

# The Temperance Hall, Aberdare, and the Latter Day Saints

Jill Morgan



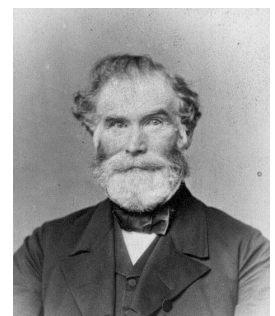
Currently a retail premises on the ground floor, with the Ty Oriel apartments on the floors above, this building in Canon Street was originally the Temperance Hall. Early photographs show just two storeys, with the entrance in the gable end, and a front porch in a variety of different styles over the years.

In the late 1860s the Temperance Hall was the location for conferences of the Welsh District of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints ('Mormons'). This was a period when membership of the LDS church across Wales was still relatively high and missionary work continued apace, although there was

considerable opposition to the missionaries in North Wales, and membership was in serious decline in rural West Wales due to both emigration and disaffection.

Three conferences are reported in the *Millennial Star*<sup>1</sup> as being held in the Aberdare Temperance Hall between August 1866 and October 1868. There may also have been additional conferences held at this venue.

**Sunday August 26 1866** a conference of the Welsh District was held at the Temperance Hall, with Orson Pratt snr and John W. Young presiding. **Orson Pratt** (1811-1881) had converted to 'Mormonism' in September 1830. A native of New York state, he came to Britain more than once as a missionary, but at the time of this conference he was serving in the German mission.



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<sup>1</sup> The UK-based publication of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints from 1840 to 1970.

**John W. Young** (1844-1924) was a son of President Brigham Young (successor to Joseph Smith) by his second wife Mary Angell, and was born in Nauvoo, Illinois. He served as a missionary in Europe from 1866 to 1867.



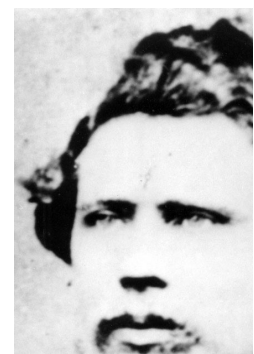
Other missionaries mentioned in the conference report include James Ure, John Parry, R.J. Davies, E. Frost, Abel Evans and Barry Wride.



**James Ure** (1817-1897) was born in Renfrewshire, Scotland, and was baptized into the LDS church in 1840 by Alexander Wright, one of the first LDS missionaries in Scotland. Ure emigrated in 1849 but returned to the British Isles twice as a missionary.

**John Parry** (1817-1882) was a native of Trelawnyd (Newmarket) in North Wales. He was baptized when 28 years of age and served a four-year 'home mission' before emigrating in 1856. He returned to Wales as a missionary in 1865 and served as president of the Glamorgan conference of the church, which at the time had 700 members. John Parry kept a detailed journal, which can be found on the Welsh Mormon History website under his individual record in the *Immigrants* database (See *Sources* below).

**Richard J. Davies** (1826-1892) was born in Ystradfodwg, Glamorganshire, and accepted the gospel through baptism in 1851, followed shortly thereafter by his wife Rebecca. They would emigrate in 1853 and settle in Willard, Utah, north of Salt Lake City. He would return to Wales as a missionary in 1865 and would later serve as president of the Carmarthenshire conference.



**Edwin Frost (1841-1904)** was present at the Temperance Hall in his capacity of president of the Herefordshire Conference. Born of an old Connecticut family, his parents joined the LDS Church when he was a very young child. They were among the first groups to enter the Salt Lake

Valley in 1847. Elder Frost served in the British Mission from 1864 to 1867.

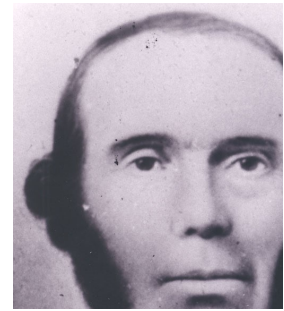
**Abel Evans** (1812-1866) was a native of Llangan, Carmarthenshire.

In 1849 Captain Dan Jones wrote of a new Welsh Mission presidency which had been formed. It included '*an indefatigable veteran*' Abel Evans, whose service to the church had been tireless since his conversion in 1844. His family had moved from rural

Carmarthenshire to industrial Merthyr Tydfil for the increased work

opportunities it offered, and were associated with the Independents. Abel Evans' conversion came about because of a series of debates held between the Independents and the 'Mormons', with Abel speaking for the former. During the second debate on the subject of baptism, however, Abel apparently fell silent during his speech, suddenly realizing that he no longer believed the Independents' doctrine. He was baptized into the LDS church that very night.

Sadly he would die just months after attending this conference.



**Barry Wride (1833-1913)** was a native of Llantrisant,

Glamorganshire, who was baptized into the LDS church in 1857

and emigrated in 1861. Just four years later he was called back to

Britain as a missionary and served until 1868. For part of this

mission, he was president of the Monmouthshire conference.



*Barry Wride in later years*

Travelling elders John D. Rees and James Boden were also present, as they were living within the boundaries of the Merthyr conference. It was typical for missionaries and leaders to travel to attend conferences. The *Star* reports that during the three sessions of the conference, "*spirited and edifying discourses were delivered by the brethren.*"

**Sunday 12 May 1867**, the Welsh District conference was again held at the Temperance Hall. Present were Franklin D. Richards, John Parry, Charles W. Penrose of the London conference, Frederick C. Anderson of the Bristol conference, as well as Elias Morris, John D. Rees, Richard J. Davies, Barry Wride, and William White. Instructions were given in both Welsh and English. The *Star* reports that the conference presidents gave their reports which were '*very favourable*'. Statistics reported included:

- ✓ 48 branches (congregations) in the Welsh District
- ✓ 297 individuals baptized into the church between March 1866 and March 1867
- ✓ 277 individuals had emigrated from Wales during that same time period.



Leaders and missionaries at the 1867 Welsh District conference in the Temperance Hall, Aberdare, 1867.

L to R: Charles W. Penrose, Franklin D. Richards, William White, Elias Morris, James Boden, Barry Wride, John Parry, John D. Rees, Richard J. Davis

President John Parry made the point that local members were mostly of the working class and poor, and “*consequently not able to comply with the call of the Lord to come out of Babylon [emigrate].*” However, financial affairs of the district were “*satisfactory.*”

Elder Charles W. Penrose during his talk argued that LDS church members:

*should be more energetic than the Saints [members] of former days, because they have a greater stimulant to exertion viz, that the latter day kingdom should not be prevailed against but become the dominant power in the earth.*

*The great question with all, he said, should be whether we individually shall prevail with the kingdom.* He concluded by exhorting the saints to faithfulness and diligence.

**October 18 1868**, the Welsh District conference was held at the Temperance Hall, under the leadership of Albert Carrington, president of the European Mission, and Elias Morris president of the Welsh District. Also present were conference presidents Nephi Pratt, John S. Lewis, W. C. Thomas, Levi W. Richards, and Thomas P. Green, who all addressed the meetings. The district was reported as having 37 branches, 1,657 members, with upwards of 1,000 having

been added in the last 3 years. Much open-air preaching had been done, and night schools had been established to provide for those too poor to attend other schools. The *Star* reported that the hall was well filled with attentive congregations, among whom there were several strangers (non-members), and that many had walked “*considerable distances*” to attend.

**John D. Rees** (1815-1880) served as a missionary in Wales from 1866 to 1868. Born in Merthyr Tydfil and christened into the Presbyterian cause, he had been baptized a member of the LDS church as an adult in 1846. He and his wife Mary were part of the first large group of Welsh saints who emigrated aboard the *Buena Vista* under Dan Jones’ leadership in 1849. In 1867 he had returned and was serving as president of the Swansea conference.

**James Boden** (1823-1868) was president of the Aberdare branch of the LDS church. He was born in Nantgarw, his wife in Pontypool, and they had been baptized in 1848, not long after their marriage. He was serving as a local missionary – not doubt in between working to support his family. The couple emigrated to Utah in 1868, where, sadly, he died shortly after their arrival.



**Franklin D. Richards** (1821-1899) presided over the whole of the British Mission from 1866 to 1868, but had already served as a missionary in the British Isles five times previously. A native of Massachusetts, his father was a cousin to Brigham Young, through whom the family were introduced to the LDS church.



**Charles W. Penrose** (1832-1925) was born in London and baptized in 1850 at age 18. He emigrated some ten years later but would return to the British Isles as a missionary four times. Kenneth Godfrey, in a 1987 article, states:

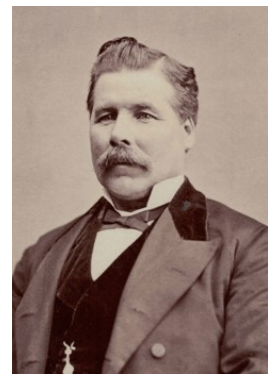
*Elder Penrose’s full-time service in Britain exceeded that of every other Latter Day Saint missionary. His first mission alone lasted a full decade and later calls brought the total to more than seventeen years. In addition, he was a prolific writer for newspapers, a politician of enormous influence, and a gifted poet during his last two decades. Yet he was first and foremost a missionary from the*

*moment he experienced the new birth of baptism until he drew his last breath seventy-seven years later.*

Details of how to access Kenneth Godfrey's article can be found in *Sources* below.


**Frederick Christian Anderson** (1840-1908) was born in Ullerup, Denmark and was baptized into the LDS church at age 18 in 1858. He had been serving in the Scandinavian and then the European mission. In his conference talk he exhorted the Saints to live their religion, *so that if the people would not come to hear the gospel, they might see by our example that this was the work of the Lord.*

**Elias Morris** (1825-1898), a native of Llanfair Talhaiarn, Denbighshire, had been baptized in 1849 and served a mission in Britain before emigrating in 1852. He returned as a missionary in 1865 and was serving as the Glamorgan Conference president in 1867, but was president of the whole Welsh Conference by October 1868.



**William White** (1826-1905) was a native of Pembrokeshire. He was working in Swansea in his mid-20s when his mother came there to tell him about the gospel message which she had just accepted from the LDS missionaries. William also heard the message and was baptized in 1852. He and his father were butchers in Haverfordwest and made a particularly good living providing meat to the British Navy. After his mother died in 1867, his father emigrated, but William was asked to remain awhile in Britain to lead the church in south Pembrokeshire. When he and his family emigrated in 1876 he offered to pay the fare for any local member who couldn't afford to emigrate. The congregation essentially disappeared as his generous offer was widely accepted.

On his death bed, with his family gathered around him, William White told his children and grand-children: *"I want to testify to you, and to the whole world if possible, for the last time in mortality, that I do know that Joseph Smith, Jr., was indeed a true prophet of the living God, and that 'Mormonism' is nothing more or less than the everlasting Gospel restored again for the salvation and exaltation of all those who obey its requirements. And all I ask of you, my children is to follow me, as I have followed Christ our Redeemer."*



**Albert Carrington**, (1813-1899) was born in Vermont and baptized in 1841 in Nauvoo. This was the first of three missions he would serve in the British Isles. After this first mission he was called as a member of the Quorum of Twelve Apostles – the leading council of the LDS church after the president. He was also a member of the Utah legislature, the official Church Historian, and the editor of the *Deseret News* in Salt Lake City.



**Nephi Pratt** (1846-1910) was born in Nauvoo, Illinois, at a time when LDS church members were experiencing the extreme persecution which led to their leaving the city.

*Nephi Pratt in later years*

He was a young man when he was called to serve as a missionary in Britain, and in January 1900 he would write to the *Deseret News* of an experience he had while serving as a missionary in Wales. This was in response to negative press then circulating in relation to the ordinance of healing.

*Healed of Smallpox, Testimony of a Living Witness to the Power of Faith*

*I wish to bear my testimony, particularly as this is a time when we are supposed to have among us, the beginning of an epidemic of smallpox. In the winter of 1868, I was laboring as a missionary in South Wales. In the town of Cardiff I was taken very sick. It was soon discovered by the people in whose house I was staying that I had a severe case of smallpox. A physician was sent for who pronounced it a very dangerous case, and who gave full direction as to the treatment to be given. The day that he was called to see me my whole body was covered with pustules until there seemed to be no particle of my body that was free from them. That same evening Elders John Parry, Elias Morris and John S. Lewis kneeled down by my bedside, and besought the Lord in earnest prayer that my life might be spared, setting forth in their supplication, my youth, the great distance I was from home and kindred, that I was there in the service of the Lord, and that my life was despaired of by some who had much experience in nursing those afflicted with this most dreadful scourge. After thus praying, the brethren took a bottle of oil which had been consecrated and set apart for the anointing of the sick, and under the direction of Elder John Parry, anointed me, commencing at the top of my head and rubbing the oil downwards until the whole surface of my body had received the application. They then laid their hands on my head and in the name of Jesus Christ rebuked the disease and commanded me to be made whole, and I was immediately relieved from all pain and distress, went into a*

*refreshing sleep, woke up with a sharp appetite and was every whit recovered. My skin began to peel off and I peeled from my head downwards until the skin came off from the bottoms of my feet. Two or three days afterwards I took a cab, was driven to a railway station, took the train to Merthyr Tydvil, twenty-four miles distant, and went about my missionary duties, as usual. When Elder Elias Morris reported to the doctor aforesaid, how I had been healed and taken a journey he exclaimed with much vehemence, "You have killed the young man." I am, however, alive today, thirty-two years after the events here recorded and have never had a relapse of that disease. Thus did the Lord God show his mercy and power to me in response to the prayers, anointing and administration of His servants.*

**John Saunders Lewis (1835-1893)** was born in Bedwellty, Monmouthshire and was baptized into the LDS church in 1855. He emigrated the following year. Elder Lewis returned to Wales as a missionary in 1867 and is reported in the *Star* as attending a variety of conferences across south Wales. He had a fine singing voice and was often asked to sing at these meetings. He also composed hymns and songs, with many of his compositions included in LDS song books, and was a member of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. While on his mission he reports rehearsing local church members and singing solos at a concert given in Swansea. He would also later conduct choirs and other musical groups in Utah for more than twenty years.



**Levi W. Richards (1845-1914)** was also born in Nauvoo and his father was another cousin to Brigham Young. He was an only child with a tendency to being sickly. However his parents were promised by Brigham Young that if they allowed Levi to go West across the Rocky Mountains with the main body of the LDS church while they served a mission in Britain, they would find him healthy on their return. This they found to be true. Elder Richards served his mission in the British Isles from 1867 to 1870.

**Thomas Parry Green (1823-1882)** was born in Halkyn, Flintshire. The 1867 conference report lists him as president of the North Wales conference. He appears on the 1871 census in Bagillt with wife Martha and some of their children. In addition to his occupation of



Blacksmith the census notes he is a 'Local Mormon Elder.' He and Martha would emigrate in 1880 with five of their children, and both would pass away two years later in Logan, Utah.

These are just some of the missionaries and leaders associated with the conferences held at the Temperance Hall in the late 1860s. Many of them were Welsh natives who had emigrated and who returned to continue the missionary work which had brought them to a knowledge of the gospel preached by the LDS church. Conferences provided opportunities for missionaries scattered across Wales and other parts of Britain to meet together with their fellow labourers and leaders. They also gave local members opportunities to be instructed in doctrine and hear the testimonies of those who served with and for them in the work of the Lord.

**Sources for this historical information:**

*Aberdare Walking Trail* brochure, online at:

<https://www.rctcbc.gov.uk/EN/Tourism/Thingstodo/WalkingandCyclingTrails/WalkingTrails/relateddocs/HeritagewalkingtrailAberdare.pdf>

'Charles W. Penrose: The English Mission Years.' Kenneth W. Godfrey in *BYU Studies Quarterly*, 27:1. 1987. Available online at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol27/iss1/11/>

Cynon Culture, online at: <http://cynonculture.co.uk/wordpress/aberdare/aberdare-temperance-hall-building>

Manuscript History of the Welsh District, available online via the Church History Library Catalog: <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/>

Millennial Star, online at: <https://lib.byu.edu/collections/mormon-publications-19th-20th-centuries/m/#latter-star>

LDS Missionary database, online at:

<https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/landing/missionary-database>

<http://welshmormon.byu.edu>