 8 November 1896. Prominent in establishing the church was John Llewellyn, who was an Inspector with the Rhymney Valley Railway Company, and had been a member of Caersalem Welsh Baptist Chapel. Llewellyn was appointed one of five Deacons, the Treasurer, and Sunday school superintendent.

Once a building fund had been initiated it was agreed in summer 1897 by the Hanbury Estate, Pontypool, to lease a building-site in Hanbury Road to the Church’s appointed trustees. The architects, Messrs James and Morgan of Cardiff, were engaged to prepare plans for an edifice with a school hall underneath. A local builder, Dan Edwards, who was a Deacon of Caersalem chapel, was given the contract to build the school hall on the site at a cost of £1200. Sir Alfred Thomas, MP, who was unable to attend, requested Mrs John Llewellyn to lay the foundation stone on 23 October 1898. This hall was formally opened on 27 April 1899. Apart from an artist’s impression by Albert Blackmore, which is in a film strip, 60 years of WITNESS, produced in 1956 on the occasion of the Diamond Jubilee, no original record of the hall seems to exist.

Various ministers looked after the affairs of the worshippers until plans were made to appoint a minister to the proposed church, and approaches were made, and turned down, by a few, before the Rev Harri Edwards agreed on 10 March 1902 to fill the role. A native of Abercarn, Monmouthshire, Edwards who was bilingual, and had been educated at Lewis Endowed School, Pengam, and Pontypool Baptist College, started his ministry in Bethel chapel, Merthyr Tydfil in 1890, and in 1893 Anstruther in Fife, Scotland, where he remained until his move to Bargoed. During his incumbency in Fife, he had a number of articles published in the *East Fife Record*, becoming embroiled in a political dispute with Keir Hardie, and corresponding with others on the evils of “pleasure sailing”[dates]on the Sabbath. Obviously a man of conviction, he also wrote *Principles of church defence*, *The spiritual observatory and other sermons*, and *A short treatise on the Christian Church and the film, or spiritual versus spectacular religion*. Edwards’s induction took place on 28 April 1902.

The chapel was solemnised for the registration of marriages on 20 November 1903. A temporary wooden building holding 600 people, and costing £165, was built in Hanbury Road and church services were conducted there from 23 July 1905.

The opening of Hanbury Road English Baptist Church took place on 30 August 1906, a short time after a spurt in the membership following the Religious Revival of 1904-05. Able to accommodate close to one thousand, the large red-bricked building which had cost £11,155, stood in the main thoroughfare of the town. The Deeds of the Trusteeship of the Hanbury Road English Baptist Chapel, Bargoed, dated 1899 reads in part: “This piece of land containing 595 square yards, forming part of No. 1496 on the Ordnance Survey Map of the parish. Width of building 50 feet. Term 99 years from Hanbury Estate. Land given to build a chapel or meeting house by and for the religious denominations of Protestant Dissenters called Particular or Calvinistic Baptists and to be known as Hanbury Road English Baptist Chapel”. The Freehold was obtained in 1924. These documents, including two copies of the Lease, 1899-1902, and forms of authorisation re. the appointments of Trustees for 1906, 1958, 1971 and 1978, were placed in a Deposit Box at Lloyd’s Bank, Bargoed.

The opening ceremony was reported in the *Merthyr Express*, 1 September 1906. The newspaper describes that the “woodwork is principally of pitch pine…There is a gallery around the main portion of the interior. In the staircase leading to the gallery there are two small turrets projecting on the frontage of the building…The facework is of Forest stone intermixed with red bricks”. Sir Alfred Thomas performed the opening ceremony. Harri Edwards in his address reviewed the history of the church and enthused about the work carried out by Mr Richard Burns, the builder, and deacon of the church. Richard Cory, JP, in his speech criticised the inclusion of ornaments in a chapel and in conclusion remarked that he “was a strong supporter of any denomination of Nonconformists, but he drew the line at the Church of England and Roman Catholics, and it would take a very good man to get a donation from him for either of those churches”.

The cost of building exceeded the initial figure of £3000, due partly to a misunderstanding about the height of the exterior walls, and the subsequent refiguring of the structure. (John Llewellyn who had played an important role in the founding of the chapel died on 30 August 1905).

During World War I ninety-four members of the congregation served in the forces, including Horace Ewart Edwards, the son of the pastor, while Edwards’s eldest son, Hywel Oscar, was one of the nine who lost their lives. A Roll of Honour, prepared by Harri Edwards, commemorates the sacrifice. In the wake of the War the chapel interior needed renovation work. Many unemployed members of the congregation were recruited to carry out the work.

A call to take up a pastorage in Raglan was accepted by Harri Edwards, and he conducted his final service at Hanbury Road on 3 July 1921. The chapel remained without a minister until the induction of Rhys Emrys Jones on 10 April 1924. He hailed from Penygraig, and had studied at Bristol Baptist College. A widower when he took up the position in Bargoed, ill health led to his resignation after only one year in the post, and in this period unspecified alterations were made to the gallery and frontage, and renovation to the exterior. The minutes of the annual meeting emphasised that the membership of over 400 was “the highest recorded in the history of our church” during Jones’s tenure.

Again there was a hiatus before William Robert Lewis was inducted as minister at the age of fifty on 19 April 1928. He was from Clynderwen, Pembrokeshire, and trained for the ministry at Aberaman Academy and Bangor Baptist College. One of his tasks was to install a pipe organ in the building. An Organ Committee had been appointed in February 1926, and three years passed before the committee was revived. Tom Griffiths was appointed organist in 1929. In November 1930 a fireproof safe was bought for the custody of the marriage registers. The estimate for the organ was £750. In September 1933 a pipe organ, built by Messrs JG Hoskins and Co., Bristol, was installed, and was formally opened on the 21st of the month. Although the organ has been tuned and maintained at regular intervals, it was not until 1956 that the organ was dismantled for cleaning overhauling and tuning. It was May 1936 before celebrations announced that the debt for the organ had been cleared. Later in the month an evening service was broadcast from Hanbury Road. Following the death of Lewis on 27 May 1937 at the Royal Infirmary, Cardiff, a window in his memory was installed in the wall adjoining the entrance to the vestry.

Before the appointment of the fourth minister, services were conducted by various pastors. The decline in the Welsh language witnessed the adoption of bilingual services. Consequently, an invitation was issued to Noddfa Welsh Baptist Church in the town to unite with Hanbury Road. Twenty-three of the Noddfa congregation were received into the English chapel on the first Sunday in July 1938, and more were to follow, including the co-opting of two into the Hanbury Road diaconate.

Monday, 10 July 1939 witnessed the induction of a new Minister, William Eiddig Mathias-Williams, who was a native of Tonypandy, to a chapel which boasted a membership of 330.

Since the inception of the church in 1896 the number of lay preachers, trustees, secretaries, deacons, organists, and choir leaders are listed in the annals.

By December 1940 the membership had risen to 353. Six months later the church resolved to pay off the remaining £300 it owed. The Thanksgiving services for the clearing of the debt were conducted from 21 to 25 September 1941.

Plans had been made to accommodate American troops in the school hall during the Second World War, but with their non-appearance the premises were used to accommodate evacuees from London and other parts of the country. Once accommodation was found for the evacuees in Bargoed, and the surrounding villages, the hall became a ‘Cleansing Station’. On the return of the evacuated children at the end of the war, the Office of Works used the room as a depot to store beds and bedding.

The war saw sixty-two members of the congregation serving in HM Forces, of whom five were killed. The Roll of Honour was inscribed by CW Borrett, one of the deacons.

The year 1942 saw the death, aged sixty, on 22 April, in Devonshire, of Emrys Jones, the second minister, followed shortly after by the death of the first minister, Harri Edwards, in Newport, on 6 September, aged seventy-eight years. The probate of his effects of £2,704 – 0s –5d, was granted to two of his sons, William Howard Edwards, railway station master, and Horace Ewart Edwards, colliery clerk.

# During Rev. Mathias Williams’ ministry, the Hanbury Road Baptist Church, Bargoed, Church Rules and Church Covenant (1943) were published (see Appendix). Mathias-Williams departed for a new living in Whitchurch, Cardiff, in 1946. The severe winter in 1946 caused the heating system to fail and was coupled with a severe gale on 16 March which effectively put the pipe organ out of commission. Worship was now conducted at the Workmen’s Hall, and the move back to Hanbury Road did not occur until Sunday, 30 March 1947.

Various ministers were nominated to fill the vacant post, and the resulting ballot indicated that Emlyn Stephens who was the minister of Ebenezer, Senghenydd, received the majority of votes. Invited in May 1946 to become the pastor, Stephens accepted, and his induction took place on Thursday, 19 September.

Prior to the induction, a *Welcome Home* service in honour of members who had served in H M Forces 1939-45, was held on 29 June, and was conducted by Mathias-Williams and pastor-elect Emlyn Stephens.

Between 1950 and 1951 Messrs Harvey and Tossell stripped and restored part of the roof, using copper nails to secure the tiles, at a cost of £325. A manse, situated at 27 Park Crescent, was bought for £800. Chairs and tables for the Sunday School were purchased in 1953. In 1956 the church interior was decorated and the electric wiring renewed, and renovation was carried out at the front of the building. The stonework at the front of the church was cleaned, and skim was placed over it. This was carried out, at a cost of £95, by W Beynon, Tylorstown. Alwyn Davies, a member of the congregation, and author of the second history of the church, produced a film strip entitled *Sixty Years of Witness*.

In 1959 Emlyn Stephens chose to leave Hanbury Road for Rogerstone, and two years passed before the arrival of his replacement, John Edwards. Originally from Aberystwyth, he trained at Cardiff Baptist College, and held the pastorate at Manselton before he was inducted at Hanbury Road on Thursday 16 November 1961.

Before Edwards’s final service on 5 July 1970, several events of note took place. Work to repair the damage to the church roof was carried out by the firm of Archer, Bargoed. Lights to illuminate the organ were installed, as was a new cold water system. Fluorescent lighting was installed in the kitchen and school room at a cost of £112. Gas heaters were installed in the pastor’s and deacons’ rooms. Messrs Tossell built a wooden stage for £70. Apparatus Tannoy Products charged £125 to install amplifiers in February 1966. In April 1969 eight windows in the school-room, consisting of five on the south side and three on the north side, were replaced at a cost of £250. Paint and repairs to the front of the church amounted to £170. The cost of renovation work carried out in the vestibule (fluorescent light), kitchen, and toilet, came to £536.

Before the appointment of the seventh pastor, and after two ministers declined to fill the vacancy, a great deal of work to the chapel was carried out. Proctor Bros, Caerphilly, made window guards, which were erected on the south side of the school-room by Mr Morgan of the Ystrad College of Further Education. The school- room was renovated at a cost of £200 in October 1970, and at a cost of £50, electric heaters were installed in the school room and kitchen by Moxey, Aber-Bargoed. Dey Ltd., Bargoed, carried out work in the upstairs area, which entailed costs of £336, and £95 for repair work and varnish application to the seating and balcony. The sanctuary was renovated. Stainless steel sink units with draining boards, and storage units were installed in the kitchen by Archard, builder, Bargoed. A gas water-boiler and gas stove were further installations in the kitchen. Gas wall-heaters in the school room were removed. The manse was sold for £2,500 on 22 February 1971.

Brian Durkin, the new pastor, who was born in Coventry in 1949, graduated in chemistry at Leeds University, before studying theology at Regent’s Park College, Oxford. For two years he served as a student pastor in Berkshire. On 8 September 1973 he was ordained into the ministry at his church in Coventry. One week later, 15 September, his induction took place at Hanbury Road.

Between Durkin’s appointment and his move to Canvey Island, Essex, in March 1979, the following improvements were made to Hanbury Road:

A carpet, fluorescent lighting, two gas fired heaters and a fan

heater were installed in the Pastor and Deacons rooms. A new gas boiler costing £1,700 was installed by Hamsworthy Engineering Company. Following conversion to North Sea Gas the gas meter was changed. Three toilet cubicles, two downstairs and one upstairs, were installed in November 1977. Linoleum was placed in the vestibule in December 1978. Scaffolding was constructed around the whole building to repair the storm-damaged roof, drain pipes and guttering, and paint the exterior of the building. The work which cost £3,400 was carried out by Ferris Builders, Bargoed. Insurance invested, amounting to £1,672, paid towards the damage to the roof.

A number of visiting ministers and laymen carried on services in the absence of a minister. At a meeting in May 1980, the church authorities decided on approaching a candidate to fill the vacancy. At the end of June Mervyn A Parsons, who had been a minister for over twelve years, accepted the invitation to become the eighth and final pastor. From New Tredegar, he was inducted on 8 November 1980.

Over the years numerous gifts were given to the church, consisting of monetary donations, the provision of the main ceiling lights by members of the church Fellowshp, and stained glass windows, one in memory of the Rev W R Lewis, one of the Good Shepherd, given by Mrs Isobel Harris, in memory of her parents and sister, another in memory of Mr and Mrs Leonard and their daughter Miss Mabel Leonard. The latter window made by G Maile and Son, Canterbury, costing £239, was positioned above the door leading to the school- room. An oil painting of John Llewellyn, the founder, painted by A G Taylor from Cardiff, was presented by the subject’s family. An oak communion table designed and made by A Shone. An oak chair in the Sedd Fawr in memory of Brother H J Morgan, treasurer, 1905-42. An oak table in the vestibule, in memory of Evan Walters. Overhead electrical heaters in the main sanctuary, given by Tom Gwynne, in memory of his wife. A music cabinet in memory of Mr and Mrs D S Jones. Carpeting of the Sedd Fawr and pulpit area; two chairs in the pulpit; Fall on the organ rail, in memory of Brother A Baber. A communion cabinet from the members of the Sewing Guild. Eleven plush chairs and one armchair for the pastor’s room in memory of Brother Percy Williams, and a number of cut-glass flower and brass vases.

The church continued to function, but as no written evidence is available to continue a written history, it has been deemed appropriate to end the narrative here.

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**Timeline:**

1. Church established, first open air baptism, first

Sunday school service.

1. Initiation of building fund.
2. Laying of foundation stone.
3. Hall opened.
4. Harri Edwards inducted first minister.
5. Chapel solemnised for registration of marriages.
6. Church services conducted in temporary building.
7. Opening of church.
8. Departure of Harri Edwards.
9. Rhys Emrys Jones inducted.
10. William Robert Lewis inducted.
11. Organist appointed.
12. Safe provided for safekeeping of marriage registers.
13. Installation of pipe organ.
14. William Eiddig Mathias-Williams inducted.
15. Membership 353.
16. Thanksgiving services for clearance of debt.
    1. Five members killed in action.
17. Mathias-Williams departure. Emlyn Stephens inducted.

1950-1 Restoration to roof. Manse purchased.

1. Purchase of Sunday school furniture.
2. Interior and exterior renovated and decorated. Renewal of electric wiring. Film strip, *60 years of witness*, produced.
3. Departure of Emlyn Stephens.
4. John Edwards inducted.
5. Amplifiers installed.
6. Replacement of windows, and restoration of fluorescent lighting.
7. Electric heaters installed in school room and kitchen. Repairs to seating and balcony. Gas water boiler, stainless steel kitchen units and storage units installed in kitchen.
8. Manse sold.
9. Brian Durkin inducted.
10. Improvements to the Pastor and Deacons rooms. North Sea Gas
    1. Toilet cubicles installed. Storm-damaged roof

repaired.

1. Departure of Brian Durkin.
2. Mervyn A Parsons inducted.

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| **Pastors** | **Date** |
| Harri Edwards | 1902 - 21 |
| Rhys Emrys Jones | 1924 - 25 |
| William Robert Williams | 1928 - 37 |
| William E. Mathias-Williams | 1939 - 46 |
| Emlyn Stephens | 1946 - 59 |
| John Edwards | 1961 - 70 |
| Brian Durkin | 1973 – 79 |
| Mervyn A. Parsons | 1980 - |