

Search for Ancestors of Thomas Jones of Penderyn

Notes from 2006 Trip and Additional Research, by Jay M. Jones



Penderyn Parish Church, St. Cynog's

Introduction

In May 2006, Carolyn and William Heaton, Alan and LuWenn Jones, and Jay and Lorinda Jones visited Penderyn, South Wales, birthplace of ancestor Thomas Jones in 1827. Penderyn is filled with history, symbolized most readily by the parish church. The tower dates back to the 1200s, although the rest of the church was rebuilt in the 1890s. It is believed that there has been a church on the site since the 6th century. Thousands of people have been buried in the cemetery in the churchyard through the centuries.

Below the parish church, at the bottom of the hill, is a small cottage named Troedrhwy'r Llanc where Thomas Jones once lived. Many relatives have visited this cottage over the years. For many in the family, it has

become something of an icon, a link to our Welsh past. But our knowledge of our Jones ancestors has been limited, even after extensive efforts to research the family history over the years.

Several obstacles add to the challenge of family history work in Wales. The first obstacle is the Welsh language. Fortunately, we have translations of some family letters to Thomas Jones in the 1850's and early 1860's. The information from these letters has been helpful, although the location of the letters themselves is unknown to me. The next challenge is the old Welsh patronymic naming system, where a person's surname was taken from the father's first name. To further confuse the issue, there was a somewhat erratic and inconsistent transition from patronymics to fixed surnames. For example, we have Thomas Jones' grandfather being referred to sometimes as John William and sometimes as John Jones. His family was referred to as the "Joneses of Ynyswendorth" in a history of Penderyn. Just when the fixed surname of "Jones" was adopted by the family is not clear. Then there is the challenge of place names, as not only villages and towns had names, but also each farm or dwelling had a name. Quite a bit of variation is found in the spelling of these place names.

In the case of Thomas Jones' ancestors, perhaps the biggest hurdle to overcome is the extensive use of very common names in the family and in the community. For example, Thomas Jones' maternal grandfather was named Morgan Rhys. There were three men named Morgan Rhys or Rees living in Penderyn at the time. It doesn't get easier to establish unique identity for names such as John William or Catherine Thomas. All of these complexities combine to make our family history search a challenging puzzle.

Recently, some local experts have been found that have contributed much to our understanding of our Welsh family history roots, and the history of the Penderyn area. This paper will summarize what we have learned, people who have contributed to this knowledge, and some highlights of the 2006 trip. There are also some indications of places to look for potential additions to our family history information.

Additional Expert Help

Ron Dennis has ignited a lot of interest in Welsh-Mormon history. Now retired as a professor of Portuguese at Brigham Young University, Ron took the time to learn the Welsh language. He then proceeded to translate a multitude of letters, magazine articles, and missionary tracts that shed light on the stories of the large number of Welsh converts to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The result is several books, and several people who want to learn more about their Welsh roots. In a visit with Ron a few years ago, he shared a picture of Ynyswendorth Farm that he had taken, along with the information that both the Thomas Jones family and the Thomas Howells family trace their roots back to common ancestors who lived at this farm. Ron promotes the vision that there is still very much of value to be learned

from our Welsh ancestors, and he demonstrates that although it may be difficult at times, it is worth the effort to dive right in and start going.

Ann Selwood, a native of Penderyn, is a professional librarian at the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth, Wales. She wrote a thesis, titled "The Social and Economic History of the Parish of Penderyn, Breconshire, 1500-1851". This is a very fine work, and it will be of continuing value as we move the knowledge of our family back from the marriage of John William and Catherine Thomas in 1769. Ann has also provided clarification and additional details that have been helpful as I try to put some pieces in place in our family history puzzle.

Celia Morgan, a resident of Penderyn, arranged some great visits for us while we were in Penderyn. We were able to visit with Nansi Selwood, Ann's mother, who has also recorded much of the local history. Celia arranged for us to visit inside the old parish church up on the hill. We also met Nancy James, a descendant of the "Joneses of Ynyswendorth". As it turns out, Celia is also a cousin -- a descendant of Morgan Rhys of Gellidiafolws Farm, which, by the way, is a neighboring farm to Ynyswendorth. Celia has been researching local and family history for years, and has been good to share a wealth of information.

These experts have provided a foundation that can be built and expanded upon. Most of what follows is an attempt to summarize what has been collected by family researchers over the years, combined with the more recent contributions of these experts.

Building on What we Know

Thomas Jones was born in Penderyn in 1827. He emigrated to the United States in 1849 on the ship *Buena Vista* with the first large group of Welsh Mormons to emigrate to Utah. Ronald Dennis' book, *The Call of Zion*, gives a detailed history of this trip. Thomas Jones' future wife, Sage Treharne, and her family, were also on the ship.

Thomas left the following written description of his origins in Wales:

"I Thomas Jones, the son of John and Ann Jones, was born July the 20th, 1827 in a place called Troedrhwy'r Llanc, parish of Penderyn, Breconshire, South Wales. My father before he was married was pretty well off or anyhow they lived first rate and he had a good education. When my grandfather died, he divided the property between the children and my father had his share among the rest, but about that time England called for men to defend their country and my father's lot fell, and he had to pay for a man to go in his place. He'd rather pay than go himself. They called again and he paid, and by that means he was stripped of most all he had. Soon after that he got married. My mother's name before she was married was Ann Rees, daughter of Morgan Rees, but to go back to my father -- as I said before, when he got married he was poor in regards to property but he had health and strength. His former occupation was farming but now he had to turn his hand to anything that came handy."

This written description is still an important starting point for what we know about Thomas Jones and his ancestors. We do not know of any photograph of Thomas Jones, but we have a description of him, written by his son Kumen, that gives us an image of the type of man he was:

Description from memory: My Father, Thomas Jones, was born July 20th 1827, and died in 1862, aged 34 years. Height, five feet and ten inches; hair sandy; whiskers, red; weight, 150; ambitious to get on in the world; thrifty; hard worker. He had a high sense of honor, and stood four-square for honesty with all men. He was what would be called quick-tempered. While camping away from home in stormy weather, hauling timber, he got wet and slept in soaking wet bedding, contracted a severe cold, took to his bed with rheumatism, and suffered unspeakable pain and misery for two years or more before he passed on. Before breaking in health he took a more or less active interest in public affairs; was a counsellor in the bishopric of the Cedar Ward, the L.D.S. Church under two bishops. Father worked on his small farm and at different jobs, some stone mason work, and he worked some time for a company who attempted to make iron.

Letters from Wales

The following translation of a letter from relatives in Penderyn was published in the book, *Lehi Willard Jones*, by York and Evelyn Jones (from pages 29-30):

Herwain, Wales -- March 13, 1860

Dear Children, Here we are taking this opportunity to send you these few lines again, hoping it will reach you and find you all well as it leaves us at present through the mercy of God.

We received your most welcome and loving letter, my dear children, and we were most happy to hear a word from you; for we had given up all hopes of ever hearing from you again for we had not received any letters since April 1854. We sent an answer to your last letter but did not know whether you received it or not. We do not know whether we will be privileged to write many more letters because we are both fast approaching the grave on account of age. Jane (a sister just younger than Thomas) is living with us for a time and helping with the work. John Owen and Gwenllian (an older sister and her husband) and his sister are well and living in the same place. They have five children and one dead.

Signed, Dave and Mary Evans, etc.

The following notes from Merle Platt's research refer to additional information gained from a letter from Wales:

An old letter was found that seemed to establish Morgan Rees of Gellydaflavos, Penderyn Parish, as the father of Ann Rees. The author and the date of the letter were unknown, but it was addressed to Thomas Jones, Cedar City, Utah and was written from Wales. Following are pertinent excerpts from the letter: ". . . Your Grandfather died sometime last summer . . . Benjamin Evans, the President of the mission was released to go home . . ." From this reference to Benjamin P. Evans a search of the SPECIAL INDEX TO MISSIONARIES AND CHURCH LEADERS IN EARLY BRITISH DAYS revealed that Benj. P. Evans emigrated 10 April 1861. The date of the letter was placed at Feb. 1861. "Your Grandfather" referred to in the above letter was Thomas Jones' maternal grandfather, Morgan Rees, for his paternal grandfather did not die until 20 July 1868.

It was John Jones, Thomas Jones' father, who died in 1868. Indications are that Thomas Jones' paternal grandfather, John Jones or John William, died much earlier than that, perhaps 1795. So it was Morgan Rhys that the letter was referring to, and Morgan Rhys of Gellidiafolws Farm near Penderyn died in 1860.

Troedrhwy Llanc Cottage



Troedrhwy Llanc cottage, before repairs



Troedrhwy Llanc cottage in 2006

Troedrhwy'r Llanc is a cottage still present in Penderyn, at the base of the hill where the Penderyn parish church is located. It was in disrepair and about ready to be demolished when Ron and Sheila McKillop, a couple from England, decided to fix it up and live in it. This is the birthplace of Thomas Jones.

In the summer of 2000, Will and Carolyn Heaton visited the cottage and were shown around the home by the McKillops. They were given a photo that showed the cottage at the time repairs were getting started. We were able to visit the cottage again in May of 2006, and were again greeted warmly by the McKillops. They have had many descendants of Thomas Jones stop by to see the cottage, and have been very gracious hosts.



Sharon Hintze, Randall Jones, Ron Dennis at cottage in 2004
(Randall Jones Photo)



The plaque placed on the cottage
(Randall Jones Photo)

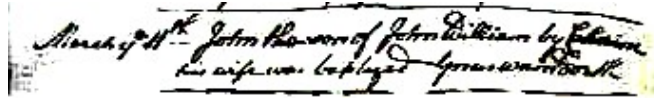
In 2004, an LDS group led by Ron Dennis, and including Thomas Jones' descendants Randall Jones and Sharon Hintze, placed a plaque on the outside wall of the cottage. The words on the plaque are:

One of the many residents of Troedrhwi'llan over the past two centuries was Thomas Jones, born at Penderyn on 20 July 1827. While living in this cottage Thomas was persuaded by the preaching of the missionaries of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon) and received baptism at the hands of Elder William Howells in 1848. The following year he emigrated to America on board the "Buena Vista" under the leadership of Captain Dan Jones. In Salt Lake City three years later Thomas married Sage Treharne, whose acquaintance he had made on board ship. The young couple eventually settled in Cedar City, Southern Utah, where Thomas was employed in the iron works and then in farming. He died in 1862 at the age of thirty five, still faithful to the religion to which he had converted fourteen years earlier, leaving a young widow and six children. His descendants have placed this plaque to honor his memory. (June 21, 2004)

In 2006 there was a program on Welsh TV, "Around Hirwaun", that featured a short segment with Sharon Hintze summarizing the history of Thomas Jones and the cottage.

John Jones, 1791

The father of Thomas Jones was John Jones. He was born in 1791 in Penderyn. The Penderyn parish registers show the following entry for March 11, 1791:



*March ye 11th -- John the son of John Williams by Catherine
his wife was baptized. Yniswendorth.*

Picture of parish register courtesy of Celia Morgan

This entry links John Jones with Yniswendorth Farm. Census records indicate that John Jones was age 50 in 1841 and age 60 in 1851, thus validating 1791 as his year of birth.

John Jones married Ann Rhys, daughter of Morgan Rhys, on 20 May 1820 in Penderyn. Their children are:

Children:

- o 1. John Jones, born about 1820
- o 2. Mary Jones, born about 1821
- o 3. Gwenllian Jones, born 1823, married John Owens
- o 4. William Jones, born 1826, died 1855
- o **5. Thomas Jones, born 20 July 1827, married Sage Treharne, died 2 Sep 1862**
- o 6. Jane Jones, born about 1829
- o 7. Catherine Jones, born 1831
- o 8. Ann Jones, born 1833

Of course, this information is subject to correction with additional information.

Family of John William and Catherine Thomas

John William and Catherine Thomas, grandparents of Thomas Jones, were married 27 May 1769 in Penderyn. They lived at Yniswendorth Farm.

Five children are listed in the parish registers as children of John Williams (or John Jones) and wife Catherine, of Yniswendraeth (Yniswendorth):

- o Gwenllian bap 01.June.1770 daughter of John Williams by his wife Catherine, Yniswendraeth (married Jenkin Howell)
- o Thomas bap 05.Jan.1772 son of John Williams by his wife Catherine, Yniswendraeth (lived at Llwyn Onn, died 1833)
- o William bap 17.Aug.1782 son of John Williams by his wife Catherine Yniswendraeth (died 1823)
- o Catherine bap 05.Nov.1786 daughter of John Jones by Catherine his wife, Yniswendraeth
- o **John bap 11.Mar.1791 son of John Williams by Catherine his wife, Yniswendraeth. (father of Thomas Jones)**

Two more daughters of John Jones are listed in the bishop's transcripts that may be from the same family. (Mother's name is not mentioned, nor is Yniswendraeth or other dwelling place mentioned.):

- o Mary Jones bap 16.Oct.1774
- o Joan Jones bap 21.Sep.1777

Yniswendorth Farm

Yniswendorth Farm is located just north of the village of Penderyn. According to Celia Morgan, the home sustained heavy damage in a fire a few years ago, in which the family living there had a narrow escape. A few years later the home was fixed up, and it is in use as a home again.



Ynyswendorth farm house following a fire
Photo courtesy of Ron Dennis



Ynyswendorth farm house, rebuilt.
Photo courtesy of Celia Morgan

In earlier times, Ynyswendorth farm was also called Gelli Dyfolws Isha. Ann Selwood found the land records which show the residents of Ynyswendorth farm in the mid to late 1700's:

Land Tax returns for Penderyn:

1754	Ynyswendorth	Hywel Prees
1762	Ynyswendorth	John William
1777	Ynyswendorth	John William

Cymorth for Penderyn (manorial tax):

1787	Gelli Dyfolws Isha, (alias Ynyswendorth)	Tenant: John William
1801	Ynyswendorth	Tenant: John Jones' widow

Hanes Plwyf Penderyn

The history of the Jones family in the 1700s is linked to the history of Ynyswendorth Farm. On page 62 of the book *Hanes Plwyf Penderyn* (History of Penderyn Parish), a couple of paragraphs describe the Jones family of Ynyswendorth farm. The following is a translation, courtesy of Celia Morgan:

Jones, Ynyswendareth: A family numerous in number who lived in Penderyn, and to them there were many descendants under different surnames. They were the residents of the land through the 18th century, Thomas Jones of Llwyn Onn, was one of the relations, second husband to Mary, sister to Mr. Rhelnallt Davies, and Miss Catherine Jones was a daughter to him. The farmer of that land at one time.

Gwenllian was one of the Joneses, wife to Jenkin Howell, Wernlas, and she was the mother of the Reverend Richard Howell, the first minister of Pontprenllwyd [an area within Penderyn]. She was instrumental in starting Hermon Chapel, Ystradfellte. The late Thomas Jones (Glaneirulyn) was a descendant of this stock; from Hirwaun, W. Jones (Gwilym Cadlan), and the late Rees Price Jones, author of *Gwen o'r Felin* (Gwen from the Mill) that was victorious in the National Eisteddfod Cardiff in the year 1879. Richard Jones (Ehedydd Cadlan) is the author of the following poem:

Iechyd

*'Cu asbri, corff ac yspryd - heb un poen,
Pena' perth yw iechyd;
Ager ein cryfder o'n cryd -
Yn elfen o'r nefolfyd'.*

Hermon Chapel, Ystradfellte

A couple of miles south of the village of Ystradfellte, and perhaps 3 or 4 miles walking distance from Penderyn, is a Baptist Chapel, constructed in 1798. As I passed by this chapel, I remembered some reference to it from Ann Selwood's thesis. It was late and I was fortunate that the photo that I took turned out as well as it did.



Hermon Chapel, established in 1798.



Aerial view of area surrounding Hermon Chapel. (upper center)

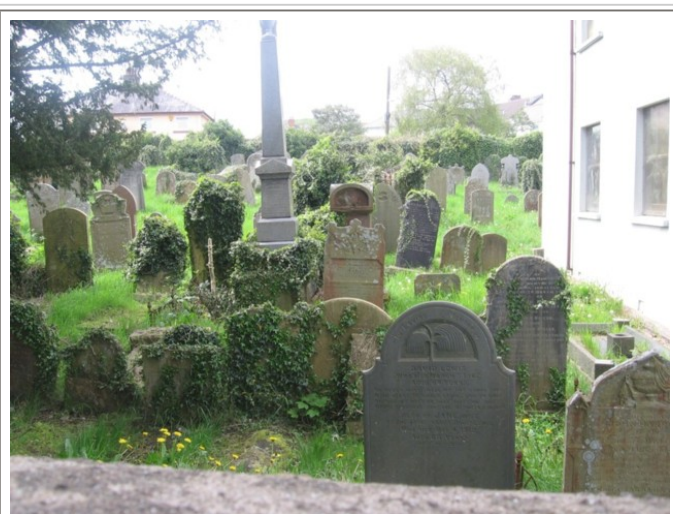
There is likely more information to gather here. Since Thomas Jones' Aunt Gwennlian was instrumental in the establishment of this chapel (see excerpt from "Hanes Plwyf Penderyn, above), it is possible that some Jones relatives are buried here, and there may be records from this church that would be helpful in our continued family history search.

Thomas Howells

Thomas Howells was the son of John Howell, and grandson of Jenkin Howell and Gwennlian Jones. Thomas Howell's father was a first cousin to Thomas Jones. Thomas Howells was baptized into the LDS church in October 1849, and he emigrated to the United States a year later. This was a bit of a local scandal, for Thomas Howell's uncle, Richard Howell (also Thomas Jones' first cousin) was the first Baptist minister in Penderyn. Thomas Howells arrived in Salt Lake in 1851. It appears that Thomas Jones and Thomas Howells kept in touch, for Thomas Jones recorded: **"26th of April, 1852. Due to Thomas Howels from Thomas Jones, 131 lbs. of flour."** This may have been payment in exchange for labor in building a home. Thomas Howells remained in Salt Lake City, while Thomas Jones moved south, first to Palmyra (Spanish Fork) and then to Cedar City. In 1870, Thomas Howells was called on a mission to Wales. He kept a journal of his missionary experiences, which included visits to Penderyn and vicinity, and visits to family members in the area.



Hen Dy Cwrdd, Cefn Coed y Cymmer.



Unitarian cemetery, Cefn Coed y Cymmer

The following is from Thomas Howells' missionary journal:

27th. In company with E. Edwards, visited Abel Evan's grave in the cemetery of Cefncoedycymer; and also visited the Unitarian cemetery to get the genealogies of Thomas Jones's relation. Called upon Howell Morgan; took tea with him and had a long conversation about the principles of the gospel. . . .

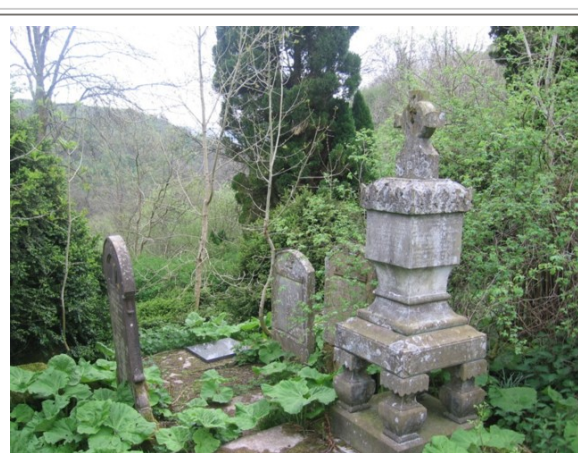
It is not known that the Thomas Jones he refers to is our ancestor Thomas Jones, but it would appear to be a strong possibility. If so, then there may be some relations to be found at the Unitarian cemetery at Cefn Coed y Cymer, which is a suburb of Merthyr Tydfil. The Unitarian Chapel was established in 1747 and is still in use today. It is named Hen Dy Cwrdd (Old Meeting House), and the cemetery is adjacent to the chapel. There is a locked gate that kept me from going into the cemetery, but I took a picture over the wall. I have ordered a copy of the monumental inscriptions from this cemetery.

Vaynor

The village of Cefn Coed y Cymer, although now a suburb of Merthyr Tydfil, was part of the parish of Vaynor in Breckonshire. Vaynor is a neighboring parish to Penderyn. The parish church of Vaynor is located in a small valley, well isolated from the nearby city of Merthyr Tydfil. If Thomas Jones had relatives at Hen Dy Cwrdd, there may also be relatives at Vaynor.



Vaynor Parish Church



Vaynor cemetery

A cemetery surrounds the church. Newer sections of the cemetery are cared for, but older sections have become overgrown and neglected. While staying in a bed and breakfast within the parish boundaries, I asked if there were any local historians for the parish of Vaynor. The host was not acquainted with any.

Morgan Rhys

As noted earlier, Thomas Jones stated that his mother was Ann Rees, daughter of Morgan Rees. There were three men in Penderyn at about that time with that name.

- o (1) Morgan Rhys of Gellidiafolws Farm.
- o (2) Morgan Rees of Gellibenuchel farm (The Gelly).
- o (3) Morgan Rees of Hepste Farm. He married Ann Giles.

It is believed that Morgan Rhys of Gellidiafolws is our ancestor. As mentioned earlier, there was a letter written to Thomas Jones in about 1861, informing him of his grandfather's death. In Merle Ballantyne Platt's research, she noted the following certificate: "Morgan Rees, age 91, 18 May 1860, farmer at Gellydefolas, Penderyn: Informant, Morgan Morgan in attendance, Garwdyla, Penderyn."

On Page 66 of *Hanes Plwyf Penderyn* (History of Penderyn Parish), by Dewi Cynon, the following translations contains the information given on Morgan Rhys of Gellidiafolws:

The occupier of Gellidiafolws in 1780 was Lleision Rhys, one of the "Neath Leyshons", who inhabited the main smallholdings of Glynneath for generations. One of them was Lleision Morgan Tremains, near Bridgend,

Glamorgan. Lleision Rhys was succeeded on the farm by his son, Morgan, who was looked upon as a man of learning in those days, and who kept a day-school at Gelli'rneuadd. He fathered a large family, and many of his descendants have emigrated to Australia, California, and the British Colonies, and succeeded well, so we hear. Margaret, one of Morgan Rhys's daughters, married Robert Roberts, stone cutter, of Pantygerddinen. Roberts was a great friend of Gwilym Harri of Garwdyle, the bard. Margaret Roberts died at 86 high St., Merthyr (Tudful) in January 1885, leaving two children, Morgan and Anne. Morgan Roberts is a responsible trader in Merthyr today, with an ironmongerly business. Anne m. William Scott of 103 Brecon Road, Merthyr Tudful in August 1859; Their daughter Sarah Margaret Scott, better known as Miss Metta Scott of Merthyr, made a name for herself throughout Wales as a violinist and pianist. She was the organist at Gobaith Chapel, Merthyr, for many years . . . Morgan Rhys's grandson of the same name is the present occupier of the smallholding.

Celia Morgan of Penderyn is a descendant of Morgan Rhys of Gellidiafolws. She has researched the family extensively, but did not know of a daughter Ann in the family. She thought that since the local custom at the time was to name children after parents and grandparents and other relatives, there should have been a daughter Ann since there was a mother named Ann. Also, she did not know of any descendants of Morgan Rhys in North America.

Celia found a reference in Cadoxton, near Neath, that indicates that Morgan Rhys had a daughter born out of wedlock in 1795. He married Ann Gething in Cadoxton on 21 Dec 1799, but moved to Penderyn by 1803, where most of his children were born and then christened in the Penderyn parish church.

The family of Morgan Rhys includes the following children:

- o 1. Ann, born 1795. Married John Jones in 1820. Mother of Thomas Jones.
- o 2. Thomas, baptized 30 Aug 1800, Cadoxton. Died 1833.
- o 3. Jennet, born 1801.
- o 4. Margaret, (1802-1885).
- o 5. Owen, (1806-1885).
- o 6. Mary, born 1811.
- o 7. Morgan, (1812-1819).
- o 8. Leyshon, (1814-1886).
- o 9. Harriet, born 1817.
- o 10. Rees, (1820-1882).
- o 11. Dafydd, (1824-1851).

The father of Morgan Rhys was Thomas Rhys. (The note in *Hanes Plwyf Penderyn* that said that Lleision Rhys was the father of Morgan Rhys is in error. Lleision Rhys was an older brother.)

Thesis, "The Social and Economic History of the Parish of Penderyn"

In 2001, Ann Selwood completed a thesis entitled "The Social and Economic History of the Parish of Penderyn, Breconshire, 1500-1851". This very well written thesis completed requirements for a Master's degree at The University of Wales, Aberystwyth. Ms. Selwood is a professional librarian on the staff of the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth, and a native of Penderyn.

The thesis gives a good overview of the geography, geology, and climate of the parish that have influenced the social, agricultural, and industrial history of the area. It also brings in court records, probate records, and church records that provide glimpses of life in Penderyn, and changes that took place over time. The thesis is also well documented, and there is much information in the footnotes and bibliography.

The thesis also contains some family history information in the 1600's for some of the Penderyn families. I have not yet determined if or how we might be related to some of these families. The thesis will be of more value to us as we learn more about our family, and extend our knowledge back another generation or two.

Following is an extract of a few pages taken from the thesis that describe the religious nonconformists of the 18th and 19th centuries in and around Penderyn. By joining the L.D.S. church, Thomas Jones became a nonconformist. Also, some of his relatives were involved in non-conformist denominations.

NONCONFORMISTS

[Starting on Page 270] Reference has been made to the influence of the Merthyr dissenters on Penderyn parish in the seventeenth century. The number of declared dissenters, however, was low, and thereafter there is no record of Nonconformist activity in the parish until the late eighteenth century. It is likely that all but the most ardent dissenters conformed at least outwardly to the requirements of the established church, and on the other hand the Rectors and curates of Penderyn may well have been sympathetic or apathetic and provided the nonconformists were discreet, were willing to turn a blind eye to their activities.

Undoubtedly, the Merthyr dissenters maintained their links with the parish as according to Dewi Cynon, it was four members of Seion Baptist chapel in Merthyr Tydfil who established the first Nonconformist chapel in the parish in 1795. (27) The names of these founder members were: David Owen Daview, Edward Evans, David Jones and Ben Richards. Edward Evans, a manager at the Cyfarthfa iron works, was originally from Carmarthenshire, an early example of how the ironworks were attracting people from farther afield, and many of these immigrants were Nonconformists. The Baptists' meetings were first held in the farmhouse of Penpont in Cwm Taf and then in a house at Ynysfelin. In 1798, another of their founder members, and an assistant preacher, David Owen Davies, was ordained minister. His son, David David, was appointed as his assistant in 1838, and took over the ministry when his father died in 1853. The numbers grew very quickly, and included people from Cwm Cadlan like Richard Howells of Wernlas. In 1799 it was decided to build a chapel. They obtained a substantial plot of ground on the farm of Penpound, close to Pwllcoch Mill, sufficient for chapel and graveyard, and called the chapel Bethel. The records of Penderyn Church at this time give some account of the Nonconformists in the area, but it is limited and biased since the clergy were doing their best either to ignore or play down the nonconformist presence. In 1799 Lewis Price the Curate of Penderyn reported that there were no papists, there were a few Presbyterian dissenters, but they had no meeting house in the parish and went to Coed y Cymmer in the parish of Vaynor. He at least acknowledges the establishment of the Baptist Chapel at Ynysfelin, which he called a "meeting house", but commented that "they do not seem to increase in number", (28) a remark manifestly incorrect with regard to a denomination which had increased in numbers sufficiently to have recently built a chapel. He also ignored the fact that a number of his parishioners attended the independent Chapel of Hermon in Ystradfellte which had been built in 1799. Among the founding members of this chapel from Penderyn, were William Jenkins, Cae Hywel, **William Jones, Ynyswendorth**, Hywel Rhys, Pantcynferth, John Rhys, Gelliffynhonau and **Gwenllian Howell, Wernlas**. (29)

The numbers of Baptists in the parish continued to increase and in 1818 another branch was established at Pontbrenllwyd where the Baptists were particularly strong. (30) Richard Howells of Wernlas, was one of the founders and became minister of the chapel called Siloam. It was built by the new turnpike road, and was officially opened in 1823. Dewi Cynon describes the chapel as being a small building with an earthen floor and benches for the congregation, a kind of armchair with a high back to serve as a pulpit with a shelf to hold the Bible, the preacher standing on a bench behind it. The chief deacon sat in a chair below the pulpit to assess whether his doctrine was correct and suitable. If it was not, the preacher was brought before the Council to give an account of his doctrine. Baptisms were held in the River Cadlan nearby. In 1828 the Rector of Penderyn reported that Bethel, Ynysfelin and Siloam, Pontbrenllwyd, each had a congregation of approximately 80 people. (31) In 1839, Bethel was said to have approximately 60 members, Siloam 50. (32) By 1851 the congregation of Siloam had increased considerably. The Religious Census reported that they had space for 154 people and on the day the census was taken, they had a congregation of 50, plus 51 scholars; while in the evening the congregation numbered 105. (34)

Other denominations did not establish churches or chapels in the parish until much later. However, the growth of the ironworks led to the establishment of a number of chapels at Hirwaun, just over the river from Penderyn Parish. As with Hermon, Ystradfellte, because they were outside the parish boundaries they were not mentioned in the reports of Penderyn Rectors, even though they attracted many parishioners. The first known meeting house "Capel Harris" was said to have been built in the 1800s by a Mr. Joseph Harris, near the bottom of Heol y Felin. (35) Here, apparently, all denominations met to hold services and Sunday Schools. The 1820s saw a spate of chapel building in Hirwaun, Nebo - Independents, 1823; Bethel - Calvinistic Methodists, 1823; Soar - Wesleyan Methodists, 1824; and Ramoth, Baptists, 1825, all with large congregations.

In 1841 there was a **Mormon chapel, Tabernacl, in Hirwaun**. (36) In the religious census of 1851 the average attendance of this chapel was recorded as follows:

- o Welsh Meeting, morning 22; afternoon 20; evening 53.
- o English Meeting, morning 12; afternoon 17; evening 30. (37)

Hirwaun was unusual as it was the only one of the Mormon congregations of the Merthyr and Aberdare valleys to hold meetings in English. (38) The Mormons were keen to preach and publish in the Welsh language, so the English service indicates the presence of a number of English speakers who had a separate English section under an English elder, George Rogers. The congregation at Hirwaun was quite small compared with the numbers recorded for the other denominations in

the parish, and the building was not used exclusively as a place of worship. This is not unusual as the purpose of the Mormon evangelising missions during this period was to persuade converts to emigrate to the "New Jerusalem" in America. A large number of Mormons from South Wales, including some from Hirwaun, had emigrated in 1849 and these were followed by others in the 1850s, prompted not only by religious zeal, but to escape persecution, as by this time there was considerable opposition to the Mormons in South Wales, particularly in Merthyr Tydfil, and when Captain Dan Jones visited the town in 1849, the house where he stayed was attacked every night. The chapels were also vehemently opposed to the Mormons. (39)

A Methodist chapel, Jerusalem, was established at the Lamb village in Penderyn in 1857; with the assistance of members of Bethel Chapel, Hirwaun, and the Independents in the parish eventually established their own chapel, Soar in 1858. (40) There were also a few Unitarians in the parish, but they were not large enough in number to establish a church of their own. An attempt was apparently made by the Rev. John Jones, of Hen Dy Cwrdd, Trecynon, but it was unsuccessful. (41) The members of this denomination travelled to Hen Dy Cwrdd, Cefn Coed y Cymmer, which had been established in 1747. (42) Among their number was the weaver Gwilym Harri and his family, who journeyed regularly over the hill on horseback and on foot.

Gwilym Harri belonged to a highly able and gifted family. His grandfather Sion Llewelyn of Cefn Coed y Cymmer had been a leading member of the Unitarians there and a founder member of **Hen Dy Cwrdd**. (43) Like his grandfather, Gwilym Harri was a noted poet. Two volumes of his poetry were published, *Yr Awen Resymol* in 1828 and *Nodd Awen* in 1835. He was born on the tenement of Garw Dyle in 1762, and he and his family lived for a while in a cottage on the farm of Llwynonn, before moving to Pontbrenllwyd, where he remained until his death in 1844. (44)

While the local clergy were doing their best to ignore or play down the Nonconformists, their activities drew the attention of many and the local poets were quick to comment on them. Gwilym Harri was particularly well-placed to observe new developments. His cottage at Pontbrenllwyd was situated right by the river Cadlan and the tramroad from Ysgubor Fawr to Hirwaun, and when the Baptists established their chapel at Pontbrenllwyd in 1824, their members were baptized in the river only yards from Gwilym Harri's door. He was a devout Unitarian, a denomination which placed great importance on reason. He was critical of other denominations and often used humour to draw attention to what he regarded as their failings, for example, among his comments on the Baptists is a poem entitled: 'Cyffes y Gwrthfedyddiwr neu Y Cristion Sych', (45) the first verse of which reads:

Pe ba'wn y cyflawn goelio bod dw'r yn puro dyn
Oddiwrth y baich o bechod, mi awn i hwn fy hun;
Cymmerwn fy ngorchuddio, heb gel ar go'dd y wlad,
Y'ngolwg mil o werin heb gynnig un naccad.

Gwilym Harri was not the only commentator. The Revival of 1828-9 had a considerable effect on the people of Penderyn and neighbouring parishes. One meeting, at Hermon, Ystradfellte, was particularly well attended and a number were blessed. A local poet, however, noted that for one individual at least, his newfound grace was short-lived, lasting no longer than the next pint of beer. (46)

NOTES:

(27) David Davies (Dewi Cynon), op. cit., pp. 97-99.

(28) NLW, Church in Wales, Bishops Visitations. Queries and Answers. Archdeaconry of Brecon. SD/QA/253. (1799).

(29) David Davies (Dewi Cynon) -- Unpublished MSS in possession of Mrs. Nansi Selwood, Penderyn.

(30) David Davies (Dewi Cynon), *Hanes Plwyf Penderyn*, (Aberdar, 1924), pp. 100-102.

(31) NLW, Church in Wales, Bishops Visitations. Queries and Answers. Archdeaconry of Brecon. SD/QA/200. (1828).

(32) David Davies (Dewi Cynon), op. cit., pp. 98-99.

(33) NLW, Church in Wales, Bishops Visitations. Queries and Answers. Archdeaconry of Brecon. SD/QA/206. (1848).

(34) *The Religious Census of 1851: a calendar of returns relating to Wales. Vol 1: South Wales*. (Cardiff, 1976), p. 184.

(35) Nansi Selwood, *A history of the villages of Hirwaun & Rhigos*, (Penderyn, 1997), p. 70.

(36) Census of Great Britain, 1841. Returns for Penderyn Parish.

(37) *The Religious Census of 1851: a calendar of returns relating to Wales. Vol 1: South Wales*. (Cardiff, 1976), p. 184.

(38) *The Religious Census of 1851: a calendar of returns relating to Wales. Vol 1: South Wales*. (Cardiff, 1976).

(39) Geraint Bowen, *Ar drywydd y Mormoniaid: golwg ar hanes y Mormoniaid Cymreig, 1840-80*. (Llandysul, 1999), p. 17, 34-36, 52, 65, 112.

(40) David Davies (Dewi Cynon), op. cit., pp. 111-112.

(41) Ibid. p. 116.

(42) Tom Lewis (Mab y Mynydd), *History of the Hen Dy Cwrdd Cefn Coed y Cymmer*. (Llandyssul, [1947]), p. 20.

(43) Ibid.

(44) David Davies (Dewi Cynon), op. cit., pp. 177.

(45) Gwilym Harri, *Yr Awen Resymol*. 2il arg. (Aberdar, 1910), p. 33.

(46) David Davies (Dewi Cynon), Unpublished MSS. (In possession of Mrs. Nansi Selwood, Penderyn.)

Nansi Selwood Writings



Nansi Selwood

Nansi Selwood is the mother of Ann Selwood, the author of the thesis. Nansi lives in Penderyn in a farm home that dates back to the 1500's.

Nansi is a retired school teacher, and collected historical information from the area. She wrote a booklet about the history of Penderyn to share with school children. Later, she wrote a historical novel, *The Land of Brychan*, which is set in Penderyn at the time of the English Civil War in the mid-1600's.

Nansi also wrote another book, *A history of the Villages of Hirwaun & Rhigos*, which contains some excellent information about two villages that are close neighbors to Penderyn. Nansi is now in her eighties, is in good health except for failing eyesight, and we had a delightful visit with her.

In the booklet about the history of Penderyn, a short section covers the building up of the iron and coal industries in Hirwaun, which borders Penderyn to the south.

Then in the 1750s it became known that there was plenty of good ironstone in the land on both sides of the River Cynon on the border with Glamorganshire. It had become possible to use coal for smelting and there was plenty of that on Hirwaun Common on the other side of the river. Lime was also needed and Penderyn could supply as much of that as was needed. A Brecon businessman called Mayberry bought part of the farm called Tir Gwyn Bach and built an Ironworks on the Penderyn side of the River Cynon. There were also other iron works a few miles away at Abernant, Aberaman and Llwydcoed. The demand for Penderyn's limestone led to the opening of several quarries on the farms of Pantcynferth and Ysgubor Fawr, on the Foel and Llwyn Onn. A tramroad was built to Penderyn to convey the limestone to the ironworks.

All this new activity brought many changes, for the ironworks, the quarries and the tramroad offered far better wages than could be earned on the farms. Men left the land in droves and many of the smallholdings in Penderyn were abandoned. Their ruins can still be seen here and there among the fields and along the banks of the streams. Streets of small cramped cottages were hurriedly built on both sides of the river Cynon as people flocked to work in the ironworks and mines. The work may have been better paid but the conditions were dreadful and often very dangerous. Children were employed to carry waste to the tips and help the men with their work and there were often terrible accidents. Boys and girls were also employed in the mines, filling and pushing trams while quite small boys were made to sit all day in the dark, opening and shutting doors for the trams. Fathers were encouraged to take their young sons and daughters to work with them because they could then have an extra tram to fill, though the girls received no pay for themselves.

However there were many people who were opposed to the employment of children in such conditions and in 1842, the Government sent inspectors to report on the situation in the mines and iron works of South Wales. One little Hirwaun girl, Elisabeth Williams, aged 9, told the inspector, "she had been below ground six months, assists to fill her father's trams; does not remain underground more than six or eight hours; does not like the work at all; was first taken by Father because he could get another tram for me; a good many girls beside me work in the mines at pushing the trams and tipping." The Commissioner adds "rather intelligent and reads a little English."

The future for this little Elisabeth must have seemed very bleak, but for another girl, from Penderyn, Elisabeth Harris, who went to work in the Hirwaun Ironworks, it turned out to be like a fairy tale come true. At that time the works were owned by the Crawshay family and the youngest son Henry was manager there. He saw Eliza Harris and fell in love with her. His family did all they could to stop him marrying her and he was moved to other works, to Treforest and then to the Forest of Dean, but to no avail. Henry took his Eliza to London and married her there. He settled her in a fine house in the Forest of Dean, where she lived the life of a grand lady and had many servants to wait on her. Later he built a mansion for her on the banks of the River Severn and a holiday house on the Gower coast because she was homesick for her native Wales. They were very happy together and had a large family.

Video, "Fishlock's Wildtracks: Around Hirwaun"

This 25 minute video was produced for a Welsh television program. Trevor Fishlock travels around Wales, and produces feature programs. One that aired in 2006 was about the Hirwaun area, including Penderyn. Several sites of local interest were mentioned, including a short segment on Troedrhwy'r Llanc Cottage, and a narrative by Sharon Hintze explaining Thomas Jones' trek to Utah. The program also included segments on Craig y Llyn (a mountain overlooking Hirwaun and Penderyn), Llyn Fawr (a lake with ancient artifacts -- the oldest iron objects manufactured in Britain, dated 700 B.C., were found here), Tower Colliery (only coal mine still in operation in South Wales), mention of a local poet that translated the New Testament into Welsh, and a walk to the Sgwd yr Eira Waterfall near Penderyn.

Other LDS members from nearby Penderyn

Besides Thomas Howells, who was described in an earlier section, there are several other early converts to the L.D.S. Church from the area near Penderyn who emigrated to Utah and Idaho. Since the Hirwaun, Aberdare, and Merthyr Tydfil areas were heavily industrialized, some of the workers were drawn from far away. Others may have had local roots, and there may be ties found to Thomas Jones. The following list is not comprehensive, but is included as a starting point.

Evan Morgan Evans was born January 17, 1804, the second of eight children born to Rachel Morgan Evans and David Evans in Hirwaun, Wales. Evan was a mason by trade, building many beautiful buildings. Evan married Jennet (Janet) Jones of Penderyn, Wales, on May 15, 1826. They spent most of their married life in Merthyr, Tydfil and were the parents of 11 children; three of the children died while they still lived in Wales. Evan and Janet Evans joined the LDS church in Merthyr Tydfil, and emigrated to the United States aboard the Buena Vista in 1849. They settled in Brigham City. Their son, Edward Jones Evans, was one of the first settlers in the Malad, Idaho valley.

Edward "D" Evans was born 27 July 1812, son of David Evans and Rachel Morgan Evans, in Hirwaun, Wales. He married Alice Richards in 1849. She was born in Merthyr Tydfil in 1827. They had seven children. He died in Malad, Idaho, in 1882. She died in Malad in 1888.

Richard Palmer, born 20 Mar 1828 in Aberaman, Aberdare, Wales. Settled in Cedar City, Utah. Married Johanna Rees from Wales. Many of the Palmer families in Cedar City are his descendants.

Cicelia Jones Evans, daughter of Daniel Jones and Mary Lloyd, born 1 July 1812 in Cefn-coed-y-cymmer, Breconshire, Wales. Married William Evans, 2 Nov 1829, Vaynor, Breconshire, Wales. Died 23 July 1892, Paragoonah, Utah.

William and Rachel Evans Rowland, 1849 immigrants from Wales, had taken up residence in Kaneshville. They and four of their children had visited with William's brother, apparently in Lexington, Kentucky, and boarded the steamboat *Saluda* to return to Kaneshville. On the way, on the morning of 9 April 1852, the boilers aboard the steamship exploded near Lexington, Missouri. William Rowland and one of his children were blown overboard and never seen again. His wife Rachel was in bed with two more of the children "when a piece of the deck fell on them and killed both children at once and broke Rachel's leg in two places. She had a very narrow escape. William Rowland and four children (William, David, Sarah, Rachel) were killed in the mishap. Rachel remarried in Cedar City, Utah, in 1855, to John Harris. They had seven children. She died in Cedar City, Utah in July, 1918.

Conclusion

There are many challenges in pursuing Welsh family history research. The information in this paper should be considered preliminary, and much more needs to be done to identify the ancestors of Thomas Jones of Penderyn. However, this paper should provide a good starting point for further studies.

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The following sources have been useful in compiling these notes, and may contain additional information that would be helpful in continued research:

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- *The History of Rhigos and Hirwaun*, by Nansi Selwood.
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