

Monkton and the Latter Day Saints

Grant Vaughn & Jill Morgan

Monkton is one of those obscure Welsh villages which many people may not even have heard of, let alone be able to locate. It sits on the western edge of the town of Pembroke, up on the hill above the river. Much of the west side of the old village was demolished in the second half of the twentieth century to make space for more modern housing, although the streets around the parish church still give a flavour of what the village would have looked like 150 years ago.

The Old Hall, Monkton, possibly the oldest domestic dwelling still standing in Wales.



The parish church of Monkton St Nicholas

Obscure though it may be, in the mid-nineteenth century Monkton was central to the religious movement sometimes referred as 'Mormonism' – the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. A branch or congregation of this church met in Monkton in the 1850s and 1860s, and documentation exists for two buildings in Monkton which were registered as places of worship for the Latter Day Saints. But according to more than one source a purpose-built LDS chapel was also erected here in 1852. Two missionary journals of the time give details of its construction and registration as a house of worship, and many other records identify individuals who were converts to the LDS Church at the time.

The first LDS convert in Pembrokeshire was Mary Ormond of Marloes who was baptised in May 1843, but it would be another five years before the Pembrokeshire Conference [District] was formed as a local organizational unit of the church. However, growth of church membership in the area was lively, with more than 40 convert baptisms recorded within a matter of months of missionaries working in the area.

Membership records are held at the LDS Church History Library in Salt Lake City for Pembroke branch, 1850-1854 and 1866-1868, although the latter set may relate to Pembroke Dock. Twenty-two LDS branches/congregations are known to have existed in Pembrokeshire in the 1840s and 1850s, but as in other parts of Wales, emigration would make serious inroads into the size and strength of the local membership.



Pembroke Castle from the back of Bridgend Terrace (formerly Monkton Lane) which leads up to the village

By 1868 Pembrokeshire had been combined with Carmarthenshire for organizational purposes, and by 1869 there were only three branches in the county. By the end of 1873 there was only one branch in Pembrokeshire and a single Conference covered the whole of south Wales.

Nineteenth century trades common among the inhabitants of Monkton included those connected with shipping, shipbuilding, quarrying and lime working as well as agriculture. In early Victorian times Monkton village spread westwards, as rows of terraced cottages were built to house the dock workers of Pembroke Dock. By 1910 the population had expanded to 1069; it remains a compact village with well under 2000 inhabitants.



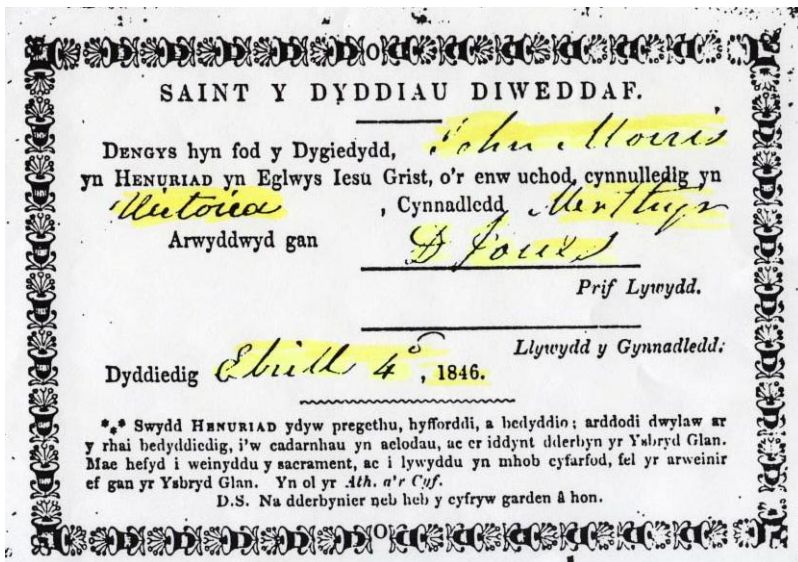
The closest LDS congregation to Monkton is now the Milford Haven branch with a purpose-built meeting house in Johnston, some seven miles to the north.

It should be noted that the naming of streets in 19th century Monkton was rather fluid, with some streets being referred to by more than one name. Monkton Lane, for example, is only marked on old maps as what is now Bridgend Terrace – the stretch of road leading up the hill into Monkton village centre, and strictly speaking still part of the town of Pembroke and the parish of St Marys. In fact in the 19th century Monkton Lane was the name used for the whole length of the road leading through the village. This often makes it difficult to pinpoint specific locations within the old village.

Individuals associated with the place:

John Morris (1805-1851) was born in Surrey, England, but moved to Wales as an adult. He is said to have been baptized into the LDS church in 1842. Widowed in 1840, he was called to serve as a missionary for the church and assigned to west Wales.





Photograph: John Morris' Missionary License, signed by Dan Jones in Victoria, Monmouthshire in April 1846

Morris became the first president of the Pembrokeshire Conference when it was formed in 1848. He had married **Mary Ormond** (1821-1903) of Marloes – the first Pembrokeshire convert - the previous year. They had two sons born in Monkton – **Joseph Smith Morris** (born 1849) and **Hyrum Smith Morris** (born 1850). The boys were evidently named after the founder of the LDS church in America, Joseph Smith, and his brother Hyrum. The Morris family emigrated in October 1850, taking with them Sarah Ann, John's daughter from his first marriage, and their oldest son Joseph Smith, Hyrum having died at just six weeks old and being buried in Monkton.



John Price (1820-1883) was born in Nantyglo, Monmouthshire, and brought up in the Methodist faith. The story is told that when he was a young man, he and a friend heard that 'Mormon' missionaries were baptising in a nearby river and planned some fun by throwing stones at the participants. But after the meeting began with a hymn and a prayer, the two young men found they'd had a change of heart and left the missionaries to carry on undisturbed. Whatever his experience with the LDS church thereafter, by age 24 John had been

baptised, and became active in preaching in the surrounding branches. He had married Margaret James in 1842 and she too was baptised, to the dismay of her Methodist family. She died in 1846, leaving John with a young son.

Welsh LDS Mission president Dan Jones counselled John to leave the area for Pembrokeshire to serve as a missionary, and this John did. In June 1851 in Monkton he re-married – to Margaret Edwards (1832-1866). Their marriage certificate lists his occupation as *Dissenting Minister*.



Price served as president of the Pembroke Conference until 1856 when the family emigrated on the *Samuel Curling* with the second large group of Welsh Saints under the direction of Dan Jones. A number of other members from Pembroke were in the group.



John Hopla (1820-1892) was a 'home' missionary in the area in 1853 and served as president of the Pembroke LDS branch from October 1850. He was also president of the local church council from 1851, with George Sinnett one of his counselors. John Price recorded in his journal:

October 11th 1850 In council at Monkton I commenced organizing and officering that Branch and council.... Here I ordained Priest John Hopla an Elder and set him to preside over the Pembroke branch and Elder

Thos. Noot 1st Counsellor .

Thomas Noot may also have been a 'home' missionary from Boulston, Pembrokeshire.

John Hopla's wife **Catherine** (nee Edwards, 1819-1859) was also a Pembrokeshire native. They moved from nearby Hundleton to Monkton in 1850 as John states, *on the purpose to have a house to preach and hold Saints meetings in and a place for Elders to lodge.*



The term *Saints* is used here to denote members of the LDS church – the same usage as Paul in the Old Testament writing to the saints at Ephesus or Corinth.

Hopla notes some of the local converts in 1850 in his journal:

*Nov 21st Baptised **Mary Jones** and **Eliza Jones** her daughter and confirmed them on the 24th at Monkton Sts. meeting*

*December 4th Baptised **Mary Sinnatt** and **Elizabeth Sommers** two aged women, one 88 & the other 85 years. Confirmed them the same time.*

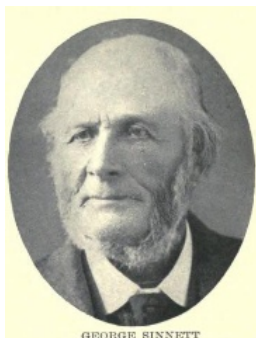
*Feb. 2nd 1851 Confirmed **Lewiza Gwyther** and Baptised **Thomas Oliver** - confd - 4th*

*Feb 7th Baptised **Mary Dawkins** and confirmed her 9th*

The Hopla's can be seen with three of their children aboard the *Samuel Curling*. Catherine died on the trek west, but John would go on to re-marry and settle in Spanish Fork, Utah.

The history of the Pembroke branch shows that there were 30 members in May of 1853, and this number remained fairly constant through 1854. Many of these individuals are difficult to identify in vital records. However a widowed Mary Sinnett of approximately

the right age can be seen on the 1851 and 1861 census records living in Pembroke. She dies in 1862, but in the 1851 census her neighbour was an Elizabeth Somers, also a widow.



George (1816-1895) and **Martha** (nee Watkins, 1812-1890) **Sinnett** were early converts in Monkton. Both were Pembrokeshire natives, and this was George's second marriage, as he was a widower. He was an agricultural labourer, and Martha kept a shop. George was for a short time the president of Pembroke branch.

George and Martha emigrated in 1856, apparently paying not only their own passage but also that of a dozen other local members. They settled in Spanish Fork, Utah Territory, along with some of their Monkton neighbours.



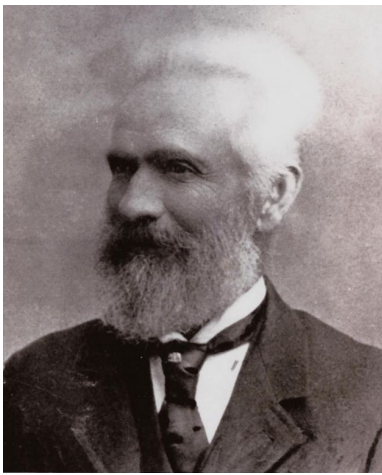
Photograph: Single storey houses in Monkton Lane, the street where George and Martha Sinnett are listed on the 1851 census. However, this is the portion of the street which was re-named Bridgend Terrace – as it is on the bridge end of the village – and strictly speaking is part of Pembroke, St Marys parish.

Paul Cray (1805-1879) is noted by John Hopla as a Monkton member in whose house meetings are held. He was from Somerset but his wife **Margaret** (nee Sinnett, 1813-1867) was local. He was a Royal Marine. The Crays did not emigrate; both died in Pembrokeshire.

Thomas (1776-1856) and **Elizabeth** (1805-1856) **Axton** can be seen in the 1841 census in Priory Mains, Monkton, with George Sinnett listed as the next entry. George Sinnett and Elizabeth Axton were brother and sister. Thomas was an agricultural labourer, and in 1856 he and Elizabeth emigrated with their son John (1846-1926), with Thomas' age listed as 80! He sadly died on the trek west across the American plains, and is buried in Wyoming. Elizabeth died shortly after arriving in the Salt Lake Valley, so John was brought up by relatives in Salt Lake City.

John Thomas Axton (1846-1926)





Daniel E. Williams (1802-1882) was a Pembrokeshire native who had migrated east to work in Monmouthshire, but returned as a missionary when twice widowed. He was very active in his calling, and provided both teaching and leadership to local Saints. He emigrated in 1853 and settled in Toole, Utah Territory.

SHIP *S. Curling* of 1858 Tons Register, *S. Curling*

No. in Application Book	NAME	Age	Profession or Occupation	ADDRESS	Country	No. of Months	Admission to Certificate of Seafarers
56	John Denny	25	Labourer	115 Dock st	E	20	April 1858
	Ann de	25	Wife	Michael Place Plymouth, Devon			
73	Anna C. Miller	41	Minister	21 Wykehill, Kent	W	14	April 1858
74	John Melling	28	Seiler	London at Camp E	202	April 1858	
	Ann C. de	25	Wife	Witch, Cheshire			
	John de	15					
96	John Lewis	31	Butler	Thomas St, Cardiff	W	205	April 1858
	Elizabeth de	33	Wife	W. Carmarthen			
	George de	6					
	Elizabeth de	3					
	Charles de	6 mo.					
	Abraham Davis	38	Spinning			204	April 1858
	Thomas Williams	13				215	April 1858
	John Hays	41	Labourer	W. St. Griffith, W. Devon		205	April 1858
	Margaret de	44	Wife	W. St. Andrew, Devon			
	Ann de	10		W. St. Andrew			
	John Price	37	Miner	W. St. Andrew, Devon		207	April 1858
	Margaret de	38	Wife	W. St. Andrew			
	John W. de	3		W. St. Andrew			
	Joseph de	11	Infant				
	Abigail Sinnett	38	Wife			208	April 1858
	James Thomas	23	Spinning			209	April 1858
	Thomas Thomas	41	Labourer	6 St. Andrew, Devon		210	April 1858
	Thomas W. de	37	Miner	W. St. Andrew		211	April 1858
	Margaret de	34	Wife				
	Joseph de	7		W. St. Andrew			
	Myron de	6					
	Marion de	1					
	John Hays	15	Spinning			212	April 1858
	Edward Hilditch	43				213	April 1858
	Thomas Jones	60	Farmer	W. St. Andrew, Devon		214	April 1858
	George Sinnett	37	Labourer	W. St. Andrew, Devon		215	April 1858
	George Hays	48	Seaman	W. St. Andrew, Devon		216	April 1858

This page from the ship's manifest of the *Samuel Curling* shows Martha and George Sinnett, with John and Margaret Price and their children.

Page 91 of the manifest includes: John Hopla, age 35, Quarry Man Catherine, age 35, Wife Jane, 7; John, 4; Lorenzo, 11 months.

William Thomas, 38, Thatcher Lettice Thomas, 39, Wife Stephen Thomas, 11; Elizabeth Thomas, 6; Joseph Thomas, 5 months

James Crane, 24, Labourer

Joseph Davies, 19, Labourer

These are listed under "Mr. John Price, Mr. Sinnett, Grocer, Monkton, Pembrokeshire" - who

would have been the local leaders who forwarded their information to church headquarters in Liverpool to book their passage.

And on later pages, again with names submitted by John Price and/or George Sinnett: John T. Thayne, 26, Farmer

- John Casens, 23, Miner
- Martha Casens, 19, Wife
- William Casens, 13, Miner
- William Geo, 18, Miner

Thomas Axton, 80, Farmer
Elizabeth Axton, 51, Wife
John Axton, 11

Margaret R. Thayne, 23, Spinster

Sarah Griffiths, 21, Spinster
Robert Roberts, 18, Quarry Man

William Thomas, 38, Thatcher
Letitia Thomas, 39, Wife
Stephen Thomas, 11; Elizabeth, 6; Joseph, 5 months

James Crane, 24, Labourer

Joseph Davies, 19

Some of these families were from other branches of the church in Pembrokeshire. Nevertheless, it is clear that in 1856 the *Samuel Curling* carried away the core of Pembroke branch.



Stories about this place:

The first documentary evidence of LDS converts living in Monkton comes from the journal of John Morris in 1847:

October 22nd, 1847. I visited some Saints in New Zealand [now Long Mains, Monkton] and enjoined with them in prayer.

Daniel Williams' journal entries, some two years later, show that both preaching and conversion were lively in the area:

February 1850. On Sunday 12th preached at Priory Mains, baptised Thomas Rees and Thomas Harris of Manorbier. Held a Saints' Meeting at Mr. George Sinnatt's. Confirmed Thos. Rees and Thos Harris; had a good meeting, full of the Spirit of God.

Monday 13th. Preached at John Bagshaw's at Hundleton, to a large congregation.

Tuesday 14th. Continued at Monkton, conversing with many about the gospel. Baptised Mary Ann Griffiths of Hundleton.

Wednesday, 15th. Baptised John Bagshaw and John Hopla of Hundleton; confirmed them that evening in Saints' meeting held at William Davies', Priory Mains.

Thursday 16th. Preached at Square Island.

Monday 20th. Baptised Mary Howells, Catherine Hopla and Harriet Dawkins of Hundleton.

Wednesday 22nd. Saints' meeting in Monkton, confirmed the above three Sisters.

Sunday 3rd March. I preached at Priory Mains and attended Saints' Meeting; confirmed Ann Lawrence.

Monday 4th. Preached at Hundleton.

Tuesday 5th at Square Island.

Wednesday 6th, Saints' Meeting at Monkton.

Sunday 10th. Preached at Monkton at 10 o'clock, Saints' Meeting at 2:30 o'clock, confirmed Thomas Griffiths, Elizabeth Lewis and William Griffiths. The Holy Ghost was poured out on all the Saints. The gift of prophecy fell on Thomas Griffith while I was confirming him.

Under the requirements of the law of the time, dissenters – that is, any denomination other than the Church of England – had to apply to register premises for religious worship. This law had been in force since the 17th century and was relaxed in 1852. Copies of applications for two places to be registered for the LDS church are kept at the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth:

- One made by John Morris for the dwelling house of *William Davies, mariner*, in March 1850, and
- The other made by Daniel Williams for the dwelling of *the late William Edmonds* in February 1851.

However, Daniel Williams also records in his journal for 23 June 1852:

I attend the councils at Monkton every fortnight and took the minutes; also to all the general councils and did the same till conference; which took place on the 23rd of May, 1852; in a new chapel which was opened on that day at Monkton.

On 23 May 1852 John Price had recorded in his journal:

Had a splendid conference in our new chapel at Monkton. I conducted the services of the day aided by several presidents of conferences and Elders from our own Conference.

The following month a journal entry refers to money borrowed from George Sinnett for the construction of the new chapel, and an agreement to pay rent on the building, as it had been constructed on land adjacent to where George Sinnett and his wife were living. Brother Sinnett evidently had some misgivings about the money and expressed his dissatisfaction by withholding the key to the chapel at one point, but the issue was evidently resolved. There are also notes that Martha Sinnett made contributions to the cost of the building, and of the amounts paid to a carpenter, and for hauling stone.

Daniel Williams records in his journal that he registered the building for worship, as required by law, on 24 August 1852.

Local historian Keith Johnson has concluded from his research that George and Martha Sinnett lived in the village of Monkton proper, and indeed a small chapel is marked on an 1869 map of the village. This was in the street now named Long Mains, or New Zealand to give it its local historical name. The building is noted as an *Independent Chapel* on the map. This could refer to its being independent of the Established Church – i.e. a non-conformist denomination – or it could have been built by LDS church members and taken over by the Independents once the branch had disbanded due to emigration. There is an Independent Sunday School building opposite the parish church which was built in 1850. It is referred to as Mains Independent, suggesting that the principal place of worship was the building in Long Mains. And indeed this building appears on the 1851 census as an independent chapel, which disqualifies it as the LDS chapel which was not completed until more than a year later.



An alternative location for the LDS chapel has been suggested by Keith Johnson. Bush Terrace, pictured here (photograph courtesy of Keith Johnson) is one of the few parts of the old west side of the village still standing. The Terrace is on the south side of the B4320. These small houses had very long gardens, and at the end of one of the gardens is a building with a porch. It would

have been accessible via Watery Lane (Old Conduit on modern maps) which runs along the end of the gardens. Further research will be required to determine whether this can be verified as the LDS chapel, but it does currently look like the most likely candidate.

The growth of the church in the area did not go unnoticed or unopposed. In December 1850, after performing a baptism at Monkton, Daniel Williams recorded in his journal:

The people about Monkton getting very mad; would frequently surround the house in the night, roar like bears, beat the doors and windows till we have expected that they would have been smashed to pieces.

And again in January 1851:

Returned to Pembroke and found that the Saints were all well, but had been greatly annoyed early that morning by a group Wesleyans returning from their Watch Meeting. They had attacked Elder Hopla's house with a design to murder some of us. About 1 o'clock in the morning Sister Hopla was awakened by a tremendous crack at the window, she distinctly heard one of them swear "We'll have 'em out directly." Another tremendous crash at the door with some heavy weapon started one of the planks of the door and nearly drew the staple which received a large iron bolt which fastened the door. They made another rush at the door with their shoulders, but failed to get it open; they then tried to force open the shutter of the window. While they were at this Elder Hopla mustered and called out "What do you want?" which frightened them and they ran away cursing and swearing like madmen!

And again in August 1852, the day before Daniel Williams registered the new chapel, he recorded in his journal:

[23rd] We held a concert, which went off well. We all rejoiced together, but a mob gathered outside and attacked the house with stones, brawling like madmen. They tried to force the doors but failed. At half past nine o'clock the concert closed with prayer. When the brethren were going home peaceable, the mob followed them, tripped the heels of Wm. Hart and William Thomas and beat them, also Elder George Gibbs, pelting the men, women and children with stones; while they offered no resistance, but took shelter in the house of Bro. Richard Jones, a priest. When they had entered the mob threw stones through the windows, breaking every window in the house, but the brethren received no more hurt. They staid there until morning.

24th. I walked to Monkton, to see Pres. J Price and the brethren to see if we could find out who had done the mischief on the previous night. We found out several who were the ringleader of the mob, but could not find who beat the brethren or broke the windows.

The history of the Pembrokeshire Conference also records in December 1853, that after a conference held in Monkton:

Brother Richard Jones had had his windows broken by a mob who had collected about the brethren and sisters to beat them as they were returning home from conference, and they took shelter in Brother Jones' house, and then the mob had their revenge by breaking the windows. A collection was taken up to pay for the damage.

Not all of the opposition came from the local community. There was also some dissension among the members, and even a court case where an unmarried woman in Pembroke branch named John Price as the father of her unborn child. The case was reported in the local press and Price was found guilty and ordered to pay support for the child. Daniel Williams however states that although several local leaders attended the court to speak in Price's favour, they were not allowed to do so.

Despite the opposition encountered, Daniel Williams also notes the kindness of the local Saints towards him as he serves his mission:

While I was at H. West my clothes got very bare, and Sister Howells of Monkton gave me a suit of clothes. Susannah Williams of Freystrop Branch knit me a pair of new stockings. Sister Howells gave me the yarn and also a pair of new stockings, and some shirts. May God bless these women is my prayer, and I promise to bless them all in time to come.

While I was transcribing [the branch records into a new book] I was supported principally by Mary Howells, Martha Sinnatt, Mary Ann Griffiths and Catherine Hopla. Sometime in the month of Oct. when President Price returned from Merthyr I received counsel from him and President Phillips to take Mary Howells to wife and to prepare for emigrating in the spring.



He did indeed marry Mary Howells. Their marriage certificate shows her to be a widow and he a *Minister of the Gospel* – and they emigrated in February 1853, settling eventually in Tooele, Utah.

Shortly before he died in 1882, Daniel Williams, in a letter to his daughter, wrote:

*The kingdom is growing daily, and the world is helping it grow by their trying to stop it--
The more they kick it the wider it spreads, like the mustard seeds the man kicked out of his garden.*

The majority of early Latter Day Saints left Monkton, and locals no doubt thought they had stopped the spread of the LDS church. History has shown this to be untrue, but for perhaps a twenty-year period, Monkton was central to the growth of the LDS church in Pembrokeshire, and the location of one of very few known purpose-built LDS chapels in Wales.

GPS coordinates: 51°40'29.3"N 4°55'25.2"W

Sources for this historical information:

The missionary journal of John Morris, available online at <http://welshmormon.byu.edu> in the *Immigrants* database

The missionary journal of John Price, available online at <http://welshmormon.byu.edu> with subsequent volumes held at the Church History Library in Salt Lake City, Utah

The Record Book of John Hopla, available online at <http://welshmormon.byu.edu> in the *Immigrants* database

The missionary journal of D.E. Williams, available online at:
<http://welshmormon.byu.edu>

<https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org> for the *British Mission Manuscript History and Historical Reports*, including details of the Pembrokeshire Conference and the *Manuscript History* of the Pembroke branch

<http://www.pembrokeandmonktonhistory.org.uk>

Keith Johnson. *Monkton Mormons*. Draft chapter in a proposed book on the history of Monkton, commissioned by the Pembroke and Monkton Local History Society, who also provided early maps of Monkton.

Grant Vaughn
Jill Morgan
February 2021