



Saron Chapel.

Note: Biography of the Late Rev. R. Rowlands

Saron, Aberaman, is the outgrowth of a church formed in 1846. when the Aberaman Iron Works was first started, in a private house, No. 242, Cardiff Road. A chapel was built on the present site in 1850, and during the ministry of the late Rev. John Davies, subsequently of Mount Stuart Square. Cardiff, the chapel was enlarged in 1856. Soon after Mr Davies left for Cardiff. Rev. Rowlands, who was a native of Bala, was chosen to succeed him in 1864, and during a ministry of 27 years' duration, proved himself a true member of the gospel of peace.

**Saron "The Romantic Beginning"**  
By Rev. Glannant Jones (Edited by H. George)

To be precise Saron Church, Aberaman began much like any other Cause. Each Cause in His name is a kind of continuation. The power experienced on the morning of the Pentecost erupting here and there and finding a home in a society of willing disciples. In tracing the history of any Church through the centuries we are always connected to some other Church unless we find that Holy Room which is the spring from where the religious life we know started. We also find that this is true of Saron, and we would all like to remember our connection with the Great Christian Movement that existed before Saron, and which will still exist in some form until the end of time.

A good, energetic man came to live in Aberaman and soon found company with like-minded people and that is how the Church, which made such a huge impression on the lives of thousands in this area, began. And the history of the Centenary of Saron Aberaman is the history of good and industrious men. Many of them must be mentioned but the hundreds who will not be named will have a glorious place in the story, faithful members, diligent teachers, simple prayers, singers and musicians, officers, and friends of the Cause, both members and listeners. Without them, there would be no history at all, and however much praise is given to the leaders, they also deserve the same praise:

"Some of them were such as left their name  
behind, so that their praises were sung.  
Others had no remembrance the ones who ended  
as if they never were For these  
were merciful men, whose justice will not be forgotten.

With their children good heritage remains;  
Their children are also in the covenant.  
Their bodies buried in Peace and their name lives forever.”

Remembering, therefore, these two things - the age-old connection and background, and the service of the nameless crowd, we will take a glance at some of the events and the characters which have been important elements in establishing and continuing the Cause that was baptised a hundred years ago in Saron, Aberaman.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the population of Aberdare and the vicinity was small – about 1,486. As the century marched on, and the ironworks opened, the population increased and by the year 1841, the population was 6,741. At this time there were only four or five houses in Aberaman itself. However, the coal and iron works had established themselves, and by 1843, many more works had opened in the area and the population of Aberaman was about 1,200. Between 1841 and 1851 the population of the whole area had reached 14,998. Many important things happened in 1846:- Coal was sent from Llety Siencyn Mine along the canal to Cardiff. This was now the cheap way of sending coal to the nearby port and to take coal and iron to the world markets. In 1846 the first iron was puddled in Aberaman. There was therefore a living to be made and people came to the neighbourhood from every part of the country. All sorts of characters were here and among them some church members and, as there was no centre for them in Aberaman itself these people joined Siloa, Salem and Ebeneser in Trecynon. It is said that some friends from Aberdare would come to Aberaman occasionally to hold Prayer Meetings, but no Cause was started here as such.

In 1846 the Rev. Thomas Jones, minister of Adulam, Merthyr, came to live in the area and to run a school. This is the good man referred to at the beginning of this chapter. In light of the events that were to follow his arrival, I almost doubt that he merely came to the area, but rather that he was ‘sent’ here. Soon after he came to live at 242 Cardiff Road, he opened his home to a small number of people to worship, and he would preach in these services. It is said that he was a slight man physically, but he was, definitely a man of strong faith and love. It was in his house therefore that the Cause started in Aberaman. The following note is from the December 1846 edition of ‘Y Diwygiwr’ (The Reformer): -

“A Quarterly Meeting was held off the East Glamorganshire Union, in Ebenezer, Aberdare, on Tuesday and Wednesday, the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> of November - and Brother Jones, formerly of Adulam, was encouraged to start a new cause and establish a Church in Aberaman, Aberdare.”

Once again in ‘Y Diwygiwr,’ January 1847 the following: -

#### *‘Church Incorporation’*

October 12<sup>th</sup>, 1846, a new cause, was started by the Congregationalists in Aberaman, about a mile and a half from Aberdare. It started with readings and prayers by members of the neighbouring churches. A Fellowship was held at the end of the meeting. From then on, the Rev. T. Jones, lately Minister of Adulam, Merthyr, who has been chosen as the Shepherd for this small church, preached every Sabbath. The Ministers gave their full support in the Quarterly Meeting Conference held in Ebenezer, Aberdare to the incorporation of the church, which occurred on the 9<sup>th</sup> of November. The occasion was administered by the Revs. W. Edwards, Ebenezer and J. Harrison, Salem, Aberdare. The Ordinance, of the Lord’s Supper, was administered, and T. Jones was chosen as Shepherd for this small church, which has only nine members. But, although small, we hope that this small number becomes a strong nation of thousands.

The Congregationalists are usually the last to start their cause but this time they were first, thanks to our dear brother's great venture in giving himself up to Providence for his livelihood. Although it is a popular place, with growing popularity, its impiety is great. We hope the Lord blesses our brother and makes him a blessing to many. We see him as a domestic missionary and wish for ministers and churches of the county, and others, to see him in the same way, by emulating the ministers and churches of Dowlais and Merthyr, who have been very, kind to him. It will be a joy to us to hear that the churches of the county are making a small collection and sending it to him, in order, to sustain, his brave mind so that he can labour as a minister. It will be a joy to the Minister and the church to see ministers and preachers visiting them when they come to the neighbourhood. We wish the Minister and the church success in gaining many souls for the Redeemer. Amen. - J. Harrison

We can see from this extract that the Cause started on October 12<sup>th</sup>, and the official incorporation was on November 9<sup>th</sup>. As well as the persons mentioned above there is one other name that needs to be added, that of Mr. Owen, Zoar, Merthyr. There were nine members, and it is a great shame that we do not have their names. It is said that two were from Adulam, Merthyr, one from Bethesda, Merthyr, one from Salem, Aberdare and one from Beulah, Brecon, and apparently the other four were from Aberaman itself. I wonder who they were, and where they came from? However, there were nine quite different people to the nine ungrateful ones mentioned in the New Testament. It is quite possible, that the descendants of some of these pioneers are still in Saron today. They quickly came together, and Thomas Jones' house became too small to contain the congregation, and they had to look for somewhere bigger. It is obvious, that they could not consider building any sort of chapel at the time and they decided to use the 'Long Room' in, the "Lamb and Flag," on, a temporary basis. This proved to be disastrously unsuccessful for the young church.

The Banner of the Lamb did not fly in that place then, any more than it did later. It caused a rift among the small flock; some went to churches in Aberdare and others back to Mr Jones' house. They remained there for a while and frequented each other's homes. During this time Thomas Jones died and his remains were buried in the cemetery at Siloa, Aberdare. No stone or cross of any kind marks where he lies. He was born in Llanwenog, Cardigan and was educated at Neuadd Lwyd, and Neuadd Lwyd was to send more like him in the years to come.

During this dark time in 1848, after poor Mrs. Jones had also passed away, the small church moved from place to place and as it had no leader it was not very prosperous, and there was some dispute about its circumstances. They put themselves in the care of the Rev. David Price, Siloa and he was a kind patron. Along with the Rev. W. Edwards, Ebenezer, Trecynon he managed to secure two dwelling houses in Davies Street for the church, and they were made into one and furnished as a house of worship. The small chapel opened in 1848 with contributions from Mr. J. Evans, Craigfargoed, Mr. J. Thomas, Glyn-Nedd, Mr. D. Roberts, Dowlais, Mr. T. Jones, Cwmbach, Mr. W. Edwards and Mr D. Price, Aberdare and Mr. G. Jones, Pontypridd.

Following the acquisition of a fairly comfortable place the cause flourished and in June 1849 a call was sent to the Rev. Joshua Thomas, Bethlem, Llangadog to be a permanent minister and he started his ministry in October 1849. This was the terrible year of Cholera and the fear and terror, many turned to the Gospel for comfort and safety through large parts of Glamorgan and Monmouth.

It was a similar story in Aberaman and about 120 members joined the church. By this time, the dwelling had become uncomfortably small and, although a gallery was added, there was still not enough room. What a change from today. Yesterday the crowd was large and the chapel small, today on its centenary, this chapel is large, and the congregation is small in comparison. This is the change coming but we will come to some of the reasons for this when dealing with the last period.

As a result of this obvious success, it was decided to go ahead and build a convenient house of worship the land was bought for this purpose. It was not possible at the time, but a legal right was had to build on land nearby. Two of the members arranged it with the landowner. We take it that they were Richard Jenkins and John Jones, one a Mineral Agent and the other a Coalminer. They agreed with Jennet Roberts, Gadlys Ucha and Dr James Lewis Roberts on a lease of 99 years at £4/9/10 per annum on a piece of land on Abergwawr farm. The piece of land measured 74 x 65 feet. It was had on condition that a chapel was to be built to service the 'Congregation of Calvinistic Independents' (note the name) and that the chapel would cost at least £500.

The deed was signed in June 1849, but it is obvious that the building work had started before this time. It would be years before Saron could secure the Freehold, but it was bought in June 1921 for £150. On 31<sup>st</sup> December 1849, Richard Jenkins and John Jones presented the right to the new 'Trustees' of the Cause for a sum of 10/- each to make it legal and this is the Church's Trust Deed. Here are the names of those who signed on behalf of the church:

On behalf of Saron	Rev. William Williams, Hirwaun
	David Price Silo (Siloa?)
	William Edwards, Heolyfelin
	Daniel Roberts, Dowlais
	Benjamin Owen, Zoar, Merthyr
	John Hughes, Bethania, Dowlais
	Dan Jones, Bethesda, Merthyr
	Thomas Foster (Weigher) Aberaman
	Walter Davies (Shopkeeper) Aberaman
	Peter Roberts (Miner)
	Charles Jenkins (Carpenter)
	David Jenkins (Collier)
	David Jones (Tailor and Draper)

These are some of the first members of the cause and likely to be the pioneers of the cause with Thomas Jones. In one of the loose pages of the church's books after 1860, there is a reference to one Cathrin Morris, who was received as a member in 1846 by the Rev. Joshua Thomas in Saron. Given that the date, is correct, this must-have happened between October and the end of the year and the Rev. Joshua Thomas must have been here on a visit. It is likely, that only a few knew the content of the Trust Deed and so it is a good idea to refer to a couple of points in it that are of great interest and give us an idea of the seriousness of the Venture.

1. In each decision regarding the arrangements of the Church, there must be a majority of two-thirds of the members who have been in full communion with the Church for six months beforehand.

This was incredibly wise in this period of financial adventure when many of those who became members had little comprehension of the great responsibility they would have.

2. That nobody had the right to serve the church as Minister or Shepherd without believing in "the total depravity of human nature, the Divinity and Atoning Sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. The absolute necessity of the influence of the Holy Spirit and the Doctrine of the Trinity!"

This shows the solemnity of our forefathers, and it would be fitting for us on this centenary to question once again what we believe, lest we find ourselves believing nothing in the end. We also

need to be completely sure of what we represent in what we believe because this is what gives our Church its, own particular character.

The church was faced with many obstacles regarding the building of the chapel. The builder was bankrupted before the work was completed. For a while, the building stood without a roof, but it was not without shelter. The good brothers who supported the cause were determined to persevere and £400 at 5% was borrowed from one David Evan Williams, a grocer from Hirwaun, which enabled them to complete the work. The building work cost £650. Although the work was not finished the faithful started to worship there on March 31<sup>st</sup>, 1850, and it was officially opened the following June.

“On Tuesday and Wednesday, the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> August 1850 a meeting was held to open Saron, Independent House of Worship; Aberaman. At 7 on the first afternoon, the service was opened by, a prayer and reading by the Rev. W. Williams, Hirwaun, and a sermon, was given by the Rev. J. Evans, Cymmer and the Rev. E. Hughes, Penmaen. On Wednesday, at 7 in the morning, the service, was opened by the Rev. L. Lawrence, Adulam, Merthyr and the sermon, was given by the Rev. T. Jeffreys, Penycae. At 10, the Rev. W. Morgan, Troedyrhiw opened the proceedings, and a sermon was given by the Rev. D. Davies, New Inn and the Rev. J. Davies, Llanelli in English, and the Rev. W. Roberts, Tabor. At 6 the Rev. E. Hughes, Penmaen preached, as well as the old patriarch Lewis Powell, Cardiff. The meetings were joyful, full of the Lord’s blessings. “The cause was still its infancy here, but it is promising and comforting.”

By this time there were 218 members. Another cloud settled over the church. Following the decline of the Cholera outbreak, many defected and others were lost, and disputes arose between them. 44 members left to worship elsewhere. Things must have been quite bad, and it would have been interesting to know the real reason for the dispute. It is likely that; the immaturity, of many of the members, conflicted with the experienced wisdom of others, and who knows what disputes there were regarding faith and belief. However, in June 1852, the Rev. Joshua Thomas decided to give up the pastorate and a farewell meeting was held on the 7<sup>th</sup> of August. He then received a calling to Libanus, Craig Berthlwyd and walked there from Aberdare on Sundays, and there was much talk of having seen Joshua Thomas’ lantern on the hillside beyond the valley.

He did great work there, where he was a minister until his death, in 1875, his grave is in Libanus cemetery. He came to Saron at a difficult time, and although the chapel that he built soon changed, his influence and his staunch stand for the church’s principles remained, and were a blessing for the period that followed, although it pained him and others.

Following Mr Thomas’ departure, Saron came under the charge of the Rev. William Edwards, Ebenezer, Aberdare who was also extremely kind to the chapel. Despite this, it was a troubling time for the small flock that longed to be led to better days. The population was increasing, and this was a chance for the church to do great work for the master and if we could slip into the prayer meetings of that time, we would no doubt hear urgent pleas for someone to lead them. The Spirit was already at work and their prayers were answered. At the same time as the cause was starting in 1846, a young man was being ordained to the ministry in Llanelli and he was the Spirit’s choice for the next chapter in the history of Saron, Aberaman. It is not surprising that the church’s “Trust Deeds” include a clause ‘to believe in the absolute necessity of the Holy Spirit’s influence’!



Jesus with the 'Crown of Thorns.'  
Picture from inside Saron Chapel.

### Success and Progress 1854 – 1891

Among the men who came to spread the word in this area was the Rev. John Davies, Llanelli, who was already proving to have great ability and talent. On a visit to Saron, it was immediately obvious that this was the man for the great challenge of the time, and he received a unanimous call early in 1854. He hesitated for months, but by October he had decided to accept the call and there was much joy in Saron. He started his ministry in November 1854, and for almost nine years his ministry was uncommonly successful. His ministry is truly a brilliant chapter in Saron's history. With the arrival of the great Revival in 1859, the Rev. John Davies welcomed the Spirit which walked so boldly across the country. John Davies made sure that the Spirit had a "PLACE as well as a VOICE."

The Rev. John Davies was a slim, handsome man. He was born in 'Cwrt' between Llandovery and Llangattock and was educated at Brecon College. He possessed boundless energy and doggedness. His horizons were broad, and his idea of Kingdom governed his ideas for the chapel. Soon after his arrival, the congregation increased, and the new members multiplied. His great mental ability demanded respect; his activity demanded admiration and his earnestness urged conviction. Two years after its establishment the chapel became uncomfortably small, and it was decided to expand. The cause was needed in Cwmaman, and 27 members were released to start a cause there in 1855. The venture was a great success and Moriah Aman Church was established which has been highly, successful over the years. But despite releasing these members to Moriah, and many listeners with them, Saron was still much too small to contain the congregation and in 1856 it was obvious that the building needed extending.



Parch. John Davies.

This is when the building was extended to the chapel's current size in the parish of Aberdare. In order to extend the building it was necessary to purchase two adjoining houses. The 'Assignment' dated 12<sup>th</sup> April 1856 states that the Trustees bought the land from Anthony Longstaff, Coal Agent, Aberdare for £220 and this meant the purchase of three houses. The intention was, not only to extend the chapel but to build a room for the children and to hold special meetings. It is not known how it became known as Saron Hall, but it was obvious that the place had a special meaning for Rev. John Davies. Each time he referred to Saron he would write "SHARON." By now Saron Hall has become a Welsh name and whatever the critics say Saron Hall holds a fond place for all who were taught there. For years, Saron Hall was the centre for everything important in Aberaman. In the years to follow the hall was the location for political meetings, the Co-op's Quarterly meetings etc. Saron Hall was the meeting place for everything important until Aberaman Hall was built.

The cost of extending the chapel and buying the land and property was £953 and added to that a debt of £250 was outstanding on the first chapel, so the total debt was £1,200. However, because the chapel was united and thriving and under the leadership of this fine deacon, the debt decreased quickly. The people worked wholeheartedly and there were many generous members among them. Saron Hall cost £300 to build. This was, indeed, quite a burden but, to their credit, the borrowed money and interest were quickly repaid, and in the first twenty years this congregation managed to clear an immense amount of money. Note that during these 20 years the costs of building and extending alone cost around £2,000 and by 1865 the entire sum had been repaid up to £280. Whatever the concerns of the saints at that time and their weariness because of the costs, they kept their faith, and we must remember that they were not rich men but simple workers, and ardently religious. We can surely say that their faith sustained them.

### A Missionary's Farewell, 22/05/1858

On Monday evening a meeting of a peculiarly imposing and affecting character was held in Saron Chapel, Aberaman - a farewell meeting with Mr. Price, who is about to proceed as a missionary to Africa. The Rev. D. Evans, Gwawr, Aberaman, read a portion of Scripture and offered prayer.

The Rev. J. Davies, minister of the place, then proceeded to address the auditors. In the course of his speech Mr. Davies said that the past, present, and future filled his thoughts with emotions of grief and joy, despondency, and hope. He remembered the day when his friend came to him to school for the first time, and he felt while taking a retrospective glance, as if it had been a dream thinking that the young boy who came to his school from Merthyr Cynog was now on the eve of bidding adieu to his country, relatives, and friends, going forth as a messenger of peace to the sons of Ham in the

interior of Africa. He believed his young friend was endowed, physically and morally, with all the requisites to make a missionary.

After Rev. Davies had spoken, Mr. Price rose to address the meeting, which he did with great fervency and deep emotion. His address being concluded, Rev. Davies presented him, in the name of the church and congregation worshipping in the place, with a Welsh Bible, Williams of Pantycelyn's Hymns. "Drych y Prif Oesoedd," (The Mirror of the Prime Ages) and Rowlands's Welsh Grammar and a duoglot Testament, neatly bound in Morocco, to Mrs. Price. Mr. Price having expressed gratitude, the meeting was addressed by the Rev. Messrs. D. Evans of Gwawr, and J. Cunnick, of Aberdare.

In 1858 many left once again on a missionary crusade and started a cause in Abercwmboi, about a mile from Saron. With Davies Bach, Aberaman behind the venture it could not fail, and Bethlehem Church has been full of conviction over the years, and it is good to note that these churches were not "splits" and that a lovely affinity exists between them and Saron to this day and they worked together on many things. I should also refer to the fact that Saron was incredibly supportive in starting an English cause in Aberdare and it is stated that the Rev. John Davies worked hard with the brothers there until they succeeded.

The Rev. John Davies was a man of letters and was one of the editors of "Y Beirniad" (The Critic), "Y Gwron" (The Hero) and "Y Gwladgarwr" (The Patriot). He was passionate about his country's literature and established a Literary Society in Aberaman. This society held Eisteddfodau of a high standard and the young people of Saron, and the area was given the opportunity, to develop their talents at a time of very few educational and cultural advantages. Among those who benefited from these meetings were Hywel Cynon (Author, Cerddi Hywel Cynon "The Poems of Hywel Cynon"), J. P. Price (America), T. Phillips, D. Harries, Gwynalaw, Gwilym Cynon and others.

In his work with literature, Rev. John Davies endeavoured to show religious ideas, thoughts and experiences were shown in, a glorious and exemplary light. We, who have had the honour of succeeding him in this ministry, acknowledge our debt to him for this great work. Since Davies' days, there has been in Saron a Society to ennoble the mind as well as the soul and it was, he who laid this foundation that many have built on since. As with the history of the building of Saron, the life of the church was also one of renewal and extension, but all on that same foundation. The Rev. John Davies was the first to discover the use of "workers" in the faith and it was no surprise to see some of the younger brothers entering the ministry. Their names, along with others, are elsewhere in this history.

We should have mentioned one other fact about Saron: when the chapel was built a piece of land was reserved as a cemetery. Few were buried there, because in 1858 the old burial laws were changed and, under the new law, internment in Saron cemetery was not permitted.

I would like to present more facts about the Rev. John Davies, but I must refrain because the intention is not to talk of personalities only but, of a special Movement, and Saron's place in the work of that movement is our chief aim. Following nine years of successful work he received a call from a young church in Mount Stuart, Cardiff, and the young there were utterly captivated and so he saw an opportunity to lead another young church. A Farewell Meeting was held on Monday 5<sup>th</sup> June 1863. Strangely enough, his successor as Saron's minister was at that very meeting. He received an Address referring to his excellent work, as well as a gold watch and chain and a purse with an impressive sum of gold. The chapel was heaving, and the congregation were very emotional. He enjoyed a successful ministry in Mount Stuart until his death in 1874 at the age of 51. "He staggered not but was strong in faith." His memoir was published by the Rev. John Thomas, Liverpool.



Present day in Chapel.

1863 – 1891.

So far it was only southern and eastern accents heard in the pulpit in Saron, but this changed over the coming years. The tide of the revival of Fifty-Nine reached Saron and the chapel was in a beautiful spiritual state. In 1864, Rev. R. Rowlands, a student from the Seminary in Bala, toured the south to raise money for the college. He was to preach at Moriah, Cwmaman on a Sunday morning at the beginning of the winter of 1864 and, at Saron in the evening. While he was in Cwmaman he received word that there would be no opportunity for him to preach or collect at Saron.



Rev. R. Rowlands.

But letter or not, he came to Saron. At five o'clock a temperance meeting was held which he attended. He received a lukewarm reception, and there would be, definitely be no collection. There must have been some opposition to the College which was so far from the south or lack of interest in it. He was invited to take part in the meeting which he did, and he sang "Pwy fel Efe" beautifully. By some strange coincidence, the gentleman who was meant to take the evening service had let them down at the last minute and the student had his chance. When he entered the service, John Williams stood up and greeted him from the Deacons Seat (set fawr). "Come in, this is God's servant and the minister of Saron." The student had done a great service and was invited back twice in three weeks and at that Sunday evening service there was great rejoicing, and he was invited to become the Minister of the chapel. He was ordained in June 1864. The Rev. M. D. Jones preached on "The Nature of a Chapel;" the Rev. W. Roberts, Liverpool admonished the minister, and the chapel was admonished by the Rev John Davies, Cardiff.

In September 1865, Saron Chapel served as a public forum for one of the great national debates of the age — the movement for religious equality. A wellattended meeting was held to promote the principles of the *Society for the Liberation of Religion from State Patronage and Control*, with the Rev. R. Rowland presiding. The speaker, Mr. Rees of the Liberation Society, argued passionately that state interference in religion violated freedom of conscience and that true Christian faith must stand independent of government control. The meeting, which unanimously adopted resolutions supporting religious liberty, shows that Saron was not only a spiritual home, but a centre of progressive Nonconformist thought in Aberaman.

The first two years were exceptional due to their religious vitality. Work and religion were doing well, but after two years there came a time of great social confusion which had quite an effect on the Aberaman area. Work was rare and many of Saron's members left leaving the chapel to face hard times for the next nine years. But the leader was a good man, and the officials were hard-working and forceful, and they managed to overcome these difficult times triumphantly. This period was but the rehearsal for a similar and worse period that Saron and Aberaman would have to endure in the new century. As proof of the minister's success, at the end of nine years, Mr Rowlands was awarded, with, a watch and gold chain engraved with these words:

“Presented by the congregation and church of Saron Chapel, Aberaman, to the  
Rev. R. Rowlands as a mark of esteem for his faithful service” 16<sup>th</sup> June 1873.

He elevated many young men to the ministry and was a great influence on the lives of the young. It is good to read John Rees and Hywel Cynon's evidence in his memoir and, in song. During Mr Rowlands' time, the chapel was completely renovated at a cost, of £1,400. It is said that the floor was lowered and that someone told Mr. Rowlands, “I see you intend to turn Saron into a cellar,” to which he replied, “Yes, and by God, we'll keep the best wine there too.” He was rewarded again and received a testimonial of £200 which friends outside Saron had also contributed towards.

A beautiful memoir was written for Mr. Rowlands by the Rev. Silyn Evans, Siloa, Aberdare and I suggest all the young members of Saron read it. It is obvious, from the memoir, why Mr. Rowlands was so loved by the chapel, the area, and the denomination. He is still held dear by those who remember him in his heyday, and they all talk of him with fondness and affection. After a long affliction, he died on June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1891. It is said that his funeral was the biggest ever seen in Saron. His remains were buried in the public cemetery at Aberdare. Saron had much to thank him for. As it neared the end of the nineteenth century Saron was a flourishing chapel. His son Mr. J. W. Rowlands and his daughter Mrs Morris are here at the time of this celebration, and we would like to greet them in fond memory of their father.

Rowlands! A happier man was never had,  
Or a more honest brother:  
The lord will never have a more faithful servant,  
Than dear Rowlands.  
(Hwfa Mon)

People who were Connected to Saron Chapel.

### Lewis Jenkins (Jenkins the Swan)

Lewis Jenkins was practically the first expert musician that lived at Aberaman since the early fifties. He was the second tenant to occupy the Swan Hotel; whither he came from the Coach and Horses, Brecon. He became the leader of the singing at Saron Congregational Church and was instrumental in forming the best singers into an organized Congregational Choir. This gradually became “The Aberaman United Choir,” which won under his conductorship at Brynmawr Eisteddfod

on the anthem "Ardderchawgrwydd pob gogonist." From this organisation, the successful choirs of later years sprang up.

### Charles Daniel Lewis

Daniel Lewis was a leader of more than ordinary ability, though he removed from Aberaman to Merthyr when beginning to climb the ladder of fame. He did useful service in musical circles at Saron Congregational Church.

### Phillip Thomas 1839-1904.

This was one of the quaintest and most original musicians that ever-frequented Saron Church, Aberaman. He was to a great extent self-taught and commenced leadership at the Band of Hope of Saron. By and by he became the conductor of the adult choir at the church, in which capacity he proved a great success. He was who first introduced the Tonic Solfa system into the locality, and he also was the man in charge of the alto section of Caradog's great choir at the Crystal Palace. He was one of the recipients of the silver medals presented by Mr Richard Fothergill, M.P., in commemoration of Caradog's victory. Thomas Phillips won splendid victories with his choir from the congregation at Eisteddfod y Cymry, Neath, as well as at Llanelli and Mountain Ash. He removed from Aberaman to Bryn Llanelli, where he passed away in 1904.

### Thomas Howells (Hywel Cynon)

Amongst our list of Aberaman musicians, there is probably no name more familiar to the music fraternity in Wales than that of Hywel Cynon. Possibly Gwilym Cynon's name loomed large in the horizon temporarily owing to his success at the National Eisteddfod, but Hywel Cynon activities of a four-fold nature, as we shall see below, earned him, greater and more lasting fame. He was born at a farmhouse in Glynneath, being one of five children. When at the age of six, his parents moved to Rhymney, and thence to Aberaman, where his real nursery in music and matter of general culture was formed. His scanty education was received at the crude and old-fashioned school conducted at Saron Hall by the Rev John Davies then pastor of Saron. When quite a young man working underground, he came in contact with Tafalaw, who owned the printing works at Lewis Street. The printing office and machines were subsequently bought by Hywel Cynon, who then devoted his whole attention to the business.

This connection with the printing trade not only helped to gratify his natural ambition and to whet his appetite for higher culture but gradually established him as a publisher of not little importance. During all his time he devoted his whole-hearted energies towards perfecting himself in the four spheres in which he always excelled viz. (1) as soloist; (2) composer; (3) conductor; and (4) as a preacher. His accomplishments as a bass soloist may be judged from the fact that he was selected three times in succession by the Aberdare United Choir on their renderings of "Judas Maccabeus," "Elias," and "Twelfth Mass." He was also a winner at important Eisteddfodau on many occasions his favourite solos in a competition being "The Prodigal Son" (J. Ambrose Lloyd), "Cadw ni" (Tanymarian), and "Y Lleidr ar y Groes."

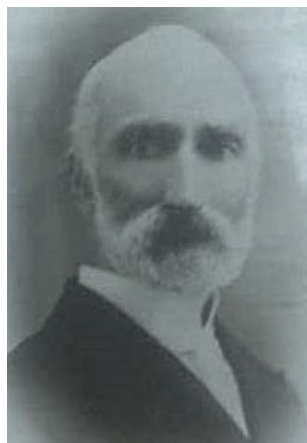
He was one of the best of his day for composing anthems and hymn-tunes, his tune "Aberaman," being one of the most popular in the Congregational hymn book of Stephens and Jones. He was also the author of an important book, entitled, "Handbook on the Theory of Music," published in the vernacular. As a conductor of "Cymanfaoedd Canu," his services were requisitioned very often, whilst his ability as a choral conductor in competitions was also great as witness his success in the Abergavenny, Aberdare, and Neath Eisteddfodau. His sitting room at one time contained over 80 Eisteddfodic trophies.



recalls that no service came, to an end without his getting up slowly and announcing, "The service is over."

Mr Jenkins' time was a successful time although things changed before it, came, to an end. Here are some of the obvious and important incidents. In 1896 he oversaw the building of a convenient schoolhouse for Sunday school and other meetings at the bottom of the village. It was full of life and a good source of members for Saron. It was sold in 1928. In 1904, the year of the revival, a school was built in North View Terrace, and it was a vast, convenient place. On the subject of the revival, it is obvious that many came under the influence of the religious energy, which was so powerful, but all the meetings were well ordered without the midnight meetings that were so characteristic of other places.

In 1911, the Congregationalists' Union was held in Aberaman and in this Union, the Rev Silyn Evans (Siloa Chapel) was elected Chairman of the Union. In the following Union in Liverpool Mr Jenkins gave an address on the subject of Mission. In 1914 the Great War broke out and 55 of the chapel members were in the forces. Two of them were lost and their names are alongside the members and Sunday school children on the Roll of Honours in the Chapel's doorway.



Rev. H. P. Jenkins.

In 1920 Single Communion crockery was purchased worth £161 and each member paid for them at 7/6 per head. This means putting the wine and bread on their "stands" before the service and in Saron Ordinance was served without anyone walking about. In 1921 a great expense was incurred. The Hall was repaired and changed. A house was used for the expansion, and it was necessary to buy another house in Regent Street for the tenant to live in. Heaters and electric lights were installed. The total cost was £2,659. It took some time to repay this debt, but it was finally repaid in 1933. A gift was, received by Powell Dyffryn Coal Co., and this was a large donation of £800. Saron also saw internal restoration work in the year 1896 and at the time of repairing the Hall an Organ Chamber was arranged but to date, and this empty, space has not been filled.

In 1921 the Freehold for Saron and Saron Hall were also bought for £150. In Mr Jenkins' time, a branch of the Christian Endeavour was established and those who were present attested to its great influence on the lives of many young people.

During this time, an innovative Drama association was started in Saron at a time when a drama was greatly mistrusted. I think that "Dic Sion Dafydd" was performed in 1912, followed by "Ar y Groesffordd" and "Helynt a Haulwen". The company was triumphant in many places. Ben Stephens was the Director, and he was followed, by W. J. Phillips and Thomas Evans.

## Opening of Saron Hall, Aberaman.

The formal opening of Saron Hall, Aberaman, took place last Sunday. The Hall, which has been repaired and altered, is now one of the very finest in the district, and the members and congregation of Saron may be proud of the Hall and the several committee-rooms, etc., connected thereto. On Sunday morning a good congregation attended, when the pastor, the Rev. H. P. Jenkins, delivered a very appropriate sermon, and briefly dwelt upon the past history of the Hall and the good work carried on therein in the past, and urged the young people connected with the Church to make the fullest use possible of the commodious building and rooms.

On Monday afternoon a most enjoyable tea was partaken of by the members and congregation of the church, whilst in the evening a miscellaneous programme was gone through. The following assisted at the tea in the afternoon: Tray-holders, Mrs. James, Mrs. Davies, Mrs. Rees, Mrs. Jones, Mrs. Tommie Harris, Mrs. Jeffreys, Mrs. Charles, Miss Rees, Brynmair; Miss Rees, Tyrheol; Miss Perkins, Miss A. Davies, Miss D. Maddy, and Nurse Thomas.

Assistants, Misses C. Charles, I. James, M. Price, M. Lewis, O. James, E. Edwards, M. Williams, M. L. Rees. Cutting bread and butter, Mrs. Jones, King Street; Mrs. Jones, Wyndham Crescent, and Mrs. J. Phillips. Assisting in various ways, Mrs. Jenkins, Mrs. J. W. Evans, Mrs. Edward Jones, Messrs. Daniel Thomas, Edward Pugh, Edward Jones (caretaker), D. T. Williams, P. Perkins, T. Harris, T. Maddy, W. T. Williams, W. Lewis, and M. Powell.

The evening's programme was commenced by an opening solo given by Mr. Howell Thomas. This was followed by Mr. D. Roberts, who gave the history of the church. Following a duet by Messrs. H. Thomas and W. T. Williams, a short drama, "Y Pwyllgor," was performed. The cast was as follows: Malachi Williams, Mr. T. Evans, Mrs. Williams, Miss L. A. James: Jacob Evans, Mr. D. R. Phillips; Mathew Bevan, Mr. E. Perkins, and Obadiah, Mr. P. Perkins.

Stage manager, Mr. W. J. Phillips. All the performers without exception, being by now well used to acting, did their work in brilliant style. The chairman was Mr. J. H. Powell, J.P., who was supported by the Rev. H. P. Jenkins. The secretary was Mr. T. Evans.

In the Singing world, there were performances of religious cantatas and various others. This was a time of great success in the singing world and Saron had been home to the song and the hymn for years. The Cymanfaoedd Canu were famous, and Saron held two each year. In 1904 an Orchestra started at Saron with about 22 members. For about two years Mr. W. T. Thomas would come down from Ebenezer Trecynon every Friday night to teach the chapel's young musicians. When they had finished their learning Mr. T. Rees was appointed as their Conductor and Mr. J. Rees Davies and Mr. W. J. Williams were secretaries. The orchestra worked hard over the years. This orchestra no longer exists but we hope that others will take it up under Mr. Rees's leadership.



Present day.

Mr. Jenkins was interested in the work of the 'Cyfundeb' (Connection) and was Chairman in 1913. His address on "The Religious Hearth" was published as he was unable to be there in person because of illness. He retired from Saron in June 1922 and was given a substantial testimonial. Mrs. Jenkins was one of the Lord's gentlest souls and she is well remembered for her godliness and her experience and her prayers. Mr. and Mrs. Jenkins went to live with their daughter, Mrs. Thomas in Llandeilo and were dearly missed. The Bible that is used for the reading in Saron each Sunday was presented to the chapel by Mr. Jenkins.

The Rev. H. P. Jenkins died in 1934, and his remains were buried in Maesycoed and those who were there all felt a whisper after the Apostolic Blessing, "THE SERVICE IS OVER".

Rev. Rowland and Rev. Jenkins enjoyed a large congregation. In fact, that one had to arrive half an hour before the start to get a seat, but things were gradually changing. There were also other strong leaders, and it is worth mentioning some of them. Wise and witty men, esteemed by all, able and faithful. Their influence remains and they come back to the congregation often. To those who knew them, they remain a part of Saron.

### 1924 – 1927

In 1923 Saron's debt was £1,427 but the spirit of the original pioneers remained, and they prepared to call a minister. They chose Mr. E. Cadvan Jones, B.A., B.D., from Bala Bangor College and Cheshunt College, Cambridge, and he was ordained on June 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> 1924. Contributors to the meetings included the Rev. J. Phillips, Mountain Ash, Morgan Price, Abercwmboi, Headmaster Thomas Rees, Silyn Evans, Aberdare, Sulgwyn Davies, Trecynon, Wern Williams, Hirwaun, W. T. Gruffudd, Dowlais, and H. Parry Jenkins.



Rev. E. Cadvan Jones, B.A., B.D., M. Litt.

Before the arrival of Rev. Cadfan Jones, the Chapel purchased a house in Brynheulog Terrace for £450 and adapted it for the minister. Despite the great debt and only 326 members, the faith was still strong. Rev. Cadvan Jones brought scholarliness to the chapel and the area. He also steered the chapel through the hard times of the strikes. He was passionate about the language and culture, and it was lovely to see the elders acknowledging their indebtedness to him.

In 1924 a meeting was held to show appreciation and admiration for the long-serving Secretary Mr. J. H. Powell who was given a painting as a gift. His portrait, still, remains on the wall in Saron, facing each congregation and, although we do not know him in the flesh, we know him in spirit.

The cause was doing well despite the period of unemployment. The services were full, and Rev. Cadvan Jones also held some classes for young people. Despite being highly active in the chapel he still managed to acquire an M.Litt. Degree. In 1927 he received a calling from Libanus, Ebbw Vale and although his time here was short, he left his legacy and made the area consider seriously the matter of the Welsh language at home and in schools.

### Rev. E. Cadvan Jones, Naturalness in the Pulpit.

This quality was very evident in the pulpit on Sunday morning, and what greater compliment could I pay him than to say that he is entirely his natural self when preaching? This is an excellent trait in any minister. We all enjoy a wellthoughtout sermon, where the preacher builds argument upon argument to establish the points he wishes to make. Cadvan found ample scope for his keen reasoning and logic in his text, Ephesians 3:19: *“That ye may be filled with the fullness of God.”* We learned that this was the climax of Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians. Paul not only prayed for others, but also told them what he prayed for, so that they might understand.

The climax is: *“May you be filled with the entire fullness of God”* — that is, that God may become incarnate in your life in the same way as He did in the life of Jesus. Paul also speaks of God as One who does more than anyone could imagine. In another passage, the Apostle speaks of the fullness of God dwelling in Jesus Christ. What happened then, Paul says, is meant to happen again. This does not lower Jesus; rather, it raises us through grace.

### Cadvan’s Analysis of the Christian Life

We then had, as it were, an analysis of ourselves. The Christian life is a life of perfect freedom. God is free, limited only by His own nature, and is selfdetermined. So was Jesus. People marvelled at His originality. He did not think like the scribes and Pharisees; He was Master of His own life. His outward actions were the expression of His inward principles, not mere obedience to rules. To be saved is to attain this kind of life — the life of the Holy Spirit, as Paul calls it — a life that knows “what passeth knowledge.” Such is the person in whose heart Christ dwells through faith.

This is also a life that values fellowship. The fullness of God's life, as revealed in Christianity, is expressed in the perfect love between Father and Son. Their harmony was complete, and Paul has no difficulty with this idea of perfect unity.

### His Incarnation and Purpose.

We enter into this fullness as we take our place with the prophets and apostles in the holy temple. We grasp divine truth along with all the saints. We learn to live together as God becomes incarnate in us.

Finally, God's life finds its fullness in fulfilling a great purpose. The Greek philosophers believed that God spent His existence in pure contemplation, but this does not satisfy the Christian experience of divine grace. The Gospel speaks of a God who fulfils Himself by saving humanity. Christ's life was the realisation of a calling — and so should ours be. Paul could think of himself as entering so fully into this vocation that he even shared in Christ's sufferings. Shall we, then, not also live for a purpose?

I know full well that in this brief summary I have failed to convey the skilful way in which the preacher presented his case, but it was so masterly that he held the congregation's attention through every stage of his argument, and we felt at the close that this was preaching of a very high standard.

### 1927-1933

During this time Saron worked hard to reduce its debt, which was now a burden. Note that 1928 was one of the worst years of the depression, but despite this, the members worked hard on this task. In 1927 Northview School House was sold for £130, and in 1928, having served its purpose, Cardiff Road School House was sold to the Salvation Army for £688/10/8. Also, the house at Regent Street was sold in 1926 for £100. A concert by the Francis Brothers made a profit of £66. The debt was reduced to £660. The hard work of collecting and saving continued from year to year and by September 1933 the debt was cleared, and Jubilee Meetings were held. These were hard years, and we must pay tribute to the chapel and its leaders for their faith. By the time the next minister arrived, they were free to start again, unburdened by debt.

## SARON, ABERAMAN

1846 – 1946

Here were discerning ones who watched.  
The leaders of the times  
From afar they saw the crowds  
Seeking a sanctuary in the valley  
They were the first to discover,  
The needs of the crowds in the valley  
They saw prosperity and its hidden longing.  
They understood the discontent of a bleak age.  
Through unprohibited sacrifice  
Here was raised a temple to God,  
And many a stranger on his unsure feet  
Came through the door for sanctuary.  
Others it held through long dark nights  
To keep the lamp lit within God's house.

Dewi Aeron

## 1933 – 1946

On the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> of October the Rev. Glannant Jones, Soar, Pontygwaith, Rhondda was established as Minister. On a Wednesday evening, a prayer meeting was held led by Mr. Thomas Edwards, the chapel's Secretary and contributions to the Establishing meetings were made by the Rev. Morgan Price, John Jenkins, Hirwaun, H. P. Hughes, Cwmbach, T. H. Jenkins, Cwmaman, Glynmor John, Tylorstown and the Rev. E. Cadvan Jones, Ebbw Vale.

Times were still hard in the valleys, and the political horizon was threatening. Despite this Saron continued to thrive, even though religion was obviously, ebbing in general through the country. Meetings were held to encourage young people, and some were successful, and others were not. This was a particularly sad time as the chapel saw many deaths and lost good members and leaders. Despite this, the chapel members were very-close and worked together readily. Here are some of the events of the period:

“The ‘Small Loft’ was repaired and adapted as a library and a room for the young people and for, committees. Many interesting and entertaining evenings were held here. An Entertainment Club was started, but, due to the fact, that our young people have been working away or at war, the club has yet to come into its own. In June 1938, the Glamorganshire Cymanfa came here, and much enthusiasm and joy were enjoyed preparing for it.”

In 1939 the world was shattered, and our young men and women were thrown into the eye of the storm. A ‘Comforts Committee’ was established to help them. The Sisters met every Tuesday night to knit and make tea for the treasury. At the end of the war, a sum of £283 was collected and distributed. Those who went were given a welcoming Social and parcels and money was sent regularly. Many of the Sisters knitted 410 gloves and socks etc. 11 members of the chapel were in the forces, and 64 were somehow connected to the Sunday School and the chapel. Despite prison and peril, not one of them was lost. But one, R. Howells, died in hospital after release.

The Blackout stopped many from going to services, but they were still held. We were determined that things should carry on as they were before the war. The children and supporters staged beautiful cantatas conducted by T. Aeron Edwards. Special efforts were made for the Mission and, for the fund for Reorganisation and Rebuilding. In September 1940 Saron celebrated its Jubilee and a week of meetings was held. Four ministers who were former youngsters of the Chapel joined us, the Rev. Thomas Jones, Erwood, John Davies, Coventry, T. Perkins, Llanelli and Phillip Jones, Swansea.

At 11.35 on the morning of the 10<sup>th</sup> of September 1944, we had the honour of broadcasting from Saron. It was strange to hear by letter that the young people of Saron were listening on the battlefield. The singing was highly praised, and this was thanks to the congregation and the conductor Mr. J. D. Harris who has been at the helm for over forty years.

The terrible war came to, an end without the loss of one of our children, but the chapel suffered a different fate. During the war years over 50 of its most dedicated members died and this has left a huge gap. We remember them very fondly. I must, however, refer to one great loss during this year, namely the death of Mr. Thomas Edwards, the chapel Secretary for over 25 years and its oldest officer. He was also a child of Neuadd-Iwyd and worthy of being mentioned alongside the names associated with the place and to follow in the footsteps of Thomas Jones, who came from that very place to start the ‘Cause in Saron.’



Deacons 1946

D. R. Phillips, W. J. Phillips, M. Maddy, D. E. Davies, T. A. Edwards, T. Evans  
S. Jones, J. D. Harris, Rev. Glannant Jones, T. Maddy, Edward Jones.

Mr. Edwards was a wise leader, especially during the period when the chapel had no minister. He came from a tradition of strong men who were Saron's secretaries. He knew Saron's history, was proud of it and worked hard on the chapel's behalf. We are sorry to lose him, especially as we are on the verge of a celebration which he had looked forward to and helped to organise. Like others who have been here, he has become a part of Saron, and in the words of Dewi Aeron:

"He can never be confined.  
In the dark prison of the grave,  
He will come to each service as ever.  
He will come in his NEW FORM."

In April, his son T. Aeron Edwards was elected Secretary and Deacon.

As we remember the cause's benefactors, we must thank the brothers and sisters who worked at Saron Hall. This is where most of the work was done from Sunday to Sunday and during the week. Who can ever measure their value and influence? Each generation in Saron must acknowledge its debt to the inspectors and teachers at Saron Hall. The story is drawing to a close, and what a romantic tale it is but it is, nevertheless, only half the story. The saints' acts in Saron have been recorded by another chronicler and the final story to be read one day will be much more glorious than anything written here. The story started a long time ago and the world has changed enormously since then.

Aberaman itself has changed, ways of life, language and expression, circumstances and atmospheres are all different, from what it once was. Due to the inventions and discoveries, the nature of the work has changed, and we must find a new way of finding souls for Christ in this age. But despite the great changes, one thing remains the same – the battle between good and evil. There have been triumphs in this battle but nothing as yet has been invented or discovered which can take the place of Jesus Christ. Many prophesise that soon there will be no church as we know it. Who knows? But, whatever the medium, it started in the Church, and it will be a Church.

So, here we stand, looking at the milestone that is a century of Saron's history, and we see that it is all part of God's purpose. In the silence of remembering we hear the voices of Saron yesterday the worship of the first nine, with no instrument, or chapel, and in a service, someone recites "This cup is the New Testament in My Blood" then from the small chapel comes a voice, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want," then, the stronger voice of Saron's large congregation. the elation of the Fifty-Niners the doubling and tripling of the worship the Amens and the Thanks Be to God, the voices

of the men proclaiming the gospel, the prayers of fathers and mothers' children's A, B, C, G.O.D., God the heavy notes of the Dead March the light singing of the children's Cymanfa. Anthem and Hymn "O, Nefol Addfwyn Oen," We never, never will bow down, the sad singing of a wistful crowd, "Mae nghyfeillion adre'n mynd," then the romance of the wondrous instance, I now pronounce them man and wife, I baptize thee, in the name of Jesus Christ hearty laughter. Drama! Say the first prayer slower. These are the things; these are the voices that come back from the past. What is their message for us? TO CARRY ON with our Faith in their God, and in, our God. But we must not tarry too long, there his work to be done, the committee needs to be called there is a programme to publish. ONWARDS! ONWARDS! There is a sermon to write, Communion to partake in, ONWARDS!

The future is calling, and the Christ is ready...no delay...ONWARDS! ONWARDS!

*Teach me to look to the Past.  
This will kill all my fears,  
Your goodness and your mercy.  
Follow me through the world.  
Through the tears, the storm and cloud  
Smile through them all,  
God's rainbow still proclaims.*

**THERE WILL BE LIGHT IN THE DARK**