

Beulah Welsh Baptist Chapel, Little Newcastle and Latter Day Saint convert David John

Jill Morgan



This headstone over the grave of Daniel and Mary John stands in the graveyard of Beulah Baptist chapel in Little Newcastle (although the chapel is now de-commissioned and the graveyard overgrown). The English translation of the inscription is as follows:

*In memory of Daniel John
who died March 31, 1856 at the age of 63.*

*Also his son Thomas John who died June 9, 1858 at the age of 23.
Also his wife Mary John who died July 1st, 1878 at the age of 78.*

Their son David paid for the stone to be erected, although some in the neighbourhood at the time accused him of having been the cause of his father's death, because of his affiliation with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints ('Mormons'). David John was one of the most educated of the early Welsh converts to 'Mormonism.' He kept very detailed journals which contribute greatly to our knowledge of the early history of the LDS Church in the British Isles, and tell his own story.

Baptists were first recorded in Little Newcastle in 1697 and they maintained a steady presence in the village throughout the 18th century. However, it was only when Joseph James came to the village as schoolmaster at the end of the century that a Baptist chapel was built. The so-called Puncheston Revival of 1795 had influenced the local area, and led to the building of Beulah chapel in 1808 – a building plot not being available in Puncheston. The first sermon was preached in Beulah on Easter Monday 1808 and by 1823 there were 135 members. Joseph James became the first minister. Baptisms were carried out in a pool under the nearby bridge in the



River Angof. The chapel was rebuilt in the 1870s and 1880s and then restored in 1910.

Beulah Welsh Baptist was the spiritual home of the John family. Their son David (1833-1908) was born in Little Newcastle. His forbears on both sides of the family were quite wealthy, many of them prosperous farmers. Daniel John was a tailor, but also farmed on a small scale. David attended school between the ages of 5 and 12, suggesting that his parents did not need him to work to contribute to the family's income. In his history he tells that he continued his schooling until age 23, although in the 1851 census, age 18, his occupation is listed as *Tailor*, and he later engages in this occupation as a means of support.



In the spring of 1848, when he was about 15, missionaries for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints ['Mormons' or Latter Day Saints] came preaching in Little Newcastle. David John tells that *'Their preaching had a great effect upon my mind, I believed their doctrine when I first heard it.'* Although he had been baptised into the Baptist church, by February of the following year, having met missionaries again and attended their meetings, he had asked to be baptised into the LDS church. He records in his history:

On the way to the water, the power of God and the powers of darkness alternately were resting upon me, 'till my frame shook. Several times on the way I came to a sudden halt, and could not seemingly walk another step, my limbs and my whole body seemed powerless; Elder Williams kept asking me, from time to time, what was the matter with me? I answered him, that some power whispered to me that I was deceived, and that I was bringing ruin on my head, and disgrace upon all my kindred. He replied "that is the power of the evil one, that endeavors to mislead you, and I rebuke it, in the name of Jesus Christ. Come, let me baptize you, and all your doubts will be drowned" [sic]. At his powerful rebuke, the powers of darkness departed, and my whole being was filled with the peace of God...

At length we reached the water, and he baptized me, in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. When he raised me to my feet, a great and marvelous power from Heaven rested upon me, and I shouted at the full strength of my voice, "Glory to God, and the Lamb, for ever, in the highest; I am born of the water and Spirit." We went back to the house, and Elder Williams confirmed me the same night. I remained in the house all of that night, and the spirit of God, seemingly without measure, abode with us during that never to be forgotten night. O! how I should like here to define my feelings, my peace, and my joy, on that night, and that week that followed, but I can not, pen can not write,

tongue can not tell, the wondrous powers of Heaven, manifested to us; not in signs, wonders, and visions, but in the calm, peaceful influences of the Holy Ghost.

Returning home full of joy, David found that the news of his conversion was most unwelcome – not only within his family but in the neighbourhood – and he reports ‘*much bitterness*’ being shown towards him. His father forbade him to attend LDS church meetings, wishing him to train as a Baptist minister. When he prayed for guidance, he felt that the Lord told him he should ‘*go East to Glamorganshire*’ but when he secretly sought out the local elders, he was advised to follow his father’s wishes. His journal entries show that he had great respect for both his father and his mother.



Photograph: David John’s father Daniel as a young man
(www.familysearch.org)

The following year his father gave permission for him to go into Glamorganshire to work, on the condition that he keep away from the Latter Day Saints until he was of age – which David promised to do. In Bridgend he found work with a Mr Jenkins, a Baptist preacher, and soon was both working for Jenkins and studying. He was offered training as a Baptist minister and when he showed reluctance was assured that this was a good sign, as ‘*the Lord does not call the conceited, the proud and haughty, to his ministry.*’ By the time he was 18 he was being asked to preach in local Baptist churches. Although he had no belief in the divinity of the Baptist church itself, he loved and believed the scriptures, and that is what he preached.

Shortly before he was 21 (1854) he enrolled in the Baptist College in Haverfordwest. Each year the students were given a vacation from their studies but were expected to spend the time preaching. David John preached across south Wales, into north Wales and as far as Liverpool, generally three times each Sunday and most evenings. He continued travelling and preaching for the Baptist church for two years, but then received a sharp reminder that this was not his life’s work. It came in the form of a ‘*dream, or night vision.*’

I dreamed that an angel of the Lord visited me.... His eyes were of a dark brown color, but full of glory. His voice was clear, and full of divine power, and authority. While in his presence, I beheld exceedingly high mountains. He told me they were "the Everlasting Hills, over, or by which the Latter-day-Saints were passing to their gathering place." He asked me, "Why are you spending your time here, in vain? Why is it, that you will not join the Church of Christ? And spend your time there?" "I hoped that I was in the Church of God now," was my reply, "Am I not?" He replied firmly, "you know better", and added, "Do not ask questions that you know perfectly well, but go on unto perfection".

The angel showed him a vision of the Latter Day Saints in the presence of Christ, and then of a beautiful valley full of precious fruits and surrounded by mountains. He was given the promise, "*This shall be thy inheritance, and thy seed after thee for ever, if thou wilt obey the commandments of God and do right in the flesh.*" He also saw his brother Thomas in the house of the Lord and knew that Thomas would one day be among the Latter Day Saints, even though he had not agreed to be baptised at this point.

After the angel departed David John reports,

I believe that the Spirit of God, and His holy angels, filled my room. I arose from my bed, and bowed myself before the Lord in solemn prayer, and desired Him that if that messenger was sent by Him, to make it known to me by the same messenger; if not, to hide the vision from me. I again laid on my bed, and soon fell into a deep sleep, (at least it appeared so to me) when at once the same personage appeared by my side, and made known to me some of the same things as before; but he mildly rebuked me for spending my time where I was, He also said, Thou wast foreordained before the foundation of the world, to come forth in this age to assist to build the Kingdom of God upon the earth, and now the time is up. If thou wilt obey the commandments of God, thy days shall be long on the earth; if not, thy days shall be short, saith the Lord. These words pierced my soul, and I again awoke, and spent the remainder of the night in deep reflection, and some what grieved in spirit, and at other moments, I rejoiced exceedingly.

The following day he was unable to attend to his studies, he was so distracted. He sought out one of the LDS missionary Elders, who gave him church literature to read - which he did for the whole of the next week, and then went home and told his mother and brother of his vision and his determination to unite with the Latter Day Saints.

They cried bitterly, pleading with me not to do so. They beged [sic] of me, not to inform my father, as he was quite feeble in health, and it might take his life. I obeyed my mother, and did not inform my father at that time.

He returned to the college, but reports,

On Wednesday, at 5 P.M., being February 6th 1856, I was rebaptized by Elder Jno. Griffiths, in the tide of the sea, in the town of Haverfordwest, South Wales.

This could refer to a number of places, the nearest beach being Broad Haven some 6 miles away. Afterwards,

the Holy Ghost fell upon me in a powerful manner. The house was filled with the spirit of God. I heard a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the house in which we sat. All in the house heard it. Thus, we received the same manifestation, in every particular, as was received on the day of Pentecost.

However, four days later, at his parents' house:

Mother called me and the Saints after nearly every evil and fowl name, so much was her rage this day, 'till all the neighbors gathered around us, and wondered at the spirit manifested. She told me that she did not want to see me "within her door". I told her that if that was the case, that I could return on my way" You are at liberty to return said she, by this I returned a few steps, when my Bro. called after me and said, "David don't return, my father sent for you, and he wants to see you, the house belongs to him, not to mother. Go in, and listen not to her tongue".

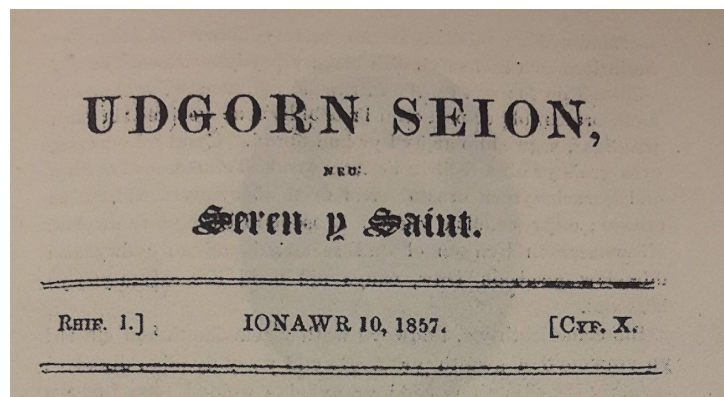
His father was very ill.

"David my child", said he, "you came once more to see your Father, and it makes me glad, he clasped me by the hand, I offered to kiss him, but he refused saying, I can't find it in my heart to kiss you, after you have brought such disgrace upon yourself, upon me, and our family, by joining the Saints." Said he, "I don't intend to quarrel with you David... I brought you up as I thought was right, in the same faith as myself, 'till you grew up. I have discharged my duties towards you as my child, I have given you much education, for years, and now I feel my conscience void of offense, that I have done my duty, so from this time forth you must answer for your own acts. You have arrived to the years of maturity and you will be responsible for your own deeds in the future. But as I said before so say I again, I don't want to quarrel with you, but this understand, I will not reckon you any longer as my son, and my house will be no longer a home for you, ... he bursted out and cried bitterly for a long time, and my Bro. and I cried with him.

In June of that year David John was called as a travelling missionary in the Pembrokeshire Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and reported by the end of the year that he had baptised about 30 people, travelled some 2,600 miles, 'lost the friendship of nearly all my former acquaintances and made hundreds of new friends in the church.'

1857 was spent travelling in North and South Wales, though with little success, despite covering more than 4,000 miles. On one occasion while preaching he tells of being 'greatly disturbed, by a band of people going back and fore, singing and making riots. Playing tin pans; trays, etc. but they failed to break up the congregation. Then the Mayor of the place came, and a long conversation took place between us, he commanded me in the name of the Queen, and by authority of his Office as a Magistrate to quit the place; I in return commanded him in the name of Jesus to go home, and leave me alone.

David John also wrote articles for the Welsh-language LDS publication *Udgorn Seion* (*Zion's Trumpet*), composed poetry, and found 'much joy in [his] labours.'



He later admitted:

I was young and unexperienced, for the large field of labor before me, nevertheless the Lord gave me power to do every thing that I was told to perform, and my soul rejoices in the privilege many times to visit my relations during the year, I continued to bear my testimony to them, but not one soul obeyed the Gospel.

In January 1859 he was called to preside over the Nottingham conference of the LDS church.

An earlier journal entry for April 11 1858 gives a clue to another change which the future might hold for him.

After a conference in Cardiff he reports, 'in the afternoon saw Sister Ann Wride, in the evening saw her sister Mary, fancied her appearance greatly in the meeting. Sent (Accompanied) her home, walked with her two miles; and became afterwards my wife.

Photograph: Mary Wride John (1831-1905) in later years



David and Mary were married in Cardiff, February 8th 1860.

She accompanied him on his mission to Nottingham. When he was released from that assignment they emigrated (April 1861) and settled in Provo, Utah Territory – where, like most of the early converts, they were initially poor but eventually did indeed prosper. He became very involved in Church and civic affairs, thus continuing to spread his influence for good.

In late March 1856 David John had received a note from his brother to say that their father was very unwell and that he should come home to see him. Two days later he did so, but found that his father had died just two hours before he arrived. He recorded in his journal:

In the evening many of my relations and neighbors came to see us, and all seemed united to persecute me; many told me, that I was the cause of my Father's death[!!] But my brother when he saw all united against me, felt sorry for me, and would not join them. I went to bed about mid-night, in grief and sorrow, I never saw the clouds so thick and dark before. I was far from the Saints, and all that surrounded me with a few exceptions, looked upon me, as though I was the murderer of my father. His case laid thus, when I joined the Church, he was unwell, when I joined he believed from his heart that I did wrong, so it gave pain and anguish to his soul, so much so that it influenced his mind, that he could not eat, drink nor sleep but little, and so he pined away, believing that I was going head-long to destruction. So he died in about 7 weeks after I joined the Church; and many said that I was the cause of his death.

So when I went to rest I had a very remarkable dream, I dreamed that I saw two tall personages, which filled my heart with joy. They told me that they were Joseph and Hyrum Smith, and said one of them. "The Lord has seen thy trouble and the persecution against thee, yea, he has heard thy prayers; thou hast overcome thus far, and power will be given thee to overcome, inasmuch as thou continuest humble and faithful; and the day comes when thou shalt sit with us, and with our God", by this I awoke full of the good spirit and gave thanks to God.



When David John returned to Wales from America as a missionary in 1871, he visited his parents' home. His mother was still alive, and rejoiced to see him. They had corresponded in the intervening years.

Photograph: David John's mother Mary

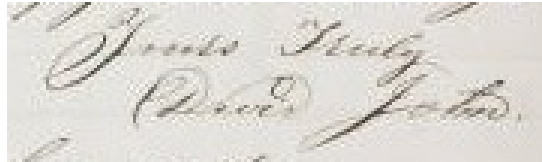
In his journal he records:

26th [May 1871] Left at 9 A.M. and arrived at my mother's house in Pembrokeshire at 6 P.M. As I passed through the town of my birth, a thousand sensations rushed through my brains. I looked all around as I walked through the streets. I looked for my old playmates but did not see any. ..., reason whispered you must not look for the boys of 30 years ago, these are their posterity. I looked and inquired of the old people, they were in the dust. All seemed to me a new generation with strange faces. I stood and gazed, the people gazed at me, but all was strange.

Tears filled my eyes, I walked on silently 'till I came within sight of my mother's house. There I saw an aged Mother standing by the door, looking earnestly towards me. A lady by her side asked her if she knew that stranger, she replied "no, but O dear he walks exactly like my husband when he was young". "It may be your son" replied the lady, no, was the reply he will not be here for a month yet. Watch, says the lady, he is weeping, by this time I was melted in tears, at what I saw and heard, my mother saw my tears and rushed towards me weeping, embracing me in arms exclaiming, "I know this is my David". My relations and friends visited me and I was greatly welcomed. This was the first time that I saw my mother for 10 years.

He visited her again during this mission and on the last occasion, before he left her, she took him to the solicitor's office and gave him some money. The story passed down

through the family is that she told him that even though his father had disinherited him, she had not, and had kept what he should have received from his father. The figure said to have been given to him by his mother was \$10,000 (approx. £2,500) – a veritable fortune at the time.



Beulah chapel lies to the south of the village of Little Newcastle, on Beulah Hill, just before the road crosses the river.

GPS coordinates 51°55′04.24″N 4°56′14.54″W

Sources

Capel: The Chapels Heritage Society

Coflein: the online database for the National Monuments Record of Wales (NMRW) at www.coflein.gov.uk

www.familysearch.org for David John's individual record (ID: KWJZ-HGK)

<http://welshmormon.byu.edu> for the individual record of David John (found under the *Immigrants* tab), including access to his extensive personal journals.

Ron Dennis, retired professor of languages at Brigham Young University (Provo, Utah) who is a great grandson of early LDS missionary Dan Jones and founder of the *Welsh Mormon* website (now the *Welsh Saints*, at: <http://www.welshsaints.byu.edu>)

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