Crisis, Challenge, and Consolidation: A Study of the Anglican Church in a Rural Welsh Parish 1700-1900

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Dissertation submitted in fulfillment

of an MA in Local History

University of Wales Trinity Saint David

August 2021

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Abstract

In a year when the Church in Wales is commemorating the centenary of Disestablishment, it encourages a priest in that Church to study the history of the parish in which he serves. In my case, it is the parish of Little Newcastle in rural, Welsh speaking north Pembrokeshire, but I must declare a vested interest, because the parish is one with which the family has had a very long connection. But, hopefully, laying bias and personal connections aside, one can also justifiably ask the questions as to what was the real state of rural Anglicanism in the eighteenth and nineteenth century Wales and are the, often, sweeping generalizations made about the religious life of the nation during this period actually reflected in the life of a particular parish? Were all parts of Welsh Wales overwhelmingly Nonconformist, largely due to an indolent and vice-ridden alien institution, which many labelled 'the Church of England in Wales', or was that very same Church alive and very active, at least in some parishes.

In an undated pamphlet, written on behalf of the Pembrokeshire Local History Society, by Sir Frederick Rees and entitled, 'The Appeal of Local History in Pembrokeshire' he states, 'Here local studies are of the greatest value. Historical interpretation is simply the presentation of generalizations which are provisionally acceptable. With the advance of knowledge those generalizations nearly always need to be qualified'. It is my purpose to embark on a local study, i.e. a study of the Anglican church in the parish of Little Newcastle, inquire whether enough primary and secondary evidence exists to challenge the provisionally accepted generalizations about the religious condition of Welsh parishes and hope, at least in a small way, to qualify the generalization.

For this to take place there will be a need to peruse the traditional opinions about the state of the church and then peruse the latest academic views on the topic to establish whether a change of opinion has taken place. But from the macro to the micro, the next chapter will examine the eighteenth-century inheritance of the parish with the woes and beatitudes of the church unveiled. The nineteenth century position will be examined from two, hopefully, inter-locking chapters: the first will examine the strengths and weaknesses of the principal Nonconformist denomination in the parish, i.e. the Baptists, whilst the second

will repeat the exercise for the Anglican Church. A concluding chapter will chronicle the findings.

Acknowledgements

John Donne stated, 'no man is an island' and this statement is particularly true of a student who wishes to pursue a piece of academic research. Thanks are due to all those historians of past ages, be they professional or amateur, who have toiled long on topics of either national significance or just local importance, yet we still enter into their labour.

Of a more immediate nature, special thanks are due to Dr Conway Davies, who steered me through the taught elements of the course and made the whole experience so enjoyable and beneficial.

To Dr Lester Mason a special word of thanks. He not only lent me his own volumes and gave his encouragement and advice every step of the way, but his Job-like patience has been severely tested on several occasions. To somebody who achieved the heights of an ink monitor, my computer skills are severely limited and the problem of footnotes and bibliography have assumed virtuality Trinitarian complexity. Understanding the latter has proved easier. My gratitude also goes to Dr Julie Coggins for all her practical help and suggestions.

To the staff of the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth, and to Pembrokeshire Archives, Haverfordwest, I am greatly indebted. Their assistance and courtesy have been unfailing and without their help, the whole process would have ground to a halt on many an occasion.

And finally, thanks to the older members of the family and to villagers, now, alas all gone, who inspired with their tales. They regaled me with stories and events of long ago and of individuals and personalities, some of whom first saw the light of day when the Georges still ruled this land; little did they know the influence they wielded.

Abbreviations

J.H.P.S. - Journal of the Pembrokeshire Historical Society.

W.W.H.R. - West Wales Historical Records.

Chapter One – Aims and Methodology

When I have the privilege of celebrating at the altar, I am conscious of the fact that I am the latest in a long line of clerics who have served in St Peter's Church, Little Newcastle, a tiny village in the Welsh half of North Pembrokeshire. But I am also reminded that whilst in the sanctuary, I stand alongside a wall plaque to Anne Symmons, and that she is my great, great, great, great, great aunt.! I am proud of the fact that I am the sixteenth generation to reside in the parish of Little Newcastle. True, the surname has changed several times over the centuries, but it is an unbroken line which stretches back to the reign of the first Queen Elizabeth.

For all that time, despite some flirting with other denominations, the church has been the family's spiritual home for almost five centuries. She has been 'yr hen fam' ('the old mother') who has witnessed so many of the rites of passage which punctuates the life of both individuals and families. But I am also reminded in this centenary year of Disestablishment and Disendowment of the Welsh Church, that for many people in the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth century, this same institution which has provided succour, support and joy to our rather ordinary, Welsh speaking family for such a length of time, was also labelled the 'alien' church. She was the 'Church of England in Wales', which, despite the fact that its apologists claimed was descended from the ancient Celtic church of our land, had in centuries past become divorced from the congregations it claimed to serve. Its mission had become narrowly focused onto a small, English speaking elite, whilst the forgotten 'werin' ('the ordinary folk'), were forced to find a spiritual home amongst the Nonconformists who worshipped the Almighty in the language of heaven.

There is here an obvious dichotomy and the purpose of this dissertation is not to examine which view of the Established Church is correct in a Welsh national context, but rather to study how the strengths and weaknesses of the institution were played out in a small, rather remote and poor parish in the Welshry of Pembrokeshire, with particular reference to the nineteenth century. Had the old mother really become alien in Little

Newcastle? This emphasis on a small, rural parish in Pembrokeshire, which seeks to examine the primary and secondary sources which exist, as well as place the findings against the wider religious picture both locally and nationally, will hopefully prove to be a worthwhile and rewarding exercise. This study into a small, individual Welsh parish, whilst not necessarily being ground-breaking, can add to our knowledge of church life and activity at the micro level where recent academic research work into the subject matter is not substantial.

With this aim in mind, it is intended to chapterise the study thus: the purpose of Chapter Two is to place the story of the local church into a Welsh context in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Ellis Wynne in his 'Gweledigaethau y Bardd Cwsg', ('The Visions of the Sleeping Bard'), writing at the very start of the eighteenth-century champions the Established Church as 'the only means of salvation',[1] yet less than twenty years later, Erasmus Saunders bemoaned the state of the Anglican Church in Wales.[2] His chorus of despair, resulting from a catalogue of complaints is taken up by others, particularly Nonconformist writers and this Dissenting view of the Church became the accepted norm on the state of Established religion in Wales. An author such as Owain W. Jones [3] catalogues many of the problems the Church faced. However, of late, the work of a number of scholars has increasingly challenged this view and come to different conclusions.

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1. Aberystwyth, The National Library of Wales, Gweledigaethau y Bardd Cwsg, Available at: www.llgc.org.uk [accessed 30 March 2020].

2. Edward Parry, 'The Revd Erasmus Saunders', *The Journal of the Pembrokeshire Historical Society*, No 13, ed by Roger Turvey. (Llandybie: Pembrokeshire Historical Society, 2004), pp. 35-42.

3. Owain W. Jones, *The Welsh Church in the Nineteenth Century', A History of the Church in Wales*, ed by David Walker (Penarth: The Historical Society of the Church in Wales, 1976), pp. 144-163.

Historians such as Brinkley,[4] Gibson,[5] Price,[6] and Yates [7] paint a far more complimentary picture and their contribution will be examined. It will be the aim of this study to add to this research by examining a specific parish, an overwhelmingly Welsh parish, in West Wales to establish at a local level which side of the historiography of the Established Church in Wales is most convincing. Chapter Three turns from the national to the local and looks at the religious heritage of Little Newcastle in the eighteenth century. The century opened in a rather unpromising way. The local church seemed to typify and exemplify many of the classical problems which past authors had lain at the door: poverty, the poor state of the church building, lay advowson, plurality and non-resident clerics who relied on poorly paid curates to carry out the necessary duties. Added to this was the ever-increasing challenge of Dissent: Quakers, Methodists (though at this time, still within the Church, of course), but particularly the Baptists, culminating in the Puncheston Revival of 1795. But the cloud does have a silver lining: the church's role in education and the provision of books, the terms of the Queen Anne Bounty and the useability of the structure all point to an institution which may have been down, but it was not out.

The modern chronicler is indebted to the work of predecessors, particularly historians who made the study of aspects of the history of Pembrokeshire in the eighteenth century their work.

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4. Richard Brinkley, 'Religion and Education, 1660-1815', in *Pembrokeshire County History*, *Early Modern Pembrokeshire, 1536-1815*. Volume III, ed by Elwyn Davies and Brian Howells (Haverfordwest: Pembrokeshire Historical Society, 1987), pp. 225-255.

5. William Gibson, 'The most glorious enterprises have been achieved: The Restoration Diocese of St Davids 1660-1730' in *Religion and Society in the Diocese of St Davids 1485-2011,* ed. by William Gibson and John Morgan-Guy (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2015), pp. 91-128.

6. D.T.W. Price, *A History of the Church in Wales in the Twentieth Century* (Penarth: Church in Wales Publications, 1990), pp. 1-7.

7. W.N.Yates, 'The Diocese of St Davids in the Early Nineteenth Century: A Reappraisal', Chapter 21*,* in *St David of Wales, Cult, Church and Nation*, ed. by J. Wyn Evans and Jonathan M. Wooding (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2007), pp 229-350.

One is lucky in this respect for the work of such men as Salmon (Quakerism)[8], Beynon (Howell Harris and the Griffith Jones circulating Schools)[9], Green and Barker (Pembrokeshire Clerics)[10], but credit is also due to local historians who have produced very informative accounts of aspects of local religious history, a man such as the Reverend Richard Edwards who traced the history of Llangloffan.[11] One is also able to tap into the work of historians who write on national topics, but quote local examples, for example the work of Michael Perkin whose studies of parochial libraries in England and Wales is informative.[12] Primary sources also become more abundant: the diaries of the Reverend John Griffiths of Llandissilio,[13] the continuous parish registers commence in 1783, whilst the first extant Visitation Return survives from 1799.[14] Modern technology, for example, the Church of England database which provides information on the history of the clerics who served the parish,[15] is another invaluable fount of knowledge. Sources such as these, and a good number more will be cited in the chapter, help to build up quite a thorough picture of the state of the religious life in the parish as the nineteenth century dawned.

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8. David Salmon, 'The Quakers of Pembrokeshire', in *West Wales Historical Records* 9, ed. by Francis Green, (Carmarthen: The Historical Society of West Wales, 1923), pp. 1-32.

9. Tom Beynon*, Howell Harris's Visits to Pembrokeshire*, (Aberystwyth: Cambrian Press, 1966), pp. 42-316.

10. F. Green & T. W. Baker, 'Pembrokeshire Parsons', in *West Wales Historical Records, The Annual Magazine of the Historical Society of West Wales*, II, ed. by Francis Green, (Carmarthen: The West Swales Historical Society, 1913), pp. 230-231.

11. Richard Edwards*, Hanes Llangloffan*, (Solva: 1932).

12. Michael Perkin, A Directory of the Parochial Libraries of the Church of England and the Church in *Wales*, ed. by Neil Kerr, (London: The Bibliographical Society, 2004).

13. Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire Archives, 'The Church of St. Tyssilio, Llandissilio, Diary of the Rev. John Griffith 'Transcribed by Elin Williams, (HDX/1361/5, HDX/1361/6).

14. Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, Diocese of St. Davids, Bishop's Visitation, Archdeaconry of Cardigan/Archdeaconry of St. Davids, (the latter after the 1828 Returns), Queries and Answers, Clergy and Wardens, with Answers, Little Newcastle.

15. Clergy of the Church of England Database: CCEd.

Chapter Four will examine what the 'opposition' was up to in the nineteenth century, because no study of the Anglican Church in the parish can be complete without observing what the Nonconformists, and in Little Newcastle that meant the Baptists, were also doing. It is undeniable that for periods in the nineteenth century, they made the religious running in the area. Following the 1795 Revival, this led to the building of the chapel, Beulah, in 1808, and its incorporation some fifteen years later, and for a number of decades, three ministers were associated with the cause. In the person of the Reverend T. Gabriel Jones, the chapel had a very distinguished scholar as their minister, but with his departure, it is apparent that the chapel stagnated and the reasons for that will be examined. By the end of Victoria's reign, however, matters had improved with the ordination and installation of the Reverend Jacob John who was instrumental in reviving fading embers and forging a very successful ministry at the chapel which was to last until his death in 1919.

This is a very local study, but once again, others have sowed that we may reap. Jones, writing in the 1830s[16] offers us a contemporary account of the state of affairs, and to his tome can be added, in addition to Edwards, already cited,[17] the articles published by W J. Rhys, in Trafodion[18] and in the short histories he wrote in the commemorative booklets when the 'Gymanfa' visited the County in 1946 and 1957.[19] Two of the ministers have been studied with more than passing interest: that teacher at Haverfordwest College, T. Gabriel Jones by

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16. David Jones, *Hanes y Bedyddwyr yn Neheubarth Cymru* (Caerfyrddin: John Thomas, 1839.) pp. 218-221.

17. Richard Edwards, Hanes Llangloffan, op.cit.

18. W.J.Rhys, 'Bedyddwyr Casmael a Chasnewydd Bach' yn Trafodion Cymdeithas Hanes y Bedyddwyr', (1934), pp. 51-68, and this article is concluded in the 1937 edition of the same journal, pp. 50-66.

19. W.J.Rhys, 'Beulah, Casnewydd Bach' yn Undeb Bedyddwyr Cymru a Mynwy, Hermon, Abergwaun, (Abergwaun: Swyddfar'r Echo, 1946). Pp. 30-31. Exactly the same account appeared in the commemorative booklet when the Gymanfa again visited Hermon, Fishguard in 1956.

Patrick Barker[20] and Griffith Havard by Denley Owen[21] Contemporary sources include frequent references to Beulah in *Seren Cymru*, the Baptist newspaper and the local newspapers such as *The County Echo*. There is an excellent account of the visit of the 'Latter Day Saints' to the Village in the *Pembrokeshire Herald and General Advertiser*,[22] but I am indebted to Nancy Deis of Dallas, Texas, who has furnished me with a great deal of information pertaining to her ancestor, David John, from an old Baptist family in the village, who left Beulah to join the Mormons and rose to the rank of Patriarch in that church.

The nineteenth century was a critical one for the Anglican Church in Wales. How it responded to changing circumstances and in the face of an ever-more confident and thrusting Nonconformity, would seal its fate. But how was this battle played out in a rural parish such as Little Newcastle? That it entered the century in a weak state was undeniable, but how did it cope with these challenges? The century divides into two unequal sections. The first ends in 1835 when the absentee perpetual curate, Reverend James Rees dies, who seemingly left all the work to curates and it is to their credit that at least 'the door was kept open'. But then, two members of the Richardson family, Peter Davies and Arthur were appointed and they held the living between them until 1911. It was during their crucial incumbencies that the hearts and minds of the locals would be won or lost. This period will be examined under five main headings: structure, worship, language, class and community – if they could succeed in these areas, the cause was not lost.

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20. Patrick Barker, 'Haverfordwest Baptist College', Trafodion, Cymdeithas Hanes Bedyddwyr Cymru, (2014-2015), ed. by D. Densil Morgan, 2015.

21. Denley Owen, *Ar Droed yn Nyfed, Bywyd ac Amserau Griffitdh Havard, Ysgolhaig, Pregethwr, Fferyllydd a Chynhyrfwr Radicalaidd* (Y Bontfaen: Cynhyrchion Red Shoes Cyf 2017), pp. 11-21.

22. *The Pembrokeshire Herald and General Advertiser,* 15 October 1847.

The church in Little Newcastle obviously did not operate in isolation and the general Anglican background (amongst other topics) can be gleaned from the relevant general chapters in the Open University quartet of books on religion in Victorian Britain.[23] An article, such as that provided by Morgan in the JPHS[24] paints an invaluable picture of the work of the Oxford Movement in the county and provides the canvas against which much of the work of the Richardsons can be placed. The Church structure is also dealt with in the Pevsner guide[25] and official reports such as the 1851 Religious Census[26] all add to our understanding of the period.

By this century, the historian is fortunate in that more primary sources become available. Apart from the Church Registers and Beulah Cash Registers,[27] an accurate study of the period would not be possible without reference to the Visitation Returns[28] which provide a rich seam of information. When studying the history of Little Newcastle, the researcher is very fortunate compared to those studying the history of contiguous parishes, in that a steady stream of articles was fed to the local newspapers, especially the *Pembrokeshire Herald and General Advertiser* and, most tellingly, *Y Llan*. It was an age which delighted in inscribing so much detailed information into newspaper accounts, much to the joy of the modern researcher!

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23. Gerald Parsons, ed. Religion in Victorian Britain, 4 volumes, (Manchester: Open University, 1988).

24. Enid Morgan, 'The Church Buildings of Nineteenth-Century Pembrokeshire: The impact of liturgical and architectural changes within the Church of England'. JPHS, 14, ed. Roger Turvey, (Llandybie: Pembrokeshire Historical Society, 2005), pp. 3k1-55.

25. Thomas Lloyd, Julian Orbach, Robert Scourfield, The Buildings of Wales, Pembrokeshire, (Pevsner), (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), pp. 245-246.

26. The Religious Census of 1851. A Calendar of the returns relating to Wales, Volume 1, South Wales, ed. by Ieuan Gwynedd Jones and David Williams, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1976), pp. 449-453.

27. Beulah Baptist Chapel, Ministry Contributions Book 1903-1923.

28. By 1851, the parish of Little Newcastle had been transferred from the Archdeaconry of Cardigan to the Archdeaconry of St Davids.

The final chapter will draw the various strands together and hopefully come to a conclusion as to whether the Anglican Church in Little Newcastle did succeed in keeping the loyalty of the parishioners. Was the church of central importance in the life of its adherents, how many remained faithful to the cause and if they did, how did this impact their lives? At a time when one of the main themes of Welsh national life was dominated by the idea of Disestablishment, did the Anglicans of Little Newcastle feel that the church in which they worshipped Sunday by Sunday was worth defending?

When examining this section, in addition to sources already cited, such as the local newspapers, a good local knowledge is of use here, including a knowledge of the headstones of the chapelyard and the churchyard! For the latter, the millennium study, 'A Directory of the Churchyard'[29] is of great help. Family tradition and oral history, with all their possible limitations noted, but which can also be a source of information unobtainable elsewhere, will also have played their role.

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29. R. Davies, St. Peter's Church, Little Newcastle, 'A Directory of the Churchyard', (Fishguard: Pembrokeshire Press, 2000).

Chapter 2 – Anglicanism in Wales: English and Weak or Welsh and Reforming?

In 1862, Archibald Campbell Tait, then Bishop of London, but a future Archbishop of Canterbury, said in his episcopal charge to the clerics of his see, 'Our Church, has, committed to it by God, in the middle of the nineteenth century, in an inquisitive and restless age, the difficult task of gathering together fostering, developing, restraining, and guiding the Christian feelings and thoughts, and energetic life of many millions of intelligent Englishmen, impatient both of political and still more of ecclesiastical control'.[30]

Tait identified three problems facing the Anglican Church:

> first the spirit of free inquiry and criticism which was gradually alienating many educated people from the Church; secondly, the difficulties of an established Church in an age of freedom of worship, and in a State which was no longer wholly Anglican; and thirdly, the ever-growing population of England, in which a generation of the working class was not growing up without any knowledge of the Church or indeed of Christianity itself. [31]

Tait was, of course, speaking primarily to the clerics of the Diocese of London, but the problems which he identified applied to the Church of England in general, a Church, which prior to disestablishment, included the four historic Welsh dioceses as well. Whilst the first and third point, which the future primate made, applied equally to both England and Wales, it could perhaps be said that the second of his points was particularly pertinent to Wales: by the middle of the nineteenth century the vast majority of the Welsh populace, who attended

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30. M.A.Crowther, 'Church Problems and Church Parties', *in Religion in Victorian Britain IV: Interpretations,* ed. Gerald Parsons (Manchester: Manchester University Press in conjunction with the Open University, 1991), p.4.

31. ibid. p.4.

a place of worship, had expressed their freedom to worship by rejecting the Anglican church to find spiritual solace in the various branches of Welsh Nonconformity and as a consequence, Wales had become overwhelmingly a 'chapel' country.

How should one account for this? The conventional wisdom of the time would have argued that the ascendancy of Dissent in Wales was not only due to the vibrancy of Nonconformity, but to the many weaknesses of the Established Church. The eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century had seen the Anglican church in Wales in a stupor of indolence and in the spiritual vacuum created, dissent had flourished. Even Anglicans themselves seemed to believe this version of events. Had not the Pembrokeshire born cleric, Erasmus Saunders painted a dire picture of the spiritual state of the largest Welsh diocese in his book, 'A View of the state of Religion in the Diocese of St. David's about the beginning of the Eighteenth Century'? In the six sections of the book, which was published in 1721, he had argued that 'the state of religion here is indeed deplorable.'[32] Whether every despairing detail should be taken at face value can be questioned because as Gibson points out, Saunders' motives in writing the book was to encourage Parliament to increase financial support for the poorest livings (Gibson also quotes G.H. Jenkins who states that Saunders was embittered by his failure to obtain a bishopric!).[33]

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32. Edward Parry, 'The Reverend Erasmus Saunders', JPHS, No 13, op. cit., p.38.

33. William Gibson, 'The most glorious enterprises have been achiev'd': The Restoration Diocese of St. Davids 1660-1730, in *Religion and Society in the Diocese of St. Davids 1485-2011*, op. cit., p.91.

Whatever Saunders' motives might have been, other Anglicans also painted a bleak picture of the state of the Church. William Williams, Pantycelyn, an ordained deacon of the church, stated in 1773:

'Pan oedd Cymru gynt yn gorwedd mewn rhyw dywyll farwol hun,

Heb na Phresbyter na 'ffeirad, nac un Esgob ar ddihun;

Yn y cyfnod tywyll pygddu…'

('When Wales lay in deep darkness, when no presbyter or priest, nor one bishop was awake.')[34]

Even as late as 1879, Dean Edwards of Bangor put the blame for the troubles which the Church was encountering firmly at the door of the actions of the British government during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the appointment by them of non-Welsh bishops.[35]

In addition to the problems identified by Dean Edwards, what ills really afflicted the Anglican Church in Wales, and the Diocese of St Davids in particular and which had made Dissent so attractive to so many? Yates identifies two basic problems: the sheer physical size of the diocese and the poverty which affected the see.[36] But to these points could be added many other woes which hampered its ministry in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century – woes which would need to be transformed into beatitudes if the church was to prosper.

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34. E.D. Evans, A History of Wales 1660-1815 (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1976), p. 70.

35. W.N. Yates, 'The Diocese of St. Davids in the Early Nineteenth Century: A Reappraisal' in St David of Wales, Cult, Church and Nation, op. cit., p. 339.

36. ibid., pp. 340-341.

Davies, in his chapter on the Established Church between 1800-1850 [37] highlights: a slow administrative machinery resulting in administrative paralysis which made it difficult to sub-divide parishes and build new churches,[38] the lower tithe which could be collected in Wales (Nonconformists permitting) and its use for so many functions other than that for which it was intended.[39] This led to plurality of holdings which in turn led to non-residence and the appointment of curates who served for a pittance. There was also the problem of lay advowson, resulting in bishops often having no control to appoint clerics and consequently, the appointment of a completely inadequate clerics for particular parishes who were incapable of serving a monoglot Welsh population.[40] It could also be added that church buildings were often in need of attention.

It would seem, therefore, that the Anglican Church only had itself to blame for the position it found itself in the mid nineteenth century and the hive of reforming activity which the Church initiated in the second half of the afore-mentioned century and the beginning of the twentieth was not enough to gain back the allegiance of the majority of the Welsh nation; it was too little, too late and Disestablishment and Disendowment were the inevitable, indeed fair, outcome.

However, that conventional interpretation is increasingly coming under review and scholarly research is now of the opinion that this Nonconformist slant on the religious history of Wales, which even senior Anglicans accepted, is in need of reappraisal. G. Williams, quoted by Gibson, states, 'if there has been a 'Whig' history of England there has also been a

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37. E.T. Davies, 'Religion and Society in the Nineteenth Century', in *A New History of Wales*, ed. Ralph A. Griffiths, Kenneth O. Morgan, J. Beverley Smith (Llandybie: Christopher Davies (Publishing) Ltd., 1981), pp. 47-60.

38. ibid. pp. 47-49.

39. ibid. pp. 52-53.

40. ibid., p. 43.

'Methodist' history of Wales' accepted by churchmen and nonconformist alike.[41] The argument basically ran that prior to the Methodist Revival, the religious life of Wales had been at a particularly low ebb and it was only the 'Great Awakening', initiated by the Methodists, which was responsible for the revival of the spiritual state of the nation. It was an interpretation of history which the Nonconformists liked, even if it ignored the part played by Old Dissent, and the logical and just conclusion of this story had to be Disestablishment.

Williams and Gibson are not alone among the ranks of historians who now seriously challenge this view. Gibson writing about the history of the Diocese of St. Davids up to 1730, identifies four key areas where discernable activity could be seen in the life of the church: the work of the bishops, the cathedral, the clergy and religious life in general.[42] Richard Brinkley, in his review of religion and education in Pembrokeshire from the Restoration to Waterloo is also cautiously complimentary. Writing of the period between 1688-1745 he states, 'The general impression of negligent or poverty-stricken clergy and tumbledown buildings… needs considerable qualification.'[43] It must be remembered that this was the period when the S.P.C.K. was doing valuable work in education and Sir John Philipps was a lay figure of national importance in the religious life of the country. It was also the time of Griffith Jones and his Circulating Schools, whilst the 'Great Awakening' was really a process which started within the Anglican Church.

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41. William Gibson, 'The most glorious enterprises have been achieved: The Restoration Diocese of St. Davids 1660-1730', op. cit., p. 92.

42. ibid., pp. 93-126.

43. Richard Brinkley, 'Religion and Education, 1660-1815', in *Pembrokeshire County History, Vol. III, Early Modern Pembrokeshire, 1536-1815*, op. cit., p. 231.

Of the period 1745-1788, Brinkley states it was 'a quiet period for 'orthodox' Anglicanism in Pembrokeshire,'[44] but for the years 1788-1815, he comments, 'we can observe considerable, albeit overdue, signs of revival and a sense of commitment among clergy and laity which had not been present for many years.' He regarded the consecration of Bishop Horsley in 1788 as the beginning of the revival.[45] The period between 1788-1840 saw five successors to St. David and Yates sums up the period thus: 'Within the limits of their powers the reforming bishops of St. Davids form Horsley to Jenkinson, had done… their best to manage and improve a difficult situation. They should be given credit for that.'[46] It can be argued that the founding of St. Davids College, Lampeter, by Bishop Burgess, was the greatest reform introduced as it was to train generations of Welsh clerics for the ministry. Of the three remaining bishops of the nineteenth century, Thirlwall, Jones and Owen, it is generally agreed that the pace of reform quickened. Speaking of the first on the list, Brinkley makes this observation, '1840... saw the appointment of a Bishop (Thirlwall) under whom great advances were made'[47] whilst Owain W. Jones says of Thirlwall that he was 'accounted the most learned man of this age.'[48] It is interesting to note that as a consequence of the new spirit which was abroad in the church at this time, the Diocese of St. Davids in 1912 'had the highest number of Easter Communicants in proportion to its total population, 8.68 per cent, of any diocese of England and Wales. The average for the whole of England and Wales was 6.28 per cent.'[49]

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44. ibid. p. 236.

45. ibid. pp. 238-239.

46. W.N. Yates, 'The Diocese of St. Davids in the early nineteenth century', op. cit., p. 350.

47. Richard Brinkley, 'Religion, 1815-1974', *Pembrokeshire County History, Vol. IV, Modern Pembrokeshire, 1815-1974,* ed. by Elwyn Davies and Brian Howells (Aberystwyth: National Library of Wales on behalf of the Pembrokeshire Historical Society, 1993), p. 371.

48. Owain W. Jones, 'The Welsh Church in the Nineteenth Century', op. cit., p. 160.

49. D.T.W. Price, 'A History of the Church in Wales in the Twentieth Century', op. cit., p. 4.

We have talked so far in general terms. Neither the decay mentioned by some nor the reform mentioned by others, was necessarily reflected in individual parishes and it will be interesting now to see how these national pictures were reflected in the life of a particular parish such as Little Newcastle. What spiritual state was the Anglican Church in a small parish almost at the western edge of a sprawling diocese in the nineteenth century? To answer that question properly demands an examination of the parish's eighteenth-century religious inheritance. What state was the Anglican Church in during that century? Did it demonstrate the weaknesses which have been outlined, and, if so, at how low an ebb was it? Or did the church, even here, in this isolated spot, provide any evidence of a growing spiritual life, which some authors have detected in the diocese as a whole? As will be seen, the eighteenth century was a fascinating one in the religious life of Little Newcastle.

Chapter 3 – Inheritance: Evaluating the role of the Anglican Church in Eighteenth Century Little Newcastle

If the argument of Chapter Two could be summed up in a sentence, then it would read something like, 'The traditional picture of the Anglican Church in Wales, in the eighteenth and much of the nineteenth century, is a moribund institution which deservedly lost the spiritual allegiance of the Welsh nation to dissent, but that view is coming under increasing attack as evidence emerges of a church which had far more life and reforming spirit than it is usually credited with'. If academic opinion now accepts the above proposition, the time has come to examine how true the statement is for the parish of Little Newcastle. Was the eighteenth century really as bad as traditionally maintained or can signs of reforming zeal be detected even in this remove parish?

It must be admitted, the eighteenth century opened badly for the Anglican Church in the village, both in the quality of the clergy and the state of the building. Despite the fact that in the 1630's the curate, Hugh John, was described as, 'being an able scholar and preacher and one that dischargeth his place well and sufficient'[50] matters had taken a definite downturn by the middle of the century. For on 31st May 1649, the parishioners of Newcastle in Kemes, (Little Newcastle in the Hundred of Kemes), petitioned the Commonwealth 'for an augmentation for their minister, their maintenance being only £4 a year, so that they could not procure any godly or able minister to reside amongst them'. Sir John Stepney held the tithes, which were worth £20.[51] It was a classic case of the tithes being held in lay hands and the lay holder, in this case Sir John Stepney, only paying one-fifth of what he received to a curate – too small an amount to entice even the most desperate of clerics to dwell in the

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50. Cust, Richard and Hooper, Andrew, '625 Stepney v Williams' in *The Court of Chivalry 1634-40*, ed. Richard Cust and Andrew Hooper, 'British History Online'. Available at: http://www.british-khistory.ac.uk/no-series/courtofchivalry/625-stepney-williams (accessed 23 March 2020).

51. F. Green and T. W. Barker, 'Pembrokeshire Parsons' in WWHR, Vol. II, op. cit. p. 231.

village. However, Sir John suffered a fine for his Royalist sympathies but this was reduced from £1230 to £530, provided he settled £70 yearly on certain rectories. Whether Little Newcastle benefitted is unknown.

The first description of the structure dates from the last quarter of the seventeenth century and this, too, does not paint a very hopeful picture: 'Church is out of repair; ye font wants a cover. One of ye bells and ye channel out of repair. Within this last three years last past there hath not been one sermon preached within ye parish church, nor ye service in ye meantime (about twice) within convenient hours. A poor illiterate woman looks after ye church and keeps it clean'. Lewis Thomas, Ch. Wdn.[52]

With the building in a bad state, with an inability to entice 'godly and able' ministers to the parish and the infrequency of services, it is hardly surprising that Old Dissent should be attracting adherents in the area. At least by 1665, Quakerism had reached neighbouring Puncheston, when Richard Davies of Welshpool, the renowned Quaker, visited that village. In Davies' account of the visit, he states, 'They having notice of a Welshman coming to keep a meeting in those parts, many came to that meeting.'[53] It is inconceivable that nobody from the parish of Little Newcastle, less than two miles away, was not present at that meeting, when 'many' had frequented the event. Salmon speculated that one Morgan David, a yeoman, who emigrated before 1694, originated from Little Newcastle.[54] A descendant achieved great notoriety as his great, great grandson was Jefferson Davis, the Confederate President.[55]

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52. George Eyre Evans, *'Pembrokeshire Church Presentments'* in *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, Vol. LXXXII, Seventh Series, Vol. VII, (London: Cambrian Archaeological Association, 1927), p. 396.

53. David Salmon, 'The Quakers of Pembrokeshire' in WWHR, Vol. 9, op. cit., p. 13.

54. ibid., p. 31.

55. I am grateful for a great deal of the information regarding Morgan David to the late Reverend Raymond Earle Davis, a descendant of the President's brother, who visited Little Newcastle in 1999.

Of a more enduring nature were the Baptists. As early as 1697, according to W. J. Rhys, a house was licensed in the village for the use of the Baptist adherents,[56] whilst Reverend Richard Edwards is of the opinion that Little Newcastle could have been the birthplace of Reverend Thomas Mathias, born in 1672 and baptized in 1701, as one of the early ministers of Rhydwilym.[57] These were the beginnings of a denomination which was to have a lasting influence in Little Newcastle for the next three hundred years.

So, as the eighteenth century began, the Anglian church in Little Newcastle was labouring under a dark sky: a poor structure, clerics of dubious quality who were plagued by poverty and a growing challenge from Nonconformity. How did matters develop as the century progressed?

With regards the fabric no relevant records exist as to the size nor condition of the church in this century. It seems the medieval building was a double-aisled structure with a two arched arcade, but as will be seen below the church seemed to have halved in size by the beginning of the nineteenth century. This left a nave whose north wall was formed of two blocked-up arches, which originally led into the north aisle, but which by 1800 had become ruinous. When this happened can only be surmised, but a date in the later seventeenth or sometime in the eighteenth century is the most likely.

Prior to 1736, no records exist at to whom were the incumbents, but in that year, the name of David Evans appears in the Diocese Book.[58] From that point onwards, a complete list

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56. W. J. Rhys, 'Beulah, Casnewyddbach', in *Undeb Bedyddwyr Cymru*, op. cit. p. 30.

57. Richard Edwards, *Hanes Llangloffan*, op. cit. p.11.

58. F. Green and T. W. Barber, 'Pembrokeshire Parsons' in *WWHR*, Vol. 11, op. cit. p. 231.

exists. Do they confirm the traditional picture of the Welsh clergy, who held livings in plurality, thereby necessitating much travelling on the Sabboth or the employment of a poorly paid curate or were they the holders of a single living? In the list provided by Green and Barker of the perpetual curates of Little Newcastle, only five held the living between 1745 and 1835.[59] Of the five, only one, William Rees, (1770-1782) and David Rees, (1762-1763) also held, for at least part of their incumbency, the neighbouring parishes of Puncheston and Llanychaer, whilst one, David Davies (763-1770) was also stipendary curate of Nicholaston and Oxwich and also Penrice, all in the Gower.[60] But by far the worst offender was James Rees (1782-1835), who not only was a member of the gentry Stokes family and was therefore unlikely to have empathized with his Welsh speaking parishioners, but he also built up an impressive portfolio of clerical livings: In addition to being perpetual curate of Little Newcastle, he was also rector of Narberth and Robeston Wathen, curate of Talbenny, rector of Robeston West, rector of Llysyfran and stipendiary curate of Freystrop![61]

It might be fair to assume that the two who held neighbouring parishes probably officiated in all three churches on the Sabboth, which would have probably meant a fairly frantic rush for them, but what of David Davies, who held three Gower livings and James Rees? Of the former, it is likely that Glamorganshire was his main interest, so who performed the services at Little Newcastle? The answer can, in part at least, be gleaned from the diaries of John Griffiths of Llandyssilio who carried out the occasional offices in a large number of parishes in rural north Pembrokeshire, but gaps do exist in his diaries. Between 1759-1774, he officiated at least 141 times in Little Newcastle: 64 christenings, (1759-1771), but with none recorded for 1761 and 1776), 28 marriages (1760-1771, 1774) and 49 burials (1761-1773), but with none recorded for 1766 and 1770. It will be noticed that these years cover

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59. ibid. pp. 230-231.

60. Clergy of the Church of England Database: CCEd., Parish of Little Newcastle. Available at: theclergydatabase.org.uk (accessed on 27 March 2020).

61. ibid.

the incumbency of David Davies (1763-1770). Griffiths' work dried up in Little Newcastle in the early 1770s when William Rees held the living and he is not recorded once between 1787-98, though he was still active in surrounding parishes.[62] In this latter period, the multi-beneficed James Rees was perpetual curate, but his name does not occur once on the parish register's (christenings and burials run continuously from 1783),[63] but the names of several curates do: Morgan Evans, Michael Davies and George Harries. Of the three mentioned, Michael Davies was stipendiary curate of St. Lawrence and Treffgarne as well as Little Newcastle, whereas Harries also held the stipendiary curacies of Ambleston and Walton East.[64] For these on the lowest rung of the ecclesiastical ladder, their holding of more than one curacy would have been necessitated by a very low stipend – James Rees and his family would have gleaned most as the advowson lay in the hands of Rees' brother, John Rees Stokes.[65] In this respect the incumbents of Little Newcastle seem to conform to the traditional view of the Welsh clergy. Was it such people that Howell Harris was thinking of when he wrote the following comment about the clergy of North Pembrokeshire when staying at Llangwarren in 1740, 'I felt grief and heartbreaking for the Lord's glory when they said how the Sabbath is profaned, and how the clergy this way of Letterston leave even the dead unburied, run over the prayers, preach but 5 minutes are drunkards, whoremongers, etc'.[66]

These were the men who had to face the growing challenge of Nonconformity; their response would determine whether the Anglican church would prove sufficient in meeting the spiritual needs of the parishioners. Quakerism, in the long run did not develop into a serious threat and regular meetings at Puncheston were discontinued by 1725.[67]

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62. The Church of St. Tyssilio, Llandissilio, Diary of the Rev. John Griffith, op. cit.

63. *Christenings and Burials, 1783-1813, Parish of Little Newcastle*. Facsimile copy kept at St Peter's Church, Little Newcastle.

64. Clergy of the Church of England Database: CCEd.

65. F. Green and T. W. Barber, 'Pembrokeshire Parsons', *WWHR*, Vol. II, op. cit., p.231.

66. Tom Beynon, *Howell Harris's Visits to Pembrokeshire*, op, cit., p.42

67. David Salmon, 'The Quakers of Pembrokeshire', *WWHR*, Vol.9, op. cit., p.26.

Methodism, though at the time a movement within the church, was active in the area, with Howell Harris making a number of visits to the village. When he visited on St David's Day in 1741 he declared, '3 mile past 4 towards Little New Castle. Discoursed to, I believe, 10,000, I think I never saw such a crowd before me. Felt some concern for so great a number of souls. Discoursed on John 5:25, with authority…which continued near four hours.'[68] The Reverend W. J. Rhys makes the point that Howell Harris, whom he says preached in both Little Newcastle and Puncheston churches, was invited to visit the parishes at the request of the rector of Puncheston, John Thomas, to counter the challenge of the Baptists.[69] Indeed, Harris himself identifies the call, 'I was sent for by Mr Thomas of Puncheston… Found him a broken humbled experienced minister. Blessed be God for him in this dark country.'[70] A key debating point between Harris and the Baptists was the question of infant Baptism, as he identified, 'Some Baptist…said that dogs were more proper objects of baptism than infants…'[71] When Harris visited the village in 1741, he reported, 'One said how the Baptists were very bitter against me and came to carp, and desired me not to speak against them. I said I would say what my dear Lord would give me.' It was to be a day in the village when very strong deep and no doubt bitter theological debates took place.[72] Harris' nemesis was the prominent Baptist, John Powell who was very active in the Little Newcastle area. Harris said of him, 'Everything I hear about John Powell staggers me about him. He is charged with drinking many pints of drink ere he begins, with gathering and loving money, railing continually against someone or other, etc. etc.'[73]

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68. Tom Beynon, 'Howell Harris' Visits to Pembrokeshire', op.cit., p.49.

69. W. J. Rhys, 'Bedyddwyr Casmael a Chasnewyddbach', op.cit., p.54.

70. Tom Beynon, 'Howell Harris' Visits to Pembrokeshire', op.cit., p.43.

71. ibid., p.48.

72. ibid., p.61.

73. ibid., p.49.

Despite the efforts of Howell Harris and the fact that Nathaniel Rowlands preached in the church around 1770,[74] Little Newcastle never became a Methodist stronghold. Even though John Wesley himself preached twice in the church,[75] neither brands of Methodism took root in the parish, but it did prove fertile ground for the Baptists.

Building on their early foundations, the Baptist cause flourished, despite the efforts of the Anglicans. The activity of John Powell in the area between 1738-43 has already been mentioned.[76] Due to his efforts and the efforts of others, whose names are not recorded, their number was growing. Forty-three names are recorded in 1743, according to the annals of Rhydwilym, who were baptized from the parishes of Little Newcastle Puncheston, Castlebythe, St. Dogwells, Ambleston and Henry's Moat.[77] When Llangloffan was incorporated in 1745, members are recorded from twenty parishes, and Little Newcastle, with sixteen persons recorded, supplying the fourth highest number of members.[78] Heading the list for Little Newcastle was Reverend Daniel Garnons a minister at Llangloffan and later Ebenezer, who left the former chapel due to a theological disagreement.[79] Garnons was resident in the parish for around thirty years and it is impossible not to believe that he had a profound influence on his fellow parishioners. He was buried in the parish churchyard in 1777. The same can be said of Reverend David Thomas who came to live at Skyber following his fall from grace at Rhydwilym in 1770.[80]

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74. W. J. Rhys, 'Bedyddwyr Casmael a Chasnewydbach', op.cit., p.53.
75. ibid., p. 54.
76. Tom Beynon, 'Howell Harris' Visits to Pembrokeshire', op.cit., p. 49.
77. Richard Edwards, *Hanes Llangloffan*, op. cit., pp. 37-38.
78. ibid., p. 13.
79. ibid., pp.21-22.
80. ibid., pp.23-24.

The third name on the 1745 Llangloffan list was Ann Symmon. Her inclusion is significant as she was a co-heiress, with her two sisters, of the small Colston estate of her late father, John. The Colston Symmons' were a cadet branch of the Symmons of Martel and she was a kinswoman of the Tuckers of Sealyham. She would have been the closest the parish would have had to a resident gentle-woman and the fact that she had been induced to become a Baptist demonstrates that the Baptists did appeal to people of all social standing and not just from amongst the ranks of the werin. It was a wake-up call to the Church that it was in danger of losing members from all ranks of society. It is interesting to note that in 1788 she was expelled as a member of Llangloffan for 'leaving the truth'[81] and she is now commemorated on a large plaque in the sanctuary of the church!

If the church felt threatened by the activity of the Baptists, worse was to come. In 1791, J. R. Jones, Ramoth, preached at Skyber[82] and he was followed by Christmas Evans who also preached in Little Newcastle in the early 1790s.[83] He was a renowned preacher and no doubt would have made converts. This was but the prelude to intense Baptist activity in the area: in 1794, Joseph James, the school-teacher, friend of Morgan John Rhys and Reverend Nathaniel Williams, moved to Little Newcastle. He was not only to open a school in the village and be ordained in 1796, but, with Thomas Richards, Llangloffan deacon and resident of Ffynnonbedr in the parish, become involved with the religious revival which was sparking into life at Pantywrach in the neighbouring parish of Llanfair Nant-y-Gof. Whilst these two gentlemen did not start the revival, they certainly took charge of it and the event has gone down in history as the Puncheston Revival of 1795. These were heady days for the Baptists

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81. ibid., p.13.

82. W. J. Rhys, 'Beulah Castell Newydd Bach', op. cit., p.52.

83. Joseph Cross, *Sermons of Christmas Evans: A New Translation from the Welsh with a Memoir and Portraiture of the Author.* (Philadelphia: Leary & Getdz, 1857). Available at: www.gutenberg.org (accessed 2 April 2020).

and the name now most associated with it is Joseph Harris, Gomer, who first started preaching at the revival, before removing himself to Swansea where he was to play a very important part in the life of the nation.[84]

All this was a challenge to the Established Church: members were being lost, and the young were being nurtured in the school Joseph James had commenced, whilst his friendship with the radical Morgan John Rhys must have aroused the suspicion of the authorities at a time when the country was at war with Revolutionary France. It is against this background that the French invaded the County in 1797. Once the foe had been defeated, the Establishment saw a golden opportunity to discredit Nonconformity in general and Baptists in particular. A few prominent Baptists were arrested and accused of treason for helping the French at the time of the invasion. Amongst their number in the parish was Thomas John, a Baptist lay-preacher from Summerton. At the Court of Great Session held at the Guildhall Haverfordwest in September 1797 the first treason trial was held in Wales for over a century. It looked black for John, but at the last moment, the French witnesses 'had a pang of conscience and refused to give the necessary evidence'. The case collapsed and John, with his fellow 'traitor' was reluctantly released. The deprivations he had suffered at Haverfordwest Castle affected his health and he died in 1804, as the tomb in the churchyard testifies.[85]

From the evidence presented so far, it would seem that the eighteenth century was for the Established Church in Little Newcastle a very difficult time. Can any positives be presented to balance the picture?

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84. David Jones, 'Hanes Eglwys Beulah, Castell-Newyddbach, Hanes y Bedyddwyr yn Neheubarth Cymru', op. cit., p.218-219.

85. Roland Thorne and Robert Howell, 'Pembrokeshire in Wartime, 1793-1815' in *Pembrokeshire County History*, Volume III, editors: Elwyn Davies and Brian Howells, (Haverfordwest: The Pembrokeshire Historical Society, 1987), p.381.

With regards the structure, whilst it halved in size, the remaining half was useable, as witnessed by the fact that Howell Harris, Nathaniel Rowlands and John Wesley were all able to preach in the building. The fact that continuous registers exist from 1783 (covering both christenings and burials) do demonstrate that the clergy were becoming more professional and taking their legal responsibilities seriously.

Efforts had also been made to raise the stipend of the clergy. The parish was a beneficiary of the provisions of the Queen Anne Bounty, e.g. a property called 'Penrhiw' in the parish of Newport (containing some 154 acres) was bought in 1761 by the Governors for £200, the amount of a grant made in 1726 to Little Newcastle out of the Royal Bounty Money by lot. This yielded a rental of £55. Similarly, a rental of £22 was gained from Gabriel Farm (24a, 1r, 18p), in the parish of Lambston and this was purchased in 1791 by the Governors Queen Anne's Bounty for £200, the amount of a grant made in 1787 to Little Newcastle out of the Royal Bounty Money by lot. Clearly, an attempt was being made to improve the material provision of the clergy.[86]

The Church had also pioneered education in the parish. Between 1739-1759, the Circulating Schools of Griffith Jones visited the village on four separate occasions and in total 113 scholars were educatded.[87] These circulating schools relied on the support of the local clergy and whilst no example can be quoted of an incumbent or his curate who actually taught in the Little Newcastle schools, as Brinkley demonstrated happened at neighbouring Puncheston when John Thomas acted as a teacher,[88] at least the clergy were not hostile. These can be borne out by the fact that on the last two occasions, the venue for the schools

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86. T. W. Barker, 'Diocese of St. Davids: Particulars relating to Endowments etc of Livings, Vol II, *Archdeaconry of St. Davids* (Carmarthen: W. Spurrell and Son, 1907), pp.15-16.

87. Tom Beynon, *Howell Harris' Visits to Pembrokeshire*, (Aberystwyth: Cambrian Press, 1966), pp.312-316.

88. Richard Brinkley, 'Religion and Education, 1660-1815', op, cit., p.236.

was the parish church when thirty scholars were educated in the 1757-58 session and twenty-seven in the following session.[89]

Undoubtedly, the greatest surprise was the establishment of a parish library in Little Newcastle in 1766. This was done by an associate of Dr. Bray and a small collection of thirty-seven volumes was housed in the village. Whether it was kept in the church or the curate's house is unknown, but its existence in such a small rural village made it a fairly unusual feature. 'By 1849, this library was reported as being one of those either wholly lost or reduced to a few tattered volumes'.[90] It would be pleasing to think that the asset had been so widely used that the books had been reduced to 'a few tattered volumes', but the parishioners had form in disrespecting written manuscripts: an inscription in the parish register reads: 'No copy of returns any further as it has been ill used by the Parishioners of Little Newcastle'. It was written by George Harris, the curate, and dated 1829![91]

And then, from the very end of the century, one has a glimpse of the life of the church from a contemporary by reading the Visitation Return of 1799. Completed by the curate, Morgan Evans, who actually resided in Ambleston, he records that there was a weekly service at the church, alternating between the morning at eleven and the afternoon at three. The Holy Sacrament was administered three times a year, at Christmas, Easter and Whitsun and he catechized only during Lent. The numbers of Easter communicants are recorded as a score, 'or thereabouts, being nearly the same as last year'. Whilst he could report that there were

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89. Tom Beynon, *Howell Harris' Visits to Pembrokeshire,* (Aberystwyth: Cambrian Press, 1966), p. 316.

90. Michael Perkin, *A Directory of the Parochial Libraries of the Church of England and the Church in Wales,* ed. by Neil Ker, (London: The Bibliographical Society, 2004).

91. Christenings and Burials, 1783-1813. Parish of Little Newcastle, op. cit.

no Baptists, he had to admit, 'the Anabaptists are numerous, they have no meeting house, they have not increased much for these last two years back, the names of their teachers are John Williams of Sclethrey + John Williams of Treglemesh'.[92]

So, what can be said of the state of the Anglican Church in the Parish of Little Newcastle in the eighteenth century? It certainly was not moribund, it still had a useable structure, efforts had been made to improve the physical well-being of the clergy and it had pioneered educational provision. The establishment of a parish library was certainly a notable achievement. It was aware of the threat posed by Nonconformity and efforts had been made to counter it by inviting those from within the Anglican structure, such as Howell Harris, to counter the challenge of Dissent or by discrediting them as in the case of Thomas John. However, the Church was not operating against a blue sky: the building had been reduced in size at a time when the population was growing, the incumbent was frequently an absentee, leaving pastoral care in the hands of curates and there was a growing threat from the Baptists. They had had a century of steady activity in Little Newcastle, culminating in the revival of 1795 and if the Church was to keep or even regain the allegiance of a good percentage of the population then the problems outlined above would have to be seriously addressed in the nineteenth century. It will be the purpose of Chapter Four to examine the weaknesses of the church, but in particular, the activity of the Baptists in the area, because an understanding of their many activities has to be appreciated in order to understand the challenge the Anglican church faced and then will be necessary to examine how the church rose, or fell, when trying to surmount that challenge.

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92. 'Visitation Return', 1799, op.cit.

Chapter 4 – "Vigour, Enterprise, and Enthusiasm": The challenge of Nonconformity in Nineteenth Century Little Newcastle

As the nineteenth century opened, the omens did not augur well for the Anglican Church in Little Newcastle. Many of the problems which had beset it in the previous century remained, but the challenge of Nonconformity was growing. The area had just witnessed a major religious revival in 1795 and whilst dwelling houses had long been used in the village as places where the Baptists could meet for worship, the revival had heightened their desire for an actual meeting place, a chapel, to be built in the area. This hope had failed to be realized in Puncheston in the immediate aftermath of the revival as no land had been obtainable, but they were to persist in their search. It will now be beneficial to consider the weaknesses of local Anglicanism before examining the position of Dissent, in the nineteenth century.

The old problem of a non-resident incumbent, in the person of Rev. James Rees, remained and the consequent necessity of the employ of curates. Rees was to hold the living from 1782-1835[93] and as has already been stated, his name does not once appear once on the existing parish registers: as recorded by the 1804 Visitation Return, 'He resides at Hilton in the parish of Roach in the deanery of Roose'.[94] In the same Return, we learn that the curate, Morgan Evans, received a salary of £15 per annum, but he was also forced to hold Ambleston, where he resided. In the 1807 Return, the curate, Michael Davies also held Ford, where he lived,[95] but by 1828, George Harris, who also held Walton East, resided within half-a-mile. His stipend was £30.[96]

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93. F. Green and T. W. Barber, 'Pembrokeshire Parsons', *WWHR*, Vol. II, op. cit., p.231.

94. 'Visitation Return' 1804, op.cit.

95. 'Visitation Return' 1807, op.cit.

96. 'Visitation Return' 1828, op. cit.

The low stipend was meant to be tackled by the provisions of the Queen Anne Bounty, but, in truth, the money was being pocketed by the incumbent and the curates were seeing very little benefit. The problem was accentuated in Little Newcastle because the incumbent and his patron, who was also his brother, were misusing the provision which had been provided for the parish. They had sub-let the farm at Lambston for three lives to David Evans without the permission of the diocesan. The arrangement persisted until Reverend James Rees' death in 1835 and on the appointment of his successor, Reverend Peter Davies Richardson, he wished to eject the tenant and regain the farm. He took the matter to the county summer assizes, but the case landed up in the Court of Queen's Bench, during the Hilary Term of 1839, before Lord Denman, C. J. Following lengthy legal arguments, the court found in favour of the plaintiff and Richardson regained possession.[97]

The Anglican cause was not helped either by the poor state of the church building. An attempt had been made to try and improve matters as early as 1807 when the eastern of the two-bay arcade was re-opened and a quarter of the old north aisle was regained. The whole project cost £96 and was met by raising a church rate.[98] However, the resulting church was not of the highest standard - little wonder that Richard Fenton in 1811 described it thus: 'a church of the very meanest fashion'.[99] In 1829, the curate, George Harris could report that the state of the furniture was 'very poor' and the state of the churchyard and fences was 'very bad', but the chancel was in good repair and that it was the responsibility of Sir John Owen.[100]

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97. 'Court of Queen's Bench: Hilary Term, 1839', *The Law Journal Reports*, Volume VIII, pages 145-148. Available at: books.google.co.uk (accessed 4 April 2020).

98. R. Davies, 'Nineteenth Century Church Restoration, Little Newcastle Church and the Reverend Peter Davies Richardson, *J.P.H.S*, No 6, 1994-1995' op. cit., pp.80-81.

99. Richard Fenton, *A Historical Tour Through Pembrokeshire*, (Broughton Gifford: Cyngor Sir Dyfed County Council Cultural Services Department, (reprint of original), 1994), p.185.

100. 'Visitation Return', 1828, op.cit.

(Sir John Owen of Orielton was a representative of one of the senior county families and as the 1848 Tithe Map confirms, he was a landowner in the parish).[101] Harris' view about the furniture is borne out by Richardson's statement that prior to his restoration in the 1840s, the church only contained seven settles, giving a total seating capacity of thirty-five when the parish population in 1841 was 430![102]

With matters in this rather poor state, it is not surprising that the curates faced a very strong Nonconformist headwind whilst seeking to discharge their duties. Little wonder that Michael Davies in 1807, when answering the visitation question as to how often he catechized the children of the parish, replied 'I can find no children here that are instructed in the Church Catechism being taught in the Anabaptist School who detest it'. But he added, 'I do instruct and examine children that are not of the above description, as much as I can in the fundamental principles of our Established religion and … hope shall have some qualified for Confirmation'.[103]

It is apparent that Dissent was gaining a hold, but the woes of the clergy were soon to be multiplied. Ever since the 1795 Revival, the Baptists had sought to build a chapel, but had found difficulty in finding a site. Finally, however, their prayer was answered when a suitable plot was found on the northern banks of the River Angof and about a third of a mile outside the village of Little Newcastle. The original intention had been a modest structure, but at the insistence of John Evans of Rynaston a grander edifice was constructed which was 45 feet in length and 25 feet wide, internally. Unfortunately, Evans, who had been very active in collecting the necessary funds, had died before all the internal fittings were complete. Fortunately, Mrs Martha Griffiths of Wolfscastle came to the rescue in order to allow the completion of the galleries. The first service took place on Easter Monday 1808 and the new

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101. Little Newcastle Tithe Map *Archeoleg Cambria Archaeology,* Sheet, (1848).

102. R. Davies, 'Nineteenth Century Church Restoration, Little Newcastle Church and the Reverend Peter Davies Richardson, *J.P.H.S,* No 6, 1994-1995' op. cit., p.81.

103. 'Visitation Return', 1807, op.cit.

chapel was named Beulah.[104] An indication of the strength of Beulah can be gauged by the fact that by 1823, the members felt strong enough to petition their mother church at Llangloffan to establish themselves as an independent congregation. In that year one hundred and thirty-two members were released from Llangloffan, but the membership had increased by another nine within two months. Joseph James was their first minister. By 1828, Beulah had begat Smyrna in Puncheston, the lead for its founding being taken by Beulah's senior deacon, John George, a member of the Prime Minister, David Lloyd George's family.[105]

During these early years, three ministers served the area simultaneously: Joseph James (1823-1844), Benjamin Davies (1818-1839) and John James (1824-1839) and these were followed by Thomas Gabriel Jones (1840-1849), who not only looked after the spiritual needs of his congregation but was also the respected classics master at the Baptist College in Haverfordwest.[106] In 1849, he was appointed to the Chair of the Pembrokeshire Gymanfa which was hosted that year in Beulah. He was also a respected 'Prince of the Pulpit' and his reputation as a preacher and scholar earned him renown over a wide area.[107]

Reading W. J. Rhys' history of Beulah and Smyrna, one has the impression that growth and success was on an every-upward spiral, but caution is here needed. David Jones, writing in 1839 states, 'Nid yw'r achos yma, erys blynyddau, wedi bod yn flodeuog iawn. Nis oes fawr o ennill tir yn cymmeryd lle…' ('The cause here, for a number of hears, has not been flourishing. Not much growth has taken place'). He mentions, however that the combined membership of Beulah and Smyrna was almost two hundred.[108]

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104. W. J. Rhys, 'Bedyddwyr Casmael a Chasnewyddbach', op. cit., pp.59-61.

105. ibid., pp.60-61.

106. Patrick Baker, 'Haverfordwest Baptist College', op.cit., pp.49-45.

107. ibid., pp.62-68.

108. David Jones, ''Hanes y Bedyddwyr yn Neheubarth Cymru', op.cit., p.221.

If matters were stagnating somewhat for the Baptists by 1839 (and it must be remembered that the three ministers serving the chapel in that year were all by then somewhat elderly), difficulties were accentuated when T. Gabriel Jones left as he was followed in quick succession by five ministers in twenty years, but for nine of those years the chapel had no minister at all. The service of some of these ministers could be counted in months, rather than years. To accentuate matters, in 1870 there was a parting of the ways between Beulah and Smyrna,[109] partly because the latter chapel was dissatisfied by the ministry of Griffith Havard, who used to find great difficulty in being able to get up early enough in the morning to reach the services in Puncheston on time![110] Between 1870 and 1878, Beulah again was without a minister, as it was again between 1881 and 1885.[111] In September 1888, a letter appeared in *Seren Gomer* from Ioan Amlod regarding Beulah's history which noted, 'ond gwelwyd y gynnulleidfa … yn dorcolonus o denai'. ('we have seen the congregation heart-breakingly small'). He goes on to say that there were various reasons for this, but does not mention any particular cause, but the letter does suggest that the middle years of the century had not been easy for the Baptist cause in the parish.[112] If a good Anglican clergyman was in position then it was a situation from which St Peter's could benefit.

Now it would be wrong to conclude that chapel life was moribund - there was a great deal of activity centered around Beulah and the annals of *Seren Gomer* are peppered with reports of a host of events which took place there. In 1875, for example the chapel was re-opened after extensive repairs[113] and in the same year we learn that there were fifty-five scholars, seven teachers and twenty-eight members in the Sunday School.[114] Two lectures are recorded in 1864: in January, there is a reference to a lecture by Dr Emlyn Jones on 'Oliver

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109. W. J. Rhys, 'Beulah Casnewyddbach', op. cit., p.31.

110. Denley Owen, Ar Droed yn Nyfed, Bywyd ac Amserau Griffith Havard, op.cit., p.15.

111. W. J. Rhys, 'Beulah Casnewyddbach', op. cit., p.31.

112. *Seren Gomer*, 7 September 1888.

113. *Seren Gomer,* 2 April 1875.

114. *Seren Gomer*, 22 January 1864.

Cromwell',[115] whilst Iorwerth Glan Aled talked on 'Ryfeddodau Natur' ('The Wonders of Nature') in December.[116] In the summer of 1879, members of the Beulah Sunday School joined six other chapel Sunday Schools to form part of a near thousand strong congregation which packed Llangloffan for the gymanfa.[117] In 1882, Beulah itself was packed for a cultural evening which was an eisteddfod in all but name[118] whilst in 1884 Beulah took its turn to host the Sunday School Gymanfa which perambulated yearly between Beulah, Smyrna and Saron, Letterston.[119] The chapel it must be remembered, was a natural home to Welsh cultural events - a point the Anglican church needed to remember if it was to 'hold' the 'werin'. If the middle years of the nineteenth century had been somewhat shaky for the Baptists, they ended the century on a very sound footing as in 1885, the Reverend Jacob John was appointed. Beulah was to be his only pastorate and he held it until his death in 1919.[120] Due to his self-sacrificing ministry, membership grew (seventeen were baptized and one 'restored' in 1883,[121] the chapel was completely rebuilt, realigned and re-opened in 1910,[122] whilst Beulah held its first eisteddfod in 1913[123]). Such was Jacob John's endearing personality that until relatively recently, the very elderly still spoke of him with the highest regard, church people as well as chapel-goers. In an age when the bitterness of disestablishment and disendowment soured church/chapel relations, to have gained the respect of people of all denominations and none, speaks volumes about the character of the man.

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115. *Seren Gomer*, 22 January 1864.
116. *Seren Gomer,* 16 December 1864.
117. *Seren Gomer*, 30 June 1879.
118. *Seren Gomer*, 14 April 1882.
119. *Seren Gomer*, 25 April 1884.
120. Memorial Obelisk inscription.
121. *Seren Gomer*, 7 September 1888.
122. Chapel inscription.
123. *The County Echo*, 27 February 1913.

In concluding this chapter, reference must be made to the very unexpected competition both church and chapel faced in 1847. For in that year, the village received a visit from the Latter-Day Saints, who hired a room in order to hold a meeting and at the same time, prepared a broth on the open fire. One local newspaper report states how 'urchins' (whether they be Anglican or Nonconformist is unknown!), climbed onto the roof and dropped 'carrion bones' down the chimney. Both broth and meeting were spoilt![124] It is unknown whether any converts were made at the meeting, but a young man definitely influenced by them at this time was David John. He belonged to an old village family who for generations had been champions of the Baptist cause, as referred to by David Jones.[125] At the time of his conversion, he was in training for the ministry at the Baptist College in Haverfordwest, but his horrified parents were insistent that he finish his course. He obeyed his parents' command, but on completion of the course, he was to leave Wales heading for Utah. Eventually, he was to rise to the rank of Patriarch in the Mormon Church and a building is named in his honour at Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.[126] His parents' grave can be seen at Beulah Chapel-yard.

Whilst acknowledging that the third quarter of the nineteenth century might have been a weaker period for the local Baptists, for much of the nineteenth century, their cause was characterized by vigour, enterprise, and enthusiasm which was crowned with much success. How the Anglican Church responded in the village will be the topic of the next chapter: a make or break period for Anglicanism in the area, if it wished to maintain more than just a nominal presence in the parish.

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124. *The Pembrokeshire Herald and General Advertiser*, 15 October 1847.

125. David Jones, 'Hanes y Bedyddwyr yn Neheubarth Cymru', op.cit., p.218.

126. I am indebted to Nancy Deis, Dallas, Texas, for much of the information on her ancestor, Patriarch David John.

Chapter 5 – "The Good Shepherd": The Anglican Renaissance and village life in Nineteenth Century Little Newcastle

When my great grand-parents returned to farm in the parish of Little Newcastle in 1916, family tradition says that on the first Sunday that they went to church, there was not a single pew available for them to sit together as a family and they had to split up and be seated in a number of different pews. The church obviously had a large congregation that Sunday morning, so approximately, how many were present? The nave was designed to seat ninety[127] and there were eighteen pews. If three were sitting in each pew, there would have been over fifty present! It would be reasonably safe to presume that the congregation was probably somewhere between forty and sixty. In the same year, membership in Beulah numbered one hundred and six,[128] but of the possible one hundred and six, twelve numbers were unaccounted for and had no name alongside, another nine named people had not contributed anything (one had died and another one was the wife of a contributing member), leaving an active membership of eighty-six. However, almost one-tenth of total contributions for the chapel in that year came from the 'gwrandawyr' – people who attended, but were not actual members. Even if there were only four of these, that would take the active membership up to around ninety and this excludes Sunday School members. What is noticeable about Beulah's membership was that they were drawn from at least six parishes, with the greatest number coming obviously from Little Newcastle, around forty-two, but closely followed by Ambleston. In order of size, the remainder came from St Dogwells, Letterston, Spittal and Puncheston. Due to its parochial structure, St Peter's membership would overwhelmingly have been drawn from the parish itself.

What is surprising from a comparison of the figures, is that the memberships of the church and chapel living in the actual parish of Little Newcastle is not that different, so obviously the church had managed to maintain a good number of the local population within

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127. *The Pembrokeshire Herald and General Advertiser*, 4 February 1876.

128. ''Beulah Baptist Chapel, Ministry Contributions Book', 1903-1924. pp.1916.

the fold. How do we account for this? The history of Anglicanism in Little Newcastle in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries falls into two distinct sections: the first, the incumbency of the ever-absent Reverend James Rees and his employ of curates, which came to an end with the reverend gentleman's death in 1835 and secondly the appointment of two members of the Richardson family, Reverends Peter Davies and Arthur, who held the living between 1835-1866 and 1866 – 1911 respectively.[129]

It would be wrong to think that everything in the first period was entirely moribund, as it was not. In 1807, the curate, Reverend Michael Davies, when asked if he had introduced simple congregational Psalmody in the church, could report, 'I have and thank God, have prevailed in a great measure, we sing Psalms every Sunday'. In answer as to whether he had taken pains, over and above the ordinary duties of his parish, to remove the errors of Schism and Enthusiasm, he could reply, 'I have and there is added to the Communion more than twenty in the short space of ¾ of a year even of those that were never Methodists, Baptists, no any other dissent.' He could also state that he instructed his parishioners every Saturday evening previous to the Communion Sunday, the parish had copies of various tracts and he himself kept family prayers.[130]

But matters took a dramatic turn for the better with the appointment of the Reverend Peter Davies Richardson who came from a dynasty of clerics[131] and they served many parishes in the Diocese of St Davids and beyond. Both P. D. Richardson and his nephew, Arthur Richardson, who succeeded him, proved to be conscientious clerics who achieved much in

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129. F. Green and TD. W. Barker, 'Pembrokeshire Parsons', *W.W.H.R.* Volume II, op. cit., p.231.

130. Visitation Return, 1807, op. cit.

131. F. Green and TD. W. Barker, 'Pembrokeshire Parsons', *W.W.H.R.* Volume III, op. cit., pp.280 and 286.

the parish. For the reforming bishops mentioned above, they must have been acutely aware that in the Diocese of St Davids between 1750 and 1800, only 45 of the 762 men ordained were graduates,[132] but at a time when there was a 'need for expertise'[133] and graduate clergy were seen as 'the norm and the ideal'.[134] Arthur Richardson at least filled the bill as he was an Oxford graduate.[135] Though neither lived in the parish, but rather in St Dogwells, collectively, they laboured in the village for almost 80 years and placed the church on a sound footing. An area of concern for both men was the state of the parish church. An uninviting structure was hardly likely to attract adherents and the narrative of the previous chapter noted how poorly equipped the church was by the 1840s to minister to a population of over 400. The story of the efforts made by the Reverend Davies Richardson have already been described by me in an article in *The Journal of the Pembrokeshire Historical Society*.[136] Basically, after levying a Church Rate, work commenced in 1842, to regain in its entirety the whole of the medieval north aisle, but the funds collected were not equal to the ambitious objective the cleric had set himself. Having run out of money and the work having come to a stop, he applied to the Incorporated Churches Building Society, (I.C.B.S.) for a grant. Technically he should have done this before commencing and they would have been within their rights to refuse him. However, they did not and after much to-ing and fro-ing of correspondence between London and the cleric, a plan was finally dispatched which proved acceptable to the Society. This plan, if implemented would have provided a church with a seating capacity of 174. Months elapsed and nothing was heard from the I.C.B.S., but enough

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132. Rosemary O'Day, 'The Clerical Renaissance in Victorian England and Wales', in Gerald Parsons, (ed), *Religion in Victorian Britain, I Traditions*, (Manchester: The Open University, 1988), p.190.

133. ibid. p.202.

134. Rosemary O'Day, 'The Men from the Ministry', in Gerald Parsons(ed), *Religion in Victorian Britain, II Controversies*, (Manchester: The Open University, 1988), p.264.

135. F. Green and T. W. Barker, 'Pembrokeshire Parsons', *W.W.H.R.*, Volume III, op. cit., p.286.

136. R. Davies, 'Nineteenth Century Church Restoration, Little Newcastle Church and the Reverend Peter Davies Richardson', *J.P.H.S*, Number 6, (1994-1995).

had been done to allow the church to host a re-opening service[137] even though there was no internal seating. However, ten months later, the incumbent received a letter from London, granting the church £25, if certain conditions had been met, including the provision of a second plan. This was duly dispatched, but it was so radically different to the original that the Society demanded an explanation. Richardson replied and said that in the intervening months, when all hope of financial aid was waning, he had allowed a farmer, at his own expense, to erect a box pew for his own family use. Others followed and soon the nave was full of box pews, with free benches provided in the north aisle, 'for the portion of the Congregation which resort to that part of the church'[138] by which he meant the lower classes. Otherwise, the farmers would 'be compelled to sit with their servants and labourers'.[139] The I.C.B.S., despite a number of attempts by Richardson to persuade them, did not pay the grant.

It was probably not only Richardson's abandonment of the original plan, nor even his rather condescending class attitudes which persuaded the Society to refuse a grant, but also the fact that the church produced was so backward looking and so completely at variance with the new ecclesiological views which were emerging by the 1840s: box pews which allowed members of the congregation to have their backs to the altar, the chancel arch cluttered by seating, thereby depriving some of a clear view of the altar and the pulpit placed along the south wall and being the most prominent feature on entering through the door, would all have shocked those who took their inspiration from the High Gothic. That said, at least Richardson had vastly improved the state of the building, and even with the reduced seating capacity which the erection of the box pews had caused, he could now claim to be able to seat around a third of parishioners. But probably even before his death in 1866, the church structure may have been causing him concern. The church which he had restored and the medieval dimensions he had regained in the 1840s, was, in truth, a jerry-built structure.

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137. *The Carmarthen Journal*, 12 May 1843.

138. R. Davies, 'Nineteenth Century Church Restoration, Little Newcastle Church and the Reverend Peter Davies Richardson, *J.P.H.S,* Number 6, (1994-1995) op. cit., page 86.

139. ibid. p.86.

An ambitious scheme, in a poor parish at difficult economic times, where probably too many corners had been cut, meant that the church was in rather urgent need of attention again in under thirty years. The challenge this time was taken up by his nephew Reverend Arthur Richardson and he employed the diocesan architect E. H. Lingen Barker to draw up plans.[140] On 8 September, 1870, plans for the rebuilding of the church were approved by the chapter.[141] What Lingen Barker envisaged was a bold step. He proposed to abandon the north aisle, widen the nave, widen and lengthen the chancel and add a vestry and porch.[142] In an age when churches were being enlarged to provide extra seating capacity, he actually proposed to reduce the capacity to 90 in the nave with seating for another sixteen in the chancel. He had foresight: rural parishes were losing population and the twentieth century would see a marked decline in the numbers attending places of worship.

But the plan and the internal fittings he envisaged deserve attention because it demonstrated how a small, remote, Welsh speaking parish was seeking to implement the latest ecclesiological thinking, as defined by the Oxford Movement, in their small church. Though architecturally undistinguished, if one knows how to read the signs, today's structure is almost a text-book model of what the ecclesiologists thought a 'proper' church should look like. True, when finished, it lacked many of the desired internal fittings which such a church should have had, e.g. a rerodos or stained glass windows, but what Lingen Barker did was to provide the basic 'correct' structure - it would be up to later generations to embellish.

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140. Thomas Lloyd, Julian Orback and Robert Scourfield, *Pevsner, Buildings of Wales, Pembrokeshire,* (Yale: University of Wales Press, 2004), p.246.

141. F. Green and T. W. Barker, 'Pembrokeshire Parsons', *WWHR*., Volume II, op. cit., p.230.

142. *The Pembrokeshire Herald and General Advertiser*, 4 February 1876.

When entering the building today, one is struck by the height of the nave ceiling. This was deliberate, because as Pugin had noted: 'height or the vertical principle, emblematic of the resurrection, is the very essence of Christian architecture'.[143] Morgan goes on to quote from 'The Ecclesiologist' that the chancel should be, 'at least one-third of the length of the Nave, if not externally, by a well-defined mark, a chancel-arch if possible, or at least by a screen and raised floor'.[144] In Little Newcastle, the chancel was almost exactly half the length of the nave (16 feet compared to 30 feet), there is a large gothic arch and the chancel is raised by two steps above the nave. By having another two steps to enter the sanctuary, where the altar was situated, and by placing the pulpit and organ each side of the chancel arch, so that virtually wherever you sat in the church, the altar was visible, the ecclesiologists dream was becoming a reality. It was a rustic fulfilment at St Peter's of the Tractarian aim when they 'advocated cleared chancels and proper sanctuaries with raised and clearly visible altars, pupils and lecterns moved to the sides of the chancel…'.[145]

An aim of the ecclesiologists was to beautify the theatre of worship, but the degree of decoration would, ultimately, depend on what was affordable. Little Newcastle, was not a rich parish and there were no wealthy patrons ready to endow and beautify the structure, as at neighbouring Pontfaen, where Percy Arden lavished his money on transforming the interior of the simple church.[146] But even at St Peter's, an attempt was made to enhance the structure. Stained glass would not have been affordable, but the east and west windows held plain light green coloured glass whilst the single lancet nave windows had clear diamond panes, but surrounding the outer rim was a ribbon of dark green glass. All windows and the south door

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143. Enid Morgan, 'The Church Buildings of Nineteenth-Century Pembrokeshire: The impact of liturgical and architectural changes within the Church of England'. *J.P.H.S.*, Number 14, (2005), op.cit., p.33.

144. ibid. p.33.

145. Gerald Parsons, 'Reform Revival and Realignment: The experience of Victorian Anglianism,' in *Religion in Victorian Britain, I, Traditions,* op.cit., p.33.

146. Thomas Lloyd, Julian Orbach and Robert Scourfield, *Pevsner, Buildings of Wales, Pembrokeshire,* op.cit., pp.364-365.

were surrounded by bi-colour voussoirs.[147] The sanctuary, chancel, nave aisles, the area around the twelfth century font (standing on its new base), in its 'correct' new position near the door and the porch were all tiled. The tiles for the porch were supplied by Peake's Terra Metallic Staffordshire Tiles, but the remainder were Webb's Encaustic Tiles from the Worcester Tileries.[148] The gift of a brass cross, candlesticks and vases for the altar an alms dish, altar cloth and pulpit and lectern falls by local landowners Reverend & Mrs Crookes in 1888 would have been welcome.[149] Building only commenced in the autumn of 1872,[150] but the re-opening only took place in the summer of 1875.[151] Progress was obviously very slow and from the newspaper report,[152] it was completed in two phases, as the church was still being used. One marriage is recorded in 1870, one in 1873, two in 1874 and two in 1875.[153] The lack of funds probably accounts for this and the successor to the I.C.B.S. have confirmed that no correspondence exists between the Society and the Church regarding the 1870s restoration. Probably the experience which Arthur Richardson's uncle had to endure in the 1840s had persuaded the Reverend Arthur not to approach the Society again. A combination of financial gifts and fund-raising events probably raised the necessary money, we know of at

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147. ibid. p.246.

148. *The Pembrokeshire Herald and General Advertiser*, 4 February 1876.

149. *The Pembrokeshire Herald and General Advertiser*, 13 July 1988.

150. *The Pembrokeshire Herald and General Advertiser,* 11 October 1872.

151. *The Pembrokeshire Herald and General Advertiser*, 16 July 1875.

152. ibid.

153. Little Newcastle Parish Registers, 1837-1906, Marriages, (Facsimile) on reflection, this is borne out by a conversation I had with my great-aunt, Mrs Florence Phillips, during the church's centenary celebrations in 1970, who recollected her mother talking am 'yr eglwys fach' ('the small church'), she remembered as a very young girl. My great-grandmother, Mrs Dinah Davies was born in 1871!

least two local newspapers report a bazaar in the summer of 1874[154] and a concert held at Letterston in the autumn of the same year.[155] It would probably have pleased the Reverend Arthur Richardson to know that by today every window contains stained glass of a very high quality, 'artistically, the Church occupies a possibly unique place in the history of stained-glass in Wales.[156]

Having enhanced and beautified the structure, thereby creating an edifice very distinct from the Nonconformists' place of worship, the incumbents also wished to offer the parishioners a style of worship which presented a different experience to Dissenting worship. When the nineteenth century opened, one sees a pattern of worship in St Peter's of Mattins and Evensong, with Holy Communion only being administered at major Church Festivals. This is made clear in the 1828 Visitation Return when the curate, Reverend Michael Davies, states that the Sacrament was only administered four times a year.[157] By the 1851 Return, one sees that the Sacrament is administered monthly[158] and this then becomes the regular pattern for the remainder of the century, but as the Reverend Arthur Richardson notes, Holy Communion was also celebrated at Christmas, Easter, Ascension Thursday and Whit Sunday, but not Trinity Sunday.[159] It is interesting to note that the church had already embraced that popular Victorian invention of the Harvest Festival by at least 1877[160] and the opportunity was taken to decorate the church on quite a lavish scale. In 1909, we read that 'yd, ffrwythau and blodau'[161] (corn fruit and flowers) were used. It was also an opportunity to invite guest

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154. *The Pembrokeshire Herald and General Advertiser*, 14 August 1874.

155. *The Pembrokeshire Herald and General Advertiser*, 27 July 1874.

156. Letter from Reverend Dr John Morgan-Guy to author.

157. 'Visitation Return', 1828, op. cit.

158. 'Visitation Return', 1851, op. cit.

159. 'Visitation Return', 1892, op. cit.

160. 'Visitation Return', 1877, op. cit.

161. *Y Llan*, 5 November 1909.

preachers: in 1891, the Reverend Morris Roberts, Porthmadog preached,[162] or the opportunity was taken to invite a son of the village to occupy the pulpit, as happened in 1897, when the Reverend Samuel Reed, then rector of Llangynyw, Montgomeryshire gave the address.[163]

But the clerics also offered something distinctive to the chapels in the music they used. Whereas the chapels were renowned for their hymn-singing, with an anthem at such events as Sunday School festivals,[164] the church was introducing the singing of the responses and the chanting of the canticles, as well as the singing of the hymns. A choir was established at Little Newcastle and this not only led the singing in their own parish church, but it also joined with other church choirs at major festivals. In 1877, twenty-five choristers from St Dogwells, Little Newcastle and Ford were amongst the 195 strong choir from twelve churches present at the first choral festival held at Fishguard.[165] In 1884, choristers from Little Newcastle were present at the all-Welsh (apart from the sermon!) choral festival held at the Cathedral[166] whilst the Cathedral was the venue of another major choral festival in 1896. Little Newcastle was one of the sixteen church choirs present and the total number of choristers numbered around 250. A fully choral English service, with anthem was held first and this was followed by a fully choral Welsh service, with anthem (Steiner's 'Cenwch gan o fawl') and the total congregation numbered a thousand.[167] The church still has its Victorian Welsh psalter, 'Y Psallwyr Cadeiriol' and it continues to sing the 'Amen' at the end of hymns, which was another distinctive Anglican custom which helped make it different to Nonconformity.

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162. *Y Llan*, 13 November 1891.

163. *Y Llan,* 15 October 1897.

164. *Seren Cymru,* 15 June 1888.

165. *The Pembrokeshire Herald and General Advertiser*, 10 August 1877.

166. ibid., 22 August 1884.

167. *Y Llan*, 3 July 1896.

An accusation often made about the Anglican Church is that it was an 'English' institution and that it was not able to relate to the people of Wales who spoke Welsh. This rather simplistic view is certainly not borne out in Little Newcastle, where there is very strong evidence that Welsh was not only the overwhelming language of worship, but for large periods, the only language of worship. In 1804, the Curate could report in the 'Returns': 'the poor can read Welsh, a few can read English.'[168] The 1807 Return states that the language of the services was, English once a month, the other three Sundays in Welsh[169] but by 1828, the Reverend George Harris stated they were all in Welsh.[170] In 1851, the Reverend Peter Davies Richardson reported that the services were, 'partly in Welsh and partly in English'[171] and this is borne out in the report of the Religious Census of 1851.[172] By 1877, all services are again in Welsh,[173] as they were in 1892,[174] whilst in 1903, the cleric could report that of the Church magazines circulated in the parish, all were in Welsh: ten 'Cyfaill Eglwysig', four 'Perl y Plant' and three of *Y Llan'*.[175] It must also be remembered that the parish has over twenty entries in *Y Llan* between 1887 and 1910.

The parish was also a supporter of that very Welsh concept of the pwnc, when a number of parishes met so that members, often of the Sunday School, could be examined in their knowledge and understanding of a set piece, be it from scripture or the catechism. In 1890, Walton East was the venue and Henry's Mote were also present.[176] In 1896, Little

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168. 'Visitation Return', 1804, op.cit.

169. 'Visitation Return', 1807, op.cit.

170. 'Visitation Return' 1828, op.cit.

171. 'Visitation Return' 1851, op.cit.

172. Ieuan Gwynedd Jones and David Williams, (eds), The Religious Census of 1851. *A Calendar of the Returns Relating to Wales'*, Volume I, South Wales (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1981), p.450.

173. 'Visitation Return' 1877, op.cit.

174. 'Visitation Return' 1892, op.cit.

175. 'Visitation Return' 1903, op.cit.

176. *Y Llan*, 6 June 1890.

Newcastle hosted and welcomed representatives from Walton East, Henry's Mote, Llanycefn and Bletherston. The examination of the Ten Commandments, from the work prepared by the late Reverend Griffith Jones, Llanddowror, took place within the context of two church services, at the first of which the Litany was intoned. Tea was provided by the villagers for all visitors.[177] St Peter's hosted again in 1899.[178] By such means, the church was able to keep it's hold over many of the parishioners, a good number of whom must still have been monoglot Welsh speakers at this time, so there is no evidence from this parish that Welsh was neglected.

The Church is often portrayed also as an institution which only served the upper classes in Wales. But once again this was not the case in Little Newcastle as there were no resident gentry present. Of course, there were landowners and the gentry were always a hovering presence in the background who could make their presence felt. Their majorities were celebrated as when Mr Harding Rees came of age[179] in 1880 , and locals were no doubt thankful when a squire's gift enhanced their lives, as the £5 cheque from the Reverend C. H. Barham of Trecwn which was delivered to the Vicar for distribution amongst the poor of the parish.[180] The village school was also remembered as when George Harries of Rickeston gave £5 towards school funds in 1876[181] and Mr & Mrs J. W. Crookes held a Christmas Tree in 1884.[182] Mrs Edwardes of Sealyham entertained locals with a variety of tunes on the gramophone in 1901 at a time when, 'the gramophone was quite a novelty in the village'.[183] But these were just visitors, they were not regular worshippers in the parish church and did not hold office such as church-wardens. The people who held these posts, or represented

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177. *Y Llan*, 5 June 1896.

178. *Y Llan,* 9 June 1899.

179. *The Pembrokeshire Herald and General Advertiser*, 13 February 1880.

180. ibid. 14 December 1877.

181. ibid. 4 February 1876.

182. ibid. 4 January 1884.

183. ibid. 18 January 1901.

the parish on the Board of the Poor Law Union or were the Correspondent and Managers of the school were the more substantial tenant farmers. Names like John Reed and F. M. R. James appear frequently.[184] These would have been Welsh speaking local employers who would have lived cheek-by-jowl with fellow villagers and even if of a slightly higher social class, they certainly had a lot in common with the 'lesser folk'. They were the leaders of village society and it was the ability of the church to hold on to such families in the parish which helped to ensure the success of Anglicanism in the area. Even to this day, the descendants of the two-named men still play a prominent part in the life of the church and this continuity has been a major reason for the survival of the church.

Having considered the issues of church structure, worship, language and class, it is also worth remembering the contribution the Richardsons made to local society in general, in particular the part they played in increasing the educational provision in the parish.

After the ending of the Circulating Schools, it was the Nonconformists who had taken the lead in education in the parish, especially with the arrival in 1794 of Joseph James 'yr ysgolfeistr'.[185] The 1807 Visitation Return mentions the 'Anabaptist School. In 1832, we are told that David Williams, destined to rise and become a college prinicipal, attended a school at Colston (a hamlet a mile or so outside the village),[186] but that he in turn established a school at Little Newcastle in 1838, which lasted a few years.[187] It was into this void, which the closure of Williams' school created, that the Reverend Peter Davies Richardson stepped. He personally paid the rent for a cottage in the village in which he established a Madam Bevan

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184. 'Visitation Return', 1880, op. cit.

185. Richard Edwards, *Hanes Llangloffan*, op, cit., p.27.

186. Obituary of Principal Williams, *The Pembroke County Guardian and Cardigan Reporter,* 24 January 1908.

187. Lewis James, Pembrokeshire Men of the Century, *The Pembrokeshire County Guardian and Cardigan Reporter,* 2 March 1901.

School, but the date of his action is unknown. The infamous ''Blue Books' do give the school a reasonable report: 'it is in good repair, and there are plenty of benches, but no desks, except planks lent by farmers, which are used as desks. The room is far too small to accommodate the scholars'.[188] Unfortunately, the master was not at home when the inspectors called so we do not hear of the teaching, but Richardson spoke highly of him. However, despite the fact that the school was socially and religiously inclusive, most of the people of the area could not read nor write and twenty children in the parish received no education at all. We do not know when the school came to an end, but it was before 1851, because in the Visitation Return of that year, Peter Davies Richardson writes, 'since the removal of the late Madam Bevan's Charity School from the Parish, I have been obliged to discontinue catechizing the children. When the school was kept in the Parish I always did so during the evening service'.[189] No Anglican Sunday School is recorded in the 1851 Religious Census, but Beulah records forty scholars.[190]

Reverend Arthur Richardson was the next to take up the cause of education and to him probably should go the credit for establishing an 'undenominational elementary school'[191] in the village, (though it was subject to diocesan inspection). Land was obtained from two local landowners[192] and the structure erected, though modest, was to play a pivotal role in the educational and social life of the community for the next seventy years. For the remainder of this life, the vicar was to play a key role in the life of the school and he was a very frequent visitor. A key role was also played by the Vicar's deputies, John Reed and Francis Michael Raymond James, and all three served as managers for the remainder of their

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188. Pembrokeshire Archives, Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Education of Wales: Part 1, Carmarthen, Glamorgan and Pembroke, London, 1848, (Photocopy), pp.414-415.

189. ''Visitation Return, 1851, op.cit.

190. Jones and Williams, *The Religious Census of 1851* op. cit., pp.449, 450 and 453.

191. Visitation Return, 1880, op.cit.

192. 'Land indenture granting the land for the building of Little Newcastle Elementary School', Pembrokeshire Archives, D-TR.1259.

lives. To the Reverend Arthur Richardson's credit, he also started a Sunday School which in 1880 boasted twenty-five scholars, but there were some adults included in that figure.[193]

It was by measures such as these that the two clerics were able to keep the Anglican Church at the very heart of village life. It must also be remembered that Arthur Richardson, in particular also performed many other functions. In 1880, he presided at a concert at the village school,[194] and in 1891, when the Sunday School and Choir had their annual excursion to Goodwick, the mighty repast they enjoyed was paid for by him.[195] To mark the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria in 1897, all the children of the day school (including the Nonconformist children) and the members of the Sunday School went on an excursion by train to Rosebush where the tea was sponsored by Reverend and Mrs Richardson. [196] But perhaps, most important of all, he is remembered as a good shepherd of his flock whose pastoral visits to the village were many. He cared for his people and they, in turn, came to love the church which he represented.

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193. ''Visitation Return', 1880, op.cit.

194. *The Pembrokeshire Herald and General Advertiser*, 2 April 1880.

195. *Y Llan*, 10 July 1891.

196. *The Pembrokeshire Herald and General Advertiser*, 25 June 1897

Chapter 6 – Conclusion

If a thinking, unbiased man had placed a wager in 1800 (knowing the somewhat chequered history the Established Church had enjoyed in the eighteenth century), as to which denomination, Anglican or Baptist, would emerge as the strongest in the parish of Little Newcastle by 1900, he would have placed his money on the Baptists. Would he have had a pay-out? In 1903, from the chapel's contributions book which lists paying members, 87 people are recorded, but four members have no corresponding name, thereby bringing the numbers of paying members (but not necessarily frequent attenders), down to 83. An analysis of the figures records around forty coming from Little Newcastle.[197]

In the same year, the Vicar recorded twenty attending church on a Sunday morning, twenty-eight in the evening and twenty-five at midweek.[198] It is far too simplistic to arrive at a church figure by adding the morning and evening congregations together and deducing that around forty-eight attended, because there would have been a big overlap of those who attended both services, but it is probably fair to say that active church membership would have been between thirty and forty. The bet would have been won, but not by a convincing majority. It is worth pondering that even if we arrive at an active membership of eighty between the church and chapel, a fair number in Edwardian Little Newcastle frequented neither place of worship (the 'unchurched masses', to quote Gerald Parsons[199]) although allowance must be made for a few who were members at places outside the parish e.g. with the Methodists in Puncheston. It is interesting to note that when the Royal Commission which had inquired into the position of the Church and other religious bodies finally reported in

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197. ''Beulah Baptist Chape, Ministry Contributions Book, 1903-1924.

198. ' Visitation Return', 1903, op. cit.

199. Gerald Parsons, 'Reform, Revival and Realignment: The Experience of Victorian Anglicanism', in *Religion in Victorian Britain, I, Traditions*, op.cit., p.111.

1910, it showed for Wales a preponderance of almost three to one for the Nonconformists.[200] The fact that in Little Newcastle the figure was much closer to a fifty/fifty split says much about the ministry of the Richardsons in Little Newcastle for around three quarters of a century.

Building on the modest advances achieved in the eighteenth century, it is apparent that their emphasis on structure, worship and language had proved to be a winning formula and their involvement in education and the general social life of the community reaped very high dividends. But they were also lucky. The fact that a number of key village families, who were all inter-related, remained very loyal Church families was an all-important factor: the Raymond James', Reed and Vaughan clans and their very numerous offspring filled the pews. My grandmother often quoted the fact that when Francis and Charlotte Vaughan and their fourteen children attended church in the first decade of the twentieth century, with every daughter dressed in black skirt and white blouse, they filled three pews completely (and there were only eighteen pews in the nave!).

But even amongst these families there was the occasional wobble: two of F. M. R. and Martha James' children were laid to rest by the entrance to Beulah Chapel, yet when Francis Raymond James died in 1892, almost a convocation of clergy was present or had expressed sympathy at his funeral in St Peter's.[201] But to a remarkable degree the above-named families remained exceptionally faithful to the church. Indeed, an analysis of all the head-stones in the churchyard, undertaken in 2000, records that of the one hundred and twenty-five tombs there then, only around a dozen do not have a known relative recorded on a gravestone, whereas the vast majority are related in some way to each other. With the exceptions noted, the occupants of the churchyard are to a very large degree descended from some six families

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200. Kenneth O. Morgan, *Wales in British Politics, 1868-1922*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1970), p.261.

201. *The Pembrokeshire Herald and General Advertiser,* December 1892.

who have been resident in the parish for at least a quarter of a millennium.[202] And even when an individual left the church and became a member with the Baptists, such as Caroline Morgan, Ffynnone,[203] it was in the churchyard she was buried, as had been the family tradition for generations.

But the Richardsons managed to instill into these families, not just a loyalty to the church, but a love for it. These families offered their sons for its ministry: F. M. R. James' son, the Reverend Thomas Nicholas Raymond James spent much of his ministry in England and was offered preferment by the Archdeacon of Windsor, which he declined,[204] as well as officiating at St Paul's Cathedral in the week Queen Victoria celebrated her Diamond Jubilee.[205] John Reed's son, the Reverend Samuel Reed served in the Diocese of St Asaph and when he died he was Rector of Llangyniew and a Montgomershire magistrate.[206] His son, Reverend John Bennett Reed, rose to be a canon and served the wider Anglican Church. There is a tradition that Thomas Truggott Raymond Vaughan, F. M. R. James' grandson, entered Lampeter to study for the ministry, but never completed the course.

And they were there defending the church when Disestablishment and Disendowment threatened. Gerald Parsons notes that it was the availability of rate support for all schools in 1902 which produced the last great campaign for Nonconformity and 'the last example of the classic Victorian alliance of Tory Party and established church, and Liberal

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202. R. Davies, *St Peter's Church, Little Newcastle, A Directory of the Churchyard,* (Fishguard: Pembrokeshire Press, 2000).

203. 'Beulah Baptist Chapel, Ministry Contributions Book, 1903-1924 'page for 1903.

204. *The Pembrokeshire Herald and General Advertiser*, 18 Janjuary 1884.

205. ibid. June 1897.

206. Headstone inscription.

Party and Nonconformity'.[207] Of course, he was talking for England but in Wales the alliances had one last hoorah over the question of Disestablishment. In Pembrokeshire, it was a battle between 'y coch a'r glas. ('the red and the blue') with the Church-goers supporting their Tory red rosettes and the chapel-goers their Liberal blue rosettes. This is well demonstrated at the political meeting held in support of the Tory candidate, Hon. Hugh Campbell, at the Schoolroom in Little Newcastle in 1898. The Reverend Arthur Richardson, seconded the vote of thanks to the gathering's chairman, whilst the vote in favour of the candidate was proposed and seconded by two brothers-in-laws, Francis Vaughan and Mark Howells,[208] both the sons-in-law of the late F. M. R. James. In 1912, a Church Defence meeting was held in the village,[209] whilst in the years before World War One, two from Little Newcastle, William Reed and Francis Vaughan's nephew, Arthur Thomas, went by train from Letterston to London to attend the anti-disestablishment rally at Hyde Park. Arthur Richardson, who had died in 1911, would have been proud of them. It is also interesting to note that there was no anti-tithe agitation in the parish as there was in some north Pembrokeshire locations.

In this chapter entitled, 'From Dissenters to Free Churchmen: The Transitions of Victorian Nonconformity',[210] Parsons makes this statement, '…the Anglican church in Wales was widely perceived as an essentially English, alien and gentry-dominated church, unsympathetic to Welsh language and culture'. With all generalisations, there are exceptions. I would contend, from the evidence presented that for most of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, the Anglican Church in Little Newcastle was such an exception. True, in the eighteenth century, the Anglican Church in the village did demonstrate

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207. Gerald Parsons, 'Reform, Revival and Realignment: The Experience of Victorian Anglicanism', op.cit., p.61.

208. *Y Llan*, 11 February 1898.

209. *The County Echo*, 13 June 1912.

210. Gerald Parsons, 'Reform, Revival and Realignment: The Experience of Victorian Anglicanism', op.cit.,p.58.

many of the widely known problems which be-set the Church but it was not moribund. However, by the nineteenth century, the Church, played a major role in the religious, social, educational, cultural and political life of the community, operating in the language the people spoke and whilst it was gentry respecting, it was not gentry dominated, as Parsons suggest. For this, the Reverends Peter Davies and Arthur Richardson must take great credit, they managed to contain the Nonconformist challenge despite the latter's active role in the area.

But Little Newcastle cannot be unique and it is interesting to speculate how many other communities in Wales would not recognize themselves from Parson's comment. Where else was Anglicanism an important driving force? But to answer that question falls way outside the scope of this local study!

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Appendices:

1. St Peters Church Little Newcastle

2. Beulah Chapel Little Newcastle

3. Beulah Chapel with the Reverend Jacob John

4. Beulah in the 1920s

5. The Reverend Arthur Richardson 1866-1911

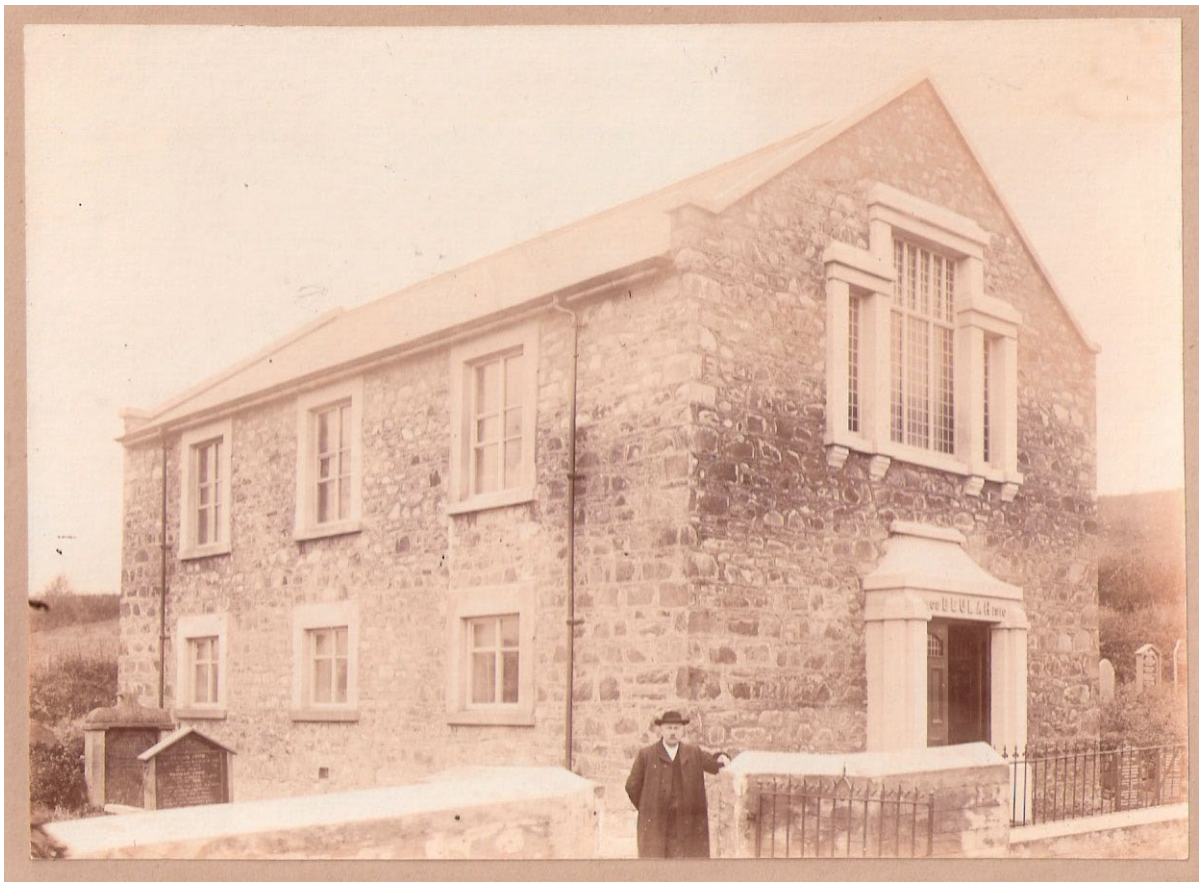
6. Original proposed plan of St Peters Church

7. Actual plan of St Peters Church (following restoration under the Reverend Peter Davies Richardson)

8. Parish Map of Pembrokeshire

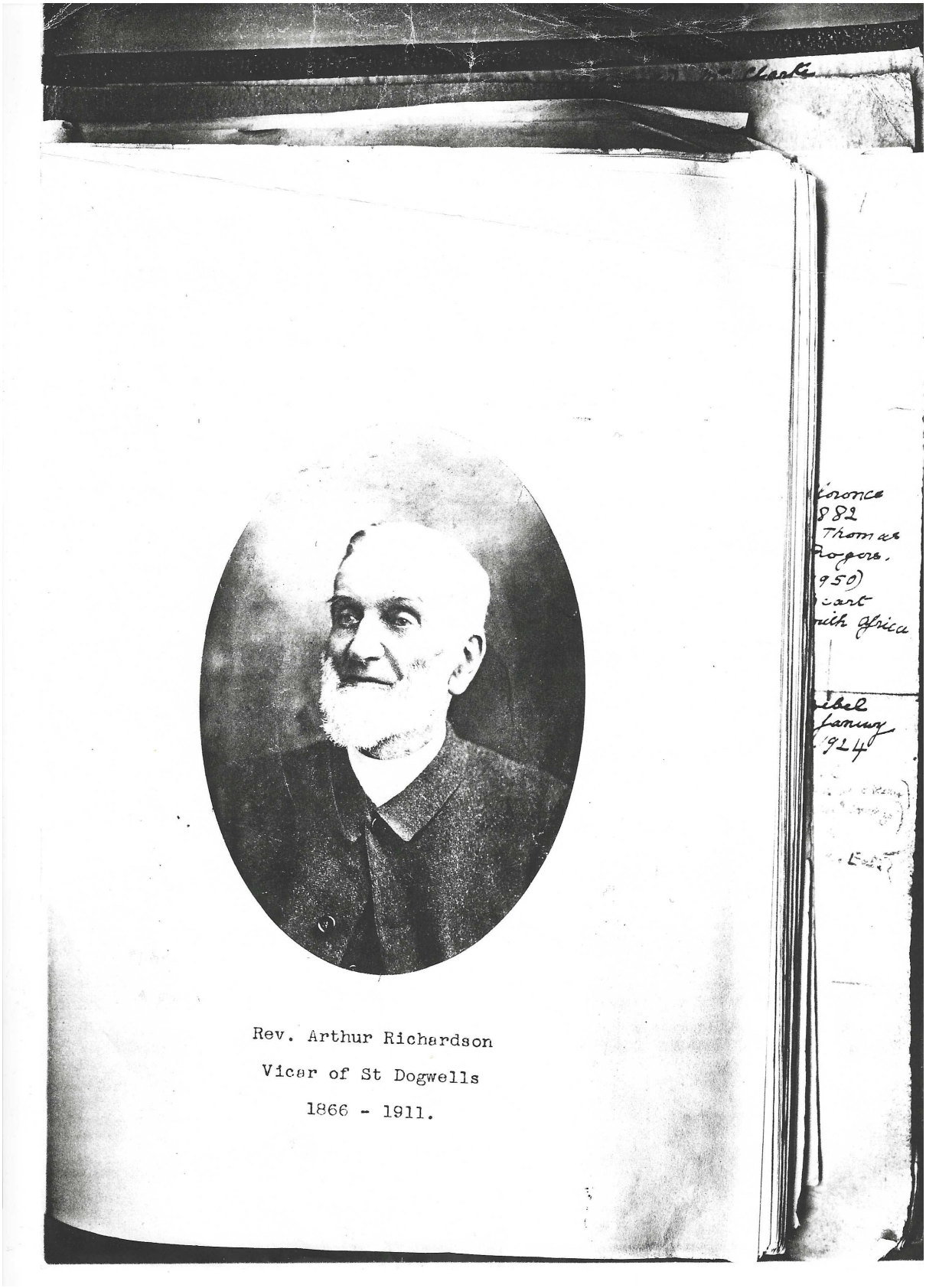
Appendix One – St Peters Church Little Newcastle - St. Peter's Church, Little Newcastle. Its present shape was determined during the long incumbency of Rev. Arthur Richardson.

Appendix Two – Beulah Chapel Little Newcastle



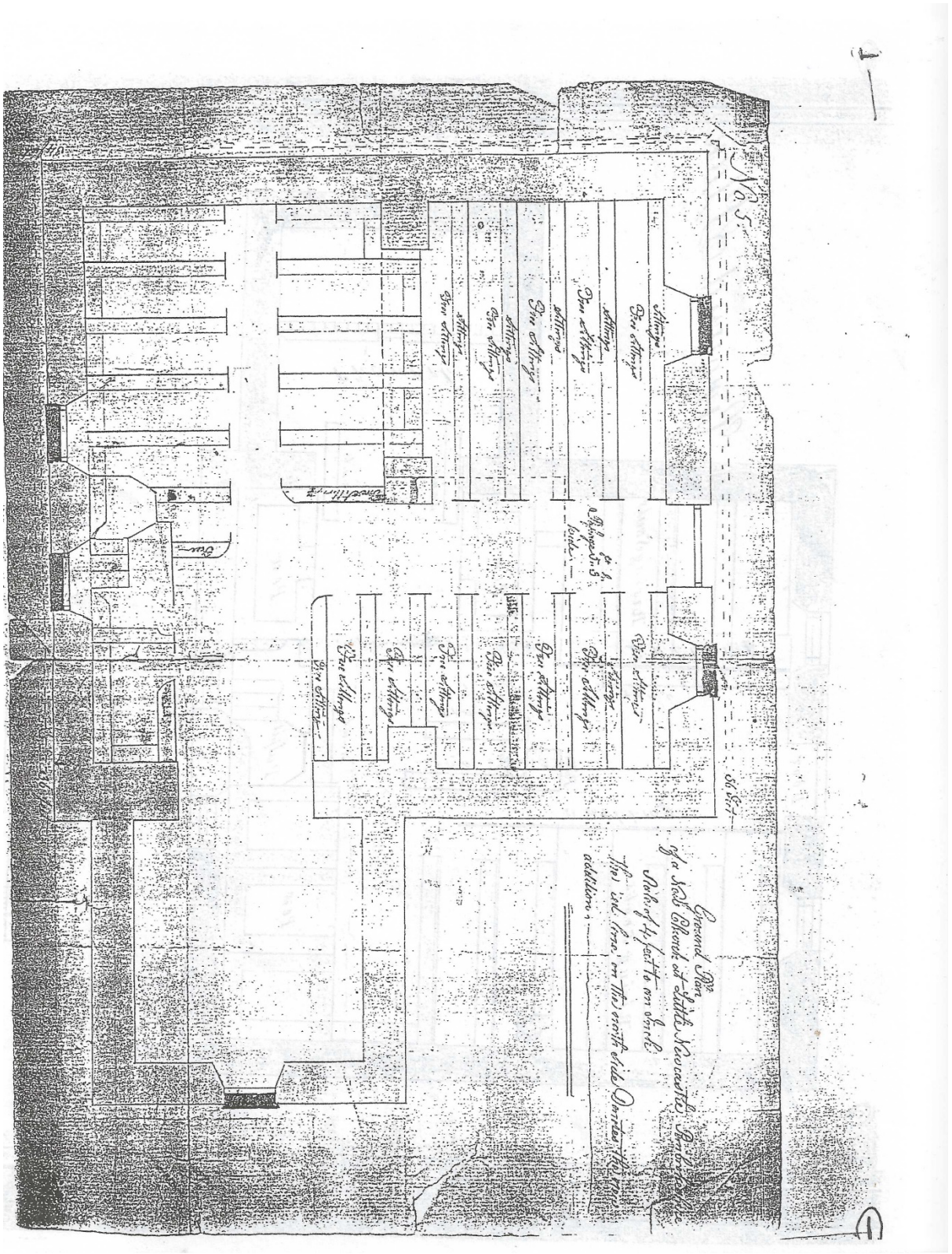
Appendix Three – Beulah Chapel - Standing at the gate is Rev. Jacob John who was responsible for the major work done at the chapel which was re-opened in 1910.

Appendix four - Beulah Chapel c 1924

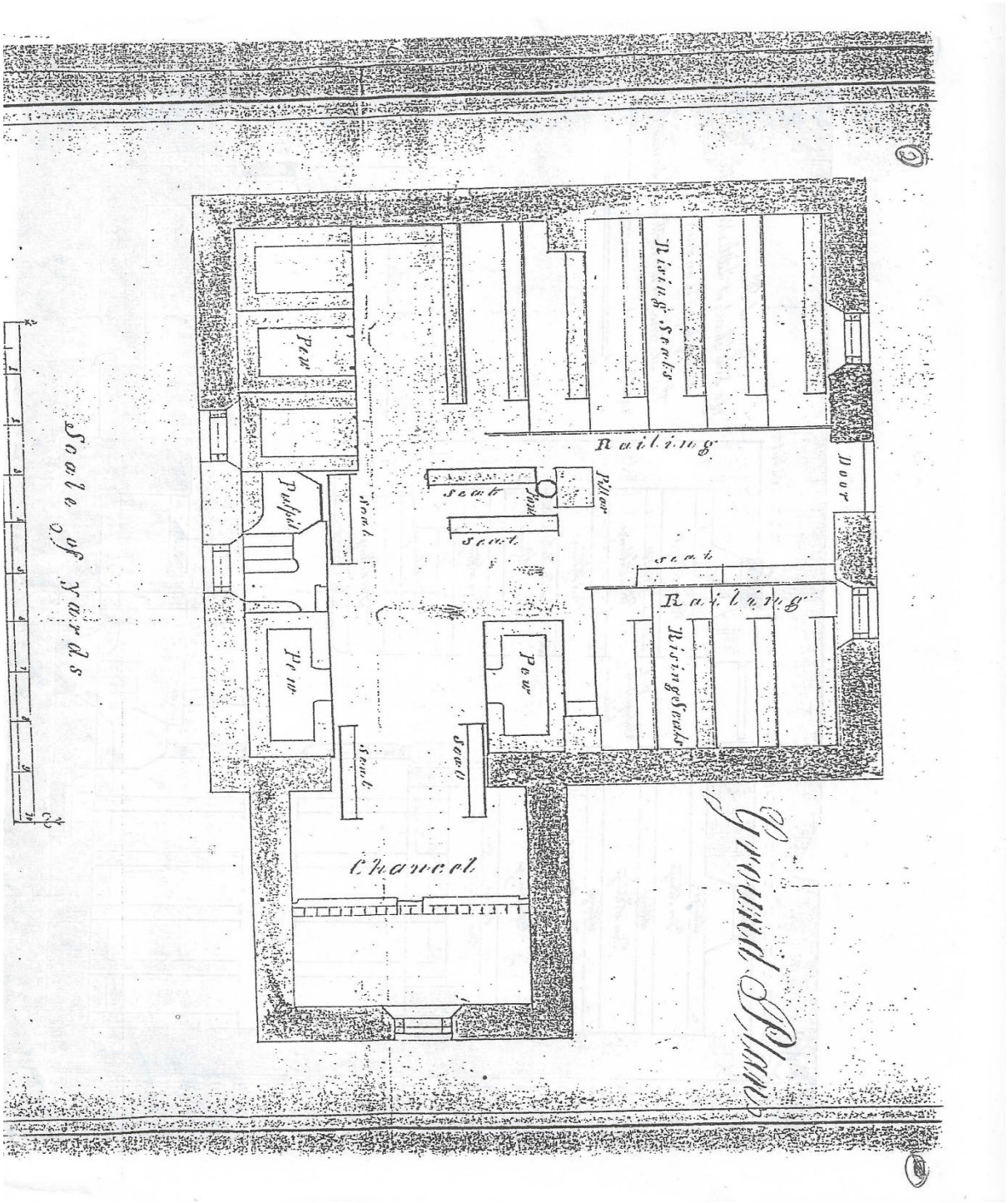


Rev. Arthur Richardson
Vicar of St Dogwells
1866 - 1911.

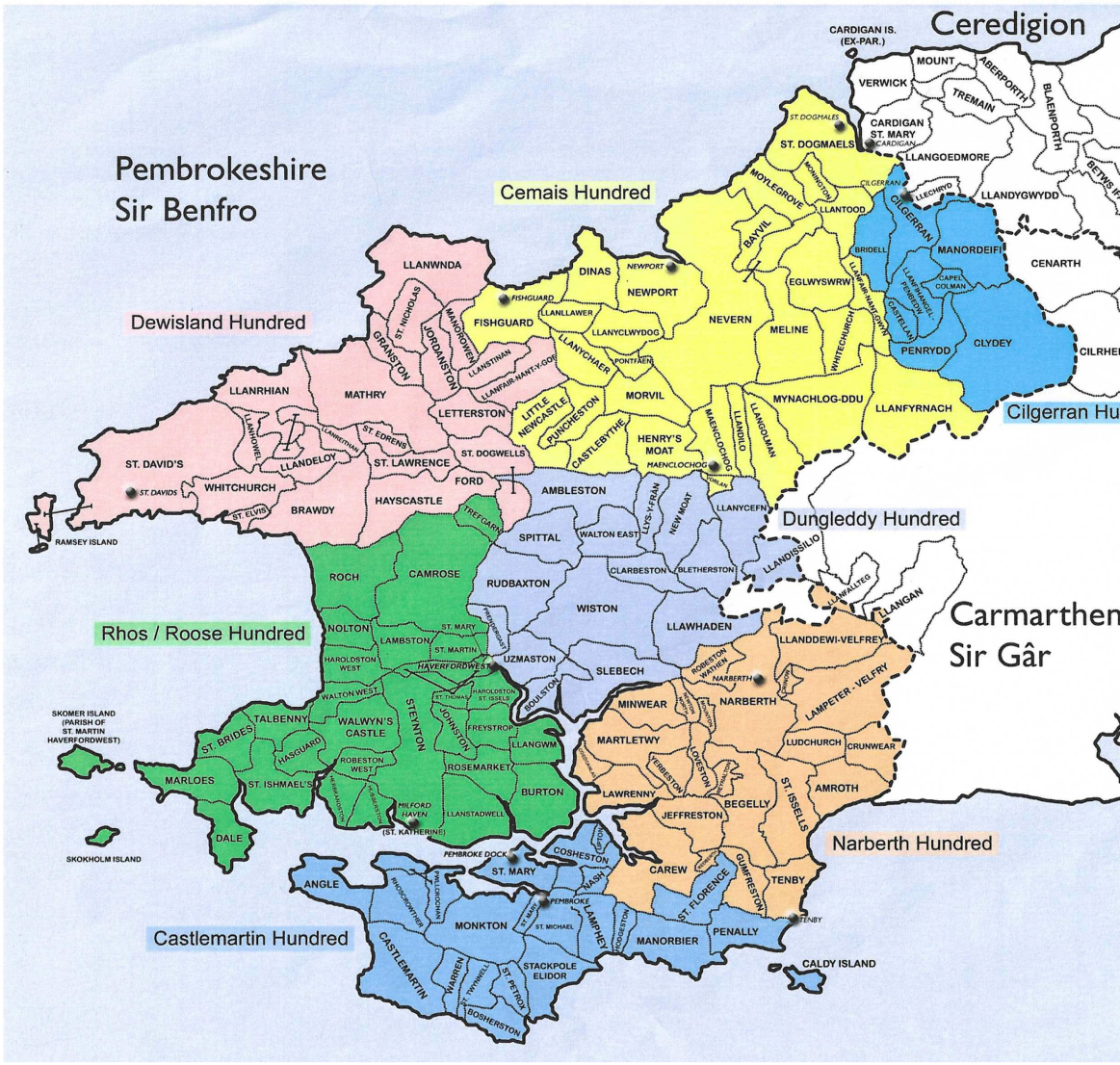
Appendix five – The Reverend Arthur Richardson: Vicar of St Dogwells, 1866-1911



Appendix six - Original proposed plan of St Peters Church



Appendix seven - Actual plan of St Peters Church (following restoration under the Reverend Peter Davies Richardson)



Appendix 8 – Parish map of Pembrokeshire – note the parishes of Little Newcastle and Puncheston, within the Cemais Hundred (in yellow)