

Ararat Baptist Church, Whitchurch - What's in a name?

(Waun Treoda Chapel - Whitchurch Common)

Something I can't accept as fact, in the history and heritage of Whitchurch and its development over the centuries, is the claim, covered by various authors, about the origin and history of 'the Ararat' Church. There is a single aspect to this that just doesn't sit well with me. What follows is the personal opinion of a local man regarding the origin of the name of the church, it is my view and my view only. In time I am more than happy to be corrected if my reasons and findings are unfounded.

In the book 'Whitchurch – A Brief History' (1982) by Hilary M. Thomas, there is a reference to Ararat as 'One of the earliest non-conformist chapels to be built in Whitchurch'. The book goes on to say that it was "*erected in 1824 on the ancient mound on Whitchurch Common, thereby providing a decent meeting house for the Baptist worshippers who had previously conducted their meetings in outbuildings at Wauntreoda Farm*".

A similar claim is made by Edgar Chappell in the book 'Old Whitchurch – The Story of a Glamorgan Parish', first published in 1945..... "*The dump or bank on Gwaun Treoda was apparently a mound which may have served as a boundary mark for two or more of the above mentioned four manors. It existed until the early part of the 19th century when it was acquired as a site for a Baptist chapel, to which was given the appropriate name of Ararat*".

So what about this 'dump or bank' and how likely is it that a place of such description would have captured the imagination of such devoted people? Even Chappell's use of the word "apparently" suggests that it only 'seems to be' true, but perhaps, is not an absolute fact.

[These are two excellent books by the way and they are 'must haves' if you have any interest in the history of Whitchurch. It's quite possible, I suppose, that Hilary Thomas based some of her research on the work of Edgar Chappell, but, regardless, it's not relevant to this].

The whole thing raises a number of questions. Firstly, the suggestion that a mound would have been sufficiently stable and big enough to have supported a structure such as a church can't be true. If it was 'erected on a mound', as suggested by Hilary Thomas, where is it now? The church is clearly on level ground and not in an elevated position, although it has undergone numerous changes since it was built there. It's reasonable of course to assume that this was just a matter of interpretation and that the church was built near to a mound and not on it. If such a mound held such significance and status to have been likened to a biblical connection, on the same land which they had acquired, why would it have been levelled? It would have, could have and should have stood as a monument, or an emblem, a tribute to an Old Testament event and to the original founders of the chapel and how likely is it that the churchgoers would have chosen a landmark considered to have been a 'dump' and how did that dump get there? What evidence is there for such a 'mound'?

If you are a local and born before 1960 you will be aware of 2 ancient mounds, one at Treoda (Whitchurch) behind the Fox and Hounds pub, near the old parish church (Old Church Road) and one in Rhiwbina, Twmpath y Rhas, locally known as the Twmpath, or, in our younger days, the 'Twmp'. (Twmp or 'dwmp'?).

Below, the Ararat Church celebrating its 200 year anniversary in 2024.



Photos T. Chard 1st February 2025

The Ararat church was built in 1824 and so it's only the years prior to this that there is any likelihood of finding a 'significant' landmark such as a mound on a map. Unfortunately there is no suggestion of any such landmark on any of the old maps available. It's fair to say however that some of the old maps lack detail anyhow and only show some of the more prominent features such as larger dwellings and places of worship. Some maps, however' do show features that you would expect to see.



1811 Map – The National Library of Scotland

This map of 1811 doesn't tell us much, but, notice Whitchurch Common described and identified as 'Gwaendurhoda'.

A 'tumulus' is shown, but is not in the correct location for the 'mound' at Treoda which it is intended to show, once in that part of Whitchurch.

The Yates map of 1799 does not show sufficient detail to identify any mound in the Whitchurch area or, Rhiwbina, for that matter. No useful and worthwhile evidence could be found on any other accessible digital maps of similar date. The 1840 Cardiff map of the 'Boundary of the Parishes of St John and St Mary' is similarly lacking in detail for this area.



1840 Tithe Map – The National Library of Wales

The tithe map of 1840 clearly shows 'the chapel' as you might expect having been built in 1824. The building is shown, neatly enclosed in an envelope of land identified as plot 271 which 'encroaches' on the more open area of land around it, described as 'Wautrodda Common'.

The tithe apportionment (1840) for the 'chapel', plot 271, provides us with the detail that it was identified as 'Cottage and Garden', the landowner was Elizabeth Young and the land occupier was Edmund Harman. The 'land use' was described as 'waste' land.

Just for comparison, the tithe map of the 'Treoda' area (next page) is also short of detail when it comes to identifying a 'mound' where we know one existed and so this is also of little use.



1840 Tithe Map – The National Library of Wales

The tithe map of 1840. The map shows what we now identify as Ty'n y Parc (top centre) with the 'Upper Village' (Treoda Uchaf) and the old parish church area just above centre.

Treoda mound was in plot 244.

The tithe apportionment (1840) for the plot 244, provides us with the detail that it was identified as field name 'Cae Bach' (Little / Small Field), the landowner was John Homfray Esq. and the land occupier was David Rowland, the 'land use' was described as 'meadow'. Just opposite this was the old parish church of St Mary's, plot number 233 and this was identified as a Church / Churchyard, the farm name 'Cottage and Garden, the occupier was Edmund Harman' and the landowner was Elizabeth Young... the same description as that of the Ararat plot.

In many of the more modern accounts on the history of Whitchurch reference is commonly made to the early 'identification' of the village and to its earliest name. It is identified with the 'capella de stuntaf' mentioned in "Liber Landavensis", (Ystum Taf – Bend of the Taff), a term that has now been conveniently adopted (politically) by a neighbouring district further south. It was partly in the Cantref (Hundred) of Caerphilly and the Lordship of Senghenydd and partly in Cibwr (Kibbor Hundred). The old southern boundary of the parish was fixed on the former site of the Great Heath when the Enclosure Act of 1801 took place. The old Parish Church (Old St Mary's on Old Church Road) formed part of the earliest identity of the village as we know it now.

We can link a number of references from various historic documents:

One of the more 'reliable' historic accounts was "Leland's⁽¹⁾ Itinerary in Wales" (1536 -39) - "A 2. miles from this hille by south, and a 2. miles from Cairdif, be vestigia of a pile or maner place decayed at Egluis Newith in the paroch of Landaf". The interesting part of this is the reference to a local landmark as a 'pile' or 'manor' and that it was in a state of ruin (*decayed*) at that time, this is understood to be Treoda, not only that but at the time of Leland's report the area was known as Eglwys Newydd (*Egluis Newith* – 'New Church'), a reference to the old St Mary's church in Old Church Road.

In 1578, a man named Rhys Myryke⁽²⁾ (Rhys Meurug, sometimes 'Rice Merrick', depending on who the literary scribe was), wrote: there "stood on the East part of the Church and old castle or Pyle but now decayed, that scarce the foundation and rubbish now remayneth". Here is the "old castle or Pyle", description once again.

Treoda in Whitchurch, is a small castle-mound or motte standing in a garden on Whitchurch Brook, which forms part of its moat. It occurs as *Tre Oda* (fifteenth century) in "Lib Land" in the magnolia and *Treoda*, 1578, in Rhys Myrkye. The name is apparently a hybrid of Welsh **tref**, "hamlet", with the personal name **Oda**. - Ref: Transactions of the Cardiff Naturalists Society Vol LIV of 1921) report...of the 'Street Names and Surrounding Place Names' of Early Cardiff. p.63

It is known that parts of Leland's work relating to Glamorganshire was reprinted by James A. Corbet in his edition of Rice Merrick's Book of Glamorganshire Antiquities. London, 1887.

- (1) John Leland was born in London in 1506, was educated at St. Paul's School and at Christ's College, Cambridge; he also studied at Oxford and Paris, becoming a practised scholar and linguist. He took holy orders before 1525, but was an absentee from the benefices to which he was later presented. Before 1530 he was Library Keeper to King Henry VIII, and three years later was made the " King's Antiquary" while prosecuting his varied schemes of learning. He is best known by the record of his notes and descriptions of England and Wales.
- (2) Rhys Meurug (Anglicised: Rice Merrick) (died 1586), was a Welsh genealogist, historian and landed gentleman. Meurug wrote a book on the history of Glamorgan, entitled *A Booke of Glamorganshire Antiquities*, completed in 1578. Though the original volume was lost in the Hafod library fire in 1807, a copy made in the late 17th century can be found in the Queen's college, Oxford library, and a second copy is in the Cardiff public library. The book is written in English and concerns three areas: Glamorgan region's characteristics, division of the country by Norman knights and the original Welsh families, and Meurug's modern-day Glamorgan. (Wikipedia)

These descriptions clearly identify the old 'mound', known as Treoda which was flattened in 1965 for the construction of apartment blocks now known as Clos Treoda, just behind the Fox and Hounds pub. Prior to construction work on the site, an archaeological survey was undertaken by Jeremy Knight B.A. and Eric J. Talbot B.A. (1965). As a 'castle mound' it was first mentioned in 1314 and is believed to have been built in the later thirteenth century. The mound was lowered and otherwise landscaped in 1848 as part of the garden of the adjacent house (Plas Treoda). It was 40mtrs diam. across its base and in 1848 it is believed to have been 3.6 mtrs. high.

There are other similar references to the 'castle' mound. Edgar Chappell in the book 'Old Whitchurch – The Story of a Glamorgan Parish' (c.1945) explains "...a substantial area of the manor of Whitchurch comprised *demesne* land, that is, land which originally was retained by and cultivated for and on behalf of the lord. Such land was usually in the vicinity of the lord's castle or manor house. A small castellet comprising a single large tower was built by the Norman lord, soon after he dispossessed Gruffydd ap Rhys of Senghenydd and carved out the Manor of Whitchurch, on a site adjoining the Whitchurch Brook (then possibly called Nant Castan), which is now occupied by a house called Treoda in Old Church Road", a description which again clearly identifies and defines the exact location of 'Treoda'.

In ancient times the place that became known as Treoda was an isolated location well away from other sites of human occupation. It remained that way until 'the conquest' and after, slowly, but surely, with the evolution of farming and land ownership, various dwellings cropped up. At the time, well before being consumed by farming, the surrounding land was almost entirely heath land forming part of the Great Heath (Y Mynydd Bychan) outside the town gates of Cardiff, the vast expanse of heath around Treoda becoming known as Waun Treoda (Gwaun Treoda). There was also a smaller area of heath land just to the east of Cardiff known as 'Little Heath' – Y Waun Ddyfal ("the waste mead"). Gwaun Treoda became

the accepted 'modern' name for the area we now know as Whitchurch Common and its modern boundary edge, 'as the crow flies', is just 700 mtrs away from the Treoda site.

Treoda itself is a significant site in the history of the village, the ancient mound forming the very foundations of our community. In later years the area has been identified as Treoda Manor, part of Senghenydd cantref and a centre of administration for the region. A manor house is said to have existed on the site. In its location, for centuries, it would have stood out, a feature on the landscape easily viewed from the surroundings at a distance, one of the reasons it was there in the first place from Bronze Age and Iron Age, through to Roman and then Medieval times.

In the *Archaeologia Cambrensis* account of 'The Manorial Particulars of the County of Glamorgan' (October 1877) Whitchurch is described as... "*Whitchurch a parish, is called a manor temp, Edward I and Edward II is returned as Whitchurch Castle and manor. The manor is parcel of Senghenydd Subtus and is in the chief lord"....."Treoda now destroyed was the seat of Yorath Mawr, a descendant of Iestyn. His descendant sold it to David ap Richard Gwyn, whose son Edward was of Llanishen and ancestor, in the female line of the Lewis of that place and of Greenmeadow. Richard Williams, Cromwell's direct ancestor, was of Whitchurch, and a cadet of the Lewises of Llanishen, whose arms and quarterings were used by the Protector"*.

"Iestyn ap Gwrgant was the last independent ruler of Glamorgan. He founded the fifth royal tribe of Wales and most of the noble families of Glamorgan claimed descent from him".

(National Library of Wales – Dictionary of Welsh Biography).

The point of all this is to emphasise the significance and importance of the Treoda site. However its description becomes plunged into murky waters by the 'Survey of Roath and Keynsham of 1702' which referred to Treoda as "*the Dump or bank on the common called Wain Troda*"**. Bear in mind that the entire vast open heath land area around Treoda, in 1702, was known as Waun Treoda (Gwaun Treoda) and not just the smaller version of Whitchurch Common we see today.

**(*Archaeologia Cambrensis* – Journal of the Cambrian Archaeological Association – National Library of Wales).

For centuries there was next to nobody here. To emphasise the sparse population of early times in Whitchurch this is how things looked in the first half of the 19thC as 'human occupation' developed:

Year	Population	
1801	696	Back in these times the boundary of 'Whitchurch' covered a wider area than it does now reaching 19,820 in 1951, but with the changing model of political influence it stood at 16,138 in 2011.
1811	997	
1821	972	
1831	1,184	
1841	1,376	
1851	1,661	

To provide some kind of visual image of just how few were actually here at that time, in 1801 those 696 people, who were distributed throughout the entire Parish, would now fit comfortably in one half of a rugby or football pitch with plenty of space to spare.

This being the case, how likely is it that a 'dump', 'man made' or not, would exist where Ararat church is now? How did it get there, how was it constructed and why? How big would it have been to have represented such an iconic and appealing feature to worshippers of the early Ararat church?It makes no sense.

In early times Whitchurch was defined by two distinct areas. Village life back then was centred on the old parish church and the Fox and Hounds area (Old Church Road), 'the upper village', or *Pentre Uchaf*, also known as 'Treoda Uchaf' (upper Treoda). The 'Lower Village' *Pentre Isaf*, was the area around the Maltsters Arms, where the carpenters, blacksmiths, labourers, shopkeepers, dressmakers and others lived in the small community. Even in 1840, between these two 'centres', there was nothing but pasture and arable land and it's highly likely nothing had changed from the time the chapel was built in 1824.

Edgar Chappell, in his book 'Old Whitchurch – The Story of a Glamorgan Parish', dedicates a chapter (XIX) to the history of Ararat (p.143). In this chapter he writes about the early development of the Baptist movement in the area stating "*local Baptists used to meet for devotional purposes locally at the dwellings of some of the members*", this being mainly due to the distance that Whitchurch was from other 'centres'. He goes on to state:

"In the northern edge of Whitchurch Common formerly stood a farmhouse called Gwauntreoda Uchaf, once the patrimony of the notable family of Yorath Mawr, and this house or one of its out-buildings was the most usual place for local Baptist gatherings. Regular prayer meetings and occasional preaching services were held there and members of the Lisvane Church used occasionally to visit them and help strengthen the faith of local adherents".

It's clear and unequivocal that the 'seat' of Yorath Mawr was Treoda as has been identified by many notable writers over the centuries and not only that, but, Gwauntreoda Uchaf, is also identified as the same Treoda site, the 'Upper' part of the village. It must be this central site that the first Baptist meetings were held.

Much of these descriptions rely on the detail within two surveys, one in 1650 and another in 1702 when the manor belonged to John Morgan of Tredegar, no contemporary maps are available and it's the 1702 survey that Chappell particularly refers to. This survey is covered in 'The Cardiff Records', which also states: "*It seems also that some separate manors were formed by subdivision of older manors, though the way in which this was effected is obscure*" and" *In addition to the manors always recognised as such, the term "manor" is found to be occasionally applied to lands which, so far as is known, never really constituted distinct manors at all. In many instances this could be accounted for, but a discussion of the subject hardly comes within the scope of the present work*".

The Cardiff Records, 1702, under "The Survey of The Manor of Roath Keynsham" provides us with the following:

..."we present that one other Tenement of the said Lord of this Manor, now in the tenure of Alice William, Widow, being a parcel of this Lordship, situate in the Parish of Whitechurch, mearing and bounding to the Common called Mynydd Buchan and a high way leading from a place called Pant-bach to a place called Ryddwathley, on the East, and a Dump or Bank on the Common called Wain Troda, which Bank adjoineth to the several Lordships of Listal-y-Bont, Landaff, Sengheneth, and to this Lordship, on the West part thereof, the Lands of the

widow Matthews of Gabalva, being part of the Lordship of Listall y Bont, of the South, and the Land of Captain Richard Jenkins, being part of the Lordship of Senghenith, now in the Tenure of William Thomas and Henry Morgan, on the North part thereof". It seems likely that this, directly or indirectly, is the source of Edgar Chappell's information regarding the mound. This section of the Cardiff Records also includes, these references also being used by Edgar Chappell:

.....Alice William, widow, holdeth one tenement late of Henry Morgan Rees, adjoining to the Common called Treoda situate in the parish of Whitechurch, charged with a red rose on every Midsummer Eve yearly as chief rent, and

.....Item... Lewis Lewis holdeth one tenement situate in Whitechurch aforesaid, under the chief rent of 1½d.

.....And we also present that all tenants of this Manor at all times of the year have, and always have had, free common of pasture for all sorts of cattle on the heaths and mountains there, called Mynydd Buchan, Wain-Dyval, and Wain-Treoda.

The Cardiff Records also describe events regarding the 'Manor of Whitchurch':

Whitchurch was called in Latin Album Monasterium ("Whitminster.") Its Welsh name is Eglwys-newydd (Newchurch). It is a parish adjoining that of Llandaff on the north, but was anciently only a chapelry under Llandaff. Most of the modern parish of Whitchurch is in Senghenydd Subtus, but a part is in Cibwr (Kibbor). The whole of the old "Album Monasterium" was in Senghenydd. The remains of the castle are near the old church. Whitchurch is a member of the great Lordship of Senghenydd, and not strictly a manor of itself. Parts of the modern parish are in adjoining manors.

1314. In an official document Whitchurch tower is spoken of as a "forcelletum" called Blankminster, "in nullo edificatum," with a mill and other profits thereunto appurtenant. It stood close to the chapel.

1440. The Castle and Manor of Whitminster otherwise Whitchurch, were in the hands of the Countess of Warwick. (I.P.M.)

1578. Rice Merrick says the old castle is so decayed "that scarce the Foundac'on and Rubbish appeareth. It is said that to it belonged a customary manor in Whitchurch. But now, by what meanes I could not learn the certainty, reputed a parcell of Seynghenith and annexed to it."

.....In this manor was Treoda (now destroyed), the seat of Yorath Mawr, a descendant of Iestyn ap Gwrgan.

.....And we also present that all tenants of this Manor at all times of the year have, and always have had, free common of pasture for all sorts of cattle on the heaths and mountains there, called Mynydd Buchan, Wain-Dyval, and Wain-Treoda.

(This particular manor description, or sections of it, in The Cardiff Records, was dated June 13th 1742).

So, to summarise, (well done for following it so far), we have Treoda being described in antiquity as an "old castle or Pyle but now decayed"; "a pile or maner place decayed at Egluis Newith" and clearly a place showing all the signs of being a ruin, we have the three areas of vast heath land mentioned, one of which is Wain Treoda and we also have a place described as "a dump or bank on the common called Wain Troda". The vast heath land called Waun Treoda of back then is not the smaller Gwauntreoda (Whitchurch Common) of today. This must surely all refer to one and the same place and given that the first Baptist

meetings were held at Gwaun Treoda Uchaf (Upper), a place that is also described as being the 'seat' of Yorath Mawr and that there was once a large mound on this site, this surely must have been the location and inspiration for the church named, 'Ararat'. There cannot be any other place other than the mound of Treoda, the site of the 'Whitchurch Castle' (*forcelletum*) and an original Bronze Age and Iron Age barrow before that.

There's a lot more on Whitchurch, on The People's Collection of Wales website.