

Cross-Party Group on Faith: Hybrid meeting

People and places of faith: Is Wales doing enough to promote, protect and celebrate its faith heritage?

Wednesday 8 November from 12.00 - 13.00

Conference Rooms C & D, Ty Hywel and on Teams

Present online:

1. Ainsley Griffiths, Church in Wales
2. Bonnie Williams, Director of Housing Justice Cymru
3. Christian Williams
4. Christine Abbas, Baha'i community
5. David Brownutt
6. Donna Graves, Associate Adviser for RE/ RVE and SACRE/SAC, Central South Consortium Joint Education Service
7. Eddie Tulasiewicz, Head of Policy and Public Affairs, National Churches Trust
8. Elliott Vanstone, Mission Adviser, Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales
9. Gareth Simpson, Support officer Wales, National Churches Trust
10. Libby Jones, WASACRE, Religious Education Adviser, Wrexham County Borough Council
11. Molly Conrad, Partnerships and Public Affairs Officer, Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales
12. Naoise Grenham, Policy and Research Analyst, Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales
13. Nathan Abrams (presenter)
14. Owen Collins, Development Manager in the Catholic Archdiocese of Cardiff
15. Siva Sivapalan, Hindu community
16. Sophie Andreae, Vice-Chair of the Patrimony Committee of the Catholic Church in England and Wales
17. Tara Moorcroft, support staff – Darren Millar MS
18. Therese Warwick, Community Participation Co-ordinator, CAFOD
19. Tom Perry, support staff – Tom Giffard MS
20. Wali Mohammad

Present in person:

1. Albert Lalmangaiha, Presbyterian Church of Wales
2. Carys Moseley, Church and Society Department Liaison Officer, Presbyterian Church of Wales
3. Christine Moore, Addoldai Cymru (presenter)

4. Christopher Catling, The Secretary (CEO), Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales
5. Colin Harris, Cardiff Watch
6. Daniel Starkey, intern for Darren Millar MS
7. Darren Millar MS (chair)
8. Jim Stewart (note-taker)
9. Kate McColgan, Chair of the Interfaith Council of Wales
10. Klara Ferreira, Evangelical Alliance Wales
11. Lee Gonzalez, support staff – Joel James MS
12. Mark Isherwood MS
13. Mavis Harries, Cardiff Watch
14. Nathan Sadler, public Policy Officer, Evangelical Alliance Wales
15. Neil Sumner, trustee of Addoldai Cymru
16. Perminder Dillon, Project Leader, Welsh Asian Heritage Project
17. Peter Harrison, Engagement Officer, British Army
18. Sai Giridhar, Welsh Asian Heritage Project
19. Scott Lloyd, Royal Commission of the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales
20. Sion Brynach, Chief Executive, Cytûn : Churches Together in Wales
21. Stanley Soffa, Jewish community
22. Stephen Adams, Senedd chaplaincy team, Church in Wales
23. Tim Rowlands, Head of Evangelical Alliance Wales

Apologies:

1. Andrew Misell, Director for Change, Alcohol Change UK
2. Gethin Rhys, Policy Officer, Cytûn : Churches Together in Wales
3. Llyr Gruffydd AS

1. Darren opened the meeting and asked attendees to observe a minute's silence to reflect on the events in Gaza and Israel and the Jewish and Muslim communities affected.

2. Darren introduced Christine Moore from Addoldai Cymru. Christine gave a presentation on the work of Addoldai Cymru which included:

A background of the Trust which was incorporated in 1999.

Their focus is on non-Anglican religious buildings in Wales – non-conformist Christian but also buildings of other faiths. They currently have acquired 11 church buildings.

A key success factor in enabling the buildings to be used by the community is getting capital grants

Addoldai Cymru is mentioned in the Welsh Government's Strategic Action Plan for Historic Places of Worship in Wales. Addoldai Cymru are noted as the organisation that is the 'third way' for religious buildings – the first way is for the buildings to stay open, the second way is that they close and become repurposed; the third way is that they are kept open and used by communities and tell the stories of those chapels and communities.

3. Darren then introduced Nathan Abrams who promotes Jewish history in North Wales

Nathan arrived in Bangor in 2006 and focuses on Jewish history in North Wales. He has created self-guided walking maps of Bangor, Llandudno and Anglesey, and exhibitions in Bangor, Llandudno and the Senedd in Cardiff. He hopes to cover Colwyn Bay and Wrexham. His aim is to capture, digitise and publicise Jewish history in North Wales.

4. Darren then chaired a wide-ranging discussion on Wales' faith heritage.

Darren asked Christine Moore (CM) about the list of 150 buildings that Addoldai Cymru had compiled to act as the main list

- (i) Are there any buildings of other faiths?
- (ii) What is the criteria of being on that list?

CM replied that they are non-conformist chapels as those are the ones that have approached Addoldai Cymru. She also said that Addoldai Cymru's constitution doesn't allow AC's constitution doesn't allow them to acquire Anglican churches. Addoldai Cymru was approached about a Roman Catholic Church on Anglesey a few years ago but that was the only occasion.

Addoldai Cymru needs to be selective and criteria includes being a grade 2 star listed building but not privately owned. Some on the list are not listed but are nevertheless considered to be important examples of that type of building. The list provides a framework whereby they can determine if they should try and acquire certain religious buildings but it is not a definitive list.

Tim Rowlands, Head of Evangelical Alliance in Wales, said that among the newer evangelical churches, there is a focus on church planting and they often need and are looking for a building. Despite what Christine said about growing evangelical churches wanting new, modern buildings, Tim feels that there is also a trend of evangelical churches wanting to repurpose older church buildings and that there is a real desire to engage with heritage.

Tim asked if there were anything in place that connects the older buildings with church planters?

CM replied that, to her knowledge, there wasn't but gave the example of liberty Church in Swansea.

Stanley Soffa from the south Wales Jewish community commended Nathan Abrams for the work he has been doing. Stanley mentioned the Foundation for Jewish Heritage and the Jewish History Association of South Wales that were worth engaging with. From a Welsh Jewish perspective, Stanley felt that Wales was not doing enough and mentioned that Wales Jewish communities in Swansea and Cardiff date back to 1761 and 1841 respectively.

Carys Mosely from the Presbyterian Church in Wales, asked if Addoldai Cymru was seeking to partner with Christian denominations to explore the beliefs and theology of the buildings? Carys felt that we are often unaware of what was believed but that there were subtle differences between denominations. Carys acknowledges that this might be seen as an added burden but to her, it was people's faith that was important and therefore worth understanding.

CM replied that Addoldai Cymru is a heritage organisation rather than a faith-based one and also very small. On the website, however, they try to tell the story of various denominations.

Christopher Catling, Secretary of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales said that their library in Aberystwyth had 3 shelves of theological works with nothing on architecture and history. The Royal Commission is trying to produce an overall picture of non-conformity in Wales which is absolutely core to Welsh identity

Nathan Abrams mentioned that, in North Wales, he is trying to capture the lived experience rather than focus on building: so artefacts that people might have in their house – documents, records, things relating to businesses – are of interest. The focus is on the faith and ethnic communities around those buildings. Nathans said that his email address could be shared with attendees.

Perminder Dillon, from the Royal Commission's Welsh Asian Heritage Project, shared about her work. The focus is on oral history but including mapping and recording buildings that are of religious and cultural importance, with some of the buildings being inherited from other religious places of worship. Her project is also interested in the people behind the buildings, and Perminder gave the example of Ugandan Asian who were expelled in 1972 and who came and settled in Wales. Part of the South Asian Heritage Project is about tracing those people and how they contributed to the life of Wales and changed the landscape in creating religiously and culturally important buildings. Another example is Afghan Sikhs, the struggles that they encountered in their journey and how they made Wales their home. It is a very multi-layered project.

Darren said that Senedd Members hear very little about the work of the Royal Commission so their work needs to be promoted to them.

Christopher Catling said that the Royal Commission was in the process of developing a new action plan and that it would be good to test the ideas on the members of the Cross-Party Group on Faith to see if they are addressing the issues.

Darren added that the Group would be very happy to engage in that and have some input to ensure that there are no gaps. There is often interest in buildings, for example, but these are not the only part of faith heritage: there are also pilgrim trails and faith trails, including trails that don't currently exist. Nathan is currently developing such trails around the Jewish faith in North Wales for example. Christine Abbas has also said that there are places in South Wales that are important to the Baha'i community but there are no trails as of yet to connect them.

Darren asked how the Royal Commission engages with faith groups and denominations in the construction of their plans.

Christopher Catling responded that in Wales, there is the Historic Places of Worship Forum which has 50 or so members of all denominations and other non-Christian faiths. There is an action plan that is designed to share good practice. The essence of the Forum is to keep places of worship in community use and they encourage influencers and decision makers to take inspiration from the ideas that members bring to the forum. There are a number of churches and chapels, for example, that are being used for overnight accommodation by the Churches Conservation Trust and the British Pilgrimage Trust.

Darren mentioned that a short walking pilgrimage is being organised by the Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales, provisional date 14 March 2024, to which any members of the Cross Party Group are welcome to attend. Elliott Vanstone will be sending invitations out shortly.

Owen Collins from the Catholic Archdiocese of Cardiff commented that that there had historically been more funding available for places of worship and capital repairs in England than in Wales, an example being the Cultural Recovery Fund – a stream which went to directly fund capital repairs but which was not done quite the same way in Wales.

Eddie Tulasiewicz from the National Churches Trust said that they have a new three-year project in Wales, Scotland and the North West of England called Cherish. They have funding for grants, particularly for small work, maintenance etc. The website is <https://www.nationalchurchestrust.org/cherish>.

Eddie also agreed with Owen, that there was much more money available in England for maintenance and looking after places of worship. Church buildings can be used for a variety of purposes such as church planting, community use (e.g. post offices, foodbanks, warm spaces) and heritage.

CM asked for clarification from Eddie if the Cherish project funded redundant buildings. Eddie responded, saying that the lines were blurring and that in Scotland churches were being taken over by community groups that may or may not have a bit of worship still in them. It is an evolving situation which will be similar in Wales as the need is for buildings that both are and are not open for worship.

5. Actions

The following action was agreed by the group:

To write to Dawn Bowden, the Welsh Government Minister whose responsibilities include heritage:

- To seek further investment in order to protect religious buildings that are at risk
- To ask if we can engage more in the work of the Royal Commission, and have some more formal engagement either as a Cross-Party Group or as individual members of different denominations and religious organisations
- To ask for resources for the Welsh curriculum in order to support educating people about their local built heritage
- To ask how the Welsh Government is responding to the 2020 published academic work, *Race, Faith and Planning in Britain*, particularly regarding the outcome to establish a register.

6. Darren closed the meeting by thanking everyone for participating and Christine and Nathan for their presentations.