

Rhydybont: Home of the ‘*prostitute press*’ in 1846

Jill Morgan

John Jones was born in 1801 at Tan-yr-Ogof near Abergele, in North Wales. Initially a coal-miner, he became a clerk at Llangollen to Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn, a Welsh landowner and politician, and by 1837 had gained a reputation as a lecturer on temperance. In 1839 he joined the Independents, and in 1842 was ordained as a minister and assigned to Capel Nonni, Brynteg, and Rhydybont near Llanybydder in Carmarthenshire. In Rhydybont he also set up his own printing press.¹



Rhydybont chapel in 2015 (photograph: author)

The original chapel at Rhydybont was built in 1778. It was rebuilt in 1829 and again in 1911. The current chapel, a two-storey building in Gothic style, is a Grade II listed building. The previous chapel had both stone and slate faced walls, as can be seen in this image.



Rhydybont chapel as it would have looked in the 1840s²

¹ It is assumed that the press was set up in the house adjoining the chapel, although this has never been confirmed.

² Reproduced by permission of The National Library of Wales Creative Archive Licence, this image can be accessed at: <https://www.peoplescollection.wales/items/17494>

It was said by some that John Jones was *exceedingly unreliable*, as the views he expressed in his lectures were often considered controversial. However, he preached extensively on the subject of baptism (by sprinkling – he was opposed to the idea of immersion) and published a number of pamphlets or tracts of his own writing, including the extensive *Y Bedyddiwr* (1842); *Adroddiad o'r Ddadl ar Fedydd yn Rhymni rhwng T.G. Jones a J. Jones o Llangollen* (1841); and *Testament yr Ysgol Sabothol* (1849).³

His printing press and liberal ideas were also important to his brother, Dan Jones, as his was the first press to produce Welsh-language publications for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (often referred to as *Mormons*, or in the 19th century, *Mormonites*).

Born in Halkyn in 1811, Dan Jones became converted to the restored gospel of the 'Mormons' and was baptized in the winter of 1842-43 in St Louis, Missouri. He is often referred to as Captain Dan Jones, as he was then working as a ship's captain on the Mississippi river. He returned to Wales twice as a missionary for the LDS church and experienced significant success in terms of the number of converts (more than 300 Welsh would accompany him to America when he completed his first mission). This success is attributed not only to his great testimony, oratory and diligence, but also to the extent of his writings – in Welsh – on gospel topics. The majority of pamphlets written by Dan Jones during his first mission to Wales (1845-1849) were printed on his brother's press at Rhydybont, as were 28 of the 30 issues of the Latter Day Saint periodical *Prophwyd y Jubili*⁴, first established by Dan Jones in 1846.



John Jones was subjected to severe criticism for publishing his brother's work; his press at Rhydybont was referred to as the *prostitute press* for printing the *dull and idiotic* writings of the 'Mormons.' His response was matter-of-fact: *Our work in printing their books proves nothing more than the fact that our press is made of*

³ *Baptism, A report of the debate on baptism at Rhymney between T. G. Jones a J. Jones o Langollen, and Testament of Sunday School*, respectively.

⁴ *Prophet of the Jubilee*.

iron and its owner is a free craftsman. Certainly no other press would print Dan Jones' responses to the frequent, lengthy and bitter criticisms of his work which appeared in the publications of the day.

Rhydybont chapel is situated on the B4337 approximately one mile from the centre of Llanybydder, on the road to Llansawel. In the 1840s branches of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints were established in both Llanybydder and Llansawel, as well as Brechfa and Lampeter. An 1876 journal entry from Elder Thomas Martell (who served a mission in Wales from 1875 to 1876) shows that some of these congregations were still in existence thirty years later, although emigration had several reduced membership locally:

Monday March 6th. I walked from Clwlffwn [Clwtffwrn] to Llanybydder purposing there to preach in the evening. There was a musttry[?] fair in the place that day, and in the evening meetings to be held at Rhidybout [Rhydybont] and at Aborduar [Aberduar].

In February 1846, Dan Jones wrote the following letter to Reuben Hedlock (then president of British LDS Mission).

Ryd-y-bont, February 7th, 1846

Dear brother Hedlock,--I have now the last form of my pamphlet in press, and am busily engaged working them off myself. I have also a reply ready, to a pamphlet published lately; printed in Welsh, at Merthyr, against my first pamphlet, by a clan of priests, misrepresenting us, and our good Mormon creed, most foully. This I can publish within a month, if I stay here to do it.

I have more places to preach in, round here, than I can possibly attend to. In fact, the prospect is good everywhere for a plentiful crop of good souls ere long. The people tell such lies about us as to stir up the curiosity of many to hear us. I have two chapels now in the neighbourhood to preach in when I can.

The letter also announced:

I intend publishing a Welsh magazine, monthly, price threepence, to proclaim the everlasting truths of Mormonism through Wales, as I hinted at manchester, and I have greater encouragements continually; then I will also insert your communications with pleasure.

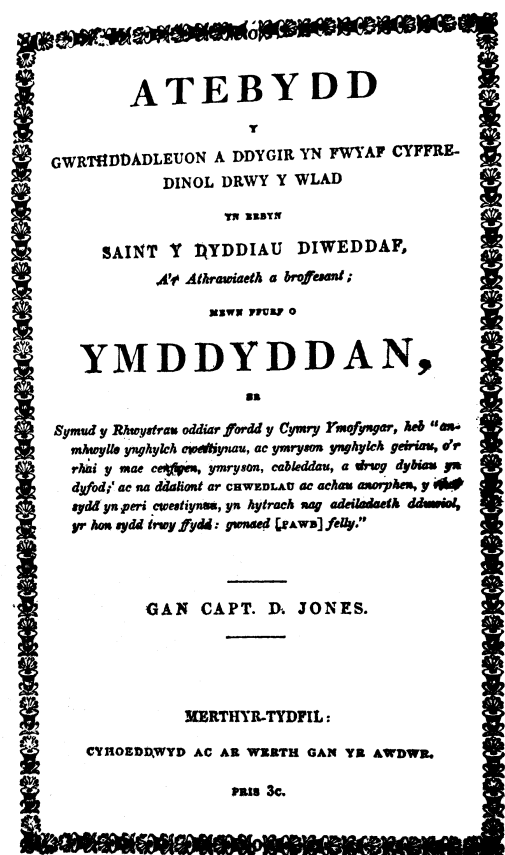
...

I remain, dear brother, yours as ever,

D. JONES

The pamphlet referred to was *Atebydd y gwrthddadleuon a ddygir yn fwyaf cyffredinol drwy y wlad yn erbyn Saint y Dyddiau Diwedda⁵*. Topics discussed include the necessity of baptism and proper authority, the apostasy and the restoration of the gospel – topics which Dan Jones revisits elsewhere.

Dr Ronald D. Dennis, a direct descendant of Dan Jones, has authored numerous publications relating to the history of the early Latter Day Saints in Wales.⁶ He has also translated the writings of Dan Jones into English, including all issues of *Prophwyd y Jubili* and its successor *Udgorn Seion*.



Sixteen Welsh-language items are known to have been printed by John Jones for his brother in Rhydybont between 1846 and 1847. But despite his close associations with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and its doctrines, he was never

⁵ *A Reply to the Objections which are Most Commonly Brought throughout the country against the Latter Day Saints.*

⁶ See: <https://www.peoplescollection.wales/items/1891931> See also: <http://www.welshsaints.byu.edu/> the website dedicated to Welsh LDS Church history, established by Dr Dennis and now under the direction of Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah.

baptised as a member, although his wife and two daughters were. The family emigrated from Wales in 1854 and settled in Cincinnati, Ohio, where he died.

Thereafter the printer for LDS publications was generally John S. Davis from Carmarthen, who had become acquainted with the LDS church while in John Jones' employ as a type-setter, and who was baptised in 1845. By 1849 he had moved – with his own press – to Merthyr Tydfil, where he took over the printing of Welsh LDS publications and subsequently also translated both the *Book of Mormon* and *Doctrine and Covenants*⁷ into Welsh. The doctrines of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints would continue to pour forth, but the Welsh were first fully introduced to this gospel through the *prostitute press* of the Rev. John Jones in Rhydybont.

Jill Morgan

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⁷ Both of these are considered books of scripture by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, companion volumes to the Bible in teaching the word of God.