

# Pengarnddu: Mormon Stronghold

Terry Jones & Alan Davies

The village of Pengarnddu has – like so much of the industrial architecture of Wales - ceased to exist. Perched on the top of the mountain overlooking Dowlais (near Merthyr Tydfil), its five rows of terraced houses were originally purpose-built homes for employees of the Dowlais Iron Company and their families. The village had its own church, school and public house, making it completely self-contained. It was surrounded by small ponds, built to provide water for the Dowlais Works.

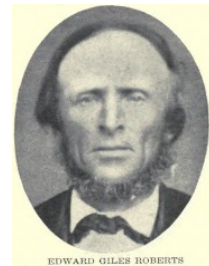
By 1851 the village had been mostly completed. In the census that year the enumerator recorded the village with 48 houses and 280 inhabitants. The population were 272 (97%) Welsh. The men were mainly recorded as “ironstone miners” i.e. working on the extraction of iron ore. Some worked in the limestone quarries or as coal miners. The 1861 census recorded the same 48 houses but with 256 inhabitants. Of these 254 (99%) were Welsh. The 1891 census is the first one to record which language people spoke. Of the 267 inhabitants 199 (75%) spoke Welsh only. Another 30 (11%) spoke both Welsh and English and 38 English only. The census returns confirm that the village continued being predominately Welsh-speaking even late in the 19<sup>th</sup> century despite the increasing anglicising of the local population with the influx of immigrants.

But in the 1860s an unusually high proportion (23% - 58 of approximately 250 individuals) of the village were members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (‘Mormons’ or LDS). Many emigrated to the U.S. but members of the church are known to have lived there for at least 40 years. The local LDS congregation or branch for residents of Pengarnddu was Dowlais, where several different locations were used for meetings: The Bute Arms, North Street (later renamed Horse Street), and in the hall adjoining the Dowlais Inn on Dowlais Lower High Street, near Sand Street. This was about two miles away from Pengarnddu.

<i>Pen</i>	<i>garn</i>	<i>ddu</i>
<i>head or top [of the]</i>	<i>heap of stones/cairn</i>	<i>black</i>

Merthyr Tydfil was the mostly densely populated town in Wales in the mid-nineteenth century, with many families and individuals moving from rural areas of west Wales to take advantage of the consistent work opportunities offered by the iron and coal industries. Several branches of the LDS church existed in the Merthyr Tydfil area in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Dowlais being just one of them. The 'restored gospel' of the LDS church was first brought to the area by Cornishman William Henshaw in 1843, but over the years a number of other missionaries visited Pengarnddu.

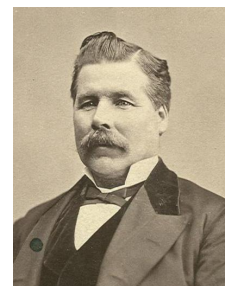
**Edward Giles Roberts (1823-1894)** was born in Machynlleth, Montgomeryshire, and raised as a member of the Anglican church. At age 16 he joined the Campbellites [Reformed Baptists], and through a fellow member of that group came to hear the LDS missionaries preach; he requested to join the church through baptism in early 1846. As a travelling Elder, he visited Pengarnddu in 1847. He recorded in his journal:



*Tuesday 14 March 1847 I went to Percarnddu and was given a welcome by John Walters. I went to work with him below ground in a works known as Pound Mawr. I stayed for some two months.*

His record also states that prayer meetings were held two or three times a week in the village.

**Elias Morris (1825-1898)** was another missionary who passed through Pengarnddu. Born in Llanfair Talhaiarn, North Wales, after his conversion he emigrated to Utah in 1851. In the mid 1860s he returned to Wales on a mission and preached in many towns and villages around Wales. He records in his missionary journal that he preached in a house at Pengarnddu on February 13<sup>th</sup> 1867. The house was "*full of strangers*" i.e. non members.



Missionaries were still visiting LDS church members in Pengarnddu in the 1880s. Daniel Lewis recorded:

*98 Twynyrodyn, Munday 7<sup>th</sup> [June] 1886... in the evening I went in company of the Brethren R.J. Owens, H.S. Goddard, --- W. Richads to stand the ordnance of babtism which was preform an Pengarnddy. 2 men by the name of John Baxter And Samuel Gould.*

And in 1888 both Timothy B. Davis and John Thomas preached and held meetings there on separate occasions:

*5th [Dec. 1887] At 98 Twyn y Rodyn Merthyr (Monday). Went up with Morgan Evans.& Richard Morse To pen Garn ddu. All three of us did Preach.& we had a good time.*  
[John Thomas]

In addition to these visiting missionaries, the following individuals and families were some of the converts who lived in Pengarnddu.

**John Walters (1810-1879)** and his wife **Mary (nee Jones, 1818-1900)**, can be seen living in Pengarnddu in the 1851 census. This was the Brother Walters who Elder Roberts worked with when he visited Pengarnddu in 1847. A native of nearby Vaynor, and raised as a member of the Methodist church, John was baptized in 1846. Mary's family was from Lampeter in Cardiganshire; she too was raised as a Methodist. They were married in 1842. Parents of six children, only one of their daughters survived childhood. In 1868 Mary, this daughter and an adopted daughter left for America; John joined them one year later in a company of more than 300 LDS converts, and with Elias Morris as their leader. His was the first group to cross America entirely by train, as the Transcontinental Railroad had been completed in March 1869 – shortening the journey from Wales to Utah Territory from many months to just 3 weeks. John and Mary settled in Beaver county in what is now south central Utah.



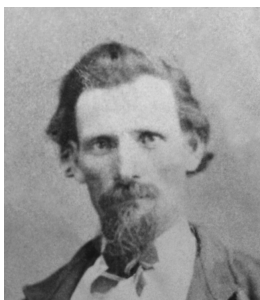
**Evan John Jones (1820-1881)** and his wife **Catherine Griffiths (1825-1893)** were both from Cardiganshire in mid Wales. They met and married in 1843 in Dowlais, as Evan had moved there for work and several members of Catherine's family are known to have also re-located there.

Evan and Catherine Jones in their later years (photograph: FamilySearch)

Evan and Catherine were baptized into the LDS church in 1846 by an Alfred Clark and confirmed by Captain Dan Jones. But it would be 20 years before they were able to accumulate the necessary resources to emigrate.

Three of Catherine Griffiths' siblings also converted to the church and emigrated to Utah Territory: **Rees Griffiths (1830-1899)** and his wife **Catherine Prosser (1833-1899)**, **John Evan Griffiths (1833-1875)** and his wife **Margaret Jones (1834-1922)**, and **Sarah Griffiths (1835-1892)** and her husband **John J. Jones (1836-1907)**.

On 30 April 1866 the ship *John Bright* left Liverpool with 747 Mormon emigrants headed for New York. Among that number were: Evan and Catherine (Griffiths) Jones and their 11 children; John Griffiths with his wife and their 3 children; and Sarah (Griffiths) Jones with her husband and their 4 children. Evan and Catherine had lost 4 children before leaving Wales. Some three years earlier on 4 June 1863 Catherine Prosser Griffiths, wife of Catherine Griffith's brother Rees, had left from London on board the *Amazon* along with 894 other 'Mormon' emigrants. Travelling with her were her three children: Jane, age 7, Mary Ann, age 2, and baby Evan. Rees evidently preceded them – a common enough occurrence, as male family members would often go ahead and make preparations for their family to join them, as well as working to send money home for fares.



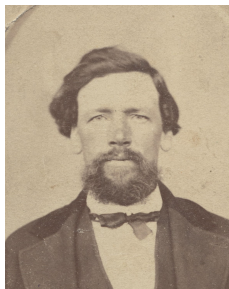
A first cousin of Catherine Griffiths also moved from Cardiganshire and lived with his family in Pengarnddu as a convert: **John Jenkin Griffiths (1837-1899)** and his wife **Eleanor (nee Lloyd, 1838-1910)**. On 21 May 1864 John put his wife and two children on board the *General McClellan* in Liverpool, and just less than a year later he left Liverpool on the *Belle Wood* and joined them in Adamsville, Utah.

Later in life they moved to Idaho.

Eleanor in later years (photograph: welshmormon)



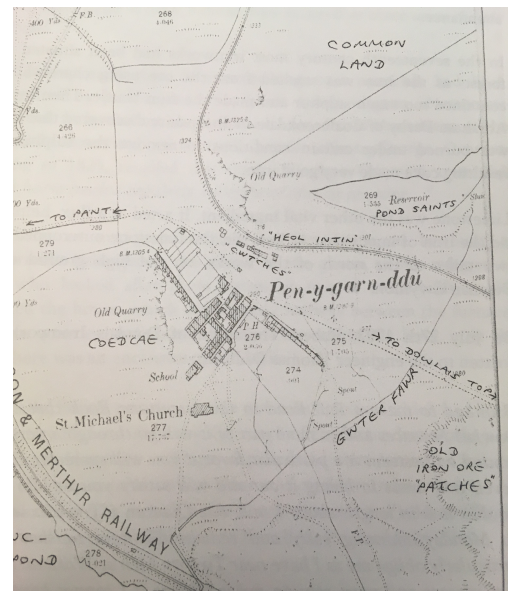
**John Baxter [1811-1883]**, a native of Montgomeryshire, and his wife **Mary Walters [born 1811]** also lived in Pengarnddu and were members of the Dowlais branch. They can be found in the 1851 census with four of their children, who also appear in the Dowlais branch records. John's occupation is given as 'Ironstone Miner'. He died in Pengarnddu and is buried in Vaynor, Breconshire – his wife's birthplace. She appears to have emigrated to Pennsylvania after John's death with their married daughter Mary, her husband and young family.



**David Powell [1839-1877]** was born in Dowlais, and died in Beaver, Utah Territory. He was baptized into the Dowlais branch of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and can be seen in the 1851 census living in Pengarnddu with his parents and siblings; his occupation, age 11, is listed as 'Cow Keeper.' He married **Ann Morris [1839-1889]** in Merthyr Tydfil in 1859 and in the 1861 census he and Ann are listed in [Pen]Garnddu with their infant son, William. His occupation is listed as 'Iron Miner.' In 1863 he and Ann emigrated from London on board the *Amazon*, with their son William. Their other 5 children were all born in Beaver, Utah.

While the early LDS missionaries had some success in Merthyr Tydfil the greatest growth came with the Welsh speaking missionaries including the well-known Captain Dan Jones. The number of members in the 1860s is also noteworthy as emigration had started as early as 1849 with Dan Jones taking the first Welsh contingent to Utah aboard the ship the *Buena Vista* from Liverpool. We do not know at this time whether any Pengarnddu members had already emigrated.

[Map: [www.alangeorge.co.uk](http://www.alangeorge.co.uk), public domain]



This map shows Pengarnddu around 1900. The nearest of the ponds surrounding the village, above the Heol Injin (Engine Road), was known locally as *Pond Saint*. This was because the pond was used to baptise the new converts ['Saints'] into the LDS church.



Member families reported that due to persecution these baptisms often took place during the night.

While the Pond Saint is no longer needed to supply water to the now closed iron works it remains as a reminder of days past and its secondary purpose as a baptismal area for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints in the nineteenth century. It still exists, but as can be seen from this photograph, is sadly now just a dumping ground for local rubbish.



Some of the convert families who lived in Pengarnddu and emigrated to Beaver County, Utah can be found on the American census of 1880. It is notable that many of those who emigrated were not doing so to flee poverty as such. Poverty in Merthyr Tydfil in the nineteenth century was always a possibility due to accidents and unemployment. However, we must remember that Pengarnddu houses were stone buildings, purpose built, and the men worked in the nearby iron works which was regarded as the largest and most important iron works in the world. Their living conditions were a vast improvement on those of the average worker in the area.

The primary focus on emigration was not for material advancement. Their eyes were set on a journey to a promised land and many left singing songs about leaving Babylon as they departed Wales. Several of these members had been in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints for twenty years and remained faithful until they could save their money and afford to travel over the seas to America.



Pengarnddu village was gradually abandoned from the 1960s onwards, with the people rehoused in the newly constructed Dowlais flats. Today the area is used largely by light industrial enterprises and only two houses still stand from the former village. They were previously

numbers 10 and 11 Castle Row which have been made into one home. This photograph shows how one of the rows of houses had an adjoining row of houses built directly on to the back of them at a right angle. Strwn around the area are the stone outlines of the previous buildings.

This photograph is of **Terry Jones** of Merthyr Tydfil, a descendant of Charlotte Powell, David Powell's sister. Not a member of the LDS church, Terry began researching his family history in the 1980s, but only recently discovered his 'Mormon' connections. He has since developed a keen interest – and expertise – in the history of the Church in the Merthyr Tydfil area. He regularly conducts tours for visitors seeking their ancestral roots, and was instrumental in identifying Pengarnddu as a site of interest. His mother was born there.



This photograph – taken in about the 1970s – shows Mountain Row, Pengarnddu – a street typical of workers' houses of the time, but which has since been demolished along with the rest of the village.

[Photograph: [welshmormon.byu.edu](http://welshmormon.byu.edu)]

If you think your ancestors may have come from Pengarnddu, you may be interested in the following resources:

*Tales of Pengarnddu: Life in a South Wales Mining Village.* by Corwyn Rogers. Published 2009 by Cath Fach Lwyd. **ISBN-10:** 0956265707. Second edition due to be published shortly.

[www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org) for the histories of the Jones, Griffiths and Powell families

<https://saintsbysea.lib.byu.edu/> for information on the *John Bright*, on which the Jones and Griffiths families emigrated

[www.welshmormonhistory.org](http://www.welshmormonhistory.org) (for the journals of Elias Morris, Edward Giles Roberts and other missionaries of the time).

[www.oldmerthyrtydfil.com](http://www.oldmerthyrtydfil.com)

[www.alangeorge.co.uk](http://www.alangeorge.co.uk) for maps of Merthyr Tydfil land surrounding area