

**RELIGION AND SOCIETY IN MONMOUTHSHIRE, 1840-1880,
WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THOMAS THOMAS,
THE PONTYPOOL BAPTISTS AND THE CAMPAIGN FOR
DISESTABLISHMENT**

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SUMMARY

This thesis examines the effects of the campaign for disestablishment upon the religious and social life of Monmouthshire in the period 1840-1880. From a position of strength in 1840, Nonconformists intensified their efforts to redress their religious and social grievances and to support the programme of the Liberation Society founded in 1844.

The main focus of this study is the increasing influence of the Baptists, the strongest Nonconformist denomination in Monmouthshire, during this period. The importance of the Baptist College and those involved in its leadership under its principal, Dr. Thomas Thomas, is analysed through the Dissenters' campaigns against compulsory Church rate and state-funded education. Thomas's leadership was paramount, not only in the Baptist College but also through Crane Street chapel of which he was the pastor in a joint appointment for thirty-seven years. His stature was publicly recognised when he was appointed President of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland in 1872. He had become a leader of the Baptist churches in Monmouthshire by 1857 when he was chiefly responsible for setting up the Monmouthshire English Baptist Association at Pontypool. Thomas became noteworthy as a leader, not only of the Monmouthshire Baptists but also in the religious and social life of the county. His relationships with other religious leaders and his influence upon them are examined.

This study seeks to fill a historiographical gap in our understanding of the impact of the campaign for Disestablishment in its early phases upon the religious life of Monmouthshire. It also provides a picture of the two institutions that were essential to the development of the Dissenters' campaign for religious equality, Pontypool Baptist College and Crane Street Chapel. From the available resources an analysis is provided of the religious and social impact of these two institutions.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACLL	Anti-Corn Law League
ASCA	British Anti-State-Church Association
<i>CMG</i>	Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian
CSU	National Complete Suffrage Union
DWB	The Dictionary of Welsh Biography
GRO	Gwent Record Office, Ebbw Vale
Glam. RO	Glamorgan Record Office
<i>JEH</i>	The Journal of Ecclesiastical History
<i>JHSCW</i>	Journal of the Historical Society of the Church in Wales
<i>JWRH</i>	The Journal of Welsh Religious History
MEBA	The Monmouthshire English Baptist Association
<i>MM</i>	Monmouthshire Merlin
NLW	The National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth
<i>NLWJ</i>	The National Library of Wales Journal
<i>ODNB</i>	Oxford Dictionary of National Biography
<i>PP</i>	Pontypool Free Press
<i>SG</i>	Star of Gwent
<i>SWDN</i>	South Wales Daily News
SWBC	South Wales Baptist College
PP	Parliamentary Papers
<i>PP</i>	Past and Present
<i>WHR</i>	The Welsh History Review
<i>WJRH</i>	The Welsh Journal of Religious History

INTRODUCTION

'An Act to terminate the establishment of the Church of England in Wales and Monmouthshire, and to make provision in respect of the Temporalities thereof, and for other purposes in connection with the matters aforesaid, on 18 September 1914', otherwise known as the Welsh Church Act, was the climax of a movement for disestablishment that had been going on since 1830, and had been applied specifically to Wales since 1868. As such it had been part of the programme of the Liberal Party after 1886. This thesis broadly examines the long background to that disestablishment drama in four acts, as it has been described.¹ Frances Knight neatly separated the disestablishment drama into four phases: the first culminated in the Reports of the Educational Commissioners in 1847 and the Religious Census of 1851; the second began with the 1868 election and ended in 1886 when Welsh disestablishment was embraced by the Liberals; the third phase traced the progress of disestablishment from 1886 to the end of the century, while phase four completed the story in the twentieth century. This thesis will concentrate on the first two phases of the campaign to discover why Wales and Monmouthshire were so ready for disestablishment by 1886. What prepared the ground for the termination of the established Church of England in four dioceses of the province of Canterbury, with their attendant privileges in government, society and education?² To answer that question, as far as Monmouthshire is concerned, is the central aim of the thesis and to focus particularly on the Baptists under the leadership of Thomas Thomas.

¹ HMSO: *Welsh Church Act 1914 (4 and 5 Geo. 5, Ch.91)*; Kenneth O. Morgan, *Freedom or sacrilege? A history of the Campaign for Welsh Disestablishment* (Penarth, 1966); Frances Knight, 'The National Scene', in *The Welsh Church from Reformation to Disestablishment 1603-1920*, eds. Glanmor Williams, William Jacob, Nigel Yates, Frances Knight (Cardiff, 2007), pp. 309-329; P.M.H. Bell, *Disestablishment in Ireland and Wales* (London, 1969); R. Tudur Jones, 'The Origins of the Nonconformist Disestablishment Campaign', in *JHSCW*, 25 (1970); W.B. George, 'Welsh Disestablishment and Welsh Nationalism', in *JHSCW*, 25 (1970).

² Before disestablishment there was officially no *Church in Wales*. Wales was administered ecclesiastically as the four dioceses of St. David's and Llandaff in the south and Bangor and St. Asaph in the north. They were part of the Province of Canterbury in the Church of England. Church leaders argued that it would be impossible to sever four dioceses from a province to create a disestablished Church. This was Gladstone's view until 1891. P.M.H. Bell, *Disestablishment in Ireland and Wales* (London, 1969), p. 230.

The thesis concentrates on Monmouthshire because of its peculiar position in relation to the rest of Wales at this time in terms of its location, legal position, ecclesiastical organisation, rapid increase in population and the strength of Nonconformity, especially among the Baptist churches. The separate reference to Monmouthshire in the title of the Welsh Church Act reflects the legal position of the county since 1536 when it was brought under English forms of legal jurisdiction.³ Monmouthshire had been included in the Welsh Intermediate Education Act of 1889, in spite of attempts to exclude it, as had happened with the Welsh Sunday Closing Act in 1881. A precedent for including Monmouthshire in Welsh Education had been provided by extending the enquiries of the Education Commissioners of 1847 to those eighteen western parishes of the county which had so much in common with the contiguous Glamorgan parishes on the coalfield. Those eighteen parishes included about sixty-four per cent of the population of Monmouthshire at the time. Ecclesiastically, most of Monmouthshire had been part of the diocese of Llandaff since 1844, as the Archdeaconry of Monmouth, but comprising rural deaneries of Llandaff since the middle ages.⁴

The overall purpose of the thesis is to engage with several omissions in the existing literature on the nineteenth century history of Wales, especially its religious history. The thesis is particularly concerned with Monmouthshire during an important period in its industrial development. By 1851 its demographic growth since 1811 was proportionately greater even than Lancashire, yet its location on the border between England and Wales, designated in its coat of arms in 1948 as '*utrique fidelis*' (faithful to both), has meant that Monmouthshire in many crucial respects has been generally neglected in the historiography of Wales. The county has been borderline, and its county town of Monmouth was in the diocese of Hereford until

³ Act of Union of England and Wales 1536 (27 Henry VI 11, C.26); William Rees, 'The Union of England and Wales' in *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (London, 1938), pp. 74 and 76.

⁴ Kenneth O. Morgan, *Wales in British Politics 1868-1922* (Cardiff, 1970), pp. 43, 100-101. Chris Williams, 'The Question of Monmouthshire' in *The Gwent County History Volume 4, Industrial Monmouthshire 1780-1914*, ed. Chris Williams and S.R. Williams (Cardiff, 2011), p. 352; E.T. Davies, 'The Church in the Industrial Revolution' in *A History of the Church in Wales*, ed. David Walker (Penarth, 1976), pp. 128-129.

1836. The rural eastern half of the county became anglicised, but the industrial western half had more in common with Glamorgan than Hereford. The neglect of Monmouthshire by Welsh historians has meant that its particular place in Welsh history has been understated.⁵ Archdeacon William Coxe published his *Historical Tour in Monmouthshire* in two parts in 1801. Sir Joseph Bradney's *History of Monmouthshire* was published in twelve parts between 1904 and 1933. *The Gwent County History* has been published in five volumes between 2004 and 2013. Volume four, which deals with *Industrial Monmouthshire 1780-1914*, includes the period covered by this thesis. In that volume the towns of Monmouthshire are described according to their origins at the time of the Norman Conquest or at the industrial revolution. Among the former were Monmouth, Abergavenny, Usk, Caerleon and Newport. Newport could claim a foot in both camps, since it was transformed by industrialisation, which brought urban expansion to western Monmouthshire where eighty-eight per cent of the county's population lived by 1911.⁶

Newport was described as an 'anomaly' among Monmouthshire towns because of its rapid transformation by 1844 from a quiet market town to a busy port and manufacturing centre.⁷ It could be claimed that the real anomaly in industrial Monmouthshire was Pontypool. Its increasing industrial population in the middle of the Afon Llwyd valley extended north to Abersychan. Pontypool in itself was 'merely part of the wider parish of Trefethin' with a population of about twenty thousand by 1880. Yet the town of Pontypool was more important than is suggested by its immediate population of about four thousand, and it lay at the centre of a much wider registration district.⁸ Archdeacon Coxe realised how important Pontypool was in 1801 as a market 'for the natives of the mountainous district' and he recognised how

⁵ K.D.M. Snell and Paul S. Ell, *Rival Jerusalems, The Geography of Victorian Religion* (Cambridge, 2009), p. 207.

⁶ C.Roy Lewis, 'Urban Society' in *The Gwent County History Volume 4, Industrial Monmouthshire 1780-1914* ed. Chris. Williams and S.R. Williams (Cardiff, 2011), pp. 112-127.

⁷ Ibid, p. 112.

⁸ Ibid, p. 115.

much it owed its origin and growth to the Hanbury family who had first established the iron works and the manufacture of lacquered japanware.⁹

The small settled town within the parish of Trefethin, dominated by the Hanburys for centuries, saw further industrial expansion in the early nineteenth century through other industrialists coming to the district and causing an influx of workers. Tinplate manufacture was developed through the Conway family at Ponthir, Pontrhydyrun and Pontnewydd. At that time the Hanburys gave their support to the established Church. The Conways were all Baptists and the Baptists were the strongest denomination in the district. It will be an important part of this thesis to determine what happened when the incoming Baptist tide hit the rocks of the Hanbury establishment in the Parish of Trefethin. Pontypool was not alone in being hierarchically governed in the early nineteenth century. The same could have been said for Monmouth, but there the forces of Dissent were much more easily suppressed.¹⁰

The Baptist College was transferred to Pontypool from Abergavenny in 1836 because the Baptists were strong in the district and the College itself needed strengthening. How much the Baptists in the district were strengthened by the presence of the Baptist College, and how much, by association, the cause of Dissent in the district was strengthened, it will be the purpose of this thesis to determine. Pontypool had been associated with the training of Baptist ministers since the eighteenth century.¹¹ In 1836 Penygarn Chapel had just moved to Crane Street as the new Tabernacle chapel, which was built on a site opposite to that on which Crane Street Baptist chapel would be built in 1847. Tabernacle started as a Welsh Baptist chapel. There was already a flourishing Welsh Baptist chapel at upper Trosnant in Pontypool, established since 1776. It was not there, but in his new English church in lower Trosnant, that Thomas Thomas delivered

⁹ William Coxe, *A Historical Tour in Monmouthshire, Part 2* (London, 1801), pp. 233-234.

¹⁰ A.H. John, *The Industrial Development of South Wales 1750-1850* (Cardiff, 1950), p. 38; Richard Hanbury Tenison, *The Hanburys of Monmouthshire* (Aberystwyth, 1995), pp. 208, 234, 259; Keith Kissack, *Victorian Monmouth* (Monmouth, 1986), p. 106. Keith Kissack, *Monmouth, The Making of a County Town* (London, 1975), p. 129. *MM*, 12 November 1836, 2 December 1837, 17 April 1841.

¹¹ See Chapter One.

his sermon on the Chartist Rising in November 1839.¹² That sermon was delivered in English, unlike the sermon on the same subject by the minister of Tabernacle, Thomas Morris.¹³ Both men were Welsh Baptist ministers in a Welsh-speaking town. Much work has been done in recent decades on the state of the Welsh language in Monmouthshire and the shift from Welsh to English in the county. The complications of this shift will be reflected in the chapters of this thesis.¹⁴

Thomas Thomas came to Pontypool to take charge of the Baptist College jointly with the pastorate of an English Baptist church in Pontypool, which settled in a new building in Crane Street in 1847. Crane Street chapel was a very special place for Thomas himself and for the Baptists of Pontypool. The chapters below will examine its importance for the Baptist College, for the Monmouthshire English Baptist Association and for the town of Pontypool. The development of local government in a town which had not availed itself of the Municipal Corporations Act and where the parish vestry held sway until 1863, owed much to the growth of confidence inspired in its ratepayers by the opportunities provided for education and public responsibility. Crane Street chapel under Thomas Thomas was an institution that provided such opportunities. This thesis identifies the growth of middle class leadership in Pontypool among the membership of Crane Street chapel as part of its picture of the life of a key Baptist church in Monmouthshire in the period under study.¹⁵

In Wales generally there has been little research done on the background, training, relationships and activities of Nonconformist ministers in the mid-nineteenth century, and there is a lack of information about the organisation and activities of Nonconformist churches and

¹² Sir Joseph Bradney, *A History of Monmouthshire, Vol. 1, Part 2B, Abergavenny (Part 2)* (London, 1992), p. 452; Tony Hopkins, *Upper Trosnant Baptist Church, 1776-2001* (Pontypool, 2001). Thomas Thomas, *The Civil Duties of Christians: A Sermon occasioned by the late outrages at Newport, Monmouthshire* (London, 1839).

¹³ Thomas Morris, *Cynghor da mewn amser drwg* (Caerdydd, 1840).

¹⁴ See Chapter One.

¹⁵ Gwent Record Office A433M-1, Pontypool Local Government Board Minutes 1863-1867. See below, Chapter Six, for details of members of Crane Street church who were involved in leadership in the town.

their leadership during these years. Painstaking research is needed on the local patch of every Welsh region before the quilt-like picture can be presented for the whole of Wales. Very few Church Minute Books provide as good a record of the running of a chapel as that of Crane Street Pontypool. The gold dust it provides has been panned in Chapter Six of this thesis. In Chapter Five the origins and training of ministers in Pontypool Baptist College will be analysed.¹⁶

The ‘low ebb of scholarly interest in religious history’¹⁷ since the 1960s has not only meant that research on Nonconformity in nineteenth century Wales has been neglected, but misleading comparisons have been made with research undertaken on clergy in England.¹⁸ Ironically, one of the best books on Nonconformist Politics in Mid-Victorian England, *Friends of Religious Equality*, by Timothy Larsen in 1999, which hardly mentions Wales, provides an essential clue to understanding the behaviour of Thomas Thomas and his Baptists in this thesis. They were Dissenters of integrity and their religion, grounded in biblical theology, dominated their campaign for equality. Their Wales was religious and religion influenced everything including their Liberalism and even their love for Gladstone by the end of our period. This thesis on Welsh history is bound to mention theology because the history does not make sense without it.

Although an analysis of his deeds and words figure prominently in this thesis, it is not a biography of Thomas Thomas. The present writer provided a short biography in response to an original request from South Wales Baptist College. That biography updated that of the Revd Thomas Morgan in 1925. Thomas Thomas has an entry in the *Dictionary of Welsh Biography*, as does his third son, Thomas Henry Thomas, the only son to survive him. T.H. Thomas,

¹⁶ Matthew Cragoe, *Culture, Politics and National Identity in Wales 1832-1886* (Oxford, 2004), p. 10-11, 178; E.T. Davies, *Religion in the Industrial Revolution in South Wales* (Cardiff, 1965), p. 160.

¹⁷ Matthew Cragoe, ‘Wales’, in *A Companion to Nineteenth-Century Britain*, ed. Chris Williams (Oxford, 2004), p. 530.

¹⁸ Matthew Cragoe, *Culture, Politics and National Identity in Wales*, p. 178.

Arlunydd Penygarn, was born at Pontypool College in 1839. He became a significant figure in Welsh artistic and cultural life. His short biography of his father in *Welsh Religious Leaders in the Victorian Era*, edited by the Revd J. Vyrnwy Morgan in 1905 is impressively objective. D. Mervyn Himbury published an article on Thomas Thomas in the *Baptist Quarterly Review* for 1955-56.¹⁹

The questions asked about Thomas Thomas in this thesis are first: what difference did he make to the religious and social life in which he shared in Pontypool and Monmouthshire, extending outwards through his involvement in the life of the Baptist denomination and his activities in the Liberation Society? Secondly, what kind of leadership did he provide in the positions which he held? Thirdly, how and to what extent did Thomas and the Pontypool Baptists preserve their religious and spiritual integrity while fighting for religious and social freedom for Dissenters in the forty years after 1840?

It is not necessary to review Thomas's published works at this stage because they will be analysed at the appropriate points in the thesis where they relate to the topics under discussion. After two years in Abergavenny Academy, Thomas went to Stepney Baptist College in 1824 for further training. In 1828 he was ordained to the pastorate of Henrietta Street Baptist church in London's Brunswick Square. Until his marriage to Mary David in Cardiff in 1830, Thomas lodged with a member of his congregation, Jonathon Dawson, a local schoolmaster, with whose family Thomas remained friendly all his life. Jonathon's son and namesake married into the Conway family and became the manager of the Conway tinworks at Pontnewydd. His other son, George Dawson, became a minister in Birmingham, a social reformer, Liberal politician and journalist.²⁰

¹⁹ *DWB sub* Thomas Thomas, p. 966; T.H. Thomas, p. 967; The Revd Thomas Thomas DD, in *Welsh Religious Leaders in the Victorian Era* ed. Revd J. Vyrnwy Morgan (London, 1905), pp. 127-160; Thomas Morgan, *The Life and Works of the Revd Thomas Thomas DD* (Carmarthen, 1925); D. Mervyn Himbury, Thomas Thomas, *Baptist Quarterly Review*, 15, 1955-56; Arthur J. Edwards, *Thomas Thomas of Pontypool* (Caerleon, 2009).

²⁰ Christabel Hutchings, ed., *The Correspondence of Thomas Henry Thomas, Arlunydd Penygarn* (Newport, 2012), pp. 58, 59, 92; Michael R. Watts, *The Dissenters Volume 3, The Crisis and Conscience of Nonconformity*

Whether Thomas Thomas, like John Frost, was radicalised by his years in London, is impossible to prove. What is certain from his first publication, the Pastoral Letter he addressed to his church in November 1835, is that he was a very serious Baptist minister, who urged the church members to be very concerned for one another and to communicate their concerns to the deacons who were responsible for the pastoral care of the church. The church was clearly growing in numbers, but Thomas was more concerned that church members should be spiritually committed to their religious faith.²¹

Thomas taught that it was essential for Christians to be free from state control in all matters that affected their religion. That freedom should extend to their schools and colleges because government interference in education was a way of allowing the establishment to impinge upon their freedom. State grants for schools created a 'spirit of dependence and subserviency'; Voluntaryism was therefore the guiding principle in education.²² Thomas was the leading exponent of Voluntaryism in south-east Wales, but he was not alone, as will be seen in Chapter Three.

Thomas Thomas receives recognition as a Voluntarist from Ieuan Gwynedd Jones, but he receives no mention on the subject in the massive Volume Two of *The Dissenters* by Michael R. Watts, or indeed in the Welsh history text-books for the period. There is a lacuna in the historiography as far as the subject of this thesis is concerned. Apart from the short biographies mentioned earlier, Thomas Thomas and the Pontypool Baptists have escaped the notice of Welsh historians, and even of the recently published *Gwent County History*. Moreover the few historians who have mentioned them have mostly got them wrong. Canon E.T. Davies in his work on *Religion in the Industrial Revolution in South Wales*, mentions Thomas Thomas

(Oxford, 2015), pp. 231-233; Thomas Morgan, *The Life and Work of Thomas Thomas DD* (Carmarthen, 1925), pp. 21-22.

²¹ Thomas Thomas, *Pastoral Letter addressed to the Church of Christ meeting at Henrietta Street Chapel, 25 November 1835* (London, 1835).

²² Thomas Thomas, *The Duty of Religious Men to study the times in which they live* (London, 1848), p. 17.

as President of the Baptist College in Pontypool and a prominent Nonconformist minister. Davies derived this information from J. Vyrnwy Morgan's *Welsh Religious Leaders in the Victorian Era*. Davies refers to the appendix to Thomas's sermon on the Chartist Rising without mentioning the sermon, and he repeats what Thomas said in the appendix, that 'not more than fifty dissenters had joined the march on Newport'.²³ This single quotation was also quoted in *The Welsh Baptists* by T.M. Bassett. It found its way into the second volume of Michael Watts' trilogy on *The Dissenters* where Watts contradicted the figure of fifty by referring to an appendix in David Williams's biography of John Frost, which quotes the claim of the Anglican chaplain of Monmouth gaol that forty-one prisoners arrested after the march on Newport claimed to be dissenters. So much for the repetition of a tiny piece of information from a secondary source whose origin had little to do with the primary purpose of Thomas's sermon.²⁴ E.T. Davies did not even know that Thomas Thomas had published a sermon on the Chartist Rising.²⁵

When it came to the Liberation Society Conference in Swansea in September 1862, E.T. Davies recognised that the Baptists played a major role 'in the persons of two local leaders and ministers, Thomas Thomas of Pontypool and Thomas Price of Aberdare'. Davies praises Price's contribution on this occasion, but he has nothing good to say about Thomas Thomas's 'fine exhibition of demagoguery'. Whether this was a fair estimate of the relative contributions of those two Baptist leaders is examined in Chapter Four.²⁶

When so few adults had the vote in the district of Pontypool in 1847 it was unrealistic to expect much improvement for Nonconformists from the parliamentary elections. Two decades later the local disappointment at the result of the 1868 election for the County produced

²³ Davies, *Religion in the Industrial Revolution*, p.79

²⁴ T.M.Bassett, *The Welsh Baptists* (Swansea, 1977), p. 141; Michael R. Watts, *The Dissenters, Volume 2* (Oxford, 1995), p. 512; David Williams, *John Frost* (Cardiff, 1939), p. 324.

²⁵ Davies, *Religion in the Industrial Revolution*, p. 79.

²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 88.

riots in Blaenafon, Abersychan and Pontypool.²⁷ Ieuan Gwynedd Jones has shown how people's first encounter with democracy in their valley communities was at the local level of Poor Law Guardians and Boards of Health and that was 'more vital to ordinary people'. It was not until 1863 that the provisions of the Local Government Act of 1858 could come into force in a limited way in Pontypool.²⁸ In the period covered by this thesis many people in Pontypool learned the realities of political organisation through their experience of Crane Street chapel and the support it spawned for Liberalism in the district. How the unquestionable support for the Liberal Party and disestablishment was achieved in the new parliamentary seat of Monmouth North will be revealed in the political activity at local level in the preceding decades.²⁹ This thesis shows that Pontypool Baptists contributed enormously to the development of this political campaign for disestablishment. In 1840, Pontypool, like Tredegar and other industrial towns, was still subject to the rule of the parish vestry.³⁰ It took the battles of the next forty years to create the democratic climate that gave parliamentary representation to the Baptists of Pontypool, and eventually equality of status with their Anglican neighbours.

Anyone wishing to conduct a fuller study of the Pontypool Baptists faces challenges and rewards as far as primary sources are concerned. Some of the secondary sources and the limit of primary sources, suggested by the 'gold dust' of a very good Church Minute Book for Crane Street chapel and the surviving letters and sermons have already been revealed. Full use has been made of the records of the South Wales Baptist College at the National Library of Wales. Also consulted there were the Nefydd Manuscripts, the Bute Collection and the Minor Deposit containing histories of the Baptist churches in Monmouthshire. The personal letters

²⁷ *PFP*, 28 November 1868.

²⁸ I.G. Jones, *Communities* (Llandysul, 1987), p. 152. GRO MS a 433M-1, Pontypool Local Government Board Minutes, 1863-1867.

²⁹ Thomas Phillips Price, Liberal, defeated John A. Rolls, Conservative, in the new seat in November 1885 on a turnout of more than 83%. Phillips secured nearly 64% of the vote: Arnold J. James and John E. Thomas, *Wales at Westminster* (Llandysul, 1981), p. 86.

³⁰ Andy Croll, 'Local Government' in *The Gwent County History Volume 4, Industrial Monmouthshire, 1780-1914* (Cardiff, 2011), p. 293.

and family papers of Thomas Thomas that have survived are deposited with Cardiff City Library, now in the Stacks collection. The records of Crane Street chapel and some records for Baptist churches in Monmouthshire are in the Gwent Record Office at Ebbw Vale. Copies of the diary of Micah Thomas and the biography of the Revd Thomas Lewis, Baptist historian, are also in Ebbw Vale, together with the minute books of the Pontypool Board of Guardians, the Board of Health and the Local Government Board. The Glamorgan Record Office has a collection of the Committee Minutes of the South Wales Baptist College from 1857 to 1912. The Haines Collection in Newport City Library contains the Circular Letters of the Monmouthshire Baptist Association and the Monmouthshire English Baptist Association, some of the publications of Thomas Thomas including his Circular Letters, and some of the Annual Reports of the Baptist College. The Annual Reports for the period 1863 to 1880 are available at Regent's Park College, Oxford. The records of the Liberation Society were consulted at the London Metropolitan Archives. The only copies of the *Nonconformist* newspaper in Wales are those that belonged to Thomas Thomas and were deposited by his son, T.H. Thomas in Cardiff City Library and are now in the Stacks collection. Much use has been made of these, as also of the *Monmouthshire Merlin*, where the letters are invaluable and do not seem to have been edited in any way because of their prolixity. Sadly many of them are published under a pseudonym. Accounts of Baptist activities have been analysed in detail in the thesis to reveal the arguments, the language in which they have been expressed and particularly how they sought to marry their religious principles with wider social action. The *Star of Gwent*, *Monmouthshire Beacon*, *Silurian*, *Cambrian*, *Cardiff Times*, *Hereford Times*, *Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian* and the *Merthyr Express* have also been consulted as well as *Pontypool Free Press* after 1859. Welsh-language newspapers consulted have included *Y Bedyddiwr*, *Y Diwygiwr*, *Yr Haul*, *Seren Cymru* and *Seren Gomer*, but they have added surprisingly little to the events described.

Finally, the thesis adopts a structure that enables the early campaigns against the Nonconformist grievances to be analysed first before proceeding to explore the underlying structures that made the campaigns possible.

Chapter One provides the contextual background to the thesis through the profound changes that took place in Wales and Monmouthshire in economy and demography, religion, the Welsh language and politics during the nineteenth century. The activities of the Pontypool Baptists can only be understood in the context of these changes.

Chapter Two analyses the causes of the battle over Church rate in Pontypool. The battle highlights the hierarchical nature of the undemocratic government of Pontypool in the first half of the nineteenth century and the tensions that developed through the clash of religious and political interests. The extent to which the Dissenters were strengthened by the disorganised state of the Established Church in the Diocese of Llandaff at the time is examined. How much their confidence came from their own renewed leadership and increasing network of relationships is examined, as well as the importance of the Church rate battle for the future of the long war of disestablishment.

Chapter Three examines the part played by the Baptists in Monmouthshire in the cause of Voluntaryism in Education. Their opposition to the Minutes of the Committee of Council on Education in 1846 is analysed for their alleged threat of government interference in British Schools. The response of the Voluntaryists to the Inquiry and Report of the Education Commissioners of 1847 is analysed for the same perceived threat of government interference and of setting up another establishment to mirror the one already in existence in the Church. The importance for Nonconformists to stand firm for their principles was revealed by the Seven

Lectures organised by Thomas Thomas and delivered by him and his Monmouthshire Baptist colleagues. Did the response of the Voluntaryists to the education issues strengthen their resolve to seek disestablishment?

Chapter Four examines the place of the Liberation Society in promoting the aims of the Monmouthshire Baptists to remove Nonconformist disabilities and work towards disestablishment. It tests the teaching of Thomas Thomas and reveals that he was not anti-Church but simply Anti-State Church. From the time of the London Conference the involvement of the Pontypool Baptists with the Liberation Society was close. Thomas Thomas's own involvement with the Society is examined and his contribution to the Swansea Conference and the subsequent South Wales committee is analysed.

Chapter Five marks a change in approach and emphasis. It shows how the Baptist College gave the confidence and opportunity for developing the Baptist programme towards disestablishment. The chapter analyses the training provided at Pontypool College for young ordinands for the Baptist ministry in Britain in the years 1840-1880. What kind of people they were and the training they received have importance for a period when the majority of Baptist ministers were not College-trained and evidence about them is so small. The Baptist College is presented as a further tribute to Voluntaryism. It is examined for the way in which it helped to reorganise the denomination that founded it. How was it organised and how did its networking leaders provide confidence to English Baptist churches which were becoming less hyper-Calvinist and more focused on outreach in mission and social concern?

Chapter Six provides an analysis of the importance of Crane Street chapel under the leadership of Thomas Thomas and its deacons, for the religious, social and political development of

Pontypool and Monmouthshire. The pattern of life and worship in an English Baptist chapel in Monmouthshire in the nineteenth century is presented for the first time from the evidence of the Church Minute Book. In a county where there was a relationship between language and religious identity, the chapter examines what this meant for the development of Baptist thinking and behaviour. The relationship between the chapel and the Baptist College and the leadership style of Thomas Thomas in the church that he pastored are analysed. What were relationships like between Crane Street church and other churches in Monmouthshire? It is argued that Crane Street was an essential power base for a network of relationships, an understanding of which is central to explaining Baptist activity in religious and political spheres in this period. Did the Pontypool Baptists retain their Christian integrity while fighting social and political battles?

CHAPTER ONE

Religion, Language and Society in Monmouthshire in the Nineteenth Century

The activities of Thomas Thomas and his Baptist associates, centred on the town of Pontypool in nineteenth century Monmouthshire, cannot be fully understood without reference to the profound changes that were brought about in Monmouthshire society in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. These changes, brought to south Wales by the Industrial Revolution, were as enormous as the subsequent volume of literature produced on the subject.¹ The country of Wales, mainly agricultural at the beginning of the nineteenth century, became increasingly industrial by its close. The character of the county of Monmouthshire in south-east Wales changed from having its historic industrial activities overshadowed by its eastern rural areas surrounding its market towns at Chepstow, Usk and Abergavenny, as well as its county town of Monmouth. In these areas of rich agricultural production, farm-labourers' cottages and small farms were abandoned in favour of work at the eastern edge of the south Wales coal-field. The agricultural rhythms of rogation-tide, harvests, markets and country fairs, that had dictated the life of eighteenth century Monmouthshire, were increasingly overtaken by the patterns of life in the densely populated western half of the new industrial Monmouthshire.²

This chapter will establish the essential socio-economic, demographic, religious, linguistic and political context of the thesis before moving on to more detailed analysis in subsequent chapters. It will argue that the activities of the Baptists in the Pontypool area cannot

¹ See for example, the following works: T.S. Ashton, *The Industrial Revolution 1760-1830* (Oxford, 1968); A.H. John, *The Industrial Development of South Wales 1750-1850* (Cardiff, 1950), pp. 1-57; W.E. Minchinton, ed. *Industrial South Wales, 1750-1914* (London, 1969); Colin Baber and L.J. Williams, eds., *Modern South Wales: Essays in Economic History* (Cardiff, 1986).

² David W. Howell, *Land and People in Nineteenth-Century Wales* (London, 1978), pp. xi, 1-19; Raymond Howell, *A History of Gwent* (Llandysul, 1988), pp. 161-165; David Howell, 'Farming in South-East Wales c. 1840-80', in *Modern South Wales: Essays in Economic History*, eds. Colin Baber and L.J. Williams (Cardiff, 1986), pp. 82-96; D.W. Howell and C. Baber, 'Wales', in *The Cambridge Social History of Britain, 1750-1950, vol. 1 Regions and Communities*, ed. F.M.L. Thompson (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 281-354, on pp. 282-300.

be fully understood without reference to their local community which shaped the parameter of their work and formed their attitudes amidst the profound changes of the time. Pontypool was differentiated from the rest of the county by its own distinctive characteristics. This was as true of its religious affiliations as it was of its social structure, where the continuation of the dominance of the landowner was represented by the Hanbury family.³ The gradual displacement of the Hanburys by the forces of freedom and democracy is very much a sub-text of this thesis. Primary among the changes in society in Monmouthshire was industrialisation, though Richard Hanbury, a London goldsmith, brought new forges and hammer mills to Pontypool as early as 1565 through the combination of iron ore and forests to provide charcoal for smelting.⁴ As Monmouthshire's oldest industrial town, Pontypool had pioneered the most profitable production of tin-plate in the eighteenth century, especially in the process of japanning, through the Hanburys and their associates. This was described by Richard Pococke, Bishop of Ossory, on a visit to Pontypool in September 1756:

What they call double block tin is done with a finer tin, and is less apt to rust, as well as the very thin sort. Of a thicker kind of plate they make salvers and candlesticks and many other things which they japan; I am told the light parts of this in imitation of tortoise shell is done with silver leaf. They adorn them with Chinese landscapes and figures in gold only....They will also japan copper boxes, or anything made in copper which they cannot well work in iron. Mr. Hanbury has a good house and gardens and a fine park here, and it is a most delightful summer retirement.⁵

That impression of Hanbury's Park and House is not dissimilar to that of a very different commentator, Edward Miall, founder of the Liberation Society, nearly a century later, at least from three sides of the view he had from Pontypool Baptist College. It was his view on the fourth side that reflected the massive impact of industrialisation upon Pontypool and

³ Ieuan Gwynedd Jones, 'The Monmouthshire Valleys', in *Communities* (Llandysul, 1987), pp.158-186, on p.171; Richard Hanbury Tenison, *The Hanburys of Monmouthshire* (Aberystwyth, 1995), pp. 194-287; W.E. Minchinton, *The British Tinsplate Industry: A History* (Oxford, 1957), p. 13.

⁴ Howell, *A History of Gwent*, p. 121.

⁵ Reginald Nichols, *Pontypool and Usk Japan Ware* (Pontypool, 1981), pp.13-14; E.T. Davies, *Religion in the Industrial Revolution in South Wales* (Cardiff, 1965), pp.1-2.

Monmouthshire in the first half of the nineteenth century.⁶ The demographic changes that accompanied increased industrialisation caused the population of Monmouthshire to multiply by 245 per cent between 1801 and 1851, the highest percentage increase for any shire in Britain at that time, from 45,568 in 1801 to 157, 418 in 1851. During the same period the population of Pontypool increased by 700 per cent from a mere 2,570 in 1801 to 20,614 in 1851.⁷ The population increase for Wales as a whole is well depicted by the vertical-line graph presented by Gwyn Alf Williams in his book, *When was Wales?*⁸

The changing fortunes of the Welsh language in Pontypool was clearly an important influence on the Baptists in the development of their activities in Monmouthshire. Equally important was the growth in Baptist membership which placed them in a strong position to carry out the activities described in further chapters. It will be shown that they were able to take advantage of the limitations placed upon the development of the Established Church in such industrial parts of the Diocese of Llandaff in the first half of the nineteenth century.⁹ A final key influence in shaping Baptist activities was the dissatisfaction following the limited parliamentary reform of 1832 and expressed by the protest movements of the 1830s culminating in the Chartist Rising of 1839. The extension of the franchise, at least to all men of twenty-one, was essential to the desired improvement of the status of Nonconformists in society and the ultimate purpose of disestablishment.¹⁰ This chapter will now explore separately the four important topics indicated above, economy and demography, religion, the Welsh language, and politics, to show how they contributed to the achievements of the Baptists in Pontypool in the years 1840-1880.

⁶ Arthur Miall, *Life of Edward Miall* (London, 1884), p.131. See Chapter 5.

⁷ Davies, *Religion in the Industrial Revolution in South Wales*, pp. 6-7.

⁸ Gwyn A. Williams, *When was Wales?* (Penguin, 1985), p. 174.

⁹ Davies, *Religion in the Industrial Revolution in South Wales*, pp. 22-28.

¹⁰ David J.V. Jones, *The Last Rising: The Newport Insurrection of 1839* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 48-50; Ryland Wallace, *Organise! Organise! Organise!* (Cardiff, 1991), pp. 10-11.

Economy and Demography

The Wales into which Thomas Thomas was born in 1805 was very different from that which he departed in 1881. Born to a tenant farmer and his wife in the Vale of Glamorgan, and growing up in a farm owned by the Bute family at Leckwith Bridge, Thomas came from the same rural background as his predecessor at the Baptist College, Micah Thomas.¹¹ Wales in 1805 was still predominantly agricultural. Cowbridge, where Thomas was baptised as an infant was a small market town, like Bridgend or Abergavenny or Carmarthen, Wales's largest town at the time. Cardiff was a small port, like Swansea or Newport. Even the development of tinplate at Pontypool, which made it an up-market town by 1805, was small-scale compared with what would happen through the industrialisation of south Wales by the development of its raw materials, particularly coal.¹²

Pontypool lies on the easternmost edge of the south Wales coalfield. The bituminous coals found there were used by the iron industry. Coal production was an ancillary to the production of iron in the first half century or so of iron making. In the 1840s it was estimated that three tons of coal were needed to produce by hot blast one ton of pig iron and a further one and a half tons of coal for converting the pig iron into bar iron. Ieuan Gwynedd Jones concludes that it is 'probably safe to assume that the major iron works were together using about a million tons of coal a year in 1850.'¹³

The iron works were not the only market for coal. Apart from the need of coal for domestic consumption, Newport shipped more coal than any other port in south Wales in the decade before 1850. By that date Swansea had become the copper capital of the world, thanks to the ease with which coal was mined in that area, and its population grew to more than 30,000

¹¹ DWB *sub* Thomas, Micah, pp. 958-9; Thomas, Thomas, p. 966.

¹² W.E. Minchinton, ed., *Industrial South Wales 1750-1914* (London, 1969), Introduction, p. ix.

¹³ John, *The Industrial Development of South Wales 1750-1850*, p. 2; Ieuan Gwynedd Jones, 'The Monmouthshire Valleys', in *Communities* (Llandysul, 1987), pp. 158-186, on p. 162.

. By the same date Merthyr Tydfil had become the iron-smelting capital of the world and the largest town in Wales with a population of more than forty-six thousand. On that same north-east rim of the coalfield, iron works had been set up at Ebbw Vale, Nantyglo and Tredegar, where the combination of easily-mined ironstone and good coking coal, stimulated by the new puddling process and the demands of war, enabled English entrepreneurs to establish about twenty ironworks on the eighteen mile stretch between Hirwaun and Blaenafon.¹⁴ Transport for the iron was provided by the canals that had been built at the end of the eighteenth century to the ports, but 'the key to the exploitation of the coalfield of south Wales was the railway'.¹⁵ After 1850 the rail communication was provided between south Wales, the Midlands and London as well as important rail links between the valleys and the ports of south Wales. In the 1850s Pontypool became a railway town with no less than three railway stations.¹⁶

The railways themselves consumed enormous quantities of coal, as well as promoting the export market in iron, copper, tinplate and steel for the industrial economy. Industries fed on each other. As Minchinton observed, 'the expansion of iron, tinplate and copper in turn provided stimulus to coal production'.¹⁷ The depression that set in after 1860 in the Monmouthshire ironworks brought an end to the age of iron. Ironworks closed in Pontypool. The Ebbw Vale works continued to be efficient, and had taken over the Abersychan works in 1852 as well as the Pontypool works of the Hanburys in 1855. The large ironworks centred on Merthyr continued to be important in the 1850s and Dowlais was the greatest in the world. The Bessemer process brought steelmaking to Dowlais and Ebbw Vale, though it was later outstripped by Siemens' open-hearth method.¹⁸

¹⁴ Ibid; D.W. Howell and C. Baber, 'Wales', in *The Cambridge Social History of Britain 1750-1950 Vol. 1, Regions and Communities*, ed. F.M.L. Thompson (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 281-354, on pp. 302-303.

¹⁵ W.E. Minchinton, ed., *Industrial South Wales*, pp. xv, xviii-xix.

¹⁶ Jones, 'The Monmouthshire Valleys', p. 163; Chris Barber, *Eastern Valley, The Story of Torfaen* (Abergavenny, 1999), pp. 200-204.

¹⁷ Minchinton, ed., *Industrial South Wales*, p. xv.

¹⁸ Jones, *Communities* (Llandysul, 1987), pp. 162-163; D.W. Howell and C. Baber, 'Wales', in *The Cambridge Social History of Britain 1750-1950, vol. 1*, ed. F.M.L. Thompson (Cambridge, 1990), p. 305.

The industrial growth of south Wales was not, as Minchinton realised, 'one of simple growth but is complicated by local increases and decreases as the fortunes of different parts of the region fluctuated'.¹⁹ That was true of the making of tinplate which originated in Pontypool and spread into the river valleys of Monmouthshire so that by 1805 most of the fourteen tinplate works in Britain were there. The importance of the industry in east south Wales in the first half of the nineteenth century was superseded by the tinplate works around Llanelli (tinopolis) after 1850.²⁰

Among the small traders and master workmen who came to seek their fortunes in Monmouthshire through the opening of tinworks and small collieries were the families of Conway and Jenkins. These two families played a very important part in the development of Baptist activity in the county and contributed greatly to Baptist influence through the leadership they provided by their extensive marriage networks. John Jenkins and George Conway came from Glamorgan and developed the tinplate works at Ponthir, Pontnewydd and Pont-rhyd-yr-yn alongside the Afon Llwyd river.²¹ George Conway was established in the area by July 1775 when he was baptised at the Baptist chapel in Caerleon. In September that year he married Jennet the daughter of John Jenkins. George and Jennet Conway had at least eleven children and fourteen grandchildren, all Baptists. Their prominence among the Monmouthshire Baptists will be a recurring theme throughout the thesis.²²

The marriage market of the large Conway family and the network of relationships that developed through that family's connections played an important part in the growth of Baptist churches providing worship in English in Monmouthshire as well as the setting up of the

¹⁹ Minchinton, ed., *Industrial South Wales*, p. xxix.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. xiii, xxv.

²¹ John, *The Industrial Development of South Wales*, p. 38; W.E. Minchinton, *The British Tinplate Industry*, p. 93.

²² NLW MS: Caerleon Baptist Church, Castle Street, Register of Baptisms, 2 July 1775; GRO: All Saints Parish Church, Llanfrechfa, Marriage register, 17 September 1775. A.J. Edwards, *Thomas Thomas of Pontypool* (Caerleon, 2009), p. 161.

Baptist College at Abergavenny and its continuation at Pontypool after 1836. Pontrhydyrun church was founded by the Conways with a covenant consisting mostly of family members, provided for the families of their tinworkers. Sarah Conway (1795-1837) married David D. Evans, the second minister, while her sister Mary, married Stephen Price, the minister of Abersychan Baptist church. John Conway, George's second son, married Anne Harris, sister of Rachel who married Micah Thomas. Anne and Rachel were daughters of John Harris of Govilon, the son of the Revd Morgan Harry of Blaina. Morgan Harry was an uncle of Miles Harry, the first minister of Penygarn Baptist church, great-grandfather of William Williams Phillips, senior. Phillips was associated with the Conways in the work of Pontrhydyrun chapel, as well as setting up English Baptist churches at Abersychan and Pontypool.²³

Just as the development of the iron industry depended upon the capital of English entrepreneurs and the tinplate works and smaller collieries were provided by enterprising Welsh industrialists, so the labour forces for these industries came from a mixture of skilled and unskilled labour, both migrant and indigenous. There was a movement of workers within Wales as well as from the contiguous English counties of Hereford, Gloucester and Somerset.²⁴

In the first half of the nineteenth century the population of the counties of Monmouthshire and Glamorgan increased more rapidly than those of Carmarthen and Cardigan, and the industrial valleys of Glamorgan and Monmouthshire increased more rapidly than the rural areas. The rate of population in Wales went on spiralling especially after 1871 when Wales's population of 1,412, 583 increased to 2,420,921 by 1911.²⁵ The large rise in the labour force clearly helped in the growth of industrial production. Workers migrated across the borders between the counties of Glamorgan and Monmouth as new collieries opened. There

²³ B.Pierce Jones, *Sowing Beside All Waters* (Gwent Baptist Association, 1985), pp. 65-66, 102-103, 104; Derek Garwood, *God of our Fathers* (Pontypool, 1965), p. 20; Sir J. Bradney, *History of Monmouthshire, Abergavenny, Part 2* (Academy Books, 1992), pp. 454, 479.

²⁴ John, *The Industrial Development of South Wales*, pp. 24-64.

²⁵ Ibid, p. 58; Bill Jones, 'Banqueting at a Moveable Feast: Wales 1870-1914', in *The People of Wales*, ed. Gareth Elwyn Jones and Dai Smith (Llandysul, 1999), pp. 145-178, on p. 148.

was also seasonal labour that migrated from the rural counties of west Wales to earn more money in the collieries and returned home when their services were needed on the farm at times like harvest.²⁶

The agricultural areas of Wales could not provide enough profitable work for their people, and the role of agriculture declined in the life of Wales. Nevertheless, as David Howell observed,

Farming remained vital in rural areas as an important source of food supply and employment...Furthermore, hunger for farms remained intense throughout; labourers, not farmers, migrated in swarms to the towns, and had there been enough farms to go round there would have been far less rural exodus.²⁷

In his description of farming in Monmouthshire between 1840 and 1880, in the neighbourhoods of Abergavenny, Monmouth, Usk, Newport and Chepstow, Howell praises the farmers for being progressive and superior to the farming of the Vale of Glamorgan. He says that 'the same consumer demand from the teeming new centres of population was felt.'²⁸

In 1851 more than half of the population of Monmouthshire had been born in the county. In Pontypool more than two thirds of its population had been born in Monmouthshire. Many of that number of 19,119 people had been born in rural Monmouthshire. Pontypool was well placed as an industrial town. It was on the edge of the eastern rim of the coalfield, but on its eastern side it stretched into rural Monmouthshire. In 1851 it was surrounded by the rural parishes of Panteg, Mamhilad and Llanfihangel Pontymoel. As recently as 1953 Pontypool was described as

an industrial town, one of the most important centres of the coal and iron trade and although built into the steep valley of the Afon Llwyd...is charmingly situated and possesses an air of the picturesque which defies the almost constant smoke and grime. Added to this the countryside to the north and east, particularly the latter, can be placed

²⁶ John, *The Industrial Development of South Wales*, pp. 61-66.

²⁷ Howell, *Land and People in Nineteenth Century Wales*, p. xi.

²⁸ David Howell, 'Farming in South-East Wales c. 1840-1880' in *Modern South Wales: Essays in Economic History*, ed. Colin Baber and J.J. Williams, pp. 82-96, on p. 93.

among the country's fairest landscapes of rural scenery; miles of open pastures, well-wooded and hilly, lie between this town and Usk.²⁹

If two thirds of the inhabitants of Pontypool were natives of Monmouthshire in 1851, just under ten per cent of the remaining third (2763) were born in other Welsh counties, and just over twenty per cent were born in England (6111) together with four hundred who had been born in Ireland.³⁰ What that meant for the Welsh language will be discussed later. What is certain is that the population served by the English Baptist chapels in the Parish of Trevethin in 1851 was preponderantly indigenous to the county rather than immigrant to Monmouthshire.

By 1841 the population of the Parish of Trefethin had increased from 1,472 in 1801 to 14,942. This was a smaller increase than that in the upland parish of Bedwellty, which included the sub-district of Tredegar, where the population reached 22,413 in 1841 from a figure of 1434 in 1801.³¹ G.S. Kenrick, manager of the Varteg ironworks, in his paper on the Population in the Parish of Trevethin in 1840, commented in a footnote that 'in 1810 Pontypool was a place of so little consideration or commercial intercourse that it was visited by a horse post only twice a week'.³² Kenrick's report serves as a good introduction to the district of Pontypool because he describes the housing conditions where adults and children slept from three to a room in Pontypool, to seven at Abersychan. At Varteg twenty Irish people lived in one house, but this was beaten at one house in Pontypool where twenty-one people lived, thirteen of them lodgers. Kenrick estimated the number of lodgers at 3537, one fifth of the population, and the number of Irish people in the whole district at 821 or five per cent. He said that there was still a preponderance of Welsh inhabitants.³³

²⁹ C.J.O. Evans, *Monmouthshire, Its History and Topography* (Cardiff, 1953), pp.448-449.

³⁰ 1851 Census Report; Paul O' Leary, *Immigration and Integration, The Irish in Wales 1798-1922* (Cardiff, 2000), p. 157.

³¹ Census of Population 1801 and 1841, quoted in David Egan, *People, Protest and Politics* (Llandysul, 1987), p. 76.

³² G.S. Kenrick, *Statistics of the Population in the Parish of Trevethin (Pontypool) and of the neighbouring works of Blaenavon in Monmouthshire* (Pontypool, 1840), p. 367.

³³ *Ibid*, pp. 368 and 370.

The houses were overcrowded and beds were never empty because men on different shifts shared the beds. This was harmful to health. There were two thousand more men than women inhabitants because of the large number of single men, most of them lodgers, who spent most of their money in 'the 170 beer-shops and public houses which are spread over the parish in every direction'.³⁴ Kenrick supported Seymour Tremenheere's opinion of the bad effect 'upon the morals and comforts of the people' of their heavy drinking. As a supporter of temperance himself, Kenrick believed that the formation of a temperance society had lowered the level of drunkenness in the district. He also praised the 'well-selected library' of the Pontypool Mechanics Institute, the only one of its kind in Monmouthshire at that time.³⁵

The industrial developments in the Parish of Trefethin with the accompanying influx of labour, completely changed the old industrial town of Pontypool. By 1861 the district had become a major destination for English people who accounted then for ten per cent of the population. Such was the society that Thomas Thomas and his associates encountered in Pontypool. Its social circumstances were caused by increased industrialisation. Ironically, in view of Irish immigration to Pontypool and Newport in the 1840s, it was the view of Gwyn Alf Williams that

If Wales had not been industrialised during the nineteenth century, its people would almost certainly have suffered the same fate as the southern Irish. Since the Welsh were so much fewer, any recognizable entity which could be called 'Wales' would have disappeared in the nineteenth century, its people blown away by the winds of the world.³⁶

Religion

When I mention religion, I mean the Christian religion, and not only the Christian religion, but the Protestant religion, and not only the Protestant religion, but the Church of England.³⁷

³⁴ Ibid, p. 369.

³⁵ Ibid, pp. 374-375.

³⁶ Gwyn A. Williams, *When was Wales?* (Penguin, 1985), p. 180.

³⁷ Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones*, Book 3, chapter 3.

Those words which the novelist Henry Fielding put into the mouth of Parson Thwackum in his novel, *Tom Jones*, published in 1749, sum up the attitude of most people in England and Wales towards the Elizabethan settlement of religion reinforced by the Restoration of Charles II. That this view did not include all Christians, let alone all Protestants, for more than a hundred years before 1749, was well known. Apart from the Roman Catholic recusants there had been Independents or Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Baptists and Quakers since the early seventeenth century. At the beginning of the nineteenth century they comprised the Old Dissent, existing in separate denominations and worshipping in buildings that had to be individually registered for public worship since the Toleration Act of 1689. Congregationalists or Independents were constituted as separate congregations which were self-governing and independent of central control. Baptists shared the same ecclesiastical government though they had their own theological belief about Baptism, which was limited to believers who were able to make a confession of faith before being immersed in the water of baptism. In spite of this difference, Baptists had much in common with the culture and outlook of Independents. They were united in the value they placed on liberty of conscience, which they shared also with the Quakers.³⁸

By 1814 declining numbers caused the Quakers to vacate their Meeting House in Trosnant and the building was used from 1835 to 1847 by the future Crane Street church. The good relationships between that church and the other Dissenting (Nonconformist) churches in Pontypool is a further theme that runs through this thesis and so some description of them is due. The earliest Independent churches were at Pontnewynydd and New Inn, the former founded by 'the old prophet' Edmund Jones in 1742 and the latter in 1756. There were six other

³⁸ Gerald Parsons, 'From Dissenters to Free Churchmen: The Transitions of Victorian Nonconformity', in *Religion in Victorian Britain*, vol. 1, *Traditions*, ed. Gerald Parsons (Open University, 1988), pp. 67-116, on pp. 77-78, 87. Ieuan Gwynedd Jones, 'Religion and Society in the first half of the Nineteenth century' in *Explorations and Explanations* (Llandysul, 1981), pp. 217-235, on pp. 230-233.

Independent churches at Trosnant, Garndiffaith, Abersychan (2) and Capel-yr-ynys as well as one in George Street Pontypool. On Census Sunday in 1851 about 1260 people attended those chapels. On the same day about 2500 people attended the nine Baptist churches in the area.

These churches represented the Old Dissent. Their theological position was mainly Calvinist, from the teaching of the sixteenth century reformer, John Calvin, who emphasised the sovereignty of God and taught that salvation was limited to God's Elect. By the beginning of the nineteenth century this high Calvinist doctrine was being gradually replaced by a more moderate Calvinism, influenced by the Baptist divine Andrew Fuller, who died in 1815. Fuller taught that the Gospel should be preached to all people without enquiring about whom God wills to save. This was an attempt to reconcile the belief in God's absolute sovereignty with that of human free will. It came close to the Arminian belief that it is God's will that everyone should be saved, shared by Methodists, even by those who were called Calvinistic Methodists, and by Anglicans, although many of them had been Calvinist in their theology.³⁹ What was true of these separate denominations in the nineteenth century was that they were much closer theologically than at first appeared, and they were united under a broad umbrella of evangelism in a common Protestantism.⁴⁰

The Old Dissenters were also united in a common antipathy towards the Church of England, the Church by law established with prestige and privileges linked to its official relationship with the Crown. In the protestant country of Wales at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Old Dissenters did not believe the religion of the Church of England was the religion of protestants. By that time the Old Dissenters, heirs of the sixteenth and seventeenth century Puritans, had been joined by a large number of New Dissenters, heirs of

³⁹ Fuller said that it was not for the minister to enquire about 'those secrets of the eternal mind of God, viz. whom he purposeth to save, and whom he hath sent Christ to die for in particular', Andrew Fuller, *The Gospel worthy of all acceptance* (London, 1882), p. 373. See Peter Naylor, *Calvinism, Communion and the Baptists* (Paternoster, 2003), p. 212.

⁴⁰ Gerald Parsons, 'From Dissenters to Free Churchmen: The Transitions of Victorian Nonconformity', in *Religion in Victorian Britain*, vol. 1, pp. 67-116, on pp. 71-72.

the Methodist evangelical revival under John and Charles Wesley and George Whitefield, and particularly in Wales by Howell Harris, Daniel Rowland and William Williams, Pantycelyn. Until 1811 Welsh Calvinistic Methodists remained in close association with the established Church in Wales, but the ordination of lay-preachers to celebrate Holy Communion by Thomas Charles and Thomas Jones in Bala and Llangeitho in 1811 produced the same schism as had occurred with the Wesleyan Methodists.⁴¹ This brought Calvinistic Methodist churches to Wales. In the following year the Primitive Methodists separated from the Wesleyans to produce even more chapels. It has been estimated that new chapels of one denomination or another were built in Wales at the rate of about one every eight days in the first half of the nineteenth century.⁴²

In the Pontypool area by 1850 there were fourteen Methodist churches. The largest number (1872 people in 6 churches) attended English Wesleyan churches. There were two Welsh Wesleyan churches with 109 attenders between them, one Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Church in Pontypool with 161 attenders, one English Calvinistic Methodist church at Garndiffaith with 221 attenders and four Primitive Methodist churches with 545 attenders. That was a total of 2908 compared with the 2500 Baptists. That situation changed greatly during the next decade as this thesis will show.

Old and New Dissent had been profoundly influenced by the Evangelical Revival of the eighteenth century and the Church of England had also benefited from the general spiritual reawakening. Methodism rejected congregational independence. Its structure was hierarchical; Welsh Calvinistic Methodists had a Presbyterian form of government, Eglwys Presbyteraidd Cymru, unlike the Annibynwyr.⁴³

⁴¹ D.Densil Morgan, 'Nonconformity in Wales', in *Companion to Nonconformity*, ed. Robert Pope (T. and T. Clark, 2015), p. 38.

⁴² David Egan, *Coal Society, 1840-1980* (Llandysul, 1987), p.100; R.Tudur Jones, *Congregationalism in Wales* (Cardiff, 2004), p. 149, says that the Congregationalists started a new cause every five weeks.

⁴³ Geraint H. Jenkins, *The Foundations of Modern Wales 1642-1780* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 342-385; Nigel Yates, 'Calvinistic Methodism: Growth and Separation' in *The Welsh Church from Reformation to Disestablishment*

The Calvinistic Methodist Church was the strongest religious body in Wales in 1851, but this was not reflected in Monmouthshire. Since their origins as separate societies within the Anglican Church, *seiadau* in Wales, all the Methodist churches were most reluctant to join the Dissenting chorus for disestablishment. That call was pioneered by the Revd David Rees of Llanelli, who launched *Y Diwygiwr* in 1835, and other Independents in west and north Wales who started the campaign for the separation of Church and State. Baptists in Monmouthshire were also involved from the date of the meeting in Pontypool on 15 January 1834, when Charles Conway and his friends 'proclaimed the principles of voluntary churchmanship', set up a committee and petitioned the Whig government to redress Dissenting grievances.⁴⁴ Methodists in Pontypool did not join the Dissenters in their disputes over Church rate though they showed much more support for them after the events of 1847.

The repeal of the Test and Corporation Act in 1828 brought Nonconformists greater freedom, but they still suffered from certain 'disabilities' which had become grievances by 1834. The first of these to tumble was the need for all Nonconformists to be married in the parish churches by the Vicar or curate. George and Jennet Conway and some of their children had been married in the parish church at Llanfrechfa, and Thomas and Mary Thomas had been married in St. John's parish church in Cardiff.⁴⁵ The Solemnization of Marriages Act, 1836, meant that Nonconformist chapels could obtain licences to perform their own marriages in the presence of a registrar. The Registration of Births, Deaths and Marriages Act of the same year, made it possible for the births of their children to be registered. For Baptists who did not baptise infants and thus register their presence in the Baptism register, this marked a step forward. There was some improvement under the Whig Government after 1833 but there was much

1603-1920, eds., Sir G. Williams, W. Jacob, N. Yates, F. Knight (Cardiff, 2007), pp. 209-222; K.M.D. Snell and Paul S. Ell, *Rival Jerusalems, The Geography of Victorian Religion* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 154-159.

⁴⁴ R. Tudur Jones, 'The Origins of the Nonconformist Disestablishment Campaign' *JHSCW*, vol. 20 (1970), pp. 39-76, on pp. 39-47.

⁴⁵ GRO: All Saints' Church, Llanfrechfa, Marriage Register, 17 September 1775; Glam RO: Parish of St. John and St. Mary Cardiff, Marriage Register, 22 February 1830.

disappointment too, particularly after the failure of the Whigs to secure the abolition of compulsory Church rate. That remained until 1868 although it had ceased to be demanded in many places by that date, and many parishes had successfully postponed its payment through securing a majority of ratepayers in the parish vestries. What happened in the Church rate dispute in Pontypool was a crucial and formative episode for this thesis and it will be described and analysed in the next chapter.⁴⁶

As to their limited access to education, of which more will be said in Chapter 3, Thomas Thomas was educated in a private school at Llandaff, run by the curate, and at Abergavenny Baptist Academy and Regent's Park Baptist College, Stepney. Henrietta Street Baptist Chapel in central London was within walking distance of University College, which did not receive its charter until 1837, by which time Thomas was back in Wales as president of the Baptist College. His successor William Edwards obtained an external degree in divinity from London University, but Thomas was not a graduate, though he received an honorary DD from Franklyn College, Indiana, for his services to theological education.⁴⁷ Nonconformists were not allowed to receive education or take degrees from Oxford and Cambridge University in the first half of the nineteenth century. Reform of those universities began in the 1850s, but Religious Tests were not abolished there until 1871. The Burial Laws Amendment Act, against which Thomas campaigned for forty years, was not passed until 1880. For the first time, Nonconformist ministers were allowed to bury their own members according to their own rites in parish churchyards.⁴⁸

The disabilities of Nonconformists were a running sore throughout the nineteenth century. As late as 1912, William Edwards, Thomas Thomas's successor at the Baptist College,

⁴⁶ Davies, *Religion in the Industrial Revolution*, pp. 42, 82; Owen Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, Part 1 (London, 1966), pp. 79-95; Parsons, 'From Dissenters to Free Churchmen', in *Religion in Victorian Britain*, vol.1, *Traditions*, pp. 67-116, on p. 88.

⁴⁷ D. Mervyn Himbury, *The South Wales Baptist College 1807-1957* (Llandysul, 1957), pp. 38, 39, 41, 58; David Bebbington, ed., *The Gospel in the World, International Baptist Studies* (Paternoster, 2002), p. 74.

⁴⁸ Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, Part 2, pp. 206-7, 452.

published his book on the subject. He related all the past disabilities as part of his argument for the disestablishment of the Church of England in Wales which was then being debated in parliament. His biggest argument for disestablishment was the numerical superiority of Nonconformists in Wales. To argue this Edwards went back to the Religious Census of 1851. He was not alone in doing so; the time when most use was made of the disputed figures of attendances at public worship on 30 March 1851 was not immediately after the publication of the figures, but during the disestablishment campaign.⁴⁹ They were used for that purpose by Henry Richard in the 1880s. Richard also used them to argue for better political representation for Wales, a 'nation of Nonconformists'.⁵⁰

The Religious Census of 1851 was a defining moment in Religious history in Wales. In Monmouthshire, at least, it was to Religion what the Chartist Rising was to the social and industrial scene. The Census caused less surprise in Wales than it did in England, not least because a greater percentage of people was present in church or chapel that day in Wales than in England and there was no deficiency in Wales in the number of seats available in churches and chapels as there was in England; in fact there was a surplus. As Horace Mann, who had been responsible for the Census, observed in his Report in January 1854, Wales was basking 'in an excess of spiritual privileges'.⁵¹ In Wales the Nonconformists provided over seventy per cent of the places of worship; only 29 per cent belonged to the Church. Only nine per cent of the population of Wales had been present in Anglican places of worship on Census Sunday; eighty-seven per cent had been present in the chapels. As Ieuan Gwynedd Jones, who did so much of the pioneering historical work on the Census, observed, 'These proportions varied

⁴⁹ William Edwards, *Nonconformist Disabilities 1509-1912* (London 1912); Frances Knight, 'The National Scene' in *The Welsh Church from Reformation to Disestablishment 1603-1920*, Eds. G. Williams, W. Jacob, N. Yates, F. Knight, pp. 309-329, on p. 314.

⁵⁰ Henry Richard, *Letters and Essays on Wales* (London, 1884), pp. 2, 87-88.

⁵¹ Ieuan Gwynedd Jones, '1848 and 1868: "Brad y Llyfrau Gleision" and Welsh Politics', in *Mid-Victorian Wales: The Observers and the Observed* (Cardiff, 1992), pp. 103-165, on p. 131.

greatly, it needs scarcely to be stressed, from place to place'.⁵² Where the relative strengths of the Nonconformist denominations and the Anglican Church lay in different parts of England and Wales and in what proportion, for fifteen selected counties, is revealed in what has become the standard work on the Census, *Rival Jerusalems*, by K.D.M. Snell and Paul S. Ell. Four Welsh counties were chosen for analysis: Anglesey and Caernarvonshire, Cardiganshire and Monmouthshire. As the authors claimed:

Monmouthshire, the fourth Welsh county for this book, has been neglected by historians probably because of its ambiguous position on the Welsh-English border. Yet in the period 1801-31 it had the fastest rates of demographic growth found in Britain and, like Glamorgan, it was a key county in heavy industrialisation.⁵³

It could be added that the scholarly articles by Ieuan Gwynedd Jones, based on the evidence of the Census for some Welsh counties, did not include Monmouthshire. That does not detract from the general conclusions drawn by I.G. Jones from his valuable study of the Census. First, 'Wales was a nonconformist country...Orthodox Protestantism was the religion of the Welsh people.'⁵⁴ Jones also notes that the strength of Nonconformity cannot be estimated from the number of members in each chapel because there was a large number of 'hearers' (gwrndawyr) which increased at times of revivalism and 'constituted a kind of reservoir from which the membership was renewed'.⁵⁵ This extended-membership also indicated the significant place of a chapel in the local community. I.G. Jones is also conscious of the consensus of evangelical theology across Wales, about which Thomas Thomas himself wrote in his first presidential address to the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland in 1872, that 'the Millenium to which all aspired, would follow rather than precede, the Second Coming of

⁵² Jones, 'Religion and Society', in *Explorations and Explanations*, pp. 217-235, on p. 227.

⁵³ Snell and Ell, *Rival Jerusalems, The Geography of Victorian Religion*, p. 207.

⁵⁴ Jones, 'Religion and Society', pp. 217-235, on pp. 227-228.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p. 228.

Christ'.⁵⁶ That brought more emphasis on evangelism in preparation for Christ's coming and no high Calvinist assumptions about the limited kingdom of the Elect. So 'moderate Calvinism was the characteristic theological belief of the vast majority of Welshmen'.⁵⁷

It is not possible to leave the matter there for the Monmouthshire Baptists because the dispute between high Calvinist Particular Baptists and the moderate Calvinist (Fullerite) Baptists in the churches, was particularly bitter in the Academy at Abergavenny established by Micah Thomas in 1807. Micah Thomas was a friend and follower of Fuller, whom he invited to Wales in 1812. Though the Revd J.P. Davies of Tredegar is regarded as its principal spokesman, Fullerism cost Micah Thomas more dearly. It brought him into dispute with the leading Welsh Baptist Calvinist theologian, John Jenkins of Hengoed, and Francis Hiley, minister of Llanwenarth Baptist church. The dispute spread all over Wales fanned by rival denominational periodicals and descending to scurrilous personal attacks. There were other issues, not least that there was too little Welsh, too little denominational control at the college, which will be discussed later. In 1834 five students left the college, accusing Thomas of being over-strict in his rules but favouring an 'Arminian' and reading the (Arminian) works of John Wesley aloud at breakfast. The College Committee supported Micah Thomas against the Calvinists, but he resigned his post, ostensibly on grounds of ill-health. The circumstances of his resignation will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

In 1883 Henry Richard attributed the growth of Welsh Nonconformity to three things:

First, the surpassing power of the Welsh pulpit; secondly, the influence of the 'Private Society'...thirdly the system of Sunday schools....differing widely from England.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 229. Thomas Thomas, *Inaugural Address, Annual Session of the Baptist Union, April 1872*. (London, 1872), pp. 7-11.

⁵⁷ Jones, *Religion and Society*, p. 230. See also Chapter One,

⁵⁸ Henry Richard, *Letters and Essays on Wales* (London, 1884), pp. 26-27, also cited by E.T. Davies, *Religion and Society in the Nineteenth Century* (Llandybie, 1981), p. 35.

The success of the Evangelical Revival and all the subsequent religious revivals in Wales depended upon the 'drive for literacy' initiated by the Circulating Schools of the Revd Griffith Jones of Llanddowror and the Sunday Schools originated in Wales by Thomas Charles of Bala. Without this work of pre-evangelism in basic education and literacy, the involvement of lay people in chapel membership and the societies would have been impossible. People had first to read and understand the Bible.⁵⁹

The work of the Sunday Schools was of paramount importance among the Nonconformists in Monmouthshire in the nineteenth century. Thomas Thomas and his associates set about such work from their earliest arrival in Pontypool. Also important was the provision of day-school education. As Voluntaryists Thomas and his friends could not accept government grants for their British School in Pontypool, but they never neglected the important work of the school which greatly enhanced their religious and social reforms. Nor could they forget the importance of their chapels in providing primary education and training for those who would be trained for the Baptist ministry at Pontypool Baptist College.⁶⁰

After that the life of the chapel with the opportunities for laypeople to participate in its democratic government and flexible organisation contrasted greatly with the formal hierarchical structure of the Established Church where 'the autocracy of the bishop in his diocese and the autocracy of the clergyman in his parish leave very little room for the activity of laymen'.⁶¹ By the end of the nineteenth century the Diocese of Llandaff had begun to learn the value of laymen to assist in conducting worship and as members of parochial church councils in parish organisation, but these changes were too little, too late; they were not enough to satisfy Nonconformists and did nothing to dent the control of Nonconformity over industrial

⁵⁹ Richard, *Letters and Essays on Wales* p.34; I.G. Jones, 'Religion and Society', p. 234.

⁶⁰ As will be shown in the following chapters.

⁶¹ H.T. Edwards, Dean of Bangor, quoted by E.T. Davies, *Religion and Society*, p. 41.

south Wales, which had been established by 1850.⁶² The shortcomings of the Established Church at the beginning of the century made it unable to meet the challenges of the Industrial Revolution. In fact in the industrial areas 'the Established Church lost nearly fifty years before beginning to provide adequate ministration to the newcomers'.⁶³

The Welsh dioceses were poorly endowed; Llandaff was the poorest and had been simply a stepping-stone to a better diocese as well as being held in conjunction with the Deanery of St. Paul's Cathedral, London. In 1850 Alfred Ollivant became the first Bishop of Llandaff to reside permanently in the diocese for a century and a half. Ollivant, a Mancunian, had learned Welsh and could preach in the language. That did not satisfy Lady Llanover and her circle, but Ollivant's episcopate was one of the best that Llandaff ever experienced.⁶⁴

The important matter of the place of the Welsh language in industrial Monmouthshire will be examined more fully in the next section, but it is relevant to say here that the parish of Trefethin had a Welsh-speaking priest for most, if not all, of the nineteenth century, as did the neighbouring parishes of Panteg and Blaenafon. When Thomas Thomas arrived in Pontypool in 1836, the Revd Thomas Davies, M.A., of Jesus College, Oxford, was assistant curate in Trefethin church. The Vicar of Llanofer, Dr. Casberd, was Vicar of Trefethin, Mamhilad and Blaenafon until he resigned in 1843 and Thomas Davies succeeded Casberd.⁶⁵ Blaenafon was already in the care of the Revd John Jones who became its first Vicar when the ecclesiastical parish was formed in 1860, and he remained there until his death in 1885. Legally the living was a perpetual curacy and it only became so by an Act of Parliament. That illustrates one of

⁶² E.T.Davies, 'The Church in the Industrial Revolution' in *A History of the Church in Wales*, ed. David Walker (Penarth, 1976), pp. 121-143, on pp. 140-142.

⁶³ Davies, *Religion in the Industrial Revolution*, pp. 26, 124, 125.

⁶⁴ Ibid, pp.118-127; Davies, 'The Church in the Industrial Revolution', pp. 121-143, on pp. 128, 129, 137; Roger L. Brown, *Reclaiming the Wilderness* (Welshpool, 2001), pp. 3-6; Roger L. Brown, *In Pursuit of a Welsh Episcopate: Appointments to Welsh Sees 1840-1905* (Cardiff, 2005), pp. 92-94; Wilton D. Wills, 'The Established Church in the Diocese of Llandaff 1850-1870', *WHR*, 4:3 (June, 1969), p. 237.

⁶⁵ Vaughan W.T. Rees, *Trefethin, Pontypool, A short history of the Parish and its Churches* (Pontypool, 1934), p.69. DWB sub James, David, p. 421; *PFP*, 16 May 1863.

the difficulties of the Established Church: the slow legal procedure for creating parishes compared with the ease with which Nonconformist churches were set up.⁶⁶ The same was true of Thomas Davies in Trefethin. He was legally perpetual curate by 1844 after he had received the help of the diocese to sub-divide the old Parish of Llanofer into three parts, Mamhilad, Llanofer and Trefethin, of which he retained only Trefethin. As the incumbent of Trefethin he was able to be more effective in the Church rate dispute in 1845 than he had been in the humiliating defeat for the parish in 1841. This will be analysed in the next chapter.

Thomas Davies was a hardworking, energetic and imaginative parish priest. At his funeral in May 1863, his friend Dr. David James, Rector of Panteg, and fellow pupil with him at Cardigan Grammar School, had claimed that Davies was in 1843, when he succeeded Dr. Casberd, 'literally the angel of seven churches'. Those churches were St. James's, Pontypool, Blaenafon, Mamhilad, Llanofer, Trefethin, Abersychan and Pontnewynydd. The last two had been built through the initiative of Thomas Davies after 1840 and he appointed vicars to both of them by 1844. Inspired by the apocalyptic vision, Dr. James (Dewi o Ddyfed) went on to describe Davies's work in setting up the Town (National) School for three-hundred pupils in Pontypool, building himself a parsonage house in 1846 and rebuilding and enlarging the parish church by 1847. James also referred to his work for many societies including the Church Pastoral Aid Society, an Evangelical body to whom Davies was invited to preach, and the local Scripture Readers' Association, which he attended with Thomas Thomas, as well as the Working Men's Institute and the Temperance meetings. Thomas Thomas was the only Nonconformist minister noted at the funeral of Thomas Davies.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Davies, *Religion in the Industrial Revolution*, pp. 29, 31. Sir Joseph Bradney, *A History of Monmouthshire*, Vol. 1, Part 2B, *Blaenavon* (London, 1992), p. 403; E.J. Davies, *The Blaenavon Story* (Newport, 1975), pp. 55-56.

⁶⁷ See Chapter Two. *PPF*, 23 April, 19 November 1859, 16 May 1863; Roger L. Brown, *The Welsh Evangelicals* (Cardiff, 1986), p. 186.

Clearly there was nothing personal in the battle that the Dissenters had with the Established Church in Pontypool. William Williams Phillips, senior, Baptist deacon and land agent of the Lord Lieutenant, brother of the senior magistrate and father of a churchwarden, had a foot in both camps, but he meant what he said at a presentation to Thomas Davies, which he chaired in May 1859. This marked the contribution of Thomas Davies to the Parish of Trefethin over twenty-five years. Phillips said that although he and Davies belonged to different denominations, there was more on which they agreed than on which they differed. Their great desire was to act together for the good of their fellow creatures.⁶⁸

That tribute from Phillips came in the middle of a period of close co-operation in the cause of a common purpose between the Christian denominations in south Wales when 'the evangelical clergy of the Church appear to have been most active in the social life of the coalfield'.⁶⁹ The continuation of this harmony after 1862 was threatened by the elephant let into the room by the Liberation Society, which will be analysed in Chapter Four.

The Welsh Language

Not least among the key changes of the early nineteenth century in Monmouthshire was the change in balance between Welsh and English. The relationship of language to social change in nineteenth century Wales as a whole has been described as 'difficult and puzzling'.⁷⁰ The changes that brought Monmouthshire from a mainly Welsh-speaking county to an overwhelmingly English-speaking one by 1914 have been described as 'complex' and

⁶⁸ Gerald Parsons, 'From Dissenters to Free Churchmen', in *Religion in Victorian Britain*, pp. 67-116, on p. 87; *PFP*, 31 May 1859.

⁶⁹ Wills, 'The Established Church in the Diocese of Llandaff 1850-1870', in *WHR*, 4:3 (June 1969), p. 237.

⁷⁰ Ieuan Gwynedd Jones, 'Language and Community in Nineteenth Century Wales' in *Mid-Victorian Wales* (Cardiff, 1992), pp. 54-79, on p. 54.

especially so in the western valleys 'where the proportions of Welsh and English speakers changed constantly'.⁷¹ Sian Rhiannon Williams has described how the English language gradually encroached westwards into Welsh-speaking areas and Welsh retreated, via a bilingual zone, to the extreme north-western corner. The complexities involved in that process of language shift are partly created by a lack of statistical evidence about the exact number of Welsh and English immigrants before 1851 as well as the movement of people from rural Monmouthshire into the industrial areas. For S.R. Williams the complexities include understanding the linguistic differences between upper Rhymney (Twyncarno), where migrants were exclusively Welsh, lower Rhymney with a high proportion of English migrants, and middle Rhymney which was more mixed and had some streets inhabited with people born in Ireland.⁷² All three places were within walking distance of each other.

The complexity of the language zones is increased by the rise in population. In the whole of Wales there were more Welsh speakers in 1901 than in 1801. The number of Welsh speakers in Monmouthshire in 1861 was greater than in 1801. In the latter year they comprised eighty per cent of the population, while they were only forty per cent in the former.⁷³ The decline in the use of the Welsh language in Monmouthshire was neither uniform nor consistent. It varied from place to place as the pattern of migration was affected by industrial changes, as at Blaina, where the stoppage in the iron-works between 1864 and 1873 caused the emigration of many Welsh speakers. When the economic situation improved, many English speakers moved into Blaina. Some places, like Bedwellty, remained Welsh-speaking, while the coal-mining settlements of Blackwood and Newbridge had a higher proportion of English speakers

⁷¹ S.R. Williams, 'The Languages of Monmouthshire' in *The Gwent County History*, vol. 4, eds., C. Williams and S.R. Williams (Cardiff, 2011), pp. 147-164, on p. 147.

⁷² S.R. Williams, 'The Welsh Language in Industrial Monmouthshire c. 1800-1901' in *Language and Community in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Geraint H. Jenkins (Cardiff, 1998), pp. 203-229, on pp. 204, 207, 227; S.R. Williams, 'Pentref mwyaf Cymreig Sir Fynwy': Rhymni a Chyfrifiad Iaith 1891, in *Ebwy, Rhymni a Sirhywi*, golygydd H.T. Edwards (Llandysul, 1999), p. 145.

⁷³ Jones, 'Language and Community in Nineteenth Century Wales', pp. 54-79, on p. 56.

than the iron towns further north. Out-migration helped to determine the comparative strength of English and Welsh and 'the later the in-migration the more likely it was to be dominated by English speakers'. After 1860, Welsh-born migrants were outnumbered by more long-distance in-migrants from England and elsewhere.⁷⁴

If we focus our attention more closely on the Pontypool area, we have the evidence of Archdeacon Coxe from his visit to Monmouthshire in 1801, when he seemed surprised by the amount of Welsh he heard spoken. He carefully differentiated the Welsh-speaking parts of the county in the south-western, western and north-eastern districts outside the towns. He also noted the bilingual church services that were held 'in the midland parts' of the county, but

The natives of the western parts, which are sequestered and mountainous, unwillingly hold intercourse with the English, retain their ancient prejudices, and still brand them with the name of Saxons; this antipathy, however, is gradually decreasing, by means of the establishment of English schools and the introduction of the English manners and customs, and manufactures.⁷⁵

Coxe astutely realised that English schools brought about a decline in antipathy towards the English, but he would not have known that English had been the medium of instruction in most Monmouthshire primary schools since the seventeenth century. Sian Rhiannon Williams noted that commentators had dated the decline in the use of Welsh in eastern Monmouthshire from the mid-eighteenth century. Church services in Welsh had ceased in Usk parish church in 1750.⁷⁶

The proximity of Monmouthshire to England and the lack of official status for the Welsh language brought about a low esteem of the Welsh language even when most of the

⁷⁴ S.R. Williams, 'The Languages of Monmouthshire' in *The Gwent County History*, Volume 4, pp.147-164, on pp. 152-153; S.R. Williams, 'The Welsh language in Industrial Monmouthshire c.1800-1901' in *Language and Community in the Nineteenth Century* ed. G.H. Jenkins, pp. 203-229, on p. 216.

⁷⁵ W. Coxe, *An Historical Tour in Monmouthshire* (London, 1801), p. 2.

⁷⁶ Williams, 'The Languages of Monmouthshire' in *The Gwent County History*, Volume 4, p. 147; Sir Joseph Bradney, *A Memorandum* (Abergavenny, 1926), p. 4.

people were Welsh speakers. The movement westwards of the English-speaking influence on Monmouthshire seems to have started in the early eighteenth century when bilingualism was noted in the parish of Pen-y-clawdd.⁷⁷ No use of the Welsh language was made in any of the seven schools established by the SPCK in Monmouthshire between 1699 and 1737. More surprising is the fact that Griffith Jones, whose schools did so much to strengthen Welsh in the Vale of Glamorgan, changed from Welsh to English as the language of education in his circulating schools in Monmouthshire after 1770, even in areas like Newport, where services were still conducted in Welsh.⁷⁸

In the mid-eighteenth century it appears that Pontypool was a centre of Welsh life. Quaker meetings had been held in Welsh there and a local apothecary, Elisha Beadles, had translated and published a Quaker book in Welsh in 1715. One of Wales's earliest printing presses had been set up in Pontypool through the initiative of Miles Harry, the Welsh Baptist minister at Penygarn in co-operation with his friend Howell Harris, the Welsh Methodist leader. Only six Welsh books were printed on the press. They were all religious and included a hymn book and the letters of the Methodist preacher George Whitefield. The publication of a Baptist Catechism, *Catechism y Bedyddwyr*, in 1741 brought an end to their working relationship with the printing press, because the Catechism supported the Baptist teaching in opposition to the practice of Infant Baptism upheld by the Methodists.⁷⁹

There were also signs in the mid-eighteenth century of increased bilingualism and the advance of English. The Corn Market, built in Pontypool in 1730 carried an early example of a bilingual sign on its front. John Wesley preached three times in English in Pontypool without

⁷⁷ Alan Roderick, 'A History of the Welsh Language in Gwent' in *Gwent Local History*, 50 (Spring 1981), p. 29.

⁷⁸ Ibid, pp. 32-33. Sir Joseph Bradney, *A Memorandum* (Abergavenny, 1926), p. 3.

⁷⁹ Roderick, 'A History of the Welsh Language in Gwent' p. 30; John Gwynfor Jones, 'Language, Literature and Education' in *The Gwent County History*, vol. 3, *The making of Monmouthshire*, ed. Madeleine Gray and Prys Morgan (Cardiff, 2009), pp. 285-311, on pp. 304-305.

having any difficulty in being understood by the people. His Welsh colleague, Howell Harris brought chaos to the streets when he preached there, presumably in Welsh, in 1739 and caused the Riot Act to be read by Capel Hanbury, the magistrate. It took the influence of Miles Harry to release him from having to appear at the assize court.⁸⁰

Miles Harry is a figure of some significance as far as the language profile of Pontypool is concerned as well as for his religious significance. He was the first minister of the Welsh Baptist church at Penygarn, Pontypool, where Micah Thomas became a member in 1795, before Thomas began to preach in 1796. Services were bilingual by that time as was the training that had been provided in the academy at Trosnant, established by John Griffith in 1736 and associated with Penygarn chapel and Miles Harry who lectured there. It had closed by 1770 and Welsh Baptist ministers like Micah Thomas had then to train in Bristol until 1807 when Micah Thomas opened the Baptist Academy in his house in Abergavenny as a theological college to train young Welsh Baptist ministers to preach in English. The fact that the only college in Wales for the training of Baptist ministers conducted its affairs solely in English is an indication of the language shift as early as 1807. Ieuan Gwynedd Jones has drawn attention to the 'enormous efforts which young men, aspirants to the ministry, put into learning English' and he said that English became an additional code for those young men, an indicator of social class, which is why they enjoyed writing to each other in English and using English on every social and public occasion that they could.⁸¹

So the colleges became eventually as English as the primary schools in Monmouthshire. As early as 1815 Abergavenny Baptist Academy had been associated with an attempt to

⁸⁰ Roderick, 'A history of the Welsh Language in Gwent', p. 29; Richard Hanbury Tenison, *The Hanburys of Monmouthshire* (Aberystwyth, 1990), p. 105. Howell Harris had visited Monmouthshire in the previous year at the invitation of Edmund Jones. See J. Glyndwr Harris, *Edmund Jones: the old prophet* (Pontnewynydd, 1987), pp. 48-49.

⁸¹ Bradney, *A History of Monmouthshire* vol. 1, part 2B, *Abergavenny*, pp. 452, 454-55; DWB sub Thomas, Micah, pp. 958-59; I.G. Jones, 'Language and Community in Nineteenth Century Wales', in *Mid-Victorian Wales* (Cardiff, 1992), pp. 54-79, on p. 67.

provide English services in Pontypool. Micah Thomas preached at the ordination of one of his students, Mr. D. Powell from Maesberllan, on 13 December 1815 in a large room in Crane Street called 'The Japan' because it was associated with the japanning works there. Powell was succeeded in the small church there by Thomas Harris from Fishguard who had also trained at Abergavenny Academy, and Thomas Thomas had preached there himself when he was a student at Abergavenny in 1824. The church had closed by 1825.⁸² Baptists who wanted to worship in English had to go to Pontrhydyrun chapel until 1827, when W.W. Phillips secured the first English Baptist chapel in Abersychan. Phillips later secured the rental of the former Friends' Meeting House in Trosnant as an English Baptist church in 1835.⁸³

Sian Rhiannon Williams has noted this Baptist activity in her studies and says of the English chapel in 'The Japan': *'yr oedd wedi cau oherwydd diffyg cefnogaeth* ('it was closed through lack of support'). Of the subsequent English chapel in Abersychan she says: *'ond ychydig iawn o aelodau oedd yno*' ('but there were very few members there').⁸⁴ That was in 1827. Even by 1851 the number of people attending the English Baptist chapels at High Street, Abersychan and Crane Street, Pontypool, did not match the attendances at the Welsh Baptist chapels, or even the English churches of the Primitive and Wesleyan Methodists, which had been established longer in the parish. Crane Street chapel, built in 1847 had already attracted more worshippers than the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists at Rehoboth in the same street.⁸⁵

During the third quarter of the nineteenth century there was a substantial shift in the relative strength of the two languages in Nonconformist churches in Pontypool. The Welsh chapels declined until Zion Welsh Baptist church was absorbed into Crane Street church in

⁸² NLW Minor Deposit 1219B.

⁸³ See Chapter Six below.

⁸⁴ Sian Rhiannon Williams, *Oes y Byd I'r Iaith Gymraeg* (Caerdydd, 1992), p. 70. All translations from the original Welsh are by the author of the thesis unless otherwise indicated.

⁸⁵ *The Religious Census of 1851, A Calendar of the Returns relating to Wales*, vol. 1, *South Wales* eds., I.G. Jones and David Williams (Cardiff, 1976), pp. 72-81.

1878 and ministers in Welsh chapels 'met with the bilingual difficulty' as described by Brynhyfryd Welsh Baptist chapel in Ebbw Vale.⁸⁶ Sunday evening services and the weekly meeting there were at least bilingual by the 1870s and Tabernacle Welsh chapel, Crane Street, Pontypool was holding all its services in English by that time. As early as 1861, the Revd Daniel Morgan, minister of Tabernacle, had returned to Horeb chapel Blaenafon, 'because the old members at Tabernacle Pontypool would not accept the need to change to English services'.⁸⁷

The language shift is complicated by generational differences. Older people in western Monmouthshire did not easily give up the Welsh language after 1861, particularly in their religious services. They were in any case in a minority of the population in Pontypool where bilingualism had set in earlier. In 1851 only 6,111 (21.8%) of the population of the whole registration district of Pontypool had been born outside Wales and Monmouthshire, a smaller percentage than either Newport or Cardiff. The vast majority of the population had been born in Monmouthshire, but it has not been determined how many of them were English-speaking people who had migrated from rural Monmouthshire. More than half of the population of Pontypool was described as 'Welsh' in 1840, but only 10.3% of the population there in 1891 claimed to be able to speak Welsh.⁸⁸

Language shift was interlinked with the language profile of the local power-structure in which Capel Hanbury Leigh played a significant part. For some years before 1819 'respectable English-speaking townspeople were welcome to the services at Pontypool Park' in the private chapel. When the number of worshippers became too many for the chapel,

⁸⁶ NLW Minor Deposit 1209B, 1213B, 1219B.

⁸⁷ NLW Minor Deposit 1213B.

⁸⁸ 1851 Census Pontypool; G.S. Kenrick, 'Statistics of the Population of the Parish of Trevethin' in *Journal of the Statistical Society of London* (1840-41), pp. 366-375.; Dot Jones, *Statistical Evidence relating to the Welsh Language 1801-1911* (Cardiff, 1998), p. 226.

Hanbury Leigh provided a site for the church of St. James, opposite the Park, for services in English only, built by public subscription and consecrated in 1821.⁸⁹

Western Monmouthshire was included in the 'Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales' in 1847. Jelinger Symons, the commissioner who reported on the county, was in no doubt about its inclusion because it was 'so thoroughly Welsh as regards its character, habits and language of the larger part of its inhabitants'.⁹⁰ The disputes of historians about the extent to which industrialisation benefited the Welsh language have not extended to Monmouthshire. It has been shown that the fortunes of the Welsh language varied from one part of industrial Monmouthshire to another, though the capacity to assimilate English-speaking immigrants became increasingly threatened by 1891, 'particularly since officialdom, the law, business, education and the Church establishment refused to grant Welsh equal status with English'.⁹¹ Leaders across the denominational and social divides in Monmouthshire were equally dismissive of the Welsh language in their responses to the questions of Jelinger Symons in 1847. As Sian Rhiannon Williams has observed 'the drive to get on in the world was a powerful influence in causing the abandonment of a language which was symbolic of an underclass'.⁹² The only grand exceptions to that low opinion of the Welsh language among the gentry and middle class were Augusta and Benjamin Hall (later Lord and Lady Llanover). Lady Hall's school at Abercarn was the only one in Monmouthshire which taught Welsh by 1855, but even that was condemned because the teacher was 'backward in English, therefore the school is a very inferior one'.⁹³

⁸⁹ Hanbury.Tenison, *The Hanburys of Monmouthshire*, p. 208.

⁹⁰ *Reports of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales*, Part 2 (London, 1847), p.271.

⁹¹ S.R.Williams, 'The Welsh Language in Industrial Monmouthshire c.1800-1901' in *Language and Community in the Nineteenth Century* ed. G.H.Jenkins, pp. 203-229, on p. 209

⁹² Williams, 'The Welsh Language in Industrial Monmouthshire c.1800-1901', p.218; *Reports of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales*, part 2, *Monmouthshire*, pp. 294-304.

⁹³ Williams, 'The Welsh Language in Industrial Monmouthshire c. 1800-1901', p. 215; S.R. Williams, 'The Languages of Monmouthshire', in *The Gwent County History*, vol.4, pp.147-164, on p. 150; Celyn Gurdien Williams, 'Lady Llanover and the creation of a Welsh cultural utopia' (unpublished PhD thesis, Cardiff University, 2009).

The position of the Welsh language in mid nineteenth century Monmouthshire was complex and varied and became more complicated as one moved from anglicised rural eastern Monmouthshire through shifting bilingualism to the greater use of Welsh in the north west of the county. Thomas Thomas faced criticism for teaching only through the medium of English in the Baptist College in Pontypool, as will be seen in Chapter 5. His real attitude towards his task as a Welsh-speaking Welshman in nineteenth century Monmouthshire was well described by Ieuan Gwynedd Jones as the view that 'the medium should not determine the message' but it is 'the substance of the revelation which must be proclaimed whatever the language'.⁹⁴ So also said Griffith Jones in the eighteenth century.⁹⁵ In the case of Thomas Thomas there was a cultural and political influence that looked to English newspapers and literature for inspiration and liberation. Thomas exasperated a fellow Welshman by his excessive use of statistics from English newspapers when he delivered a lecture at Llanofor on 'total abstinence' in 1855.⁹⁶

Politics

As well as the changes in the economy, religion and language in Monmouthshire during the nineteenth century, there were far-reaching political developments as control by the aristocracy and gentry was gradually replaced by a more democratic form of government, but only gradually and not until 1884 when members of parliament were elected on a broader franchise by secret ballot.⁹⁷ Thomas Thomas died in 1881 without seeing the fruits of the labours to which he and his colleagues devoted so much of their energies, the return of members

⁹⁴ Jones, 'Language and Community in Nineteenth Century Wales', p. 60.

⁹⁵ Moses Williams, ed. *Selections from the Welch Piety* (Cardiff, 1938), p. 47.

⁹⁶ *MM*, 2 and 16 February 1855.

⁹⁷ After 1872. Margaret Escott, 'Parliamentary Representation' in *The Gwent County History*, Volume 4, pp. 265-290, on pp. 265-80.

of parliament who would support the removal of their religious and civic disabilities through the disestablishment of the Established Church.⁹⁸ The frustration caused by the failure of the Reform Act of 1832 to improve the parliamentary representation of Monmouthshire resulted in the violence of the Chartist Rising and the continued support for the People's Charter. The failure of the 1867 Reform Act to change Monmouthshire's representation or make provision for a secret ballot, produced the failure of the Liberal candidate in the county in the 1868 election and the consequent rioting in Abersychan, Pontypool and Blaenafon.⁹⁹ The riots, which the Liberal Nonconformists sought to disown as they had rejected the Chartist Rising, still expressed the great disappointment they felt after their hard efforts of the previous two decades. Whatever might be said of the influence of Nonconformist ministers upon their congregations at the time of elections, the fact that so many of the people of Wales did not have the vote (in 1867, ninety per cent) meant that any such influence was limited in the face of a public poll.¹⁰⁰

When Thomas Thomas returned to Wales in 1836 to become the principal of the Baptist College, the small landowning aristocracy that had ruled Wales for centuries still held sway. Charles Morgan of Tredegar and the family of Somerset, dukes of Beaufort, were owners of one sixth of the county. Directly beneath them, as Ian Pincombe has described, the likes of 'Crawshay Bailey, the earl of Abergavenny, Robert Salusbury MP, John Hanbury of Pontypool, Hanbury Williams, John Jones of Llanarth, and a small group of others, groaned under the weight'.¹⁰¹ After Capel Hanbury Leigh, the first choice of the Reformers in 1831,

⁹⁸ Thomas Thomas, *The Rights and Duties of Christian Citizens*, Circular Letter of the Monmouthshire Particular Baptist Association (Cardiff, 1847), p.8. Thomas Thomas, *The Duty of Religious Men to study the times in which they live and to apply their energies to the right conduct of public affairs* (London, 1848), p. 17.

⁹⁹ David J.V. Jones, *The Last Rising: The Newport Insurrection of 1839* (Oxford, 1985), chapter 2 esp. p. 5; Margaret Escott, 'Parliamentary Representation', pp. 270-274; Ryland Wallace, *Organise! Organise! Organise!* (Cardiff, 1991), pp. 9-10.

¹⁰⁰ Matthew Cragoe, *Culture, Politics and National Identity in Wales 1832-1886* (Oxford, 2004), pp. 173-174, 224.

¹⁰¹ Ian Pincombe, 'The Rural Economy' in *The Gwent County History, Industrial Monmouthshire*, 4, pp. 129-146, on p. 43.

had declined nomination on grounds of health, William Addams-Williams of Llangibby Castle succeeded Sir Charles Morgan, while Beaufort candidates were returned for the other county seat, as well as for the seat for the three boroughs of Newport, Monmouth and Usk. Benjamin Hall held the borough seat from 1832 to 1837, but faced so much pressure from his rivals that he retreated to Marylebone.¹⁰²

The 1832 Reform Act had failed to add the boroughs of Pontypool, Abergavenny and Chepstow to the borough constituency and the proposal for Monmouthshire to have a third county member had been defeated because its total population was marginally below the qualifying threshold of 100,000. The seat went instead to Merthyr Tydfil. Apart from the brief tenure of Addams Williams, 1832-37, Morgans and Somersets controlled the county seats until 1880. In the borough, Benjamin Hall was followed by Reginald James Blewitt of Llantarnam for fifteen years after 1837, until Crawshay Bailey won the seat for the Conservatives in 1852 and held it until the 1868 election.¹⁰³

In the wake of the riots in Merthyr Tydfil in 1831 in favour of reform, the borough received an MP in 1832. There were also clashes with the forces of law and order in Pontypool and Newport at that time, but they were put down by the influx of eight hundred soldiers.¹⁰⁴ One of the letters of the Scotch Cattle in 1832 included the word Reform. The Cattle (*Tarw Scotch*) had been operating in Monmouthshire since 1816 in opposition to wage reductions and the controlling influence of the truck shops, even after the Anti-Truck Act of 1831. The Scotch Cattle met at night and damaged the property of industrialists to whom they sent warning letters. One such industrialist was Capel Hanbury Leigh of Pontypool Park, who received a warning letter and was visited with arson to his property in 1830.¹⁰⁵ In the years before the

¹⁰² Margaret Escott, 'Parliamentary Representation' pp. 265-290, on pp. 269, 272.

¹⁰³ Margaret Escott, 'Parliamentary Representation', pp. 269, 273; Jones, *The Last Rising*, p.51.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, p. 50.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 36, 42-46, 48.

Chartist Rising there was Scotch Cattle activity across the coalfield. Industrial relationships were greatly affected by workers' combinations and the responses of the employers to this early trade union activity. Capel Hanbury Leigh started the assault against unionists in 1834 when he refused to employ them.¹⁰⁶

As the decade progressed Chartism emerged as a key local political force with the Charter itself of paramount importance for the political aspirations of many who did not participate in the Newport Rising in 1839. John Frost had appeared on the national scene as a political reformer by 1831, and he and his colleagues set up a branch of the Political Union of the Working Classes, committed to universal manhood suffrage, in November of that year. Frost encouraged his followers to distance themselves from moderate reformers like Capel Hanbury Leigh, George Kenrick, Reginald Blewitt and others, whom Frost described as 'enemies of the people'.¹⁰⁷

Pontypool was an important centre of Chartist activity. In July 1837 a radical association, only the second of its kind, was formed there. It had a membership of about fifty people, which included William Jones, an actor and watch-maker, leader of the Pontypool contingent on the march in November 1839, John Llewellyn, a hatter and beer-house keeper, of Pontnewynydd, as well as William Shellard, master shoemaker, Evan Emanuel, a turner, and Thomas Parry, a shoemaker. These were the ring-leaders, but there were also workers like Samuel Shell, whose son George was killed outside the Westgate Hotel in 1839, and the brothers John and Solomon Britton, both colliers.¹⁰⁸

The Newport Rising of 3-4 November 1839 had national significance and was a focal point in the history of nineteenth century Monmouthshire. The official government-sponsored

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, pp. 41-43.

¹⁰⁷ Jones, *The Last Rising*, p.49.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, p.52.

reports and investigations carried out in industrial Monmouthshire in the wake of the Rising made the details of the *Reports of the Educational Commissioners, Part Two*, in 1847 stale news, and the numerical superiority of Nonconformist attendances over the Established Church, revealed in the Religious Census of 1851, came as no surprise.¹⁰⁹

Chartism was a mass political movement in which one in five of the population of Monmouthshire was enrolled in 1839. As Lord Lieutenant, Capel Hanbury Leigh complained that most of the coal and ironworkers in the Pontypool area were forced to join Chartist lodges, while those he had sworn in as special constables were afraid to sleep in their beds. Hanbury Leigh sent anxious appeals to the government for help and a defence association was set up in Pontypool, while soldiers were sent to Newport, Abergavenny and Monmouth in May 1839. All the shops in Pontypool were closed when the People's Charter was presented to parliament, 1,500 special constables were sworn in and six hundred people marched west through the town.¹¹⁰

Chartism was nationwide and by no means confined to Monmouthshire and Glamorgan, and it certainly did not end after the Newport Rising. In spite of the very poor housing and working conditions of the industrial workers and the insecurity they faced in their employment and their health, Chartists wanted a political solution to their economic grievances. They wanted the six points of the Charter so that the workers could vote for paid members of parliament who would represent their interests in their class-divided communities.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, pp. 13, 37; Seymour Tremenheere's Report on *The State of Elementary Education in the Mining Districts of South Wales* (London, 1840); *Report of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales* (London, 1847); *The Religious Census of 1851, A Calendar of the Returns Relating to South Wales*, vol. 1, eds. Ieuan Gwynedd Jones and David Williams.

¹¹⁰ Jones, *The Last Rising*, pp. 65, 67-69, 74, 77, 79.

¹¹¹ Ibid, pp. 81, 82; Malcolm Chase, 'Rethinking Welsh Chartism' in *Llafur*, vol 10 No.3 (2010), pp. 39-57; David Osmond, 'After the Rising: Chartism in Newport 1840-1848' in *Gwent Local History*, 98 (2005), pp. 8-52.

In May 1839, in the face of the presentation to parliament of the People's Charter and much anxiety in Pontypool, a loyal address was sent to the Queen from the meeting of the Monmouthshire Baptist Association in Risca.¹¹² This was both significant and sad, significant because it showed the concern of Baptists as a leading Dissenting community in the county, to emphasise their loyalty to the Crown and distance themselves from the charge of sedition. It was sad because the Baptists believed that the aims of the Charter also expressed their only hope of securing the disestablishment of the Church of England, which had entered their agenda in the 1830s. Baptists could not accept the physical force methods of the Chartists.¹¹³

The Revd Micah Thomas, principal of the Baptist Academy at Abergavenny, had welcomed the election of Addams Williams for the county seat in 1832. He also pleaded for the life of John Frost to the Home Secretary in 1839. Thomas had then described himself as an 'advocate of reform' but said that he had 'always abhorred violence'.¹¹⁴ Thomas Thomas's first published work in Pontypool was the sermon that he preached in Lower Trosnant in November 1839 on 'the civil duties of Christians' in the light of the 'late outrages in Newport'. Thomas's teaching on the subject is clear. Christians must obey the civil magistrate in all civic matters. If the magistrate makes demands upon Christians which their consciences do not permit them to obey because they are contrary to their religion, then they should passively submit to the consequences of their inability to comply.¹¹⁵ This will be discussed in the next chapter on the subject of Church Rate, where the whole issue of conscience came into focus close to home in Pontypool.

To some extent the activities of the Chartists interfered with other legitimate protests at the time. For all that the Newport Chartists agreed that the Corn Laws were 'unjust and

¹¹² Jones, p. 76.

¹¹³ R. Tudur Jones, 'The origins of the Nonconformist Disestablishment campaign, 1830-1840, in *JHSCW* 25, (1970), pp. 39-76, esp. p. 45.

¹¹⁴ Jones, *The Last Rising*, p. 50; David Williams, *John Frost* (Cardiff, 1939), p. 292.

¹¹⁵ Thomas Thomas, *The Civil Duties of Christians* (London, 1839), pp. 12, 24.

iniquitous', they believed that the condition of the people could not be improved before the achievement of universal suffrage.¹¹⁶ Thomas Thomas expressed a similar belief in a letter to the *Nonconformist* newspaper in October 1841. He said that it was no use expecting a removal 'of commercial restrictions by the present parliament' because 'the present constitution is aristocratic, a mere modification of Feudalism.'¹¹⁷ That feudalism would present itself nearer home in the confrontation over the compulsory Church rate in the Parish of Trefethin.¹¹⁸

At the same time, while attempts by Independent ministers to conduct meetings in north Monmouthshire against the Corn Laws were being spoiled by Chartists, Thomas Thomas was gaining support for the ACLL in Pontypool. He went with his colleagues to the Manchester Conference and he preached a sermon in its support in Pontypool. Thomas also gained local support for the Complete Suffrage Union (CSU), an offshoot of the ACLL, and the British Anti-State Church Association (ASCA), later to become the Liberation Society. He helped to set up branches of the CSU and the Liberation Society in Pontypool. The only known Chartist activist who became a member of Thomas's Baptist church in Trosnant was William Wise, who was excluded from the church on 14 November 1839. It may be that the increasing membership of alternative liberal societies in Pontypool detracted from future Chartist activities in the town.¹¹⁹

In his description of the town of Aberdare in 1850, Ieuan Gwynedd Jones quoted from a Board of Health report that described a lack of middle class residents who would be found 'in every other town in England'. I.G. Jones said that the town of Aberdare had grown too quickly and the absence of an established, indigenous middle class helped to explain why 'to all intents and purposes, it was as destitute of civic government as the smallest rural village in

¹¹⁶ Wallace, *Organise! Organise! Organise!*, p. 48.

¹¹⁷ *Nonconformist*, 20 October 1841.

¹¹⁸ See Chapter 2.

¹¹⁹ Thomas Thomas, *A Proper Consideration of the cause of the Poor, a test of righteous character* (Pontypool, 1841); Crane Street Church Minute Book, Thursday 16 November 1839.

the empire'.¹²⁰ Had I.G. Jones turned his attention to Pontypool in the same period he might have come to the same conclusion. For all it was an old town and the Hanburys had been there since the seventeenth century, providing an MP for one of the county seats in the eighteenth, the government of Pontypool was indeed 'feudal' in the first half of the nineteenth century. Capel Hanbury Leigh replenished the ironworks and ruled as magistrate and benefactor of the workhouse and as Lord Lieutenant after 1835. The *Monmouthshire Merlin*, owned by his friend Reginald Blewitt and later by Blewitt's brother-in-law, Edward Dowling, spoke well of him as a good employer, but he had property set on fire in the run up to the first Reform Act and he was a controlling influence in Pontypool, disliked by the Chartists.¹²¹ The Conway family of Baptists were rivals in trade as tin manufacturers as well as in religion. 'If most of the conflicts of the early nineteenth century were about control', Hanbury Leigh was a controller who used the office of lord lieutenant to exercise patronage.¹²² It was not until 14 July 1863 that the Local Government Board came into force after Pontypool finally adopted the Local Government Act of 1858. So long had it taken to replace the power of the Parish Vestry in a town that had had a town hall without a council for ten years. Capel Hanbury Leigh had died in 1861.¹²³

¹²⁰ Ieuan Gwynedd Jones, 'Dr. Thomas Price and the Election of 1868 in Merthyr Tydfil' in *WHR*, 2:2 (1964), p. 152.

¹²¹ Hanbury Tenison, *The Hanburys of Monmouthshire*, pp. 112-145, 203, 235; Jones, *The Last Rising*, pp. 48-49.

¹²² *Ibid*, p. 40.

¹²³ David Williams, *John Frost*, p. 86. GRO: Newport Borough Council Minutes 1836-43; GRO A 433M-1: Pontypool Local Government Board Minutes 1863-1867; Hanbury Tenison, *The Hanburys of Monmouthshire*, p. 283.

Conclusion

The activities of the Baptists in the Pontypool area therefore took place in a context of great change but significant activities. The efforts and thinking of Thomas Thomas and his associates were shaped by their reactions to the profound economic and political developments that took place in Monmouthshire during the mid-nineteenth century. In some respects Pontypool, described earlier as an 'anomaly', followed the wider developments, while in others it retained its distinctiveness as an old town where the power of the Hanburys over its economic, political, religious and even language developments, was an important determinant of Baptist emergence in the public sphere. The coming of the Conways to develop new tinworks in Torfaen was an omen for the future fortunes of the Baptists in their bid for religious and social equality for all Dissenters. The great changes in all the spheres described in this chapter, worked together to create a drive for religious freedom. This inevitably involved the Dissenters in political activity which required strong leadership to preserve their integrity and avoid the mistakes of the Chartists. This became evident in the battle over Church rate in 1845, which will be analysed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

The Battle of the Church Rate

It was the belief of the Congregationalist historian, the Revd R. Tudur Jones, that 'the campaign which had as its final result the disestablishment of the Church of England in Wales in 1920 was a long and tedious one'.¹ While tracing arguments against the close relationship of Church and State back to the discussions of the 1830s in Wales, Tudur Jones sensibly played down the philosophical influences of the French Revolution and he claimed that for most Dissenters 'pragmatic considerations were often more influential than philosophic convictions'.² As already described in Chapter 1, Nonconformists faced religious and social disabilities which they petitioned the government to remove. In the 1830s they placed great faith in the reforming Whig administration and they were disappointed when the government did not meet their expectations.³ The compulsory raising of a rate from all the parishioners for the building or restoration of the parish church was a grievance that Dissenters found increasingly irksome after 1832. Church rate became what Owen Chadwick has called the 'giant sore' grievance at a time when Dissenters were building their own chapels from voluntary contributions.⁴ To what extent pragmatism prevailed over principle in the battle over Church rate in Monmouthshire may be open to debate, but Tudur Jones was certainly correct when he observed that Church rate was the issue that did most to

¹ Jones, 'The Origins of the Nonconformist Disestablishment Campaign', *JHSCW*, p 39.

² *Ibid*, p.41.

³ G.I.T. Machin, *Politics and the Churches in Great Britain 1832-1868* (Oxford, 1977), pp.39-47.

⁴ Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, part 1, pp. 81-89, 146; J.P. Ellens, *Religious Routes to Gladstonian Liberalism* (University Park Pennsylvania, 1994), pp.19-32.

convince Nonconformists that 'piecemeal redress of grievances should give way to the more radical demand for disestablishment'.

Had the Dissenters' objections to the payment of Church rate been simply pragmatic because they had their own chapels to build, the government would have found the matter easier to resolve. Most Dissenters were Voluntaryists which meant that they did not believe that the government had a right to impose religion upon them in the form of an established Church. More positively, they believed that there was no justification in the Bible for such a Church, and they wanted religious freedom to worship God according to their own denomination, which should have equal rights with every other denomination. This presented a difficulty for the government which regarded their refusal to pay Church rate as the thin end of the wedge of disestablishment. As J.P. Ellens wrote in his study of the Church rate conflict in England and Wales, 1832-1868: 'The voluntaryist context of the anti-Church rate cause made it difficult for Churchmen to redress the grievance for fear of undermining the establishment principle'.⁵

Church rate was a local tax and was still under the control of the parish vestry; in the case of Pontypool this was Trefethin.⁶ The rate had to be agreed by the churchwardens and parishioners at the annual parish vestry meeting at Easter or after proper notice had been given in the vestry or church. Any parishioner who refused to pay the Church rate could be brought before an ecclesiastical court. For a rate of less than ten pounds, as was the case in Trefethin parish, parishioners were brought before two Justices of the Peace. Wherever Church rate could be enforced it remained compulsory until 1868 and in some conservative country parishes it lingered after that

⁵ Ellens, *Religious Roots to Gladstonian Liberalism*, p. 20.

⁶ Chadwick, *The Victorian Church, part 1*, pp. 81-83. Trefethin Parish Vestry book for this period has not survived.

date as a voluntary rate. What R.W. Ambler observed in Lincolnshire was true elsewhere, that 'Churchmen did not lose all the polls that were forced on them' by the Dissenters, 'who took the lead in opposing church rates'. Yet 'there were disputes at one time or other in most Lincolnshire market towns from the 1830s'.⁷

Every parishioner, whether Anglican or not, who was supposed to pay Church rate was able to vote to refuse the raising of the rate. Church rate was a grievance that Dissenters could vote to adjourn or avoid altogether, as happened in Newport after 1833. When Newport acquired a mayor and town council, the town's second mayor, John Frost, had no difficulty in persuading the council, where Nonconformists outnumbered Churchmen by two to one, to accept his proposal for a petition to the government to abolish Church rate, in February 1837. Frost had presided over a public meeting called at the request of the Dissenters of Newport in January to discuss the abolition of Church rate. He found favour with the Nonconformist ministers by attacking the wealth and privileges of the Church.⁸

What John Frost as mayor could get away with unopposed in Newport was not granted to the older town of Pontypool where the radical Baptists had to do it for themselves, though their meeting, which voted overwhelmingly against the levying of Church rate, took place a month before John Frost's meeting in Newport. Yet the prospect of a mayor and councillors for Pontypool was still in the distance two decades later.⁹

The failure of the bill to abolish Church rate in 1834, and the founding of the Church-rate Abolition Society in October 1836, led to the setting up of the Pontypool

⁷ R.W. Ambler, *Churches, Chapels and Parish Communities of Lincolnshire 1660-1900* (Lincoln, 2000), p. 197.

⁸ GRO: Newport Council Minute Book, 1837-43, 7 February 1837, p. 83; *MM*, 21 January 1837; Williams, *John Frost*, pp. 88-89.

⁹ *MM*, 5 January 1856.

Church rate Abolition Society in January 1837 on the proposal of Thomas Thomas at a meeting in Pontypool chaired by William Conway. Charles Conway made a long speech condemning Church rate and William Williams Phillips urged the government to act more speedily to abolish it. The Revd Stephen Price, Baptist minister at Abersychan, and the Revd D.D. Evans, minister of Pontrhydyrun Baptist church, also proposed resolutions.¹⁰

That meeting took place at Tabernacle Baptist chapel in Crane Street Pontypool only six months after the arrival of Thomas Thomas in the town. The building of his chapel in Crane Street, discussed in Chapter Six, had not even been planned. The meeting in Tabernacle on 5 January 1837 prepared the way for the battle of the Church rate and also decreed the means by which the course of the battle would be reported. One of the meeting's ten resolutions was that all its resolutions should be published in the *Monmouthshire Merlin*, which also carried a full account of the meeting.¹¹ The resolutions were also advertised in the *Cambrian*, the *Morning Chronicle* and the *Patriot*, but they gave no account of the meeting.

When it came to the disputes over Church rate in Pontypool, the only publicity given to them in the Welsh press were the brief reports of the proceedings in the magistrates' court in November and December 1845 when the recusants were sentenced to distraint of their property for their refusal to pay the rate. On those two occasions *Y Bedyddiwr* printed in Welsh the accounts of the trials that had previously appeared *verbatim* in the *Monmouthshire Merlin* as will be noted later in this chapter.¹²

The only source for full and lengthy reports of all the meetings involved in this battle from the meeting of January 1837, through the first part of the skirmish in 1841

¹⁰ *MM*, 14 January 1837.

¹¹ *MM*, 14 January 1837; T.M. Bassett, *The Welsh Baptists* (Swansea, 1977), p. 148.

¹² *MM*, 14 November 1845; *Y Bedyddiwr*, December 1845; *MM*, 13 December 1845; *Y Bedyddiwr*, January 1846.

to the most important part of the struggle in 1845, is the *Monmouthshire Merlin*. In this chapter, as elsewhere in the thesis, the lengthy reports in the *Merlin* will be analysed in detail for what they reveal about the developing campaign for disestablishment and how the Baptists interpreted the relationship between their religious beliefs and their emerging political involvement. This battle of the Church rate in Pontypool is a complicated episode, not least because of the vicissitudes of the struggle against a background of conflicting opinions expressed by correspondents to the *Merlin* on both sides of the dispute. In fairness to the *Monmouthshire Merlin* as the primary source, the reports submitted for publication have not apparently been edited, and long letters in response to those reports seem to be published *verbatim*. The full and graphic accounts in the *Merlin* present both sides of the case and enable the reader to hear the voices on both sides of the arguments.

This chapter argues that the struggle of the Church rate in Pontypool is very significant but it has been neglected. It is a crucial development and the proper starting-point for this thesis because it highlights the important part played in the battle by the Baptists of Pontypool under the leadership of those who were associated with the Baptist College there. The work of the Baptists in Pontypool since the time of Miles Harry has been described in Chapter 1, and it was his grandson, William Williams Phillips senior, who became in 1836, the land agent for Pontypool Park estate, the home of the Lord Lieutenant. That a Baptist deacon could occupy such a position will be seen as a reflection of the nature of Baptist leadership in Pontypool at that time when Phillips's younger brother, Edward H. Phillips, was the chief magistrate in this Church Rate battle and would soon become High Sheriff.¹³

¹³ Bassett, *The Welsh Baptists*, pp. 67-68, 137.

No coherent account, let alone analysis, of this battle has hitherto been attempted. The secondary material on the subject of Church rate in Monmouthshire is very slim. The short biography of Thomas Thomas by Thomas Morgan in 1925 refers to the distraint on the property of Thomas Thomas for his refusal to pay the Church rate in 1845, but gives no detail of the battle.¹⁴ The article of R. Tudur Jones on the origins of the Nonconformist Disestablishment Campaign pays no attention to the battle in Monmouthshire. T.M. Bassett, the historian of the Welsh Baptists, has nothing to say of this battle. Ieuan Gwynedd Jones was aware of the leadership given by Thomas Thomas over Education in 1847, but he said nothing about the Church rate battle in Monmouthshire.¹⁵ Canon E.T. Davies, writing within the county, said nothing of it but he noted very briefly that Church rate had ceased in Newport in 1833 and 'it became a voluntary rate in Trevethin parish after 1845'.¹⁶

At one level, this chapter shows for the first time how that was achieved by means of the battle that was waged. But the episode's significance goes further because it shows that the events themselves, the theological arguments used and the language in which they are expressed, reveal a readiness for disestablishment in this part of Monmouthshire in the 1840s that has not previously been appreciated. When the dispute began with the meeting to set up the Pontypool Church rate Abolition Society in January 1837, the *Monmouthshire Merlin* had already published the report of a Church rate meeting in Abergavenny in October 1836, when Micah Thomas had succeeded briefly in securing the adjournment of the rate there on his amendment at the vestry meeting. Micah Thomas's adjournment was overturned by a majority of sixty-six when the supporters of the rate demanded a poll of the parish.¹⁷ Micah Thomas had proposed

¹⁴ Thomas Morgan, *The Life and Work of the Rev. Thomas Thomas DD* (Carmarthen, 1925), pp. 90-91.

¹⁵ Jones, '1848 and 1868: *Brad y Llyfrau Gleision* and Welsh Politics' in *Mid-Victorian Wales*, p.129.

¹⁶ Davies, *Religion in the Industrial Revolution in South Wales*, p. 42.

¹⁷ *MM*, 5 November, 12 November 1836.

the postponement of the rate on the principle of conscience. At a later meeting in Abergavenny in December 1836, Micah Thomas was cheered and received very good support when he proposed the setting up of a Church rate Abolition Society in the town.¹⁸ His actions however did not pass uncriticised and Micah Thomas had to endure no fewer than six letters in the *Monmouthshire Merlin* from a correspondent called 'Christianus' who objected to those who 'hypocritically plead conscience when they are only contending for temporal advantages' in opposing the payment of Church rate.¹⁹ 'Christianus', like so many correspondents to the *Merlin* at that time, caused frustration by hiding behind a cloak of anonymity. At least one of his broadsides was reserved for Mr. William Conway after the anti-Church-rate meeting in Pontypool on 5 January 1837.²⁰

The episode is also significant for what it reveals about emerging Baptist leadership and the network of personalities brought together in this conflict and the peculiar conditions that made it so protracted and so important for the future development of the disestablishment campaign in Monmouthshire. The Church rate struggle cannot be understood without reference to these factors. The Baptists were the strongest denomination in the county, as we have seen. They had some support from the Independent or Congregational ministers in the parish of Trefethin, but the Independents were not a leading influence as they were elsewhere in England and Wales, or even in the town of Monmouth.²¹ The Baptist leaders were a young group of radical Voluntarists brought together by the peculiar circumstances of the transfer of the Baptist College to Pontypool and the growth of new English Baptist churches in

¹⁸ *MM*, 3 December 1836.

¹⁹ *MM*, 10 December, 24 December 1836, 14 January 1837.

²⁰ *MM*, 7 January 1837.

²¹ *MM*, 17 April 1841; Snell and Ell, *Rival Jerusalems*, pp. 99, 104, 107; Keith Kissack, *Victorian Monmouth* (Monmouth, 1986), p.106.

response to the growth in population in the industrial parish of Trefethin. By 1841 the Dissenters clearly outnumbered the Church people of the comparatively strong Anglican parish. This gave the Voluntaryists confidence to act according to their consciences.²²

Thomas Thomas, like his predecessor Micah Thomas as principal of the Baptist College, was very clear on the refusal to pay Church rate as a matter of principle because it was contrary to the consciences of Voluntaryists.²³ It was the political battle over Church rate that first brought Thomas into prominence in Pontypool and forged lasting relationships for the future with his supporters. Thomas, the teacher or 'tutor' as he was called, had already given his supporters the way in which they were to proceed in the battle. They should follow the example of the Society of Friends (Quakers) who had long resented the payment of Church rate, which they called the steeple-house tax. The Quakers refused to pay it and suffered the distraint made upon their goods by the magistrates as payment. This example of passive submission was commended by Thomas in the sermon that he preached after the Chartist Rising in November 1839, and it could be said to have influenced the course of events described in this chapter.²⁴

Finally, the Church rate battle in Pontypool marked a significant turning point in the relationship between Dissenters and the Established Church in the district. It also highlights the tensions in a growing industrial community where the political leadership still lay in the hands of what many regarded as a clique based on Park House Pontypool, the seat of the local squire Capel Hanbury Leigh, who had become the Lord Lieutenant of the county in 1835.²⁵ His presence in Pontypool as a force for stability and continuity in his terms was a crucial factor in this Church rate battle. His family had been

²² Thomas Thomas, *The Civil Duties of Christians* (London, 1839), p. 31.

²³ *MM*, 7 June 1845.

²⁴ Thomas Thomas, *The Civil Duties of Christians* (London, 1839), p. 24. See Chapter 1.

²⁵ Hanbury Tenison, *The Hanburys of Monmouthshire*, p. 238.

instrumental in the development of much of the industrial, social and religious life of Pontypool. As a supporter of the established Church, Hanbury Leigh was in the process of helping to rebuild the parish church as his estate church. In a town where middle class leadership was much smaller in 1840 than it was fifty years later, and there was much evidence of poverty, it is not difficult to detect the element of class conflict in the relationships between church and chapel as used by the protagonists in the Church rate battle.²⁶ The unfolding narrative will also reveal that the structures of local government at the time were not fit for the needs of a rising population of 18,000.

The first Church rate battle, 1841

The battle over the compulsory raising of a Church rate in 1845 was itself the consequence of, and was anticipated by, an earlier attempt to raise a rate in 1841. That there was such an attempt as late as 1841 would have surprised the Bishop of Llandaff who thought as early as January 1834 that 'Church rates must, I fear, be sacrificed'.²⁷ It was therefore some irony that the delay on the part of the Diocese of Llandaff in implementing the improved parish structure for Trefethin, which made Revd Thomas Davies the legal incumbent, meant that the parish authorities were caught unprepared by the action of the Dissenters who were able to exploit the uncompleted parish structure to enable Thomas Thomas to secure the adjournment of the compulsory Church rate in 1841.

The Revd Thomas Davies emerges through this first attempt to raise a Church rate in 1841 as another key player in this battle. It was not until 1843 that the Diocese

²⁶ Hanbury Tenison, *The Hanburys of Monmouthshire*, pp. 234-241; G.S. Kenrick, *The Population of Pontypool and the Parish of Trevethin* (London, 1840), pp. 367,372; Jones, *The Last Rising*, pp. 25-28.

²⁷ Roger Lee Brown, ed., *The Letters of Edward Copleston, Bishop of Llandaff, 1828-1849* (Cardiff, 2003), p. 150. Letter of Copleston to Bruce Knight, 6 January 1834.

of Llandaff separated Trefethin from its parent parish of Llanofer and made Thomas Davies its perpetual curate.²⁸ The old parish church at Trefethin was in a state of disrepair and it would need to be rebuilt.²⁹

On 19 June 1841 the *Monmouthshire Merlin* carried a full report in two columns of the 'great' meeting that took place in Pontypool on 10 June 'to make a rate for the repair of the parish church'.³⁰ Strictly speaking there were two meetings, because the first meeting in the Greyhound inn at Pontypool after due notice had been posted on the door of Trefethin church on Sunday 6 June, was 'crammed to suffocation' with 'hundreds outside'. The Dissenters were gathered in large numbers well before the advertised time of twelve noon and they had appointed a local doctor, David Lawrence, to be chairman of the meeting. The curate, Thomas Davies, attempted to act as chairman but this was refused because he was not the 'perpetual curate' or incumbent of the parish. David Lawrence offered to vacate the chair in favour of the curate if the latter agreed to accept an amendment to the proposal of the Church rate. Thomas Davies refused to comply with this request and also refused the use of a room at the National School. The meeting then voted *nem. con* to adjourn to the Tabernacle Baptist chapel. The two churchwardens, the curate, one other clergyman and three other ratepayers refused to move from the Greyhound inn. They remained there, fixed the rate of two pence in the pound and then dispersed.

At the large meeting adjourned to Tabernacle the minutes of the previous parish meeting were read and confirmed. Dr. David Lawrence continued in the chair and made a long speech in which he wondered why some Churchmen wanted to compel 'one

²⁸ See Chapter 1.

²⁹ Sir Joseph Bradney, *A History of Monmouthshire*, vol.1 Part 2B, *Abergavenny* (Academy Books, 1992), pp. 441, 443, 451.

³⁰ *MM*, 19 June 1841. 'great' was the adjective used by the *Merlin* to mean 'very large'.

class of brethren to build a house for the religious accommodation of another'.

Lawrence then perceptively observed:

They tell me, gentlemen, that you are the enemies of the Church, that you are Chartists, and that you would like to see the church and state crumble together in one huge shapeless mass. But I believe them not gentlemen. I know the kindness of your hearts too well.³¹

After Lawrence had finished his speech there was some discussion about how they should proceed in the absence of the Churchwardens. Thomas Thomas made a long speech in which he said that he was delighted to see 'that vast assembly animated...by a spirit of determined hostility to the compulsory principle in religion'. He went on to say that church-goers were well able to pay for the necessary repairs to the parish church themselves, and all denominations should be treated the same and supported by the voluntary contributions 'of those who maintained and valued them'.

In Thomas's opinion it was not necessary to raise a Church rate and

nothing but the most urgent necessity could, even on church principles, justify the church wardens in bringing forward their proposition for a rate at such a time as this. Trade was in a very depressed state, most of the ratepayers were in trying circumstances, and many were in very real want of bread; and it seemed to argue great want of feeling to attempt under such circumstances to burden the people with a church rate.³²

The *Merlin* reported that loud cries of 'hear, hear' were heard in response to Thomas's words. Thomas was aware of the depressed economic conditions at the time through his involvement with the work of the Anti Corn-Law League. He knew the state of the poor in Trefethin parish in 1841 and they were soon to be described by the Revd Stephen Price of Abersychan at the ACLL Conference of Ministers at Manchester in August. At this meeting in Tabernacle Stephen Price made a shorter speech than

³¹ *MM*, 19 June 1841.

³² *Ibid.*

Thomas in which he expressed his opposition to a compulsory Church rate by saying that he

very much regretted that the parish should be agitated, and that unfriendly feelings should be created among neighbours. He had therefore spoken to the clergyman the day before the meeting, and had entreated him for the sake of promoting good feeling between Churchmen and Dissenters, to come down to the vestry meeting and tell the rich members of his church that he would much prefer that they should enter into a voluntary subscription for the necessary repairs of the church, than that they should make a compulsory rate.³³

Stephen Price reported that this had received a negative response from the Revd Thomas Davies. Thomas Thomas's proposal that 'the consideration for the making of a church rate in this parish be adjourned until this day twelve months' was 'carried with tremendous acclamation'. Those who spoke in its favour included the Independent minister, Herbert Daniel, who spoke in Welsh, Thomas Kenvyn, the Baptist minister of Pysgah chapel, and Mr. Daniel of Trosnant who seconded the motion. Mr. William Conway, druggist, moved the vote of thanks to the chairman, David Lawrence and 'apologised for his embarrassment in appearing for the first time in public before so vast an assembly...with feelings of diffidence on account of his youth and inexperience'. For William Conway that speech marked the start of a fifty-year career in public service.³⁴ He urged opposition to the payment of the Church rate on 'the higher ground of duty and conscience'. In acknowledging this vote of thanks, David Lawrence refused to give the Dissenters advice about how to act should the rate be enforced, but he assured them that he would never pay it but would allow his goods to be seized instead.³⁵ In important respects the events of 1841 laid the foundations for the much greater struggle four years later.

³³ Ibid. Stephen Price was aware of the depression in Abersychan caused by the partial closure of the ironworks. Brian Foster, *Abersychan Ironworks 1827-1884*, GRO, LIB/1103, pp. 18-20.

³⁴ William Conway became Chairman of Monmouthshire County Council in 1888.

³⁵ MM, 19 June 1841.

The second Church rate battle, 1845

‘This battle must be fought, and it will be a hard one’. Those words were addressed by Thomas Thomas in a letter to his wife well before the meeting to raise the Church rate on 16 May 1845.³⁶ Thomas knew that the parish was resolved ‘to make another attempt to get a Church rate’. The Pontypool Dissenters had clearly caught the parish authorities unprepared in June 1841. In 1845 the Dissenters faced the second Church rate challenge. They probably did not expect four years to elapse before they had to fight the most significant round in this Church rate battle with the forces of the establishment prepared to strike back and impose more severe consequences on the Dissenters. In August 1841 Thomas Thomas had attended the Ministers’ Meeting in Manchester, organised by the Anti Corn-Law League,³⁷ and his sermon in Pontypool after his return had encouraged all Christians, Independents and Methodists as well as Baptists, not to be afraid of involving themselves in political affairs for the sake of religious freedom because

while the enemies of liberty, and the opponents of the interests of the poor, are ‘politically religious’, [there was no reason why] the friends of freedom and popular rights should not be ‘religiously political’.³⁸

In such terms Thomas provided clear justification for the involvement of Dissenters in political affairs, and he had already advocated the response of ‘passive resistance’ to demands that compromised their religious integrity. By November 1843, thanks to the Pontypool Dissenters, there was already a branch of the Complete

³⁶ Morgan, *The Life and Work of the Rev. Thomas Thomas DD*, p. 91.

³⁷ See Chapter 6.

³⁸ Thomas Thomas, *A Proper consideration of the Cause of the Poor, a test of righteous character* (Pontypool, 1841), p. 4.

Suffrage Union in Pontypool.³⁹ The CSU was initiated by Joseph Sturge as an offshoot of the ACLL in November 1841 to improve the electoral system by encouraging middle class voters to support the democratic demands of the Chartists. In 1844 there was support in the town for the work of the Anti-State Church Association after Thomas had attended the conference in London where the Association was set up.⁴⁰ By 1845 Thomas Thomas and his Dissenters seemed ready for the challenge posed by the raising of another compulsory Church rate.

In May 1845 the architects Mr. Robert Carter and Mr. Marchant estimated that £220 was necessary to repair the fabric of the parish church. Notices were posted on the door of the parish church and on the door of the other 'episcopal churches' announcing a vestry meeting to be held at four o'clock on the afternoon of Friday 16 May with the Vicar, Revd Thomas Davies in the chair, 'for the purpose of granting a rate, to put into a state of decent repair the fabric of the parish church'.⁴¹

There were two different accounts in the *Monmouthshire Merlin* of the events surrounding the enforced rate. Both accounts were written anonymously. The first, on 24 May 1845 was from 'A Correspondent' and was published as 'Outrage on the Parishioners of Trevethin'. The outrage was caused by 'attempting to force a Church-rate on this notoriously nonconforming community...to support a system of religion from which eight-tenths of them dissent'.⁴²

This account claimed that insufficient notice had been given of the meeting and the opponents of the rate had to rush round to get there by four o'clock that day.

This correspondent claimed that one churchwarden, Mr. William Williams Phillips, Junior, read the estimates, while the other Mr. William Williams, an iron master who

³⁹ Wallace, *Organise! Organise! Organise!*, p.61; *Nonconformist*, 1 November 1843.

⁴⁰ A/LIB/275. See Chapter 4; *Nonconformist*, 24 January, 16 October 1844.

⁴¹ *MM*, 24 May, 31 May, 1845.

⁴² *MM*, 24 May 1845.

lived at Snatchwood House, claimed that he had 'probably given more to dissenters than any individual present'.⁴³ He then suggested that all who were not rate payers or had not paid their rates should immediately withdraw. Mr. E.H. Phillips, the magistrate, then cleared the room of intruders. The room was the vestry of the parish church, 'a porch capable of seating about twenty individuals, where their farce is to be enacted of consulting a parish of about 18,000 as to the propriety of a church rate'. Mr. E.H. Phillips read a letter from Mr. Hanbury Leigh approving of the rate and Phillips then proposed the rate himself in a long speech during which he said that 'as long as there is an established church it is the duty of all to support it' and the church was 'so out of repair that if not soon attended to it would be unfit for the reception of the parishioners'. The proposal for the rate was seconded by Mr. C.J. Parkes of Wentsland House. Mr. Phillips had sought support in the town that morning, but only 38 people attended to vote for the rate of three-pence in the pound, which was opposed by 13 dissenters.⁴⁴

This first account was more favourable to the Dissenters. There was a second account, written by 'An Occasional Correspondent' which was published in the *Monmouthshire Merlin* on the same day. This account was very critical of the Dissenters and particularly of the Revd Stephen Price of Abersychan who had tried in vain to speak at the beginning of the meeting. 'An Occasional Correspondent' claimed that 'frequent interruptions were offered by Mr. Price, assisted and encouraged by others present', but 'An Occasional Correspondent' admitted that 'the chairman made known at the same time his firm determination to put no motion of adjournment of the rate, which Mr. Price held in his hand'. 'An Occasional Correspondent' also noted that there were no Wesleyan Methodists among the opponents of the rate and 'the

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ *MM*, 24 May 1845.

unenviable notoriety of being the ringleaders, was therefore confined to a few Baptists'.⁴⁵

The first account, more favourable to the Baptists, had admitted that Mr. William Conway, supported by Mr. C. Davies, demanded a poll for the whole parish, but this was refused by the chairman. After the vote, Mr. E.H. Phillips continued to address the meeting in the churchyard where he denounced the conduct of the dissenting ministers. When the Revd Thomas Thomas in reply described the rate as 'illegal and worthless', E.H. Phillips accused him of making a disturbance in consecrated ground and threatened to cite Thomas before the court at Llandaff, which aroused laughter. Thomas Thomas then replied:

I look on all that has been said by Mr. Phillips with contempt; he has lowered himself in my estimation by his conduct this day, and I am sorry a magistrate should descend to become canvasser for a church rate.

According to the correspondent, this produced cheers, but the proceedings were described as 'the most discreditable the inhabitants of this parish have ever witnessed'.⁴⁶

That a magistrate should descend to become canvasser for a church rate is probably the best summary of what happened at that church rate meeting in Trefethin church on 16 May 1845. The magistrate, Mr. E.H. Phillips had not only canvassed for the church rate, he had also proposed it. He went on to pursue and punish those who refused to pay it. Phillips's reasons for speaking at such length when he proposed the rate, after he had carefully read the letter of approval for the rate from the Lord Lieutenant, were to deprive the Dissenters of their opportunity to propose an

⁴⁵ *MM*, 24 May 1845.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

amendment on that occasion as they had at the previous meeting called to set a Church rate in the parish in 1841.

The notice of the meeting of 16 May 1845 was short, and speed was essential for the proposers of the rate to avoid a repetition of what had happened at the previous meeting on 10 June 1841. On that occasion the opponents of Church rate had gathered in large numbers well before the advertised time of twelve noon at the Greyhound public house in the centre of Pontypool. The attempt that Stephen Price had made before the meeting to persuade the Revd Thomas Davies not to seek a compulsory rate had been rejected. Four years later, after Stephen Price had been criticised for his part in the church rate meeting of 16 May 1845, he remembered clearly what he had said at that earlier meeting about his concern for the hostility that was being created in the parish. In May 1845 it was alleged by 'An Occasional Correspondent' in the *Monmouthshire Merlin* that the Revd Stephen Price had questioned the validity of the notices announcing the meeting on 16 May. The same correspondent also claimed that Price 'under feelings of great excitement' had asserted his right to make a speech and was determined to be heard by interrupting Mr. E.H. Phillips while he was speaking in proposal of the rate. Price denied the truth of that in his letter of reply. He insisted that he had only tried to speak after the proposal for the rate of threepence in the pound had been moved and seconded. He was holding in his hand a piece of paper on which he had written an amendment to the proposal, but the chairman, Revd Thomas Davies, had refused him permission to speak. The rate was then approved by thirty-eight ratepayers voting in favour and thirteen against, a majority of twenty-five. Price claimed in his letter that

nothing had been left undone by the Dissenters, consistent with their principles, to prevent and avoid a revival of those unpleasant feelings which on a former occasion caused so much disturbance in the parish. [He had tried to prevent] a revival of the unpleasant feelings which were excited at the last church rate

meeting and the peace and harmony of the parish being sacrificed to party contests. This time he had written to one of the churchwardens, Mr. William Williams Phillips, Junior, but to no avail.

A copy of that letter to the churchwarden was enclosed with Price's letter.⁴⁷

Stephen Price was not alone in objecting to 'An Occasional Correspondent's' version of the meeting of 16 May 1845. Thomas Thomas was equally incensed by the 'numerous misrepresentations and false statements' in the report of 31 May. Thomas was the prime mover in summoning another very large meeting of Trefethin parishioners to the Tabernacle chapel in Crane Street on 2 June 1845 where five resolutions were passed against the exaction of a Church rate upon the parish.

Mr. Isaac Hiley of Varteg in his introductory speech as chairman claimed that the Church rate was illegal. He said that he paid tithe because it was legally enforced, but Church rate ought to be abolished because it was taken from his income to support the religion of his neighbour. He protested against a compulsory Church rate and was emphatically in favour of Voluntaryism.⁴⁸

In the course of a lengthy speech Thomas Thomas vindicated himself and Stephen Price from acting either 'perversely' or irregularly at the parish meeting in May. He objected to the way in which the meeting had been announced with such short notice that the majority of parishioners were in ignorance of the time or place of the meeting where the contribution of the English Baptists had been so falsely reported by an Occasional Correspondent. It was, said Thomas, a 'gross falsehood' to claim that 'frequent interruptions were offered by Mr. Price encouraged by others present' while E.H. Phillips was proposing the rate. Mr. Price had been perfectly in order to rise to propose an amendment, but he was forbidden by the chairman. Thomas insisted that

⁴⁷ *MM*, 31 May 1845.

⁴⁸ *MM*, 14 June 1845.

both he and Price had a right as ratepayers to state their objections to the motion and he ridiculed the idea that the few parishioners who were present at the meeting represented a poll of the parish. Thomas deplored the singling out of the English Baptists for attack and appealed to the presence of ministers and others of several denominations at that meeting on 2 June as evidence that the strong feeling of opposition to the rate was by no means confined to the Baptists let alone the English ones, because there were men of both languages at the meeting to prove that the Welsh were equally opposed to the exaction.⁴⁹

Thomas proposed the first resolution. It was long but clear. He moved that the compulsory support of any form of religion was opposed to the Divine law for maintaining the Church, to the civil right of the people and to the peace and mutual good will of fellow citizens. Those who preached the gospel were to live off the gospel and not off the State. The gospel ministry should be supported by those who enjoyed its benefits and not from compulsion or necessity. Thomas said that the majority should not be forced to contribute to the support of the religion of a few of the people. No man was bound in the sight of God to obey any law which violated his conscience, but rather to expose its injustice and submit to its penalty. He was perfectly satisfied that the present demand for a church rate was illegal because a poll of the parish had been refused. The rate could have been raised, he claimed, by voluntary subscription in the same way as Dissenters had cheerfully contributed to their own colleges and chapels. His proposal was seconded by Mr. H. Lewis and approved.⁵⁰

Thomas had probably said all that needed to be said on that occasion. He had touched on the questionable legality of the Church rate because there had been no poll

⁴⁹ *MM*, 14 June 1845, p. 3.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

of the parishioners, but he had taken his stand as a Voluntaryist in denying the acceptance of a compulsory rate and had appealed to the right of conscience to refuse the payment of the rate and passively take the consequences. Those were his arguments. In making them he not only provided inspiration to others but he stood alongside the younger generation of Dissenters who were prepared to make a political stand for their cause.⁵¹

Support for Thomas was given by another Baptist Minister, David Edwards, in a speech in Welsh in favour of Thomas's resolution. The Revd Stephen Price then presented the second resolution which related to the liberties of Dissenters that he perceived to be threatened by the overbearing conduct of the supporters of the Church rate in Trefethin parish. Not only had the Dissenters been kept in the dark about the meeting in May, but the notice had been placed on the church doors so secretly that it had even escaped the vigilance of the police. The Dissenters' struggle was not between men, claimed Price, but between principles, 'between the voluntary and the compulsory principle'. The rate was illegal, but more than that, it was evangelically wrong, scripturally and morally wrong'. Nothing was acceptable to God but the freewill offering of a willing people.

Price's resolution was seconded by William Conway who read the case as submitted to legal authority in London by Thomas Thomas and also the counsel's opinion pronouncing the rate invalid. Conway then proceeded to make the case for preserving freedom of conscience by appealing to the example of Martin Luther at the time of the Reformation. In a challenging speech Conway went on to claim that there was a 'miniature star chamber' in the parish where about half a dozen individuals

⁵¹ Jones, *The Origins of the Nonconformist Disestablishment Campaign*, JHSCW, 20, p. 45; Ellens, *Religious Routes to Gladstonian Liberalism*, pp.45-46.

appeared to speak for everyone.⁵² Mr. Stephen Fletcher, a Pontypool glazier, spoke in support of the resolution. He also strongly condemned the mismanagement of parochial affairs by a dominant clique. The third resolution was moved by Revd Herbert Daniel, Minister of Capel-Yr-Ynys Independent chapel, who had lived in the parish for sixteen years. He said that he had never failed to pay any ordinary civil tax but he considered it 'unscriptural and oppressive' to compel people to support a religion from which they dissented. His resolution was seconded by Mr. Charles Davies, ironmonger and chapel deacon, who said that he considered the principle of Church rate to be contrary to the law of God and the spirit of the Gospel because it interfered with the dictates of conscience as exemplified in the behaviour of Peter and the apostles who disobeyed the authority of men when it was opposed to their consciences. Therefore, he concluded, every Christian who believed that the principle involved in church rates was at variance with the will of God should 'joyfully yet peaceably' allow his goods to be distrained 'rather than for interest sake put his conscience in his pocket'⁵³

It might be well to pause at this point to summarise the arguments that were used by the Dissenters in their appeal against the payment of the enforced Church rate, and to consider what the different versions of events given in the *Monmouthshire Merlin* tell us. The Dissenters' objections were well expressed in terms of their principles over the imposition of a tax which they conscientiously believed to be contrary to their religion. In terms of Thomas Thomas's biblical analogy, they could claim that Caesar was demanding their conformity to an enforced religion by demanding payment for the maintenance of a church-building for a Church to which they did not belong. Their objection was given added ammunition by the apparent

⁵² *MM*, 14 June 1845, p. 3.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

subterfuge with which the rate had been enforced with insufficient notice and hasty transaction without allowing a proper poll of the parish. Their primary objection was on the grounds of conscience and the circumstances of their pragmatic objection were secondary. The supporters of the enforced Church rate believed it to be simply a local tax for the benefit of the parish church which was available for all the parishioners like the local bridges and roads. William Conway emerged as a more practical politician whose objection extended to an attack on the way in which local government in the parish of Trefethin was controlled by 'half a dozen individuals' at the behest of Capel Hanbury Leigh. Conway's objection was supported by a local glazier, Mr. Stephen Fletcher.⁵⁴

By the time in the meeting that the fourth resolution had been reached either the speakers or the reporters had begun to run out of steam or perhaps time. It was simply noted that the fourth resolution was moved by the Revd Maurice Jones, the minister of Sardis Independent church in Garndiffaith. The resolution was seconded by Mr. Christopher Arthur, a layman who lived in Abersychan. He said that he had been a ratepayer for seventeen years and he had never been 'more astonished and hurt than when he heard of the proceedings for forcing the church rate upon the parish'. He was convinced that it was illegal and unjust.⁵⁵

John Havard, chapel deacon and grocer of Pontypool, said that he felt anxious to express his feeling in reference to a subject of so much importance. Perhaps for that reason he did not say precisely what his resolution was, but he condemned the church rate as 'unjust, oppressive and antichristian'. Havard said that they had reached a time in the history of the parish of Trevethin when everyone should 'assert the principles by

⁵⁴ *MM*, 14 June 1845; Thomas Thomas, *The Civil Duties of Christians* (London, 1839), p. 12.

⁵⁵ *MM*, 14 June 1845.

which we as dissenters must either rise or fall'. He condemned the church rate as illegal because liberty of speech had been allowed only to those who were in favour of the rate. Even if it had been legal, it was only so according to human authority but not according to the authority of the scriptures. The resolution was briefly seconded and a vote of thanks carried 'with acclamation' to the chairman and everyone went home.⁵⁶

By the meeting of 2 June 1845, therefore, the battle-lines were well and truly drawn. The Dissenters took their stand upon the voluntary principle in the face of a demand for a compulsory Church rate that they believed had been illegally enforced. They were prepared to take the consequences for acting according to their consciences. The supporters of the Church rate were determined to enforce it because they needed the money to restore the parish church at Trefethin after it had been separated from the old parish of Llanofer to serve a large new industrial population. Dissenters, especially the Baptists, had gained members from among the English-speaking immigrants who had moved into the parish of Trefethin after 1815. As we have seen, the challenge to Church rate from the radical leadership of Dissent, particularly from the Baptists, had already prevented the collection of Church rate on a previous occasion in 1841,⁵⁷ and the supporters of the Revd Thomas Davies intended to ensure a victory on this occasion. The Lord Lieutenant, Capel Hanbury Leigh, supported the Church rate and his henchman, E.H. Phillips, was the chief magistrate and would soon be elevated to the position of High Sheriff. The second magistrate on the bench with Phillips was the Revd David Jones, vicar of the neighbouring parish of Panteg and a former curate of Trefethin.⁵⁸ The magistrates were determined to enforce the Church rate and to punish those who refused its payment.

⁵⁶ *MM*, 14 June 1845.

⁵⁷ *MM*, 19 June 1841.

⁵⁸ Bradney, *History of Monmouthshire, Abergavenny vol 1, part 2B*, pp. 443,456. David Jones was a son-in-law of Watkin George, Hanbury Leigh's partner in the iron-works. The Parish of Panteg secured

The Response of the Establishment

On 21 June 1845 it was reported in the *Monmouthshire Merlin* that about three-quarters of the entire sum of the Church rate had already been placed in the hands of the churchwardens by their collector, Mr. Wallace. It was also reported that orders had been given to remove the wall on the eastern side of the parish church and to enclose the new burial ground. More relevant to the purpose of this chapter, the authorities were determined to make an example of the leaders of the meeting at Tabernacle chapel on 2 June 1845.⁵⁹

On 8 November, 1845 Stephen Price was the first of eight Trefethin parishioners to be called before the magistrates, E.H. Phillips and Revd David Jones, for failing to pay the church rate that had been arranged in May. E.H. Phillips, the magistrate who had descended to become canvasser for a church rate, decided that he should now sit in judgement upon those who had not paid it.

On his first appearance before magistrates, the Revd Stephen Price was unashamed. E.H. Phillips did not thank him for being reminded that he had refused Price permission to speak at the meeting in May and Price claimed that Phillips had treated him and his friends 'not as neighbours and parishioners, but as the scum of the earth'. Price said that they were prevented from expressing their objections to the rate by the same person who was now enforcing its payment. He said that his conscience would not allow him to pay a compulsory rate. He thought it unjust that Christians of

a Church rate 'on all properties in the parish' on 16 April 1869 and it was collected, as proved by the Churchwardens' accounts presented at Easter 1870. *Panteg Parish Vestry Book, DPa 111/45*, Gwent Record Office.

⁵⁹ *MM*, 21 June 1845.

one denomination should be compelled to support the religion of another or a place of worship which they did not attend.⁶⁰

Thomas Thomas, also summoned, was the next to state his reason for not paying the rate. On this occasion, as in June 1841, Thomas made a much longer speech than Price. He made no further reference to the meeting in May, but he so bombarded the large gathering with his arguments against a compulsory church rate that he baffled E.H. Phillips who asked him to submit a copy of his statement, to which Thomas agreed. Thomas completed his statement by saying,

With such convictions deeply impressed upon my conscience, I cannot, I dare not, sin against God and my own soul, by paying any rate, whether legal or illegal, for the support of your establishment, but feel it to be my solemn duty to do all in my power, by reason and argument, and especially by passive resistance in all church exactions, to expose the enormity, and hasten the downfall of an anti-Christian and corrupt system.⁶¹

William Conway, young Baptist layman and local chemist, was then asked why he had not paid the rate. He objected that he had not received proper notice from the churchwardens who were authorised to collect the rate, but had only had an informal notice from Mr. Wallace. Upon being told by the magistrates that Mr. Wallace had been appointed collector of the rate by the churchwardens, Mr. Conway questioned the legality of making the rate before a poll of the parish had been conducted as he had requested. The chairman had refused such a poll. To this E.H. Phillips replied that he considered the rate to be legal 'or he certainly would not assist to enforce it; he had a competent legal opinion to that effect'. Conway replied that he merely wanted,

'to commit the magistrates to those points' but his objection to a church rate was 'higher and more simple...the existence of an established religion of any kind was a curse to liberty and religion...he did not believe that human power had a right to exercise its authority over the domain of conscience.'⁶²

⁶⁰ *MM*, 14 November 1845.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

Others who had refused to pay the rate, like Mr. Harrison of Abersychan and Charles Davies, Pontypool ironmonger and Baptist deacon, also questioned the legality of making the rate when a poll of the parish had been refused. Harrison had no conscientious objection and agreed to pay. Davies thought that the rate was contrary to God's will and so he refused to pay it. So did Andrew Williams, an aged objector who was represented by his son, John. He thought that religion should only be supported by the voluntary principle. Finally, Henry Lewis and C. Arthur of Abersychan said that although they were convinced that the rate had been illegally enforced, they took their stand upon the high ground of principle and conscience. They refused to pay the rate and said that they would take the consequences of distraint upon their goods.

The seven ratepayers who refused to pay the church rate were ordered to do so with costs. When they did not pay, warrants were signed by the magistrates for the seizure and sale of their goods by the police.

The final word of this meeting was with Stephen Price who asked why only eight of the recusants had appeared in court that day. Price said that he knew at least eight Dissenting ministers of different denominations who had refused to pay the rate, but only two Baptist ministers had been summoned. Mr. Williams, one of the churchwardens, gave the game away by replying that

he thought it best to fix upon the persons who had taken part in the meeting held at the Tabernacle; and as it was known that those persons had very great weight and influence in the neighbourhood, especially over the working man, he thought that if they could be induced to pay, others would do so too. He hoped that the working men would soon learn to think for themselves.⁶³

⁶³ *MM*, 14 November 1845. A clear acknowledgement of the influence of the ministers over the district.

This reply clearly indicated that there were issues of class differences in the attitudes of some Church leaders towards the Dissenters. Price retorted that he hoped that this would apply

not only in religion but also in other matters, and that they would insist on being paid for their labour in money, and not by means of the truck shop.

This remark was enjoyed by the spectators but quickly suppressed by the magistrates.⁶⁴

There was clearly more at stake in these exchanges than the refusal of a very small number of Dissenters to pay a Church rate for the restoration of the local parish church. The whole issue of local government and influence upon the working people of Pontypool came to the fore as well as the control that was exercised over them by the continuation of the truck shops as a means of controlling their spending rights.

What passed for the proceedings of the magistrates' court as recorded in the *Monmouthshire Merlin*,⁶⁵ was soon overtaken by the reaction to these events by the local community in Pontypool and the subsequent attempts by the police to distrain upon the goods of the recusants and persuade local auctioneers to sell them. Thus the whole contentious issue of the enforced Church rate entered the newspaper column and onto the streets and formed public opinion on the subject.

During the next few weeks the seven who had refused to pay the rate had goods seized from their houses to be auctioned to pay the debt. Stories circulated about the reluctance of the authorities to approach the Baptist College where they were 'rather afraid of the students', but Thomas Thomas, like Stephen Price, had a table taken from his home at the College on 27 November 1845. The table, estimated to be worth two pounds and two shillings, was never recovered by Thomas, but it was reported that no

⁶⁴ *MM*, 14 November 1845

⁶⁵ As noted earlier in the chapter, there was a shorter version of this trial in *Y Bedyddiwr*, December 1845, which seems to have been sent in by a correspondent with a final derogatory comment about the Church of England preaching one thing and practising another, 'in the spirit of Nebuchadnezzar'.

auctioneer in Pontypool was willing to sell it.⁶⁶ In spite of the overwhelming power of the magistrates' court at that time, there was clearly respect and wide support for those who had resisted the rate.

When the police went to William Conway's chemist shop to distrain upon his goods, they removed a box of cigars which was later auctioned for two pounds and two shillings. The purchaser was less than satisfied when he found that the cigars had turned to what he called 'sawdust'. This produced laughter in court when it was reported to the magistrates on 5 December, 1845 by Mr. Henry Roberts, Superintendent of Police in Pontypool. Roberts said that he was surprised by this because he had a great respect for Mr. Conway. He claimed that Conway had indicated the cigars to him as being worth two pounds eight shillings, the most expensive of three boxes in the shop.⁶⁷

Mr. Roberts was embarrassed by his failure to anticipate that the cigars might have been past their best. The spectators in court that day were clearly entertained. Mr. E.H. Phillips was not amused. He ordered Roberts to make a second levy on Conway's goods. Conway denied that he had indicated the box of cigars to Roberts. He was annoyed that the magistrates took the word of the policeman against his. At that point it was the turn of Mr. E.H. Phillips to get excited. He ordered two policemen to take Mr. Conway into custody for insulting the court. The policemen were dumbfounded. The spectators were 'half confounded at the sudden exhibition and half choked with suppressed laughter.' Phillips ordered Conway to leave the court. Conway asked what redress he had to vindicate his character. He was referred to his attorney, Mr. Taylor. Mr. Conway 'withdrew and immediately returned by the advice of his attorney'.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ *Nonconformist*, 7 January, 1846; Morgan, *The Life and Work of Rev. Thomas Thomas, DD*, p.90.

⁶⁷ *MM*, 13 December 1845, 'The Pontypool Church Rate Again'.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*.

This second meeting of the magistrates on 5 December was intended to hear the evidence of further recusants in the battle, three Dissenting ministers, two Independent and one Baptist, as well as twelve other ratepayers who had not paid the church rate made on 16 May. The by now familiar arguments against the Church rate were repeated by the recusants. After the bizarre prelude to the meeting provided by William Conway, Isaac Hiley, Baptist layman from Varteg, was called before the magistrates. He was followed by three other laymen, Isaac Evans, Henry Harris and William Morgan.

William Morgan's case adds a revealing dimension to what was unfolding in Pontypool in 1845. Morgan was a young coal-miner, born in Pontypool, who had become secretary of the English Baptist church in Llanhilleth. His occupation added further drama to the proceedings of the court because it had attracted the attention of the solicitor John G.H. Owen, who was determined to represent Morgan. Owen regularly provided legal representation for coal-miners and ironworkers. He was skilled at questioning the easy relationships between ironmasters and magistrates.⁶⁹

Owen would already have been well-known to E.H. Phillips; he asked how Phillips as a proposer of the rate and one who 'took great interest and showed great warmth on the occasion' could sit as judge on a case in which he was an interested party. Phillips replied that it was his duty to sit as a magistrate and he would be accountable for his office. He denied that he was an interested party in the case since he did not 'receive tithes or rates of any kind whatever for or from the Church'. Owen went on to question Phillips about the legality of the notices of the meeting to make the rate on 16 May and he quoted the Act 58 George 111 chapter 19 section 1, which required that proof should be provided that the notice had been put up. In answer to

⁶⁹JH Morris, and LJ Williams, *The South Wales Coal Industry, 1841-1875* (Cardiff, 1958), p. 267; PFP, 18 April 1863; G.S. Kenrick, *The Population of Pontypool and the Parish of Trevechin* (London, 1840), for evidence of working-class religious commitment in Pontypool at the time.

Owen's questions about the completion of the preliminary matters Phillips insisted that Owen would have to give proper notice for papers to be produced in the magistrates court because the person who had to produce them could be away. Owen offered to wait for an adjournment, but Phillips said that he would prove that 'it was done properly'. Owen told Phillips that he might appeal against the court's decision. He objected that the notice had not been produced and that the churchwardens had made no proper legal demand for the payment of the church rate.⁷⁰

There then appeared the Revd Herbert Daniel, the first of the two Independent ministers. Mr. Daniel said that he was a long-serving minister of a small Independent chapel and a life-long resident of the Parish of Trevethin. As a resident in a remote part of the parish (Cefn-y-Crib) 'having a wife and eight children dependent on me for support' Herbert Daniel thought it unjust that he 'should be compelled to support the church of the rich'. That is how the established Church seemed to Daniel, an Independent minister whose financial circumstances were poor. He claimed to be a loyal subject with reverence for the Queen and love of his country and obedience to the laws. He respected the magistrates but the payment of the rate was contrary to his religious principles.⁷¹

After Daniel came three laymen, Mr. William Phillips from Llanhilleth, Mr. William Hiley and Mr. Thomas Lewis. They all refused to pay the rate because it was contrary to their religious principles. The same reason was given by the second Independent minister, the Revd Maurice Jones of Garndiffaith. It was then the turn of the only Baptist Minister to appear on this occasion, the Revd David Edwards. He was

⁷⁰ *MM*, 13 December 1845.

⁷¹ *MM*, 13 December 1845.

stopped by the magistrates when he started to describe how innocent women in Poland had their eyes put out for refusing to conform to the national religion!

The last recusant to be called was Mr. John Havard the young Pontypool grocer and Baptist deacon. He asserted his preference as a Nonconformist for the 'voluntary contributions of those who have the prosperity of genuine Christianity at heart.' When he started to refer to 'those individuals who call themselves Christians robbing their neighbours of their property under the pretext of supporting religion' he was forbidden by the magistrates from proceeding with his observations. They demanded to know whether he would pay the rate. He replied that he would never pay a farthing whatever the consequences might be.⁷²

Finally Mr. Samuel Long of Abersychan, Mr. Charles Davies on behalf of Mr. Jones, Mr. William Bird and Mr. Benjamin Jones all pleaded similar objections against the rate and refused to pay it. All fifteen of those who had appeared before the magistrates that day were ordered to pay the church rate and waited for the police to distrain upon their goods.⁷³

The impact of the 'church-rate warfare', which was 'still raging with such fury in this neighbourhood'⁷⁴ in November 1845, was still being reflected in the newspaper's correspondence columns until Christmas 1845. There were three principal correspondents, all anonymous. The first with 'a few observations on that subject' signed himself 'An Observer' from Pontypool. The writer had read the account of the meeting on 8 November 1845 and concluded that 'there must be something radically wrong in the principles of church rates'. 'An Observer' reflected on 'the intelligence,

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ *MM*, 29 November 1845.

respectability, and moral influence' of those who appeared before the magistrates for not paying the church rate:

Had they been men of doubtful character, or of known sceptical principles, opposing the demands of the Church, it might have been imputed to impiety [but] we know that each of them is engaged in doing all the good he can, either in training the rising ministry, preaching the Gospel, teaching in a Sabbath school or as deacon in a Dissenting church; nor can their opposition be attributed to covetousness, as their liberality is well-known in the communities to which they belong.

'An Observer' went on to praise the efforts of the recusants without which

A great portion of the population of this parish, particularly the lower classes, would never have an opportunity of hearing the Gospel preached, as there is a physical impossibility for all to attend the parish church.⁷⁵

This correspondent was clearly in sympathy with the Dissenters. He asked why Nonconformists had to face the vengeance of the law when it would be more appropriate for

the opulent members of the Church to refrain from laying their hands on the property of those men who happen to differ with them in their religious views, and worship God in their own way, according to the dictates of their own conscience, and maintain and support, as they do, the Church to which they belong.

In the opinion of An Observer the Church should have used her energies to purify her own communion of Puseyism.⁷⁶ She should also have resisted her appeal to the law about church rates while forgetting the law that enforced attendance at Sunday services in church. The implication was that the Church didn't care if Dissenters didn't attend its worship provided that they paid money to repair and build the parish churches.

In the same issue of the newspaper was another letter, the first in a series from someone called 'A Church-rate payer'. This correspondent was clearly in support of the

⁷⁵ *MM*, 29 November 1845, Supplement, p. 2.

⁷⁶ Puseyism was a pejorative term for the ceremonialism and doctrine of Edward B. Pusey and his Oxford colleagues in the Oxford Movement to revive Catholicism in the Church of England. See Chapter 4.

Established Church and the legality of the Church rate. He asked whether any serious person would doubt that

those ministers of the Gospel who by precept and example urge the flocks to disobey the law of the land, do in fact urge them to disobey the express commandments of the Bible

which urged Christians to obey their rulers. He concluded that

the ministers of the Established Church are supported by property which belongs to themselves and to no-one else, and the consequence is that the poor within its pale have the Gospel preached to them without money and without price.⁷⁷

By contrast, claimed this correspondent, the Dissenters took the money of the poor to support their ministers. He argued that all the ministers of the Established Church were compelled by law to perform those offices for all the parishioners, surely therefore all parishioners should be compelled by law to pay for the repair of the church and churchyard where those offices were performed. If parishioners were freed from their obligation to pay church rates, the Church minister should not be obliged to bury those individuals who never belonged to his flock and never wished to belong. There would have to be an act of Parliament to enforce the building of public cemeteries and officials would have to be paid for the maintenance. That would cost more money than the present church rates. The Dissenters should seek to change the law.⁷⁸

With such prescience did 'A Church-rate payer' write one of his series of letters in defence of the payment of Church rate.⁷⁹ It may have defended well the position of the Established Church but it missed the point as far as the Nonconformists were concerned since they did not want the services of the Established Church or its clergy.

There was a third letter from a correspondent named 'No Churchman'. This was also one of a series in which he supported those who had refused to pay the church rate

⁷⁷ *MM*, 29 November 1845, 'A Church-rate payer'.

⁷⁸ *MM*, 29 November 1845, 'A Church-rate payer'.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

in Pontypool although he revealed in his final letter that he was not someone who had taken part in the Pontypool contest nor even an inhabitant of Pontypool. 'No Churchman' was opposed to what 'a Church-rate payer' had written in his letter of 22 November, when he claimed that 'the early Christians were told to obey their kings and all who were in authority under them', even if the kings or emperors were pagan. It was therefore, claimed 'No Churchman', difficult to prove from the Scriptures that Christian ministers were authorised to disturb the peace of the community by resisting the operation of the existing law. 'No Churchman' described the letter of 'a Church-rate payer' as being very intellectually small because it argued that church rates ought to be paid in a Christian land. This argument would mean that

all the first Christian martyrs were in reality no martyrs at all, but palpable and unmasked disobedient scoundrels, who...were mere breakers of the law and were justly punished for their transgressions.⁸⁰

'No Churchman' then resorted to the *reductio ad absurdum* of suggesting that whatever was lawful ought to be a moral duty, so that it was a moral duty to hold a man in slavery in America because it was in accordance with the law. 'Surely' he concluded 'there is a difference between a moral and a civil obedience? But your correspondent either does not, or will not see it'.⁸¹

The final points in this war of words in the *Merlin* were made in a very long letter on 13 December from 'a Church-rate payer', who expressed surprise at the 'spirit of vindictiveness and hostility' in the abusive language of the replies to his previous letters. 'Such language' he said 'may be in keeping with the species of Christianity taught at the Tabernacle chapels of Trevethin' but, of course, 'the Christianity which the Church teaches me' is different.⁸²

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ *MM*, 29 November 1845.

⁸² *MM*, 13 December 1845.

This letter continued in similar self-righteous vein to make a series of claims that were at best questionable. First, that a public grant to the amount of many thousands of pounds was yearly given to the support of Dissenting preachers or ministers. This grant came from the taxes levied on Churchmen, Romanists and Dissenters, without distinction. A Churchman could say that his conscience would not allow him to pay taxes, but he did not. Secondly, the Dissenters, and especially the Baptists, were violently opposed to the truck system because less money came thereby into the hands of the working classes. Consequently they had less to give at the weekly and monthly collections for the preachers. Therefore, the truck system meant that the poor could not pay all the expenses of the chapels and so the chapel deacons frequently had to 'put their fingers in their purses and make up the deficiency'. Thirdly, the Baptists of Pontypool were 'so inimical to the incumbent of the parish' the Revd Thomas Davies, because he was 'hard-working in ministry, of unblemished character and most exemplary in conduct'. It had been basely insinuated that he was building his new house from public money, but his conduct deserved the highest commendation. Fourthly, the Baptists had lost the spirit of true Christianity and had become like the Pharisees of old, so that

of late many good people at Pontypool...left the Tabernacles and resorted unto the parish church in order to breath the free and pure air of Christianity...hence the unmitigated hostility of the Baptists against the minister of Trevethin Church..

Baptists preferred Church ministers to be less devoted to their sacred duties. They would then have less to fear from them.⁸³

The reference to the public grant probably referred to the *Regium Donum* awarded to Presbyterians, Baptists and Congregationalists after 1727. It ceased in 1851, but Thomas Thomas refused to receive it, persistently condemned all who did and

⁸³ *MM*, 13 December 1845.

insisted that local Baptists should depend only upon voluntary contributions.⁸⁴ The truck system was an abuse of labour which was exploited in Pontypool long after it had been made illegal. The convenience of food made available at the company's shops assisted the exploitation.⁸⁵ The chapels of Pontypool appeared to derive more income from middle class members and were not obviously dependent upon very poor workers. Far from being inimical to the Revd Thomas Davies, except when he refused to let them speak at the meeting to raise the church rate, the public purse which was presented to him in recognition of his sterling work in the parish in 1859 was made by the senior Baptist layman in Pontypool, William Williams Phillips senior. On that occasion Phillips said:

He would on no account have undertaken to do so but for the sincere regard he entertained towards the gentleman to whom he was about to present it.⁸⁶

Whether 'many good people at Pontypool' in 1845 left the Baptist chapels to go to the parish church is questionable considering the strength of the Baptists by 1851.⁸⁷ The English Baptist church of which Thomas Thomas was pastor had no chapel building of its own in 1845 but was still meeting in the Friends meeting house in Trosnant. Its rapid growth since 1836 meant that plans were well advanced for the building of the chapel in Crane Street, a crucial development as will be discussed in Chapter Six.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Thomas, Thomas, *The Rights and Duties of Christian Citizens*, Circular Letter, Monmouthshire Particular Baptist Association (Cardiff, 1847), p. 7.

⁸⁵ Morris, and Williams, *The South Wales Coal Industry, 1841-1875*, pp. 267-278.

⁸⁶ *PPF*, 4 June 1859.

⁸⁷ Ieuan Gwynedd Jones and David Williams, *The Religious Census of 1851*, vol 1 (Cardiff, 1976), pp. 71-91; Arthur J. Edwards, 'Some aspects of Methodism in Monmouthshire', in *The Monmouthshire Antiquary*, 27 (2011), pp. 103-109, on p. 108.

⁸⁸ Dilys M. Thorn, *Crane Street Baptist Chapel Pontypool 1836-1986* (Pontypool, 1986), p. 13.

Conclusion

What this Church-rate dispute achieved in terms of developing leadership and relationships between the Dissenters who participated in the debates was enormous. Their future collaboration in working towards the removal of Nonconformist grievances was ensured. Not simply Thomas Thomas, but Stephen Price, William Conway, Charles Davies, Isaac Hiley and the Independent minister Herbert Daniel became more used to working together in the cause of opposition to the Established Church.

The determination to work together for the disestablishment of the Church did not detract from their work for the repeal of the Corn Laws at this stage and their concern for the poor. Thomas's opposition to the Corn Laws was closely linked to his work for the Complete Suffrage Union because he realised that the intermediate aim had to be 'organic' reform to extend the franchise. Thomas believed that the Whig government elected under the voting system then in place would not deliver better conditions for the poor or help to remove Nonconformist disabilities.⁸⁹

The students of the Baptist College and its secretary, Stephen Price, had clearly made their presence felt in this dispute. The leadership of Thomas Thomas as President of the College had been decisive. His reasons for refusing to pay the rate had influenced others and his position hardened with experience and confidence. From his objection to the attempted rate in 1841 when he spoke of the respect in which he had held the churchgoers of the neighbourhood and said that he would have contributed to the rate had it been voluntary and not enforced, Thomas stated quite clearly in June 1845 that

He differed a little with the respected chairman as to the obligation to pay ecclesiastical exactions clearly legal, until the law could be altered or abolished.

⁸⁹ *Nonconformist*, 20 October 1841

He held that no man was bound in the sight of God to obey any law which did violate his conscience.⁹⁰

As this quotation forcefully shows, the Church rate battle made clear in the mind of Thomas Thomas that the legal right of the magistrate to demand Church rate and the possible illegality of its enforcement in Pontypool, were both secondary to the primary obligation to obey one's Christian conscience in this matter. The compulsory payment of a Church rate for the maintenance of the established Church was an affront to the rights of conscience for a Dissenter because there was no authority in the Bible for a church enforced by statute law. The Royal Supremacy was demeaning to the 'crown rights of the Redeemer' as evangelicals described the reign of Christ over his Church. That meant that conscience for nineteenth century Dissenters was informed by Scripture and moulded by Evangelicalism. It also meant that the battle over the Church rate must lead to a more determined drive towards disestablishment because an established Church was, as a Baptist Union resolution put it in 1838, 'a violation of the law of Christ and the rights of conscience'.⁹¹ The battle of the Church rate in Pontypool thus clearly demonstrates the truth of the argument of Timothy Larsen in his book, *Friends of Religious Equality*, that 'mid-Victorian Nonconformist politics was religiously motivated'. In the words of Thomas Thomas, this meant that 'the friends of freedom and popular rights (should be) religiously political.'⁹²

Thomas's stature and the importance of his leadership is reflected in the fact that the magistrates had clearly targeted him to secure his compliance with the rate. Although the responses of other leaders in the dispute like Stephen Price and William

⁹⁰ *MM*, 19 June 1841, 14 June, 1845.

⁹¹ D.W. Bebbington, 'The Baptist Conscience in the Nineteenth Century' in *Baptist Quarterly*, 34:1 (January 1991), pp. 16, 22.

⁹² Timothy Larsen, *Friends of Religious Equality, Nonconformist Politics in Mid-Victorian England* (Paternoster Press, 2007), p. 88. Thomas Thomas, *A Proper Consideration of the Cause of the Poor* (London, 1841), p. 4.

Conway were criticised by opponents, there was no suggestion that Thomas had behaved with anything but dignity throughout the conflict. He retained the loyalty of the deacons and members of the church of which he was pastor. He never once mentioned that he was in the process of trying to raise £2,200 towards the cost of a chapel building on which the debt would not be paid until 1867.⁹³

The battle over the Church rate also reveals that to some extent the ground was shifting under the established Church. There was a failure on the part of the Church in Trefethin parish to realise that they were not alone in their concern to provide spiritual and pastoral care for the rapidly increasing population of industrial workers. They seemed to resent the strength of Dissent and were unwilling to accept that the monopoly of the Established Church as well as the nature of Establishment had changed in recent decades. Nonconformists had been able to get married in their own chapels since 1837 and in Trefethin the Baptists had their own burial ground at Penygarn.

The unfolding events of 1845 as revealed by these contemporary newspaper reports have been analysed in detail so that their full significance in the development of the demands for disestablishment may be appreciated, as well as their place in the activities of Thomas Thomas and the Baptist College. The manner in which the Church-rate was raised and collected in Trefethin parish in 1845 left a lingering doubt about its legality and questions about the over-involvement of the magistrate, E.H. Phillips. There was also the question of the need to enforce a rate on this occasion when it might have been better obtained on a voluntary basis as it would be in the future.⁹⁴ There never was another attempt to raise a compulsory Church rate on the parishioners of

⁹³ *PFP*, 16 November 1867.

⁹⁴ *Pontypool Free Press*, 13 April 1861.

Trevethin. As the *Nonconformist* put it in January 1846, ‘All honour to the Pontypool Dissenters!’⁹⁵

⁹⁵ *Nonconformist*, 28 January 1846.

CHAPTER THREE

Education! Education! Education!

I am bound to say that the Reverend Mr. Thomas, the principal of the Baptist College at Pontypool; the Reverend Evan Jones, of Tredegar; the Reverend Mr. Bright, of Newport; W. Phillips, Esq. of Pontymoile, and other Dissenters of influence, who expressed in no measured terms their disapproval of the Minutes of Council, gave me very valuable assistance in the prosecution of my labours, which I am desirous of acknowledging with thanks.¹

Thus wrote Jelinger C. Symons, a barrister and later an HMI, appointed by the Committee of Council on Education as one of the Commissioners to report on the state of Education in Wales in 1846. Symons's report on education in Monmouthshire was completed by 1 September 1847. He made passing reference at the beginning of his report to 'the hostility evinced towards your Lordships' Minutes of Council of 1846' as he did in the above quotation to those 'who expressed in no measured terms their disapproval of the Minutes of Council'² with complete courtesy and co-operation. That was the style of the local Dissenters, but if Jelinger Symons thought that his gracious acknowledgement would forestall opposition, he would soon learn otherwise.³ There was intense opposition to the Report of Jelinger Symons on Education in Monmouthshire as this chapter will show.

Education was not the first national issue to produce conflict for Dissenters in Wales, though E.T. Davies thought it was so.⁴ Church rate took precedence, especially in Monmouthshire where the Dissenters based on Pontypool had already won their spurs by 1846, as we have seen. As that battle was unusual because it had been undertaken through the leadership of the Baptists rather than the Independents,

¹ *Reports of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales*, Part 2, Monmouthshire, p. 272.

² *Minutes and Reports of the Committee of Council on Education*, August and December 1846.

³ *Education Commissioners' Report*, Part 2, pp. 1 and 269.

⁴ Davies, *Religion and Society in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 21.

so too the conflict over education in Monmouthshire in the late 1840s received its leadership from the same source, in spite of co-operation from the prolific Independent champion Revd Evan Jones of Tredegar (Ieuan Gwynedd).⁵ The importance of education in the programme of the Dissenters cannot be denied and this chapter will argue that the Monmouthshire Baptists played a significant part in the cause of educational Voluntaryism in the years after 1846. As in the Church rate battle, the part played by the Monmouthshire Voluntaryists in this education dispute relies heavily upon the *Monmouthshire Merlin* as a primary source for evidence of its resolutions and activities. The accounts in the *Merlin* are invaluable for enabling us to recapture how the different contributors expressed their basic principles, assimilated the new information and communicated their disagreements with their opponents. At one point they drew the editor, a sympathetic Roman Catholic, into the controversy.

The Minutes of Council to which Jelinger Symons referred were the Minutes of the Privy Council Committee on Education whose reports were presented to both Houses of Parliament. The Minutes of August 1846 proposed inspection of schools as a consequence of increased government grants for schools. These Minutes were being debated in Monmouthshire while Jelinger Symons was conducting the Inquiry which produced his Report on the State of Education in September 1847. The Council Committee Minutes should not be confused with the Education Commissioner's Report, though they were linked. The former seems to have excited more concern in Monmouthshire than the latter and enabled the local Voluntaryists to extend their network and organise opposition to Symons's Report in the following year.

In his separate Report on Monmouthshire Symons spent much time explaining the independence of his Report from the proposals of the Committee of Council's

⁵ DWB *sub* Jones, Evan (Ieuan Gwynedd), pp. 460-61; ed. J. Vyrnwy Morgan, *Welsh Political and Educational Leaders in the Victorian Era* (London, 1908), pp. 539-574.

Minutes because of the hostility expressed towards those Minutes in Monmouthshire.⁶ The educational inspections conducted by R.R.W. Lingen in Carmarthen, Glamorgan and Pembroke, Jelinger C. Symons in Brecon, Radnor, Cardigan and the 'Welsh' parts of Monmouthshire, and H.R. Vaughan Johnson in north Wales, were part of a long process of inspecting schools in England and Wales. The work of the Commissioners was completed and the three Reports of almost two thousand pages published within a year. A shorter one-volume version was published in Welsh and English in 1848.⁷

The Dissenters to whom Jelinger Symons paid tribute in his Report were all Voluntaryists in education as well as in the provision of religious worship. They believed that it was not the task of the government to provide education. Parents should provide education for their children and should especially supervise their religious education in co-operation with the Sunday Schools. Day schools should be places of secular education and not dependent upon grants from the government which interfered with the freedom of the schools and made them liable to government inspection and, by implication, open to the influence of the Established Church.⁸ Voluntaryists were incensed by any suggestion of state interference in their schools. The same principle of freedom applied in their schools as in their churches. Voluntaryists believed that they were more consistent with their principles than other Dissenters who accepted state grants for British schools for pragmatic purposes.

The educational scheme proposed in the Minutes of Council provided fuel for the fire of disestablishment because the Voluntaryists saw it as contrary to the

⁶ Gwyneth Tyson Roberts, *The Language of the Blue Books* (Cardiff, 1998), pp. 112-113.

⁷ Jones, '1848 and 1868', p. 109; Prys Morgan, 'From long knives to Blue Books', in *Welsh Society and Nationhood*, ed. R.R. Davies, R.A. Griffiths, I.G. Jones and K. O. Morgan (Cardiff, 1984), p.206.

⁸ Sian Rhiannon Williams, 'Education and Literacy' in *The Gwent County History*, vol. 4, *Industrial Monmouthshire, 1780-1914*, ed. C. Williams and S.R. Williams, pp.182-204, on pp. 189-91; Gareth Elwyn Jones and Gordon Wynne Roderick, *A History of Education in Wales* (Cardiff, 2003), p. 63.

principle of religious equality and biased towards the Church. From the dispute in Monmouthshire it will be seen that poor communication even exaggerated this alleged bias, but it seems clear that the battle over the Church rate and the campaign to remove Dissenting disabilities had given the local Voluntaryists a paradigm to follow.

The part played as Voluntaryists by the Independent denomination in Wales has been well-documented.⁹ Their best-known champion, Revd David Rees of Capel Als chapel, Llanelli, was converted from Voluntaryism when David Williams, headteacher of a Llanelli works school and an Independent, succeeded the Baptist Revd W.R. Roberts, Nefydd, as Secretary for south Wales of the British and Foreign Schools Society.¹⁰ The part played by the Baptists has not however been analysed hitherto or fully appreciated. The analysis that follows of the way in which the issue of education shaped Baptist development is divided into three sections: first, the Minutes of Council, secondly, the Seven Lectures and thirdly, The Commissioners' Reports. The chapter will argue that the 'hostility evinced towards your Lordship's Minutes of Council of 1846' was greater in Monmouthshire than that aroused by the Report of Jelinger Symons on 1 September 1847. Nevertheless the response to 1847 was equally significant through its threat of government interference. The chapter also discusses the course of seven *Lectures on the Present Duties devolving on Christian Professors as Members of a Civil Community*, initiated by Revd Thomas Thomas in October and delivered in November and December 1847. It shows that the lectures were not, as has been suggested, undertaken at the same time as Jelinger Symons's Inspection nor in response to his Report, though they contain much about the

⁹ Leslie Wynne Evans, *Education in Industrial Wales, 1700-1900* (Cardiff, 1971), pp. 305-314; idem, 'Voluntary Education in the industrial areas of Wales before 1870', *NLWJ*, 14:4 (1966), pp. 407-423.

¹⁰ Evans, *Education in Industrial Wales*, p. 309; R. Tudur Jones, ed. Robert Pope, *Congregationalism in Wales* (Cardiff, 2004), pp. 169-171.

Government's proposals for education.¹¹ More importantly, the chapter also argues that the significance of these lectures has not previously been appreciated. The lectures were primarily a presentation of the position of Nonconformity in its relationship with the State and the Dissenters' case for the disestablishment of the State Church. Voluntaryists objected to the need for State schools, but they objected equally to the necessity of a State Church. That was in the wake of the increasing importance of the Anti-State Church Society in the thinking of the Pontypool Dissenters and the influence of its newspaper the *Nonconformist*, where the seven lectures had first been advertised on 13 October 1847.¹²

The disapproval of the Minutes of Council

Before proceeding to analyse in detail the reaction to the Minutes of Council and what it tells us about the development of Baptist activity and thinking, certain matters need clarification. First, the condition of education for children in Monmouthshire was both confusing and contested, and this fundamental fact underpins the disagreement that it engendered.

To say with certainty what percentage of children in Monmouthshire went to school in 1847 is not easy. Most of those who attended did not do so regularly. In the eighteen Monmouthshire parishes selected for attention by Jelinger Symons, slightly more than half of the children whose names were on school registers were in school at any given time. That was a big improvement on Seymour Tremenheere's estimate of 1839: about 70% of his sample of 17,000 children between the ages of three and

¹¹ Jones, '1848 and 1868', pp. 103-165, on p. 129.

¹² *Nonconformist*, 13 October 1847.

twelve did not attend school.¹³ Most of those who did went to Church schools under the auspices of the National Society, set up in 1811. Others went to British Schools set up by the British and Foreign Society created in 1814. Some went to Charity (endowed) schools; others to Works (industrial) schools while an unknown number attended private schools. To complicate the picture even more, there was a British school in Abersychan that was a Works school set up by the British Iron Company in 1845.¹⁴ The National Society (Church of England) and the British and Foreign Society (Nonconformist) administered the grants provided by the government for building schools after 1833.

The provision of government grants brought greater opportunity for government interference in the schools in the form of inspections. When the Committee of Council on Education was set up in 1839 to superintend the government grants for public education, it appointed H.S. Tremenheere as Inspector of grant-aided schools and sent him off in December to report on the schools in Monmouthshire in the wake of the Chartist Rising in November. Tremenheere's Report in February 1840 on the parishes of industrial Monmouthshire anticipated the report of Jelinger Symons and made the latter report less alarming to its readers. This was because Tremenheere's Report, published at the same time as that of his Monmouthshire mentor, G.S. Kenrick, highlighted the educational and social destitution of the ironworks communities in Monmouthshire. There were more schools by 1846, though the population had also increased. Only two of the schools that Tremenheere found in the industrial parishes were British schools.¹⁵

¹³ E.T. Davies, *Monmouthshire Schools and Education to 1870* (Newport, 1957), pp.103-104; Jones, '1848 and 1868:' p. 116.

¹⁴ Davies, *Monmouthshire Schools*, pp. 64-67 and 96-98.

¹⁵ Ibid, pp. 77-82; Tremenheere, *Report* (1840); G.S. Kenrick, *The Population of Pontypool* (Pontypool, 1840). Kenrick was an ironmaster in the parish of Trefethin.

The confused picture was almost confounded by the Voluntaryists who rejected all government grants for schools but set up British schools, as in Pontypool, after 1843. They reserved to themselves the right to their own educational theories, the exclusion of all doctrinal teaching in day-schools and the priority of Sunday schools as the necessary providers of religious education. Unlike the Revd David Rees, the Congregationalist champion of the west, the Monmouthshire Voluntaryists did not object to Works schools, particularly if they were provided by favourable Nonconformist industrialists, or even the Infants' school provided in Pontypool by the Lord Lieutenant, since the Church catechism was not taught there.¹⁶ These differences in viewpoints between Baptists and other Nonconformists raise a wider question concerning the extent to which the leaders of Dissent, especially David Rees and Thomas Thomas were aware of each others' activities. If there was contact between them, no evidence of it seems to have survived.¹⁷

The Factory Education Bill of Peel's Home Secretary Graham had united Nonconformists in March 1843 against the common threat to religious liberty posed by the possibility of a national system of compulsory education under the control of the Established Church. The Bill had been withdrawn in June 1843 after many petitions to parliament, and the educationist, Hugh Owen, urged the provision of British Schools throughout Wales.¹⁸

The Minutes of the Committee of Council on Education were not subject to parliamentary approval. It was against a background of nervousness about that and the threat of government inspection that the Voluntaryists received news of the Minutes of Council of 1846 with proposals for the provision and training of teachers in

¹⁶ Davies, *Monmouthshire Schools*, p. 90; Thomas Thomas, letter in *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 26 June 1847.

¹⁷ Davies, *Religion in the Industrial Revolution in South Wales*, p. 53.

¹⁸ Evans, *Education in Industrial Wales*, pp. 21, 26. For Owen, see DWB *sub* Owen, Hugh, pp. 706-7.

schools. By March 1847 the correspondence columns of the *Monmouthshire Merlin* were becoming filled with the controversy aroused by the government's educational scheme. The Revd Thomas Bright, an Independent minister in Newport, was the first local Voluntaryist to write in condemnation of a scheme that had been adopted without reference to parliament. He claimed that the scheme would co-ordinate power in the hands of the clergy, require the Church Catechism to be taught by authority, shut down the schools of the Dissenters and appoint four new inspectors by permission of the Archbishop of Canterbury. Bright urged that a petition should be sent to parliament against the scheme and to bring an end to the Committee of Council.¹⁹

That was on 13 March. On 20 March it was announced that Jelinger C Symons Esq., 'one of HM commissioners of education, with two gentlemen acquainted with the Welsh language as assistants', had been in Pontypool during the past week to examine the public day schools in the parish.²⁰ On 27 March it was reported that the Dissenters of Pontypool had held a meeting on 17 March in the vestry of Crane Street Baptist chapel under the chairmanship of William Williams Phillips, senior, to prepare for a series of public meetings in the district in opposition to the Committee of Council's plan of education. On 30 March 1847 two such meetings were held at Newport and Pontypool. These were reported in the *Monmouthshire Merlin* on 3 April 1847.²¹

The Newport meeting took place two days after the Pontypool meeting but it received more prominence in the *Merlin* because it was chaired by the mayor, T.M. Llewellyn in the Town Hall. The *Merlin* report also listed the four resolutions which were proposed and seconded, passed overwhelmingly, and copies sent to Lord John

¹⁹ *MM*, 13 March 1847.

²⁰ *MM*, 20 March 1847.

²¹ *MM*, 27 March and 3 April 1847.

Russell, the Prime Minister, and the MPs for Monmouth county and borough. The first resolution stated the profound alarm raised by the Minutes of the Education Council Minutes of August and December 1846; they were likely to paralyse the work of the Voluntaryists and injure their schools. The second resolution condemned the dangerous precedent that was being set because the Minutes had not been submitted in the form of a bill for scrutiny by Parliament. The education proposals would bring increased government patronage and stipendiary teachers. The third resolution criticised the extension of the principle of national establishments of religion by the use of public money for the support and teaching of various contradictory creeds. This prevented Nonconformists from being identified with the scheme because of their conscientious dissent from any principles that tended to make religion an instrument of state policy. The fourth resolution was simply to embody the first three resolutions in a petition to Parliament.²²

The proposers and seconders of the resolutions represented a range of local leaders and show that the protests against the Minutes of Council crossed boundaries of class and denomination. At the Newport meeting the first resolution was proposed by Mr. R.C. Slade, one of the two secretaries of the Newport British Schools Committee. It was seconded by Mr. E. Thomas. The second resolution was proposed by the Revd Thomas Bright, an Independent minister who was the other secretary to the local British Schools Committee. The third resolution was proposed and seconded by two Baptist ministers, Revd W. Allen of Commercial Street Baptist church and the Revd J.W. Todd, formerly a student at Pontypool Baptist College and then at Stratford-on-Avon. Todd was a Scotsman and a life-long friend of Thomas Thomas. It looked as if Thomas Thomas had a hand in the organisation of the Newport meeting

²² *MM*, 3 April 1847.

because his own son, William, then a student for the Baptist ministry, seconded the proposal in Newport to send a petition to Parliament after it had been moved by the Revd John Matthews.²³

The Pontypool meeting, held in Tabernacle Baptist chapel and chaired by Charles Conway, passed the same four resolutions. The first resolution was proposed by the Revd Thomas Thomas's colleague at the Baptist College, the Revd George Thomas. It was seconded by the Baptist minister of Abersychan, the Revd Stephen Price, who had been prominent in the battle against the compulsory Church rate. The second resolution was proposed by Revd Thomas Thomas himself and seconded by 'Mr. Smith, a Baptist teacher'. He was in fact Thomas Brooks Smith, headmaster of the British School in Pontypool for forty-six years after 1843.²⁴ The third resolution was proposed by the leading Baptist layman in Pontypool, William Williams Phillips, senior, and seconded by the Revd David Edwards, Baptist minister at Trosnant, also involved in the Church rate battle. The Revd Herbert Daniel, Independent minister, likewise involved in the previous battle, also spoke against the Minutes. Charles Conway made a long speech affirming his loyal support of the government when it acted in its duty of protecting the people, but when they 'established any system of religion or endeavoured by any means to make the minds of the working classes subservient to their plans then he could look at it in no other light than as a religious despotism'. For this he was cheered, and the petitions were passed and posted.²⁵ In the course of his speech Charles Conway twice referred to the damaging effects of the education proposals upon the 'working classes'. This harks back to the arguments in

²³ *MM*, 3 April 1847.

²⁴ *MM*, 3 April 1847. E.J. Smith, *A Useful Life: Memorials of the late T.B. Smith of Pontypool* (Pontypool, 1892).

²⁵ *MM*, 3 April 1847.

the Church rate battle and the identification of Dissenters as the champions of the working class in society.

Following the meeting, the campaign gained momentum and the war of words escalated. Interest in the issue locally spread to the *Nonconformist*. On 10 April 1847 the editor of the *Monmouthshire Merlin* paid tribute to:

the immense amount of good which has been effected, often under very unfavourable circumstances, by the members of our religious denominations, and by many advocates of strictly secular education. On the other hand...the present power of voluntary effort is not adequate to the wants of our population.²⁶

For this expression of stark reality while paying tribute to both sides of the argument, the editor, a Roman Catholic, was accused in the *Nonconformist* of speaking 'in a true oracle style, it being impossible to divine what side he takes' after keeping 'a profound silence on the education minutes until Saturday'. The editor of the *Nonconformist* continued:

The probability is that he [the editor of the *Merlin*] has been driven to say something by the rumour that the Premier intends to throw the Roman Catholics overboard for the present, and that something must depend upon the truth of the aforesaid rumour.²⁷

In 1847 the Prime Minister, Lord John Russell, had abandoned the idea of offering government grants to Roman Catholic schools because the Methodists disliked it. A year later, after the Methodists had received grants, they were extended to Roman Catholic schools. The first Roman Catholic schools were being opened in Newport at this time and the editor of the *Merlin* would have known their need of government grants. The editor firmly denied that he had kept silent on the education Minutes to which he had specifically devoted articles for three weeks and declared his opposition to the proposals.²⁸

²⁶ *Nonconformist*, 21 April 1847.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *MM*, 28 April 1847.

Only one week before that editorial and four days before the attack on him in the *Nonconformist* the editor of the *Merlin* had written of the education scheme that

We really should be surprised at any man possessed of ordinary penetration failing to see that its effects will be highly favourable to the extension and strengthening of the Established Church....the most money will go to the Church of England schools because there are more of them.

But he finished by saying that the scheme was 'the best measure for carrying out the objects of national education, hitherto devised by a British ministry'.²⁹

It might seem that the reaction to the *Merlin's* editorials shown by the *Nonconformist* of 21 April 1847 was disproportionate in view of the measure of agreement the *Merlin's* editor showed for the Voluntaryists' viewpoint. What also escaped notice was the fact that the editorial in the *Merlin* of 10 April 1847 reviewed the education proposals in exactly the same terms as the Revd Thomas Thomas's opposition to the education plan in his resolution at the public meeting in Pontypool on 30 March 1847, thus revealing further indication of Thomas's status and influence. Thomas had said that the scheme was uncalled for: it was unconstitutional; it was massively expensive; it violated religious freedom and equality, and it was hostile to 'civil liberty and manly independence of the working classes'.³⁰ After adopting all the points of Thomas's proposals, the *Merlin's* editor proceeded over two separate editions to agree with all of them except the expense, which he claimed would be justified if it made proper provision for the education of the greatest number of school-children.³¹

The *Merlin's* argument in favour of justifiable expenditure did not satisfy the Voluntaryists because they objected to the payment of any money by the state for the

²⁹ *MM*, 17 April 1847.

³⁰ *MM*, 3 April 1847.

³¹ *MM*, 10 April 1847.

funding of schools. What made them more sensitive in Pontypool at this time was highlighted by a notice that appeared in the same issue in which the *Merlin* agreed with so much that Thomas Thomas had said. There was an announcement that a petition, headed by Capel Hanbury Leigh as Lord Lieutenant

And other respectable and wealthy inhabitants of the parish of Trevethin had been forwarded to Lord John Russell to present in the House of Commons in favour of the Minutes of Council on Education as prepared by Her Majesty's government.³²

As was the case with Church rate, therefore, opposing positions on education reflected the clear gulf between the 'working classes' and the 'respectable and wealthy inhabitants' of the parish in a town where the lack of popular representation could not have been more evident.

It would appear that their anxiety about the significance of the Minutes of Council for the future of their schools led the Voluntaryists to exaggerate the outcome of the proposals for the appointment and power of government inspectors. The Revd Thomas Bright of Newport wrote another letter to the *Merlin* on 24 April 1847 in which he acknowledged that he had been mistaken about the inspectors in all schools being appointed with the approval of the Archbishop of Canterbury. Bright still expressed the perennial fear of Dissenters that all children in village schools would be 'compelled by authority of Council to become indoctrinated in the catechism and tenets of the Established Church'.³³ He thought that the poor could not afford to let their children go to day-school even if they saw the point of it. In that respect he undermined one of the principles of the Voluntaryists, that parents should pay for the education of their own children. Another point he made, loved by Voluntaryists at the time, was that 'the education that corrects vice and fosters habits of virtue, is not to be

³² *MM*, 10 April 1847.

³³ *MM*, 24 April 1847.

acquired in government schools'. He claimed that the number of criminals in Britain who could read and write was increasing yearly.³⁴

Bright's letter had been provoked by one that had been published in the *Monmouthshire Merlin* a week earlier. It was written by Thomas Stephens from Merthyr Tydfil, where he had become well-known as a Unitarian, antiquary and literary critic as well as running a chemist's shop.³⁵ As Bright later realised, Stephens had plenty of time to write letters to the press.³⁶ After chiding Bright for his mistake about the appointment of the school inspectors by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Stephens pursued him in the *Merlin* in May for his assertion that vice was not corrected by education and for the reference that Bright made to Prussia as an example of a country where the best government schools did not fail to produce 'the most demoralised country in Europe'. On this subject Stephens could dilate happily.³⁷

On the subject of compulsory teaching of the Catechism, Thomas Stephens engaged with Charles Conway who shared Bright's fears on this subject as well as the conviction, shared by the editor of the *Merlin*, that the government's favours would not be showered equally upon Church and Dissent, since the former had far more schools than the latter. If, as Stephens claimed, this would produce 'a system of purely secular instruction', why did the government insist upon the Authorised Version of the Bible as a school book? Mr. Stephens might think that the Bible was a secular book, but Mr. Conway did not agree, and thereby lay part of the problem about government interference in the schools as far as the Voluntaryists were concerned.³⁸

³⁴ *MM*, 24 April 1847.

³⁵ For biographical details see DWB *sub* Stephens Thomas, p. 924; Marion Loffler, 'Thomas Stephens a Llythyru Cyhoeddus yng Nghymru Oes Victoria', *Y Traethodydd* (January 2010), pp. 33-49.

³⁶ *MM*, 17 April and 3 July 1847.

³⁷ *MM*, 1 May 1847.

³⁸ *MM*, 15 May, 22 May and 3 July 1847.

It can be seen therefore that in Monmouthshire the disputes in the press over the Minutes of Council were not just between the Established Church and Dissent, but also between Dissenters themselves. Sian Rhiannon Williams has noted that 'the nonconformists were split among themselves' over the acceptance of state-aid for education.³⁹ Gareth Elwyn Jones described how most Nonconformists in Glamorgan 'rejected state interference and money', but said nothing of divisions between Nonconformists over the issue.⁴⁰ In Monmouthshire the main antagonist was a Unitarian from Merthyr Tydfil. On the other hand there was common ground between the denominations: the influence of the Voluntaryists based on the Baptist College at Pontypool was strong enough to draw into its ranks Independent supporters like Revd Thomas Bright of Newport and the Revd Evan Jones (Ieuan Gwynedd), then Minister of Saron Independent chapel, Tredegar. Ieuan Gwynedd, who died at the young age of thirty-two, was a well-published protagonist for Nonconformity against the attacks of Anglicans such as the Revd John Griffith, then Vicar of Aberdare, and others associated with *Brad y Llyfrau Gleision*,⁴¹ as well as William Williams, Member of Parliament for Coventry, who had initiated the debate that resulted in the 1847 Report. Ieuan Gwynedd joined forces with the Voluntaryists of Pontypool and he also debated with Thomas Stephens as well as John Griffith⁴² in the pages of the *Merlin*.

Stephens was a Dissenter but not a Voluntaryist. He concluded, from his study of Merthyr schools, that voluntary contributions would be insufficient to

³⁹ Williams, 'Education and Literacy' in *The Gwent County History*, vol. 4, *Industrial Monmouthshire, 1780-1914*, ed. C. Williams and S.R. Williams, pp. 182-204, on p.189.

⁴⁰ Gareth E. Jones, 'Education in Glamorgan since 1780' in *Glamorgan County History*, vol.6, *Glamorgan Society 1780-1980*, ed. Prys Morgan (Cardiff, 1988), pp. 315-332, on p. 317.

⁴¹ Prys Morgan, 'From Long Knives to Blue Books' in *Welsh Society and Nationhood* (Cardiff, 1984), ed. R.R. Davies, R.A. Griffiths, I.G. Jones and K.O. Morgan, pp. 199-215, on p. 199.

⁴² Roger L. Brown, *John Griffith, The Unmitred Bishop?* (Welshpool, 2006), pp. 20, 40, 48, 50, 53, 59; DWB *sub* Jones, Evan (Ieuan Gwynedd), pp. 460-61; *MM*, 3 July 1847; Wilton D. Wills, 'The Revd John Griffith and the Revival of the Established Church in Nineteenth Century Glamorgan', *Morgannwg*, 13 (1969), pp. 75-102, on p.75; Evan Jones, *A Vindication of the Educational and Moral Condition of Wales in reply to William Williams, Esq.Late MP for Coventry* (Llandovery, 1848), p. 871; Benjamin Evans, *Bywgraffiad Barchedig T.Price Aberdar* (Aberdar, 1891), pp. 48-52.

educate the children of Merthyr Tydfil. The Church of England, he claimed, had given the most daily instruction. The Dissenters had given the most Sunday instruction, but the 'greatest educators of the people in secular instruction, have been the people themselves'. Evan Jones had no quarrel with him about that because, like George Thomas, he did not believe that it was the duty of the government 'to interfere in any way whatever with the education of the people'.⁴³ Evan Jones also had the last word on education as an antidote to crime, which he expressed better than anyone else in the dispute when he wrote that 'crime is the result of a depraved heart and not that of an ignorant head'.⁴⁴

Thomas Stephens turned out to be the catalyst who focused the minds of the Voluntaryists on their real objections to the Minutes of Council of 1846. After Stephens had finished doing battle over the statistics for school attendance in Merthyr, he turned to Pontypool 'to remark upon the flourishing condition of the schools established at Pontnewydd under the superintendence and at the cost of the philanthropic Mr. Conway' and to 'do justice to both dissenters and churchmen'.⁴⁵

The burden of Stephens's letter, for which he relied on statistics supplied by a friend in Pontypool, was that 'the Church has done infinitely more for the cause of daily instruction than the dissenters'. Stephens included statistics relating to the neighbouring parishes of Panteg, Bedwellty, Llanhilleth and Mynyddislwyn. The statistics for the last three parishes were subsequently contradicted by Evan Jones.⁴⁶

The Revd Thomas Thomas also joined forces against Thomas Stephens. In his only letter of the dispute on 26 June, 1847, he referred to the parishes immediately surrounding Pontypool, including Trefethin. Thomas's letter is very clear and

⁴³ See below p. 23, George Thomas, *Religious Equality essential to Civil Liberty* (London, 1848), p. 15.

⁴⁴ *MM*, 29 May and 3 July 1847.

⁴⁵ *MM*, 22 May 1847.

⁴⁶ *MM*, 19 June, 26 June and 3 July 1847.

confident in its statistics, which correct those of Mr. T. Stephens who has 'been a good deal misled by his friends'. Thomas claimed that Stephens had underestimated the number of children who attended the British school in Pontypool and exaggerated the number of children attending Church schools. This was because only one of the four schools claimed by Stephens as Church schools was specifically so and taught the Catechism. The others were the British Works school, the Infants' school set up by the Lord Lieutenant and the Town school 'intended to be a school "for all denominations" but practically a church school, though some dissenters have contributed to its funds, and one or two leading dissenters have been put on its Committee'.⁴⁷

Thomas claimed that the superiority of the Dissenters' contribution to local education lay entirely in the voluntary contributions made by 27 Sunday schools, where nearly 3,400 children were taught, and in the British day-school with about 200 children. Thomas admitted that there were no public charity schools in the parishes of Panteg or Llanfrechfa. The small parish of Panteg, with a population of 2,000, bordered Trevethin and shared its schools or used private schools. In the parish of Llanfrechfa neither Charles Conway nor J. and W. Jenkins, Baptist tinworks owners, provided Works' schools, but the people in their employ 'are as intelligent, well-conducted and religious, as any in the county of Monmouth. I believe it will be difficult to find many children of a proper age who are not under instruction.' Thomas's argument was that the full well-paid employment provided by the local tinworks owners enabled their workmen to pay for their children's education. Their religious education was provided in Sunday schools which the works' masters also

⁴⁷ *MM*, 26 June 1847

attended and 'when misfortune or affliction calls for the exercise of private benevolence, their hearts and their purses are always open'.

In defence of 'the philanthropic Mr. Conway' and against the sneering tone of Mr. Thomas Stephens, Thomas Thomas concluded with the following remarks:

Mr. Charles Conway is inferior to none; and the vicinity of Pontnewydd and Pontrhydyrun with its constant and well-remunerated employment, its decent dwellings, its cleanly and well-clad people, its beautiful chapel, and its admirable singing-class, trained and conducted by Messrs C. Conway and W.C. James, is an example for some localities which boast of their public schools supported by the stopped earnings of workmen, the grants of government, or the profits of Truck!⁴⁸

Although the *Monmouthshire Merlin* is the only source available for the dispute that arose among the Dissenters over the Committee for Education Minutes of 1846, the correspondence columns of the *Merlin* reveal the anxieties of the Voluntaryists over the Minutes of Council. The published letters show how the arguments of the Pontypool Voluntaryists developed and were shaped by the arguments of an opponent like Thomas Stephens. The Voluntaryists' arguments were seen to be further reinforced by their social, religious and political grievances. The government's proposals for education sharpened the campaign against the Established Church.

The Seven Lectures

It is possible that in the course of his perambulations in the county, Symons may have heard of the lectures Thomas Thomas was giving in various locations, and he may even have seen the printed version, the title of which read, *A Course of Lectures on the Present Duties devolving on Christian Professors as Members of a Civil Community, Lecture the First, The Duty of Religious Men to study the time in which they live, and to apply their energies to the right Conduct of Public Affairs.*⁴⁹

⁴⁸MM, 26 June 1847.

⁴⁹ Jones, '1848 and 1868: *Brad y Llyfrau Gleision* and Welsh Politics' in *Mid-Victorian Wales*, p. 129.

Of the many historians who have written accounts of the Treachery of the Blue Books, the essay by Ieuan Gwynedd Jones in his *Mid-Victorian Wales* is one of the best.⁵⁰ However, contrary to what I.G. Jones suggested in the above passage, it is unlikely that Jelinger Symons would have heard of the lectures while conducting his inspections of the schools of Monmouthshire because he had completed his work and his report had been published before the course of lectures by the Voluntarists had been advertised. This lack of precision regarding the timing of the lectures highlights the way in which the significance of these lectures has been misunderstood or ignored.

On 13 October 1847 the *Nonconformist* announced that 'a course of eight lectures' was about to be delivered 'in the principal towns of Monmouthshire...on the duties devolving upon Christian professors as members of a civil community'. These lectures were to start on 2 November and continue weekly for eight weeks. The promised lecturers were, 'Thomas Thomas and George Thomas, tutor of the Baptist Academy at Pontypool, Price, Abersychan, Evan Jones, Tredegar, Bright and Allen, Newport and Evans, Pontrhydyrun.' Evan Jones and Thomas Bright were Independent ministers, while the other five were Baptist ministers. David D. Evans, Baptist minister of Pontrhydyrun chapel, founded by the Conway family, is the only person who had not been involved in the activities of the Voluntarists up to this point, but he was well known to them all⁵¹. The lectures actually began on 9 November in Pontypool and 10 November in Newport. There were seven lectures in all, because the Revd William Allen, minister of Commercial Street Baptist church in Newport,

⁵⁰ Ibid, pp. 103-165.

⁵¹ See DWB *sub* Evans, David Davies, p. 226. Evans was editor of *Seren Gomer* 1825-34. He married Sarah Conway.

failed to produce a lecture. Thomas Thomas gave the first and the final one himself. The lectures were his brain-child.

The *Nonconformist* rejoiced that the friends of Civil and Religious freedom were chiefly indebted to Charles Conway Esq., Pontnewydd, for the sponsorship of these lectures in defence of their principles and conduct. The newspaper expressed the hope of good attendance in response to this attempt to explain 'the connection between true Christian principle and right political actions'. The lectures were intended more in support of the work of the Anti-State Church Association, by members of that Association who were also Voluntaryists, than they were meant to frighten Jelinger Symons in the course of his inspections, though there were references to the low opinion which the lecturers held of the Minutes of the Committee of Council on Education for 1846. No mention was made of Jelinger Symons in any of the lectures, but Symons was unsettled by the antipathy of the Voluntaryists to the Minutes of Council.⁵² While Symons and his two assistants had been inspecting the schools 'the Resolutions passed by the two denominations' in the two county meetings at Newport and Pontypool... condemning the Minutes of 1846 as a threat to religious liberty and an attack on Nonconformity' had taken place. Symons knew of the hostility aroused by the Committee of Council Minutes and in the course of his Inquiry he had certainly received evidence from Thomas Thomas, though he never published it.

The lectures were held at a significant point coinciding with two events which reinforced the strengthening of the Baptist and Voluntaryist position in the area. At the time of Symons's Inquiry and simultaneously with the meetings condemning the Minutes of Council, Thomas Thomas was preparing for the opening of his new

⁵² Jones, '1848 and 1868', p.129; Education Commissioners', *Reports*, Part 2, p.1 and p.269.

English Baptist chapel in Crane Street. That took place on 7 April 1847. It was a new building for a church of which Thomas had been the Minister for more than a decade.⁵³ Similarly the British School, with which he had been associated for more than four years, moved into new premises in George Street, Pontypool, and was officially opened on 12 June, 1847. With William Williams Phillips, senior, in the chair, there were more than eight hundred people present for the occasion, including Thomas Thomas, George Thomas, Stephen Price, Herbert Daniel and other Voluntaryists united in agreement that 'the instruction given should be upon comprehensive liberal and unsectarian principles'.⁵⁴

The Seven Lectures were widely advertised and printed cheaply in the form of tuppenny pamphlets for wide distribution among Dissenters to remind them of their fundamental principles. Thomas Thomas was strong on the relationship between religion and politics. The state had its limits, which it should not transgress. Civil liberty assumed freedom of conscience and the right of private judgement in religious affairs and also in educational matters. The state should not set up another establishment in the name of government-controlled schools. The lectures upheld the principles of Voluntaryism by being opposed to compulsory education in the same way that they were opposed to compulsory Church rates. It was not the responsibility of the state to educate its citizens or to determine their religion. These themes were played out in all the lectures and they were also brought together in the final one by Thomas Thomas in which he said that to be a Nonconformist was to have complete integrity in your life and actions, as expressed in the text of the lecture.⁵⁵

⁵³ *MM*, 3 April 1847; Dilys M. Thorne, *Crane Street Baptist Church, Pontypool, 1836-1986* (Pontypool, 1986), pp. 11-13.

⁵⁴ *MM*, 12 June 1847

⁵⁵ Thomas Thomas, *The Christian Duty of Determined Adherence to Right Principles: 'Till I die I will not remove mine integrity from me'*, Job xxvii, 6,7 (London, 1848), p. 3.

There was very little about the educational proposals of 1846 in the introductory lecture that Thomas Thomas delivered at the beginning of November 1847. In a *tour de force* that swept everything before it from Noah to Napoleon and Armenia to America, Thomas showed that there was nothing wrong with religious people, and even Christian ministers, concerning themselves with secular politics; indeed it was their duty to do so, as they always had since the time of Joseph and Daniel and the Prophets. Politics was no more incompatible with personal piety than any other lawful activity and ministers of the Gospel should set an example to others in their duties as members of a civil community. Thomas believed that people were indebted to Nonconformist ministers for the benefits of civil, commercial and religious freedom.

He thought that the people who were most opposed to Dissenters being involved in politics were

The zealous partisans of a political church, whose very bishops are legislators; whose services, articles, canons, courts and revenues are regulated by law; whose special acts of public devotion...are directed by royal authority; whose priests are found on boards of guardians, and on the bench of magistrates...⁵⁶

Thomas wrote in praise of the Voluntary principle and the work of the Anti-State Church Association. He hailed as a 'cheering sign of the times' the 'great prevalence of just views on the unscriptural nature and injurious effects of the union of church and state'. He praised the example of the United States of America for separating religion from the state and allowing the voluntary principle to flourish. When he condemned the interference of the state in Church affairs all over Europe and in Britain and Ireland, against the wishes of the churches, it was perhaps inevitable that he would include the 'new education scheme' which 'infringes upon

⁵⁶ Thomas Thomas, *The duty of Religious Men to study the times in which they live and to apply their energies to the right conduct of public affairs* (London, 1848), pp. 11-12.

civil liberty, tends to subvert parental responsibility, and rears a new church establishment for the religious education of the rising generation'. All government aid for schools or teachers, said Thomas, should be refused. It was an offence to the principle of Voluntaryism.⁵⁷

Government aid was also an insult to the freedom of conscience about which the Baptist Minister of Abersychan, Revd Stephen Price, spoke in the second lecture on 16 and 17 November on the words 'Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind' (Romans 14 verse 5). Since conscience was of great importance to the Dissenters as a decider on the quality of a moral act, Stephen Price wanted to assure them that they should follow their own convictions and leave the consequences to God. No one should interfere beyond the limits of persuasion with a person's private judgements or religious beliefs:

How monstrous then, must have been the act of religious uniformity. And how inconsistent it must be to compel persons to support a religion of which they do not approve.⁵⁸

Price concluded that the right of private judgement was 'so clearly identified and interwoven with the history of Nonconformity that it seems to be part of it'. It was based upon the noble principle of liberty.⁵⁹

In the third lecture the Revd Evan Jones of Tredegar explored the object and functions of civil government as described in Romans 13, verses 1-7. He discussed the limitations placed upon the civil power to interfere with individual actions. Jones also extolled the Voluntary principle as described by Edward Miall whom he quoted at length. Jones said that

If man in his individual and domestic capacity does not infringe upon the rights of his fellow man, he lives beyond the jurisdiction of the Court of Civil

⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 17.

⁵⁸ Stephen Price, *The inalienable right and imperative duty of every man to act in accordance with his conscientious convictions in all the affairs of life* (London, 1848), p. 6.

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 15.

Government. The British Civil Government ought not to become the National or the British and Foreign School Society. It is not adapted for instruction; it is not apt to teach...if the Magistrate brings his sword to regulate our educational institutes, it will be borne in vain'.⁶⁰

He also repeated what he had said earlier about the relationship between education and crime and the ability of the former to improve the rate of the latter. He claimed that education was not the remedy for crime. The remedy, he said was 'Religion, which government is not qualified to teach. Crime is the result of depravity and not the creature of ignorance'.⁶¹

The fourth lecture was delivered by the Revd Thomas L. Bright, the minister of Hope Independent church in Newport, of which John Frost, the leader of the Chartists, had been a member. Bright lectured on the rights of a Christian to the immunities of a citizen, based on Acts 22, verse 25. Bright stated that as the Christian was bound by the responsibilities of citizenship, so he was entitled to the privileges of citizenship. Bright asserted that the rights to the immunities of a freeman could not be impugned by the monopoly of a dominant State Church.

We have no quarrel in our present discussion with the Episcopal Church of these realms, except as a State Institution...Her history has but resembled that of every rational establishment of religion...I believe that as Nonconformists, our confession but anticipates the verdict which a more advanced posterity will be unanimous in finding. *Persecution for Conscience Sake*, a violent interference with that freedom of religious opinion, which is one of the inalienable rights of Citizenship.⁶²

The Revd George Thomas, tutor at the Baptist College, presented the case for religious equality being essential to civil liberty, in the fifth lecture on 7 and 8 December. He also argued for the disestablishment of the Church, because the liberty of the subject was endangered by the existence of an Established Church. He

⁶⁰ Evan Jones, *The object and functions of Civil Government as set forth in the New Testament and the limits prescribed to its interference with individual action* (London, 1848), p. 9.

⁶¹ Ibid, p. 10.

⁶² Thomas L. Bright, *The Right of the Christian to lay claim to the immunities of the Citizen* (London, 1848), p. 9. The word 'rational' is possibly a mis-print for 'national'.

expressed more forcefully than any of the other Voluntaryists his fear of the centralisation of authority expressed in the government's education proposals. He thought that the government's plan was

in perfect harmony with an established religion; but is the very antipodes of everything connected with religious liberty...and only the first stride made towards the *Centralisation* state⁶³

He likewise, thought that it was not the job of the government to educate the people.

The last thing the Voluntaryists wanted was another scheme to endow all religious sects and create 'another establishment, as if the one already in existence were not sufficiently oppressive'.⁶⁴

Government centralised education was too centralised. That was a theme taken up by the Revd David D. Evans in the penultimate lecture. Evans described the threat to the liberties of Dissenters that was presented by the Establishment from year to year. After the Dissenters had secured the overthrow of Graham's proposals they faced the education proposals now on the table.

As Dissenters in this country, is it not evident that our liberties are more and more threatened ...? It is but...yesterday that Graham stood forth to offer us his "olive leaf"; but now behold the whole "Shuttleworth" branch...It is clear as noon day that the Aristocracy...are next to unanimous on the point of tying us down, as so many slaves to their religious monopolies.⁶⁵

In the course of his lecture, based on the theme of doing everything to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10, verse 31) Evans contrasted the two views of religion held by two different parties:

The one party hold that a state religion, and the compulsion of the unwilling to support it, tend vastly to advance the glory of God; and the other party maintain that God receives no glory from anything called religion, only as far

⁶³ George Thomas, *Religious equality essential to Civil Liberty* (London, 1848), p. 15.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p. 17.

⁶⁵ David D. Evans, *The duty of bringing Christian principles to bear on all concerns of life* (London, 1848), pp. 4-5. Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth was Secretary to the Committee of Council on Education from 1839 to 1849.

as it proceeds from a willing heart; and that no force should be employed in its support, but that of argument and persuasion⁶⁶

The obedience of faith could not be compelled by law, concluded Evans, but now the Compulsory System had grown into three great branches which he called Compulsory support, Compulsory ministry and most recently, Compulsory education.

Thomas Thomas's last lecture in the series addressed the subject of integrity and its importance in the lives of Christians and particularly for Nonconformist Voluntaries.⁶⁷ He told them that they were not to shrink from 'agitation'. They must obey their consciences in their fight against state control of the Church and they should patiently submit to the consequences of their actions. Their adherence to right principles meant that they should actively propagate those principles and withhold 'all aid, by payments, votes or otherwise, from the contrary principles'. Dissenters should never 'either with our money or our vote, prop up the colossal iniquity of a State Church'⁶⁸ Once again the full programme of the Dissenters' case against the established Church is painted on a much wider canvas than that of the dispute over education. 'The principle of compulsory support of religion is a *moral* evil infinitely offensive to the Supreme Ruler of the world', said Thomas in this final lecture which highlighted the theme of all the lectures, that it was the duty of Christians to show determined adherence to right principles.

That lecture formed the climax to the others and had its second delivery at Newport on 23 December 1847 in time for Christmas. It could be read in pamphlet form in the new year, like the other lectures. Puritans like Thomas Thomas did not make much of Christmas, unless it fell on the Lord's Day, but the response of the Voluntarists to

⁶⁶ David D. Evans., lecture, p. 8.

⁶⁷ Thomas Thomas, *The Christian Duty of determined adherence to Right Principles* (London, 1848).

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 4 and 14.

the reports of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales had to wait until the new year.

The Commissioners' Reports

The Voluntaryists' reactions to the Minutes of Council were intense and provoked more correspondence in Monmouthshire than Jelinger Symons' Inspection. Nevertheless the publication of the Education Commissioners' Reports themselves further exacerbated tensions and strengthened the arguments of the Voluntaryists for disestablishment.

The final part of this chapter attempts to assess the impact on the Dissenters of Symons's Report of the state of education in the eighteen industrial parishes of Monmouthshire bordering on Glamorgan and Breconshire.⁶⁹ In what follows it is argued that Symons's Report influenced relationships between the churches as it strengthened the determination of the Voluntaryists to pursue their longer vision of disestablishment. The primary concern of this section is not to deal exhaustively with the Report itself and its inadequacies on the grounds of education and social welfare.

The Report might be regarded as a self-fulfilling prophecy with its hurriedly-produced conclusions from a hastily-conducted Inquiry. J.D. Griffiths questions whether the government intended the information in the Reports to be used to promote a system of 'national education'. Griffiths believes that the charge that Kay-Shuttleworth and the Commissioners were at the heart of a conspiracy 'to show the ineffectiveness of Voluntaryism and to use Wales as a pilot scheme for a form of

⁶⁹ The eighteen parishes were: Aberystwith, Bassaleg, Bedwellty, Caerleon, Llanelen, Llanfihangel Llantarnam, Llanfihangel Pontymoel, Llanfoist, Llanfrechfa, Llanhilleth, Llanover, Llanwenarth, Machen, Mynyddislwyn, Newport, Panteg, Risca and Trefethin.

national education' is not entirely without foundation.⁷⁰ Gareth Elwyn Jones noted Griffiths's argument, but went further to say that 'the real insult to Wales lay in the fact that it was not Wales as such which was the object of their (the Education Commissioners) interest.' The state of education in England was no better and Wales was used as a means to an end, 'a system of teacher training and pay financed by the state' in England and Wales.⁷¹

It is worth remembering that the 'Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales' had been initiated by a question asked in the House of Commons on 10 March 1846 by William Williams, a Welsh-speaking Welshman who was MP for Coventry. He asked for a Royal Commission 'to examine the state of education in Wales, especially with regard to the means available to the Welsh to learn English', because he believed that his countrymen were held back in the race of life by their lack of English. He did not get his Royal Commission and he had to be satisfied with the Committee of Council on Education, a departmental committee of the Privy Council, but the means by which the people could learn English became a major concern of the enquiry.⁷²

More surprisingly, the commissioners enquired into the social conditions and the morals of the people of Wales. This caused bitter resentment, not least because the state of immorality in Wales was judged largely on the evidence of clergymen of the Established Church who were not closely involved in the lives of most of the people and often lacked sympathy for their inadequate housing. The idea that the morals of the people would be improved by more attendance at day schools was easily lampooned, particularly at a time when so many people in Wales, adults as well as

⁷⁰ J.D.Griffiths, 'Monmouthshire and the "Blue Books" of 1847', *History of Education*, 19:3, pp. 261-263.

⁷¹ Gareth E. Jones, 'Matter, myth and motive in the "Blue Books" of 1847', in *The Education of a Nation* (Cardiff, 1997), pp.25, 33.

⁷² Gwyneth Tyson Roberts, *The Language of the Blue Books* (Cardiff, 1998), p.23.

children, were regular attenders at Sunday schools. There does not seem to have been any suggestion that the Welsh language itself was a cause of immorality, though one Monmouthshire clergyman thought that it assisted Chartist activities and promoted plots against the government.⁷³

Symons and his assistants had two things to say about the schools of industrial Monmouthshire that were music to the ears of their London masters: all the children spoke English, in spite of their Welsh accents, and 'it is quite impracticable to teach the Welsh language to English children'.⁷⁴ The Inspectors' questions on the subject of religious education were inappropriate for the educational standards of primary schools, as Sir Thomas Phillips, Anglican Mayor of Newport at the time of the Chartist Rising, pointed out in 1849 in his book, *Wales: The Language, Social Condition, Moral Character and Religious Opinions of the People*.⁷⁵

Sir Thomas Phillips was the founder of a good National (Church) school at Cwrt-y-Bella in the parish of Mynyddislwyn. Jelinger Symons commended him for the 'handsome building' with its three spacious rooms that he had provided.⁷⁶ Yet Phillips had no doubts about the self-fulfilling prophecy nor the inappropriate questions:

They [the Commissioners] were sent into the Principality with instructions to make out a case against the Welsh people, -there are grounds for distrusting the accuracy of many of their opinions, as well as the practical value of some of their conclusions; not only from their ignorance of the language of the country, but also from the want of a previous practical acquaintance with the character and condition of schools for the poor, which has led them to employ an ideal standard, rather than to regard results actually attained in our own or other countries, or really attainable in any social system which has yet existed.

⁷³ Prys Morgan, 'From Long Knives to Blue Books', in *Welsh Society and Nationhood*, pp. 206-207; Daniel Evans, *The Life and Work of William Williams MP* (Llandysul, 1939), pp. 82-93; *Education Commissioners Reports*, Part 2, pp. 290-293, 302-304.

⁷⁴ I.G. Jones, '1848 and 1868: *Brad y Llyfrau Gleision*' and Welsh Politics', in *Mid-Victorian Wales*, p. 128. *Education Commissioners' Reports*, Part 2, *Appendix A*, p. 308.

⁷⁵ Sir Thomas Phillips, *Wales* (London, 1849), p. 411.

⁷⁶ *Education Commissioners' Reports*, Part 2, *Appendix A*, p. 285; Davies, *Monmouthshire Schools*, pp. 109-110.

The record of the inability of children to define a miracle manifests the infelicity of the question, rather than the inefficiency of the school; and to cite, as a proof of ignorance, the answer of a girl, that civilized meant Christian, is to exhibit a want of familiarity with the ideas and phraseology of the poorer classes of society, by whom gentle breeding is ordinarily identified with Christian influences.⁷⁷

Many similar criticisms were made by Churchmen and Dissenters of the unfairness, prejudice and ignorance shown by the Reports, as people read, discussed and heard them debated throughout Wales. As one modern historian concluded:

The reports declared that the Welsh were ill-educated, poor, dirty, unchaste, in danger of being led into sedition and even revolution; the gentry, the clergy, the industrialists had failed the common people, lacking the will to educate them; the Welsh were too poor and divided amongst themselves to sustain a voluntary educational system, and so were best improved by a system run by the state.⁷⁸

The last of those conclusions as it affected industrial Monmouthshire most annoyed Thomas Thomas and his Voluntaryists, and galvanised them into action when they discovered that their verbal evidence to the contrary had been ignored by Jelinger Symons. The same group of Baptist leaders who had fought against an enforced Church rate in Pontypool and the Minutes of Council, now continued their campaign against state interference in education. Significantly, they were assisted by some of the ministers who had contributed to the Seven Lectures, indicating that the 'alliance' formed was being perpetuated, and that there was a broadbased campaign against Jelinger Symons. The opposition of Evan Jones (Ieuan Gwynedd) to the Blue Books of 1847, as well as the criticisms made by Sir Thomas Phillips, have been noted by historians.⁷⁹ There were other local opponents, such as the Archdeacon of Llandaff, Thomas Williams, whose disagreement with Jelinger Symons over his report throws into relief the attitude of Symons towards all opponents alike. It also reveals that Symons was adroit at playing off Anglicans and Dissenters who opposed

⁷⁷ Sir Thomas Phillips, *Wales*, p. 411.

⁷⁸ Prys Morgan, 'From Long Knives to Blue Books' in *Welsh Society and Nationhood*, p. 208.

⁷⁹ I.G. Jones, '1848 and 1868', p. 142; Morgan, 'From Long Knives to Blue Books', p. 209.

him. He was less than honest in his treatment of evidence given to him by Voluntaryists in Monmouthshire and his pretensions of appeasement with the Pontypool Voluntaryists soon became apparent.⁸⁰

Symons and his report had a significantly marked impact on Thomas Thomas. Not only was he led to deliver one of the best speeches made in opposition to the report, but he also provided ammunition for others in their own opposition, not least the Revd Evan Jones. The report also focused Thomas Thomas on renewed activity in the cause of voluntary education and the liberation of religion from the control of the state. Before the end of this chapter it will be seen that Thomas's real response to the Blue Books was an invitation to Edward Miall to lead a deputation from the Anti-State-Church Association to visit Pontypool in October 1848.⁸¹

The personality of Jelinger Cookson Symons, the tone of his Report and his failure to consult with Nonconformists in Monmouthshire made him no friend of Thomas Thomas and his friends. Symons fuelled their dislike further by his response to criticisms that were made of him in the press. Many words have been written in praise of Symons and the difficulty of his task which came at a time when the Voluntaryists felt threatened by the Minutes of Council and determined to resist government interference. In spite of at least one modern writer who has expressed his sympathy with Symons and pointed out, rightly, that Symons was only doing what James Kay Shuttleworth expected, it is worth remembering that Symons was no stranger to Wales when he came. He may have known Monmouthshire well-enough to suggest that its industrial parishes be included in his Report although the county was not then regarded as part of Wales for the purposes of administration. That is the opinion of D.E.Sutton in his doctoral thesis. Nor did Symons disappear as quickly

⁸⁰ *MM*, 15, 22 and 29 January 1848; *Education Commissioners' Reports*, Part 2, pp. 271-272.

⁸¹ *MM*, 25 March 1848, 8 and 22 April 1848, 21 October 1848.

from the scene of his investigations as was previously implied, but remained as an Inspector for the rest of his life. Sutton feels sorry for Symons, particularly since his health does not seem to have benefited from a prolonged stay in Wales, but he also seems ambiguous about the honour conferred on Symons by Shuttleworth who made Symons continue in his role as an inspector.⁸² The apparently high opinion held of Symons by the government was not shared by the majority in Wales.

Symons knew Wales from its geographical and social hinterland, but he did not understand most of its people. His father-in-law, Edward Kendall, was an ironmaster near his home in Crickhowell and High Sheriff of Breconshire in 1809. His father had been Vicar of Monkland, Herefordshire, which left the son with a high regard for 'beneficed clergymen' of the Established Church and an even higher estimate of the office of archdeacon, but no knowledge of the ecclesiastical leadership in Monmouthshire or the changes that were taking place in the Diocese of Llandaff which then included Monmouthshire.⁸³ The Archdeacon of Llandaff since 1844 was Thomas Williams, a native of Monmouth, and Rector of Llanvapley in rural Monmouthshire since 1827. Symons seemed to know nothing of the responsibility Williams held for the industrial parishes in his archdeaconry.⁸⁴ He was surprised to learn from Williams that the 'beneficed clergymen' whom Symons had consulted about the state of affairs in their parishes, were not best-placed to give the most reliable evidence.⁸⁵

Once again the *Monmouthshire Merlin* is the only source for the letters that passed between Archdeacon Thomas Williams and Jelinger Symons in January 1848.

⁸² David E. Sutton, 'Tactics for the Times, Jelinger C. Symons, The Man, the Metaphor and the mid-Victorian Popular Mind' (unpublished PhD thesis Cardiff University, 2000), p. 424.

⁸³ ODNB, Symons, Jelinger Cookson (*odnb*/26897).

⁸⁴ E.T. Davies, 'The Church in the Industrial Revolution' in *A History of the Church in Wales*, ed. David Walker (Penarth, 1976), pp. 121-143, on pp. 128-129, 136.

⁸⁵ *MM*, 15 and 22 January 1848.

In replying to the letters which Archdeacon Williams wrote to him Symons was unfailing in paying due deference to 'the respectability of your character and the dignity of your station' but he didn't accept any of the points that the Archdeacon made against Symons's claim that the state of education in Monmouthshire had declined since Tremeneere's Report in 1839.⁸⁶ Thomas Williams, who had taken a first-class honours degree at Oriel College, Oxford and held office there while Newman and Keble were fellows, became runner-up to succeed Ollivant as Bishop of Llandaff in 1849.⁸⁷ Yet he was patronised by Jelinger Symons as someone who had probably not had much experience of dealing with statistics. Nor did he think that the Archdeacon understood the true nature of education:

The merely mechanical instruction in reading, writing, ciphering and rote exercise, which you are alone giving with few exceptions, can neither inform the understanding nor improve the heart, though it may often empower the faculties of evil; hence to miscall this *Education*, is, I think, gravely to mislead, and to attach to it the discredit of a moral failure, which arises, in reality, from its absence.⁸⁸

Thus silenced by his ignorance of education, Thomas Williams might have reflected that this was the same Jelinger Symons who had denigrated the people of Brynmawr, 'all of the lower class, with the exception of the shopkeepers', because 'one main body of the mob who marched upon Newport under Frost, congregated and issued from thence'. Symons claimed that this had happened because 'not one third of the adult population can read, and a still less proportion are able to write'.⁸⁹

The rest of the second letter that Symons wrote to Thomas Williams is of interest in enforcing the impression that Symons was anxious to assert the social range of the people from whom he had taken evidence during his inspections. He

⁸⁶ *MM*, 22 and 29 January 1848.

⁸⁷ John Morgan, *Four Biographical Sketches* (London, 1892), pp. 7-10; Roger L. Brown, *In Pursuit of a Welsh Episcopate* (Cardiff, 2005), pp. 90-91.

⁸⁸ *MM*, 22 January 1848.

⁸⁹ *Education Commissioners' Reports*, Part 2, p. 62.

claimed that these ranged from the Lord Lieutenant of Monmouthshire to the Revd Evan Jones of Tredegar. Hanbury Leigh did appoint someone to respond on his behalf but there was no recorded evidence from Revd Evan Jones in Symons's Report. One comment in this letter to Archdeacon Williams would later be used by Thomas Thomas against Symons:

There are some excellent and active clergymen in this district....The Church clergy are a most praiseworthy body; nothing but love of God and man could induce an educated man to dwell on a small pittance, in such a district, so revolting to civilisation, as this; and I had admissions of their activity and usefulness from Dissenters'.⁹⁰

In the first half of 1848 opposition to Jelinger Symons's Report emerged from Churchmen and Dissenters alike. This is not the place to discuss in detail the pamphlets published by Evan Jones (Ieuan Gwynedd) in opposition to the letters of William Williams M.P. who had requested the work of the Commissioners and welcomed their Reports. Much attention has been paid to the disputes between Ieuan Gwynedd and the Revd John Griffith and others concerning the 'vice, immorality, superstition and irreligion' of the labouring population of Wales, which the Reports exaggerated. The essence of the reply of Revd Evan Jones to the first letter of William Williams is perhaps best expressed in Evan Jones' last sentence:

Pray let us alone and we will continue to take care of ourselves as we have hitherto done.⁹¹

William Williams lost his seat as MP for Coventry in 1847 because of the strength of the Nonconformist vote against him after he had proved himself a state-educationist by voting to increase government grants for the Roman Catholic Maynooth seminary in Ireland and by his acceptance of the Minutes of the Committee

⁹⁰ *MM*, 22 January 1848

⁹¹ Evan Jones, *A Vindication of the Educational and Moral Condition of Wales*, p. 104; Daniel Evans, *William Williams MP* (Llandyssul, 1939), p.170; Roger L. Brown, *John Griffith, The Unmitred Bishop* (Welshpool, 2006), pp. 59, 62-63.

of Council on Education of 1846.⁹² Those Nonconformists who were Voluntaryists, and not all of them were, remained opposed to the state taking any part in the education of the children of the nation. For Evan Jones and some Welsh Voluntaryists this seems to have been bound up with a determination to defend the Welsh language from annihilation in the face of a desire by the government to promote the use of English in the day schools of Wales. Other Voluntaryists in Monmouthshire acknowledged that the English language was 'gaining ground, and doubtless will be an advantage, as it will open a very increased means of improvement in the numerous small cheap publications in the English language'.⁹³

What motivated Voluntaryists even more than their concern about the languages of Wales was their belief that education was not the business of the state. Voluntary schools were as essential as voluntary churches to the safeguarding of Dissent from an establishment which would subvert independence and promote centralisation. This was clearly expressed by Sir Thomas Phillips, not himself a Voluntaryist:

The inevitable tendency of centralizing powers is to uproot independent and responsible authority; and they end by enslaving and destroying the community of which they have become the organs.⁹⁴

The various responses to the Blue Books threw together a number of unlikely associates. The minds of Thomas Thomas and his circle of Voluntaryists were not moved by the Reports even to suggest the acceptance of government aid for secular education, as seems to have been done by Dr. Lewis Edwards, Calvinistic Methodist leader, preacher and editor⁹⁵ before the Reports had been published. What Thomas Thomas did admit was what Dr. Lewis Edwards wrote in *Y Traethodydd* for April

⁹² Evans, *William Williams MP*, p. 105.

⁹³ *Education Commissioners' Reports*, Part 2, p. 401.

⁹⁴ Sir Thomas Phillips, *Wales*, p. 432.

⁹⁵ D. Densil Morgan, *Lewis Edwards* (Cardiff, 2009), pp.120-128; Jones, '1848 and 1868', pp. 151,153.

1848, '*am addef fod peth gwirionedd yn yr Adroddiadau*' ('that there is *some truth* in the Reports'). Edwards said, '*Y mae y Dirprwywyr yn addef fod llawer o ddaioni yn Nghymru: ond ni fyn rhai o'u gwrthwynebwyr i ni addef fod yr Adroddiadau yn cynnwys y mymryn lleiaf o wirionedd!*' ('the Commissioners acknowledge that there exists a large amount of good in Wales: but some of their opponents would not have us acknowledge that the Reports contain the least particle of truth').⁹⁶

Expressions of opposition to Jelinger Symons in the press were accompanied by public meetings to express outrage at the reports of the Commissioners. Thomas Thomas attended a large meeting at Cardiff Town Hall on 29 February 1848 to debate the reports. The meeting had been called by the Mayor of Cardiff in response to the request of thirty inhabitants, but hundreds had to be turned away because the hall was 'filled to inconvenience'. Surprisingly, the only newspaper to cover the event was the *Monmouthshire Merlin*, a fact that again highlights the invaluable nature of this important source for the Dissenters' campaign. The Revd William Jones, minister of Bethany Baptist church, Cardiff, was the first speaker. Thomas Thomas spoke in support of a motion of the Revd Evan Morgan, a Calvinistic Methodist Minister in Cardiff, after his friend the Revd D.R. Stephen, a Baptist Minister, had seconded the motion criticising the employment of Commissioners who were 'all utter strangers to the language of the people and in religious opinion opposed to the vast majority of the population'. Thomas condemned the use of evidence derived from partial information, based upon unwarrantable conclusions and isolated occurrences. The virtues of the Welsh people were concealed, he said, while their defects were exaggerated.⁹⁷

In his speech in Cardiff, Thomas had referred to the Parishes of Trefethin and Mynyddislwyn and the references in Symons's Report on those parishes, which he

⁹⁶ Quoted in Daniel Evans, *William Williams MP*, p. 195.

⁹⁷ *MM*, 4 March 1848.

considered 'partial and unfounded'. Thomas thought that the school at Abercarn, supported by Sir Benjamin Hall, was unjustly represented in a discreditable light by Symons's assistant John Jones. Thomas read out a letter from a correspondent giving a much more favourable opinion on education in Abercarn. His speech was reported as being 'of considerable length and great power concluded amid loud cheering'.⁹⁸

Nearer home, Thomas attended a massive demonstration in the Market-place in Abercarn on 17 March 1848. David Phillips of Llanhilleth, a local landowner, was in the chair. His son, of the same name, proposed the first resolution of the meeting, and he spoke of the partial and prejudiced work of the Commissioners. In the parishes of Mynyddislwyn and Llanhilleth, he said, there were about 7,000 people, 4,000 of whom were Dissenters in eleven chapels and there were about 1,000 young people in their Sunday schools. There were two Anglican churches. He said that Sir Benjamin Hall had never made any difference between churches and chapels in his dealings with his many tenants in those parishes. Jelinger Symons had not consulted him. Nor had Symons consulted Sir Benjamin Hall's land-agent, Mr. Llewellyn, nor had he consulted Mr. Rogers, the Welsh manager of the Abergwyddon collieries, employing about 400 Welshmen and knowing much about their characters to their credit, which would not have suited the Report.⁹⁹

It is instructive to compare statements made at the meeting regarding the state of education and the morals of the people of Monmouthshire with the evidence that actually appeared in Jelinger Symons's Report. The Rector, the Revd James Hughes, condemned their drunkenness, said his parishioners were likely to be deceptive, to act disingenuously, and even dishonestly. Hughes claimed that they were dissatisfied with laws, unable to pay their debts or the weekly-pence for their children's school, or

⁹⁸ *MM*, 4 March 1848. For a more favourable opinion of the schools at Abercarn see *Labour and the Poor in England and Wales 1849-51*, ed. Jules Ginswick, volume 3 (London, 1983), pp. 142-143.

⁹⁹ *MM*, 25 March 1848.

provide shoes for them to attend school. Hughes thought that in secular matters they were more ignorant than the English, but 'capable of arguing on the most abstruse theological points'. They had a 'fondness for divinity subjects to the exclusion of all secular knowledge', which Hughes attributed to the absence of day schools. He thought they were kind to one another and helped their neighbours when they were in need. There were too many public houses. They were open on Sunday during service-times and controlled by the works' agents. Hughes thought that there were few places in more need of government aid, particularly for the payment of teachers and monitors. The Welsh language was 'a nuisance and an obstacle, both to the administration of the law and to the cause of religion' because services had to be provided in both languages.¹⁰⁰

It was on the single evidence of the Revd James Hughes that Jelinger Symons based his opinion of 'the bad character, ill-conduct and low condition' of the parishioners. Hughes had been the Rector for five years, while David Phillips, the chairman, had lived and worked there for fifty years. When Thomas Thomas spoke at this Abercarn mass demonstration to second the proposal of David Phillips, junior, condemning Symons's failure to consult more widely about these parishes, he did not dwell on the specific details of Hughes's charges against his parishioners, but he provided a most intelligent estimate of the work of the Commissioners. He did not deny that there was 'some truth in the Reports', or as Thomas put it, 'Let the Devil have his due'.¹⁰¹

Thomas had some fun at Symons's expense. He said that he had spent twelve years in England 'trying to get some little knowledge and morality'. It was sad that Wales was so destitute of these things, but his admiration of the Welsh character was

¹⁰⁰ *Education Commissioners' Reports*, Part 2, pp. 298-300.

¹⁰¹ *MM*, 25 March 1848. The three resolutions of this meeting were published on the front page of the *Merlin* of 25 March and sent to Sir Benjamin Hall MP, for his attention.

not at all lessened. At the same time he did not underestimate the excellences of the English. Thomas agreed with Symons on a number of issues in his Report. First, there was much ignorance in Wales and Monmouthshire about religious and secular matters, which should be removed. Secondly, the masters who employed most workmen in Wales had failed to provide proper accommodation or facilities 'for mental and moral improvement'. The masters were motivated by their own profits. Thirdly, many people were to blame for the vices of drunkenness, improvidence and unchastity, which Thomas did not condone. Thomas went on to confess to other faults that Symons had not enumerated, such as welcoming government inspectors into their houses and schools 'as if they were honourable men', accepting government money for their schools, voting for churchmen and state educationalists at elections and sending their children to Church schools to learn the Church catechism.¹⁰²

While allowing 'the Devil' these points, Thomas disagreed with Symons's self contradictions. Symons claimed that he found shocking immoralities and evil in Wales, but the jails were empty. Symons said that the people were benevolent and kindhearted, but at the same time he found them depraved, insubordinate and profane, while 'the children', implying all the children, utter imprecations in the street, and the bodies and habits of the men were almost 'as dirty as the towns and houses of the swarthy region in which they swarm'. The character of some of the authorities from whom Symons had taken evidence was questioned by Thomas as well as the balance of their evidence. Symons put loaded questions to selected witnesses which were likely to 'elicit only the unfavourable traits in the character and condition of the

¹⁰² *MM*, 25 March 1848.

people' and would lead enough witnesses to welcome government grants towards education.¹⁰³

Thomas regretted that no mention had been made in the Report about the progress that the people had made in knowledge, morality or religion during the last fifty years, and he objected to Symons's illogical habit of drawing general conclusions from particular cases with insufficient data. Thomas also objected to the Commissioners speaking of the Chartist and Rebecca riots as if there had been no other riots in the world except in Wales. When it came to Symons giving compliments to Dissenters, Thomas acknowledged the praise that they had received from Symons for the superiority of their Sunday Schools, but they were still attributed with unworthy motives for their work. When it came to the clergy of the Established Church, Thomas remembered that Symons had praised them for their love of God and men which alone could 'induce them to dwell on a small pittance in such a district'. To this Thomas retorted:

Certainly there is a wonderful amount of suffering inflicted on gentlemen educated at Lampeter College in Cardiganshire, when compelled to dwell in such a district as this! Nothing but love to God and man can keep them here; but as for dissenting ministers, some lower motives can induce them; they are only fit for the company of colliers and chimney sweepers.¹⁰⁴

The fact that Symons made such a statement was evidence of his own ignorance of the ecclesiastical and social background of the clergy and ministers of Monmouthshire. More will be said of the ministers in a later chapter, but the majority of the Anglican clergy in industrial Monmouthshire at that time were non-graduates or literates whose education had been received only in local Grammar schools at Usk, Abergavenny or Cowbridge, where they were given enough Divinity for ordination. Less than half the remainder had trained at Lampeter and the rest were graduates,

¹⁰³ *MM*, 25 March 1848; *Education Commissioners' Report*, Part 2, p. 294.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, p. 290; *MM*, 25 March 1848.

mainly of Oxford University, with whom Symons may have been empathising. In the Pontypool area in 1848 the Vicars of Trevethin and Abersychan had Oxford degrees, but the Rectors of Panteg, Mynyddislwyn, Bedwellty and Aberystroth as well as the Vicars of Pontnewynydd and Llanhilleth, were simply literates.¹⁰⁵

Thomas Thomas was understandably annoyed by the snobbery of Symons's behaviour and language and unimpressed by the disingenuousness that caused Symons to flatter and to deceive. Symons was guilty of that in his dealings with the Archdeacon of Llandaff as well as in his apparently generous recognition of the co-operation he had received from the Voluntarists in Monmouthshire. Symons recorded none of the evidence that Thomas Thomas gave him in an hour-long interview at Thomas's home in 1846. Thomas related as much to the Revd Henry Richard, who recorded it in his Crosby Hall lecture in London in 1847¹⁰⁶. Thomas also claimed that Symons had not recorded the evidence of any other Dissenting minister who had expressed disapproval of the Minutes of Council.

The same point was taken up by two other Dissenters in letters to the *Monmouthshire Merlin* in March-April 1848, Revd Henry Griffiths, senior tutor of the Voluntarist teacher-training college at Brecon, and the Revd Evan Jones (Ieuan Gwynedd). Symons denied that he had suppressed "written evidence" but admitted that he had received "verbal evidence".¹⁰⁷ The only Monmouthshire Voluntarist to get his evidence recorded was William Williams Phillips, Senior, a layman too powerful to be ignored. Phillips fearlessly recorded his denial of the need for

¹⁰⁵ Wilton D. Wills, 'The Clergy in Society in Mid-Victorian South Wales', *JHSCW*, 29 (1974), pp. 27-43, on pp. 31, 39-40; E.T. Davies, 'The Education of the Clergy in the Diocese of Llandaff, 1750-1866', *JHSCW*, 26:31(1979), pp. 54-64, on pp. 60-61; J.D. Evans, *Clergy of the Ancient Parishes of Gwent* (Pontypool, 1991).

¹⁰⁶ Revd Henry Richard, Crosby Hall Lectures 1848, *On the Progress and Efficiency of Voluntary Education, as Exemplified in Wales* (London, 1848), pp. 207-208. Henry Richard had not yet relinquished his title of Revd; *MM*, 22 January 1848; *Education Commissioners' Reports*, Part 2, p. 368.

¹⁰⁷ *MM*, 11 March and 8 April 1848.

government aid in answer to Symons's question: 'If you think Government aid desirable, state specifically to what extent.' Phillips simply answered, 'I do not'.¹⁰⁸

After 1847 some key consequences of the response to the Education Commissioners began to become apparent. Whatever the verdict of Jelinger Symons had been on the state of education in Monmouthshire, it would not have affected the attitude of the Voluntarists towards the provision of education without government aid or interference. This principle of voluntarism extended also to the payment of teachers and their training in the Voluntary Normal College, first at Brecon and after 1848 in Swansea.¹⁰⁹ At a public meeting at Newport Town Hall in April 1848, Thomas Thomas supported the move to Swansea because it would make the College more central to Wales. Thomas thought it important for young Welsh teachers to be trained in Wales by 'persons who understood the Welsh language, and who were acquainted with the habits of the people, and their modes of thinking'.¹¹⁰ Thomas already had his own Voluntarist College to run in Pontypool and the Pontypool Voluntarist who served on the executive committee of the Swansea Normal College with the Revd David Rees of Capel Als, Llanelli, was William Williams Phillips, Senior.¹¹¹

What was really becoming more important to Thomas Thomas and his circle in Pontypool was the work of the Anti-State-Church Society and the place that he would come to occupy on its executive committee by 1850.¹¹² It is significant that 1848 ended for Thomas on a high note of expectation of disestablishment after a massive Anti-State-Church meeting on 11 October in the large school-room of the

¹⁰⁸ *Education Commissioners' Reports*, Part 2, p.295.

¹⁰⁹ This was a voluntary unsectarian college for religious and secular training on the principles of the British and Foreign School Society.

¹¹⁰ *MM*, 22 April 1848.

¹¹¹ *MM*, 22 April 1848. Phillips was the land agent at Pontypool Park, senior deacon at Crane Street chapel and devoted to the work of education and training.

¹¹² *Nonconformist*, 8 May 1850

British School in Pontypool to welcome Edward Miall on his first visit to the town. Thomas Thomas was in the chair, and around him were gathered The Revd George Thomas, Revd D.D. Evans, Pontrhydyrun, Revd Stephen Price, Abersychan, Revd Herbert Daniel, Pontypool, and Mr. John Conway of Abergavenny. The first resolution of that meeting, moved by the Revd Stephen Price, provided the appropriate response to the Minutes of the Council on Education and the Report of Jelinger Symons, and set them both in the context of the liberation of religion from the control of the state. The resolution included condemnation of the injustice of paying 'the teachers of our religious creeds which is believed to be seriously contemplated'. Stephen Price said that such payment 'would be highly dangerous to civil liberty, would degrade religion into an instrument of state-craft, and would strike at the heart of all religious independence'.¹¹³ It will be necessary to return to the subject of state interference in the next chapter which investigates the influence of the Liberation Society upon the activities of the Pontypool Voluntaryists.

Thomas Thomas was actively involved in the work of the Liberation Society by 1850. In spite of the verdict of the Blue Books that the poverty of the people of Wales made government grants for schools essential, Thomas continued to proclaim the principles of Voluntaryism. This meant in the words of the Revd David Rees in 1853, avoiding the situation where '*Y mae y cwmni neu y perchennog, neu y 'resident manager' yn dewis yr athraw, ac yn nodi allan ansawdd y ddysg i'w chyfrannu, heb ym holi dim a rhieni y plant.*' ('The company or the owners or the resident manager chooses the teacher and sets out the quality of the learning to be contributed without asking the parents of the children').¹¹⁴ By that date David Rees was changing his

¹¹³ *MM*, 21 October 1848.

¹¹⁴ *Y Diwygiwr*, 1853, p. 223 cited in Leslie Wynne Evans, *Education in Industrial Wales, 1700-1900*, (Cardiff, 1971), p. 308, as '*Rhieni ddylai ddewis addysg eu plant*' ('Parents should choose their children's education').

attitude towards state aid. Thomas Thomas did not relent his opposition to grant-aid and went on opposing the British schools set up by Nefydd with government money, as Nefydd lamented in his Journals.¹¹⁵

Thomas Thomas remained a governor of the British School in Pontypool, which he went on visiting until the governors voted by a majority of one to accept government aid, and his visits ceased. The Education Act of 1870 settled the argument in favour of state-aid for the building of schools in Britain, but the arguments of the Voluntaryists had moved on by that time to a renewed campaign for disestablishment of the Church of England in the wake of the disestablishment already achieved in Ireland.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that education was a key factor in the development of the programme of the Monmouthshire Baptists. Their thinking was not just focused on disestablishment but was much concerned with the relationship between religion and politics. The response of the Voluntaryists to the Minutes of Council, the delivery of the Seven Lectures and their engagement with Jelinger Symons's accounts in his 1847 Report and subsequently in the press, developed relationships forged through the Church rate battle and helped to shape the subsequent campaign for disestablishment.

As with the Church rate, the issue of education exposed deep divisions in the local society as a result of the religious and political attitudes of the establishment. Once again, the local press, the *Monmouthshire Merlin*, was a key vehicle for communicating arguments and providing a platform for a long and detailed debate.

¹¹⁵ B.L. Davies, 'British Schools in South Wales', in *National Library of Wales Journal*, 18:4 (1974), pp.390-391.

The columns of the *Merlin* provide invaluable evidence of the detail and minutiae of the various points put forward in the arguments of the Dissenters. What emerges very strongly is the centrality of religious justifications for political activity in a campaign for change. The arguments reveal that the political focus of Nonconformity after 1847 had as much to do with religion as politics. As Timothy Larsen concluded from his study of religious equality in England, Dissenters became educational Voluntaryists ‘because of their deep desire to have a national life based on religious equality’.¹¹⁶ Thomas Thomas’s calling of the Anti-State-Church Association meeting in October 1848 was his real answer to the Commissioners’ Reports. It is the influence of that Association upon the lives of Thomas Thomas and his associates that will be analysed in the next chapter.

¹¹⁶ Larsen, *Friends of Religious Equality, Nonconformist Politics in Mid-Victorian England*, p. 166.

CHAPTER FOUR

Monmouthshire Baptists and the Liberation Society: cui bono?

Church disestablishment became a public issue for Dissenters in the 1830s.¹ The Nonconformist disestablishment debate in Wales began as early as 1830.² On 15 January 1834 disestablishment was first proposed in Monmouthshire by Charles Conway at a meeting of Nonconformists in Pontypool. This was followed up in February by a petition to Parliament from the Monmouthshire Baptist Quarterly Meeting, 'that no specific form of religion be the subject of the government's exclusive recognition and legal support'.³

In spite of their frustration with the Whig government of Earl Grey, Dissenters saw some progress through the Acts of Marriage and Registration in 1836. Demands by Dissenters increased for the abolition of compulsory Church rate. In the view of R. Tudur Jones it was the issue 'that did most to convince Nonconformists at large that piecemeal redress of grievances should give way to the more radical demand for disestablishment'.⁴

It might be questioned whether that conclusion is altogether valid because in Monmouthshire there was an initial demand for general disestablishment that was sustained throughout the next fifty years and continued after Nonconformists were finally allowed to be buried in parish churches by their own ministers in 1880.⁵ This general demand nevertheless accepted that the campaign would have to proceed one disability at a time. The separate

¹ Larsen, *Friends of Religious Equality*, p. 81.

² R. Tudur Jones, 'The Origins of the Nonconformist Disestablishment Campaign', *JHSCW*, 25 (1970), pp. 39-76.

³ Bassett, *The Welsh Baptists* (Swansea, 1977), p. 147.

⁴ Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, Part 1, p. 144; Jones, 'The Origins of the Nonconformist Disestablishment Campaign', p. 65. The long process of ecclesiastical legislation between 1836 and 1898 has been described as 'the gradual disestablishment' of the Church of England by A.D. Gilbert, *Religion and Society in Industrial England* (London, 1976), p. 163.

⁵ Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, Part 2, p. 206. Support for the abolition of Church rate was increased by the failure of Nonconformists to obtain the support of Parliament. Bassett, *The Welsh Baptists*, pp. 153-155.

grievances enhanced the drive for disestablishment by providing issues of inequality and injustice that strengthened the Dissenters' cause. Thomas Thomas and his friends realised that their golden goal of disestablishment was a distant horizon that depended upon parliament for its achievement. They kept their eyes on the ultimate goal because it would give them equality of status with Anglicans. It would also enable them to participate as equals in religious and civic opportunities for mission and evangelism.⁶

This chapter will first show the importance of disestablishment in the thinking and teaching of Thomas Thomas as a Baptist leader. It will demonstrate that all his activity from the sermon against the Chartist Rising in November 1839, through his involvement in the Manchester Conference in 1841 to the Complete Suffrage Union activity in Pontypool in 1843 was done in order to achieve enough support in Parliament to obtain disestablishment. When the Anti-State-Church Association (ASCA) was set up in 1844 at its London Conference, enthusiastically supported by Thomas Thomas and Pontypool College, it was the best hope yet provided for Dissenters' desires for disestablishment. By the time of Edward Miall's first visit to Pontypool Baptist College in 1848, Thomas Thomas and his associates were committed to the aims and activities of the ASCA, which became the Liberation Society in 1853. Thomas was a regular subscriber and occasional contributor to the Society's newspaper, the *Nonconformist*, for the rest of his life.⁷

The contribution of the Liberation Society to the political life of south Wales and to demands for disestablishment in Wales have been recorded. Ieuan Gwynedd Jones in a pioneering article in 1961 described the antecedents, organisation, development and programme of the Liberation Society and its influence on Welsh Politics in the twenty years before 1868, when 'numerically resurgent' Welsh Nonconformists became 'more prepared to

⁶ See below and Thomas Thomas, *The Rights and Duties of Christian Citizens* (Cardiff, 1847), pp. 4 and 8.

⁷ *Nonconformist*, 20 October 1841, 24 January 1844; *MM*, 29 May 1847; Thomas, *The Rights and Duties of Christian Citizens*, p. 8; Wallace, *Organise! Organise! Organise!*, pp. 62, 69-70.

give political expression to their religious sentiments'. Parliamentary reform 'had a religious...rather than a secular flavour' in Wales partly because of the Liberation Society, but Jones is careful not to claim too much credit for the Society because by 1868 'the Liberals...were again disposed to take up questions of ecclesiastical policy'.⁸

The work of I.G. Jones was used by G.I.T. Machin. Machin summarised the influence of the Liberation Society on Wales as:

The potential Voluntary strength of Wales, long hindered by interdenominational differences and landlord influence, was now beginning to be exploited by a London-based organization. When it had gathered strength, the movement for Welsh disestablishment was to assume a more nationalist colouring, but the English initiative in 1862 was important to its development.⁹

This chapter aims to add flesh to the bare statistics in the work of I.G. Jones that show the consistent support for the Liberation Society in Monmouthshire from 1844 to 1868 without any explanation. The chapter acknowledges the debt owed to the 'London-based organisation' and the value of the 'English initiative' while stressing that the outcome was only 'indirectly the fruit of the Liberation Society's exertions'.¹⁰ How the commitment of Monmouthshire Baptists to the Society helped to develop its work in the context of local politics will be shown in the second part of this chapter, culminating in the Conference in Swansea in 1862 and the outcome of that conference. It will be argued that Thomas Thomas's primary purpose in supporting the Liberation Society was to obtain political support for the removal of Nonconformist disabilities and the goal of disestablishment. When it became clear to Thomas Thomas that there was a greater chance of obtaining disestablishment in Wales than there was in England, he became an advocate for the disestablishment of the Church in Wales apart from England. By that point

⁸ Ieuan Gwynedd Jones, 'The Liberation Society and Welsh Politics, 1844-1868', *WHR*, 1:2 (1961), pp. 193-224, on p. 222.

⁹ Machin, *Politics and the Churches in Great Britain 1832-1868*, p. 321.

¹⁰ Jones, 'The Liberation Society and Welsh Politics', *WHR*, 1:2 (1961), p.222.

Thomas began to depart from the strict agenda of the Liberation Society for general disestablishment.¹¹

Thomas Thomas and disestablishment

Thomas Thomas has left written evidence for his views on disestablishment. His public debut on disestablishment came in the long Appendix that he published with the sermon on the Chartist Rising in 1839. Thomas had been encouraged by an article in the *Monmouthshire Beacon* which showed the strength of Dissent in the Parish of Trevethin compared with the Established Church. This encouraged Thomas to put forward his view of what was most to be desired:

The separation of the Church from the State, might take place in *this parish* without any detriment to religion, or the least diminution of the means of moral improvement. For suppose that at the death of the present Incumbent, or earlier, the church property of the parish were devoted to the secular education of the rising race, or to the general purposes of government; what would *religion* lose by the change?

Of greater importance to his views on disestablishment, Thomas went on to argue that

The principal causes of contentions and heart-burnings being removed by the abolition of religious monopoly, Episcopalians, Baptists, Independents, Wesleyans etc. would all harmoniously unite in redoubled efforts to effect the moral regeneration of the whole parish.¹²

That was as early as 1839. In 1845 Thomas and his colleagues refused to pay the compulsory Church rate and suffered distraint upon their property.¹³ This was followed in 1847 by the Reports of the Educational Commissioners and the events that succeeded their publication. The Commissioners acknowledged the co-operation of Thomas Thomas and William Williams

¹¹ Wallace, *Organise! Organise! Organise!*, pp. 197-198.

¹² Thomas, *The Civil Duties of Christians*, p. 30.

¹³ See Chapter Two.

Phillips, senior, in their investigations,¹⁴ but when the Monmouthshire Baptist Association met in Sirhowy at the end of May 1847, Thomas Thomas ‘thundered forth against the corruption of government help, and in defence of the voluntary principle’ and he received strong support from his Baptist colleague Revd D. Rhys Stephen of Newport.¹⁵ Thomas had addressed the Baptist Association at Sirhowy on the *Rights and Duties of Christian Citizens*. The address, when published as a Circular Letter of the Association, was described as ‘substantial and cogent’.¹⁶ It was an eloquent appeal for disestablishment. Thomas acknowledged that the purpose of civil government was to protect the person and property of the subject, but ‘it has never been invested with authority to interfere with the rights of conscience, or with religious instruction’.¹⁷ He said that the Apostles had never obeyed the laws of the Roman Empire in matters of religion and the Bible did not give the state ‘authority to choose a religion for their subjects’. In his support for disestablishment, Thomas said that Dissenters had suffered for their principles since the Reformation, while the Bishops and clergy of the Church of England had enjoyed secular privileges. He condemned the *Regium Donum*, the parliamentary grants given by the government to Dissenting ministers, as well as the government grants for education, which would bring children and teachers ‘under the direct influence of government and the State Church’. Dissenters were strongly advised to join the ASCA ‘and cordially to aid its operations, especially in Wales’.¹⁸

Dissenters were also urged to support Voluntary education. Above all they should ‘be resolute and faithful at the approaching Election’. Every Baptist in the country with the right to vote was asked to remember his responsibility to vote only for a candidate who supported the voluntary principles of Nonconformists. No Baptist should vote for anyone who would vote

¹⁴ *Reports of the Education Commissioners, Part 2, Monmouthshire*, (1848), p. 272.

¹⁵ Thomas Richards, ed. *Monmouthshire Baptist Association, Circular Letters 1832-1945* (Newport, 1947), pp. 6-7.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Thomas Thomas, *The Rights and Duties of Christian Citizens* (Cardiff, 1847), p. 3.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 3-8.

in parliament 'on the principle of religious compulsion regardless of the rights of conscience and the feelings and petitions of Dissenters'.¹⁹

Thomas gave his advice without any threat of compulsion or reprisals being taken against Baptists who disobeyed. This is an important point which will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. Although Matthew Cragoe has claimed that 'it was alleged that preachers were prepared to bully their flocks with threats of excommunication or everlasting damnation if they failed to vote as directed',²⁰ the surviving sources provide no evidence that Baptists in Monmouthshire were excluded from membership because they did not conform to this advice. The message that Thomas gave to Baptists in May 1847 was delivered to more general audiences at the end of the year in the seven weekly lectures in Pontypool and Newport on the principles of Nonconformists and the right relationship between Church and State.²¹ Thomas regarded 'a State Church as morally wrong' and so it had been morally wrong to pay a compulsory Church rate.²² In his final lecture in 1847 Thomas had included in the benefits of disestablishment the release of the Established Church from 'abject dependence on the state'.²³

Thus it seems clear that well before the first visit of Edward Miall to Pontypool in 1848 Thomas Thomas was convinced of the need for disestablishment. He was also sure that the ASCA was playing an important part in working towards that end. The opposition that Thomas showed to the interference of the State in religious affairs did not mean that he was hostile to the government when it exercised its legitimate secular executive functions. Still less was he opposed to the monarchy. Like so many Dissenters of integrity and good-will Thomas was anxious to show that his conscientious objection to the State's control of religious affairs was

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 8.

²⁰ Cragoe, *Culture, Politics and National Identity in Wales 1832-1886*, p. 174.

²¹ For the Seven Lectures, see Chapter Three. The lectures began on 9 November 1847 and were first advertised in the *Nonconformist* on 13 October 1847.

²² Thomas Thomas, *The Christian Duty of Determined Adherence to Right Principles* (London, 1848), pp. 1, 7, 8, 9, 11.

²³ Ibid, p. 20.

not seditious. He simply desired to assert the distinction between what rightly belonged to Caesar and what truly belonged to God.

In his search for disestablishment Thomas was prepared to face the death (euthanasia) of Dissent as he knew it, because when there was no establishment to which he would not conform, there would be no further need of Nonconformity.²⁴ Thomas insisted that he was not opposed to the Anglican Church but simply its status as the Established Church.²⁵ He was not the only Dissenter to make that point, though he was one of the earliest.²⁶ Its truth would depend upon the state of the Established Church. Dissenters became increasingly concerned about the developing Tractarianism (Ceremonialism) of the Church of England, which was popularly called Puseyism. John Griffith, Rector of Merthyr advocated disestablishment as the only way to deal with the Tractarians.²⁷ Ironically, the Anglo-Catholics in the Church of England were often supporters of disestablishment.²⁸ In 1869 the Revd A.H. Mackonochie, notorious for his high Church ritual at St. Alban's Holborn, declared that 'the time had come' for the Church to 'demand to be delivered from the burden of its connection with the State'.²⁹ It is interesting that this was reported by the *Pontypool Free Press* as if in evidence of local Dissenting activities being supported by national events.

In describing Thomas Thomas's attitudes towards the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church it is necessary to separate their doctrine and worship from their relationships with other separate churches in a community of Christian churches. The Church

²⁴ Ibid, pp. 19-20.

²⁵ Thomas, *The Christian Duty of Determined Adherence to Right Principles*, p. 20.

²⁶ Larsen, *Friends of Religious Equality*, p.95. Charles Vince, a Dissenting minister in Birmingham, made the same point in 1863.

²⁷ R.L. Brown, *John Griffith, The Unmitred Bishop?* (Welshpool, 2006), pp. 253-270.

²⁸ See for example, G.L. Prestige, *The Life of Charles Gore* (London, 1935), p. 314; Chadwick, *The Victorian Church, Part 2*, p. 432. Anglo-Catholics disliked the interference of Parliament in their religious affairs as much as the Dissenters did. Pusey himself favoured disestablishment. See, P.M.H. Bell, *Disestablishment in Ireland and Wales* (London, 1969), p. 102; R.L. Brown, 'Traitors and Compromisers: The Shadow Side of the Church's Fight against Disestablishment', *JWRH*, 3 (1995), pp. 35-53, on pp. 38-39.

²⁹ *PFP*, 16 January 1869.

of England by law established, with its Book of Common Prayer enforced by the Act of Uniformity, did not satisfy the Puritans among whom the Baptist movement began. As D. Denzil Morgan described it succinctly:

The Puritans' vision was for a far more radical reformation than the Reformers had allowed, placing the catholic form of the church and its episcopal government inherited from the medieval past, under a much more bracing scriptural discipline than the Reformers would have wished.³⁰

Thomas Thomas's strongest condemnation of Anglicanism was that it was 'but Popery modified and reformed; but still retaining much of its heathenish ceremonialism, and some of its most unscriptural doctrines'.³¹ Thomas still believed that Baptists and Anglicans could work together in one community as will be shown in Chapter Six. At the same time, though Thomas did not accept the Pope, he had no hostility to the Roman Catholic Church as a separate independent denomination within a family of disestablished Churches.

Thomas opposed the government grant to the Roman Catholic seminary at Maynooth in Ireland for the same reason that he disapproved of State grants to Nonconformist schools in Wales and the parliamentary grants that had been paid to Nonconformist ministers of the older denominations from the *Regium Donum* since the eighteenth century. It was all part of his opposition to government interference in religious institutions as an imposition upon their freedom. When the disestablishment of the Church in Ireland was part of the Liberal party programme in the election campaign of 1868, Thomas advocated its support by Nonconformists in Wales as a prelude to the election of an increased number of Liberal Nonconformist MPs in Wales in preparation for achieving wider disestablishment.³²

³⁰ D. Denzil Morgan, 'Conflicting Commitments? Baptist Identity and Welsh National Consciousness, 1649 to the Present', in *Baptist Identities, International Studies from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Centuries* ed. Ian M. Randall, Toivo Pilli and Anthony R. Cross (Paternoster, 2006), pp. 45-55, on p.47.

³¹ Thomas Thomas, *The Leaven of the Modern Pharisees and Sadducees* (MEBA Circular Letter, Cardiff, 1877), p. 4.

³² MEBA, 14/15 April 1868, Ebbw Vale, Minute 4.

Evidence of Thomas's good-will towards all disestablished Churches was revealed in a little-known exchange between Nonconformist leaders in 1850 over the appointment of Bishop Nicholas Wiseman as Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster by Pope Pius IX and the setting up of new Roman Catholic dioceses and bishops with territorial titles, similar to Church of England bishops, though named after different cities. Many Nonconformists agreed with the majority of people in the Established Church that this was an insult to the Archbishop of Canterbury and even a threat to the Queen's supremacy over the Church.³³

For two decades the Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales had received episcopal ministry from Vicars Apostolic, without territory. In 1850, to acknowledge increasing numbers of Roman Catholics in England and Wales, Pope Pius IX agreed to set up the Roman Catholic hierarchy with twelve bishops, in addition to Wiseman as Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster. It is not necessary here to describe the anti-Roman Catholic hysteria that followed the establishment of the bishops. Part of the reason for this hysteria was the state of the Church of England at that time. Some of the hysteria was attributed to the exaggerated terms in which Wiseman's pastoral letter of 7 October, 1850, announced the hierarchy and his own elevation as Cardinal Archbishop. This was followed by a sermon from the Anglican convert and future Cardinal, J.H. Newman, in similar exaggerated rhetoric.³⁴

There was a wave of anti-papalism throughout England and Wales such as had not been experienced since Roman Catholic emancipation in 1829. That has been well documented.³⁵ What is less known is the division that the so-called 'papal aggression' aroused among those who belonged to other Churches but viewed the establishment of Roman Catholic bishops in

³³ Chadwick, *Victorian Church*, Part 1, pp. 286-291; Machin, *Politics and the Churches in Great Britain, 1832-1868*, p. 221.

³⁴ Chadwick, *Victorian Church*, Part 1, pp. 291-293. Wiseman and Newman described the appointment of the new bishops as the return of England (sic) to the true Church.

³⁵ *ibid*, pp.203-207; Machin, *Politics and the Churches in Great Britain, 1832-1868*, pp. 218-222; Larsen, *Friends of Religious Liberty*, pp.230-234; *Nonconformist*, 4 December 1850, p. 970, described 'a fearful riot' in Birkenhead.

different lights. Thomas Thomas would have agreed with the new Roman Catholic Bishop of Birmingham who wrote in a letter to *The Times* that the hierarchy was simply an 'internal affair of church government entirely concerned with spiritual matters'.³⁶ Thomas was surprised to find that the leaders of the ASCA were divided over the matter. He read a letter from the Revd J.P. Mursell of Leicester in the *Nonconformist* on 25 November 1850 claiming that the recent conduct of

the Pontiff of Rome is, in my decided opinion, a most audacious infringement on the civil supremacy of the Queen, and as such ought to be indignantly resisted by every loyal and patriotic subject.³⁷

Thomas respected Mursell as a prominent Baptist leader who had pioneered the work of the ASCA in Leicester where he had worked with Edward Miall when Miall was a Congregational minister there. One historian, J.P. Ellens, has tried to distinguish between those whom he categorises as moderate or militant Dissenters on the basis of their reaction to the papal aggression in the establishment of the Roman Catholic hierarchy.³⁸ Ellens also suggested that the enthusiasm among Dissenters for anti-Catholic legislation in 1851 was an indication that the ASCA had not won mass support for militant voluntarism. The trouble with that diagnosis is that Ellens had already presented Mursell as a militant voluntarist, but he was now behaving like one of the moderate Dissenters whose 'allegiance to Protestantism generally overwhelmed their voluntarism'.³⁹

Thomas Thomas gave a cautious reply to Mursell's letter of 25 November out of respect for Mursell and also because the *Patriot* newspaper had pilloried the anti-papal position taken by Mursell and others.⁴⁰ Thomas wrote as follows:

³⁶ *The Times*, 22 October 1850. Chadwick, *Victorian Church*, Part 1, p. 293.

³⁷ *Nonconformist*, 27 November 1850.

³⁸ Ellens, *Religious Routes to Gladstonian Liberalism*, pp. 104-105.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 83-85.

All who know Mr. Mursell of Leicester must respect his opinion on any point relating to the bearings of the Anti State-Church question. I confess I have been a little surprised to find him express his decided opinion 'that the conduct of the Pope of Rome is a most audacious infringement on the *civil supremacy* of the Queen'. As a constant reader of the Patriot as well as the Nonconformist I have seen very many strong assertions to the same effect. I have been anxiously, but in vain, looking through speeches, letters, and leading articles, for something like a clear and calm statement of the *grounds* on which this conclusion is founded—a conclusion from which I have hitherto felt compelled to dissent. I know no man better able than Mr. Mursell to render a reason; and really, Sir, a little logic would be very tranquillizing amid the roar and fury of this anti-papal hurricane.⁴¹

Mursell became President of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland in 1864, some eight years before Thomas himself. Mursell went on refusing to believe that

the Pope of Rome or any foreign potentate has without consulting the authorities of the land the right to institute titles with territorial jurisdiction in this realm.⁴²

Mursell continued to champion the prerogative of 'our beloved Queen' though there is no evidence that she was concerned. The editorial in the *Nonconformist* of 4 December 1850 had tried to put the issue into perspective by stating:

How anyone, seeing what he might have seen during the last six weeks, can imagine our Protestantism to be in peril because the Pope has substituted an archbishop and twelve bishops for eight Vicars Apostolic we are at a loss to understand.⁴³

Thomas Thomas showed by his letter to the *Nonconformist* and what he said to the Monmouthshire County meeting at Usk in December 1850 in response to the Papal aggression, that he certainly believed that the Pope had 'simply effected a change in the administration of the affairs of the Roman Catholic Church' and 'any legal interference with any religion unconnected with the state is an invasion of the rights of Her Majesty's subjects'.⁴⁴ That was the failed amendment put to the Usk meeting by a Roman Catholic to the proposal that was

⁴¹ *Nonconformist*, 4 December 1850.

⁴² Ernest A. Payne, *The Baptist Union* (London, 1959), p. 258; *Nonconformist*, 19 December 1850, p. 1036.

⁴³ *Nonconformist*, 4 December 1850, p. 978; Machin, *Politics and the Churches*, p. 222.

⁴⁴ *MM*, 21 and 28 December 1850.

‘passed overwhelmingly’ against the ‘Pope’s infringement of the prerogatives of the Crown.’ Thomas regarded the meeting as ‘a Church of England meeting’. It had been convened by the High Sheriff at the request of the Lord Lieutenant, Capel Hanbury Leigh and other ‘Gentry and Clergy’ and included the MPs, fifteen local gentry, twenty-six Anglican clergy and their archdeacon, seven Dissenting ministers and one Roman Catholic priest.

When Thomas addressed the annual meeting of the Pontypool ASCA in January 1851, chaired by his friend William Conway in the British school, he described his experience at the County meeting in December, as being

quickly made to feel that he was no longer among an assembly of anti State-Church Association men, nor of Dissenters...(and) it was plain he was surrounded by a multitude of Protestants, standing up for their religion, but utterly ignorant of the principles of civil and religious liberty.⁴⁵

It was Stephen Price who expressed what all the Voluntaryists felt at that Pontypool meeting. They endorsed his view that, though he objected to the doctrines of the Church of Rome, he had seen

Nothing to convince him that the late act of the Pope had violated any law of the British Constitution-any prerogative of the Crown; and therefore he could consent to no legal interference. If Dissenters assisted in re-enacting the penal laws, those very laws might some day be turned against themselves.⁴⁶

Thomas never changed his mind about the rights of any religious body to make its own internal arrangements for the well-being of its life and administration. Yet the whole issue was further confused by Russell’s introduction of the Ecclesiastical Titles Bill, which passed through Parliament in the first six months of 1851. The Act made it an offence for Roman Catholic bishops to use territorial titles, derived from British place-names though they avoided

⁴⁵ *Nonconformist*, 29 January 1851

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

the names of Anglican dioceses. Some of the new bishops used their titles from 1850 with impunity. There were no prosecutions under the Act, which Gladstone repealed twenty years later, but conscientious voluntaryists found it very difficult to accept what Russell had done by using parliament to compromise the freedom of a disestablished Church.

The Liberation Society and Local Politics

The process of what has been called the ‘gradual disestablishment’ of the Church of England went on throughout the nineteenth century and outlived Thomas Thomas.⁴⁷ He and his colleagues were willing to co-operate with any group or society that might help them to achieve redress of their disabilities. The *Nonconformist* newspaper, founded by Edward Miall in 1841, provided them with a valuable English-language voice for their grievances. The setting up of the Anti State-Church Association at the London Conference in April-May 1844 was warmly welcomed by the students of Pontypool Baptist College in their letter to the *Nonconformist* noted in Chapter 5. That might have been expected, since their Principal was a member of the organising committee of the Conference, attended its sessions and spoke there, and was voted to serve thereafter on its executive committee and council of five hundred members. Thomas continued with active membership of those committees for the rest of his time in Pontypool. The Anti State-Church Association, which changed its name in 1853 to the Liberation Society, received overwhelming support in Monmouthshire from the Baptists, centred on Pontypool College.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Gilbert, *Religion and Society in Industrial England*, p. 163.

⁴⁸ *Nonconformist*, 31 January 1844; London Metropolitan Library, Liberation Society Minute Books, A/LIB/1, M275, M329, M382, M384, M385, M388, M391, M404, M761, M824-6. A/LIB/2, M25, M38, M478. A/LIB/3, M139. A/LIB/4, M1010. Triennial Conferences, A/LIB/382 (1856), A/LIB/384 (1864), A/LIB/385 (1865), A/LIB/388 (1868), A/LIB/391 (1871).

It will be seen in this section of the chapter that Thomas Thomas's long reign as Principal of Pontypool College for forty years after 1836, and the interest in the work of the Society that he inspired in his colleagues and students, helped to develop the Society's work in Wales. That however was not Thomas's primary purpose. The Liberation Society served as an agency to assist Thomas and his colleagues in the political development of Pontypool as well as providing political support for the removal of Nonconformist disabilities. This would ultimately depend upon the disestablishment of the Church, for which purpose Thomas and his colleagues knew that they had to gain much more political commitment from their fellow Nonconformists than the latter were prepared to give in 1853. Although Edward Miall was himself a Congregational/Independent minister and the principles of the Liberation Society for 'Ecclesiastical self-rule and self-support' were 'extraordinarily compatible with the private theological convictions of English Congregationalists',⁴⁹ it remained true that the ASCA (Liberation Society) 'did not have a honeymoon period with the great and the good of Congregationalism'.⁵⁰ As late as 1868 only two of the 23 annual subscribers to the Pontypool branch of the Liberation Society were not members of Crane Street Baptist church. As far as the Methodists were concerned, Wesleyans generally did not support the campaign for disestablishment but 'sought to bolster the State Church'.⁵¹ In Wales Calvinistic Methodists came to support disestablishment by 1886 and their support for the established Church wavered after the Education Commissioners' Reports in 1847. In Trefethin parish, where there was little settled Methodist ministry, Thomas Thomas was invited to preach in their churches and had good working relationships with the Methodists after 1853.

Edward Miall resigned from being a Congregational minister in Leicester to devote himself entirely to the work of 'separating the Church of England from the State'. He set up

⁴⁹ Larsen, *Friends of Religious Equality*, p. 88.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 83.

⁵¹ Ibid, p. 100.

the *Nonconformist* newspaper for that purpose and challenged all the Dissenting ministers with 'unfaithfulness to sacred principles, evasion of a noble mission, and seeming recklessness of all the mighty interests at issue'. Miall was undeterred when the Congregational Union claimed that they were not political Dissenters. He responded by stating that the political issue was insignificant compared with the spiritual principle. Miall's greatest achievement was the setting up of the ASCA in 1844, but the editor of the Congregational Magazine was not reconciled to the movement.⁵²

Miall paid his first visit to Pontypool Baptist College in October 1848. At a meeting in Newport on his way to Pontypool he gave his first address to a Welsh audience. Miall disclaimed any gift for Welsh oratory, but he went on to praise the success of the 'voluntary principle' as shown by the progress of the Dissenters in providing themselves with chapels and paying 'all the expenses of their own worship'. As must have been expected in Newport in the wake of the Chartist Rising, Miall said that they were 'not physical-force men' and they did not intend to resort to violence, but they must prepare and instruct their congregations, 'by instilling into their minds the doctrines they advocated'. As a result of Miall's speech there were a number of recruits to the ASCA and a certain amount of money was subscribed to the Association.⁵³ The meeting was chaired by the Revd William Allen, Minister of Commercial Street Baptist chapel, where he had succeeded the Revd D. Rhys Stephen, fellow-delegate with Thomas Thomas at the London Conference in 1844.⁵⁴

From the time of that first conference in 1844 it was determined that the work of the Liberation Society would be conducted in a just and peaceful way in an attempt to convince

⁵² John Waddington, *Congregational History, 1800-1850* (London, 1878), 4, pp. 551ff.; ODNB sub. Miall, Edward (ref: odnb/18647); Clyde Binfield, *So Down to Prayers: Studies in English Nonconformity, 1780-1920* (London, 1977), pp. 101-124. Miall is seen as evidence that the ministerial classes were also the 'teaching and communicating classes'.

⁵³ *Nonconformist*, 18 October 1848.

⁵⁴ *Nonconformist*, 17 April, 26 June 1844.

people throughout Britain of the need for disestablishment by visiting them, appointing agents and lecturers and communicating their message with

Christian forbearance, candour and charity but with unflinching firmness and untiring perseverance-prayerfully and with dependence upon the blessing of the Most High-any departure from this temper will retard the success of the enterprise.

Miall's message was certainly not wasted on Thomas Thomas. He himself chaired the 'large and enthusiastic assembly' at the British school-room in Pontypool on 11 October 1848. The *Monmouthshire Merlin* reported that Thomas had described the ASCA as 'unsectarian', 'evangelical', 'not destructive' of episcopal buildings or worship or doctrine. The Association wished only to influence public opinion without force to disrupt the alliance between church and state. It was anti state-church not anti-church. The report of that meeting in the *Nonconformist* referred to the 'intolerant spirit of the members of the Church of England here' and the 'persecution to which some of the leading Dissenters have been subjected' and the resistance they had shown, leading to their loss of property.⁵⁵

In the minds of the Dissenters injustices were followed quickly by more injustices, as we have seen in earlier chapters: distraint on their property after their refusal to pay the compulsory Church rate was followed by the Reports of the Educational Commissioners and their aftermath. The seven lectures by Thomas Thomas and his colleagues had been delivered at the end of 1847 to highlight the principles by which the Nonconformists came to question the State-Church settlement. Paramount importance was now attached to the Anti State-Church Association. In spite of Edward Miall's disclaiming oratorical skills before the people of Newport, he was praised at Pontypool for delivering 'a most elaborate and masterly oration' which 'riveted the attention of one of the largest audiences ever assembled in this place'. He soon won the approval of his audience by his insistence on 'the absurdity of coercion in matters

⁵⁵ *MM*, 21 October 1848; *Nonconformist*, 18 October 1848.

of conscience'.⁵⁶ Miall also made an eloquent appeal for people to join the Association, which a number of them did. After a further meeting addressed by Miall in Pontypool on Thursday evening, again chaired by Thomas Thomas, a Pontypool committee of the Association was formed. Mr. William Conway, already a member of the Council of the Association, was enthusiastic and said that what he had been charged for the Church rate, which he did not intend to pay, he would give to the Association. Thomas Thomas and others said that they would follow his example.⁵⁷

Edward Miall's lecture tour in south Wales in 1848 was a success. As a follow-up the Association sent John Kingsley, one of its main agents, to south Wales in 1849. He spoke at Newport on 28 November to a meeting chaired by the Mayor T.B. Batchelor, a Nonconformist leader and timber-merchant, whose brother, John Batchelor, also a timber-merchant, became Lord Mayor of Cardiff in 1853 and was prominent at the Liberation Society Conference in Swansea in 1862.⁵⁸ Kingsley went on to address a crowded meeting at the British school-room in Pontypool. As chairman of the meeting, Thomas Thomas disclaimed any evil design upon episcopacy as such, but commented on the injustice of a State-Church. The Revd Stephen Price of Abersychan also spoke, as did the Independent Minister, Mr. Keddle. John Kingsley's address was followed by one from John Carvell Williams, the London-Welsh Secretary of the Association, who praised the power of the voluntary principle as exemplified in the history of Wales. He claimed that 'willinghood' was the 'right principle of action and the cheapest and most efficient means of extending Christianity'.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ *Nonconformist*, 18 October 1848.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Nonconformist*, 28 November 1849. Neil Evans, 'The Welsh Victorian City', *WHR*, 12:3 (June 1985), pp. 350-387, on pp. 358-360. Tom B. Batchelor, Mayor of Newport was a member of Commercial Street Baptist church, Newport. See GRO/D1884.21. His more famous brother, John, was a Congregationalist. See ODNB article by Neil Evans (ref: odnb/101138).

⁵⁹ *Nonconformist*, 28 November 1849

The Minute Book of the Committee of the British Anti State-Church Association reveals that Kingsley returned to south Wales in 1851, accompanied by a Mr. Clapp, and another 'South Wales Tour' started on 20 April 1852, when the Revd D.M. Evans of Manchester came with the Revd Charles Short of Swansea.⁶⁰ As mentioned earlier in this chapter Professor Ieuan Gwynedd Jones has described the debt that is owed to the Liberation Society for making Welsh Dissenters 'more prepared to give political expression to their religious sentiments'.⁶¹ I.G. Jones claimed that it took them nearly twenty-five years to get to that point of political commitment. The frequent exhortation in Monmouthshire from the English Baptist Association brought commitment to disestablishment ten years earlier than that, but the franchise was still inadequate and there was no secret ballot. In the light of that fact the alleged threat of exclusion if Dissenters didn't vote for parliamentary candidates who would deliver on disestablishment will need to be addressed in response to the claims of Matthew Cragoe.

Cragoe claimed that Nonconformist ministers in Wales bullied their congregations into voting Liberal, and in 1868 threatened them with exclusion from their chapels if they did not do so.⁶² In fairness to Cragoe, he acknowledges that this was a charge made by Conservatives at the time of the election and not one that was based upon a proper understanding of the relationships between ministers and congregations in most chapels in Wales. The influence of a Dissenting minister upon his congregation was considerable. Their relationship was symbiotic and based upon what was collectively perceived as being in the best interests of all members; it was acknowledged to be important to laypeople who were certainly invoked by their ministers to preserve jealously the integrity of their individual consciences. In fact, many

⁶⁰ Liberation Society Minutes, A/LIB/ 1,2,M407.M763.

⁶¹ Jones, 'The Liberation Society and Welsh Politics, 1844-1868', *WHR*, vol.2 (1968), pp. 193-224.

⁶² Cragoe, *Culture, Politics and National Identity in Wales*, pp.154, 181.

of the examples that Cragoe gives of Chapel-enforced conformity concern the influence of lay people on one another.⁶³

Cragoe was taken to task by Ioan Matthews in a debate in *Past and Present* in 2000 for blaming the ministers for allowing chapels to be used for local Liberal meetings when the decision may have been made by the church meeting.⁶⁴ Matthews was correct to criticise Cragoe for failing to understand the world of chapel politics from the inside, but more as an outside observer. Cragoe also assumed that a chapel was co-terminous with a community when there were a number of separate chapels even in small districts. Matthews over-stated the extent to which Cragoe's apparent failure to consult Welsh-language newspapers prejudiced his conclusions. Cragoe was right to reply that 'Welsh-language newspapers contain no secret messages about the political life of Liberal Wales' and the ideological positions of the Welsh political leaders were forged in a British context. Cragoe was also correct in saying that there is no 'large corpus of modern scholarly material on nineteenth century Dissent in Wales' but much work needs to be done on the lives of the Dissenting ministers and the interplay of relationships and social composition of their chapels as well as the working relationships between the separate denominations.⁶⁵

Cragoe acknowledges that the election meetings in industrial Monmouthshire in 1868 relied 'less heavily on Dissenting preachers' than others he found elsewhere.⁶⁶ The Welsh and English Baptists in Monmouthshire and individual preachers themselves encouraged their congregations, or such as had the vote, to remember their obligations to their fellow Dissenters by voting for candidates who would best represent their true interests. If any of those preachers made threats of exclusion from chapel membership, there is no available evidence that any

⁶³ Cragoe, *Culture, Politics and National Identity*, pp. 198-199.

⁶⁴ *Past and Present*, 169 (November, 2000), pp. 194-204, Debate. Matthew Cragoe's 'Reply' follows on pages 205-213, *PP*, 169 (November, 2000).

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Cragoe, *Culture, Politics and National Identity*, p. 193.

such threats were carried into action by Baptists in Monmouthshire. In fact the address by the Revd Sidney Young to the Monmouthshire English Baptist Association meeting at Ebbw Vale in 1868 was strongly in favour of aiming to restore to full church membership anyone who had been excluded 'without regard to the particular sins committed'.⁶⁷

Cragoe drew attention to an editorial in the *Star of Gwent* newspaper for Saturday 13 February 1869 which reported that a quarterly meeting at Llanwenarth of the Welsh Baptist Association in Monmouthshire had disapproved of those Baptists who had voted for the Tories in the 1868 election and had even influenced other Baptists to follow their example.⁶⁸ The report claimed that the Association had said that Baptists had no right 'to choose between a Liberal and a Tory' and those who did so betrayed 'either lamentable ignorance of the principles of the Baptists or much wicked unfaithfulness to their Christian profession by spitting in the face of Nonconformity'.⁶⁹ In fact there was no Welsh Baptist Association meeting at Llanwenarth at that time, but the condemnation was uttered at a meeting of Welsh Baptists by the Revd John Jones (Mathetes) of Rhymney. No threat of exclusion from any Welsh chapel was made.⁷⁰

Mathetes was condemned by Baptist laymen in letters to the *Star of Gwent* and the *Monmouthshire Merlin*, though he tried to explain his comments in both newspapers. He did not however get away with his remarks in spite of hiding behind the authority of Thomas Thomas whom he quoted as saying that a 'Baptist Tory is something like an honest rogue, a chaste adulterer or a sober drunkard'.⁷¹ The fact that Mathetes was condemned by Baptist laymen for what he said, suggests that the power of preacher influence in Monmouthshire was

⁶⁷ Sidney Young, 'Excommunication', Circular Letter, *MEBA*, April 1868 (Cardiff, 1868), p.8.

⁶⁸ Matthew Cragoe, 'Conscience or Coercion? Clerical influence at the General Election of 1868 in Wales', *PP*, 149 (1995), p.155

⁶⁹ *SG*, 13 February 1869.

⁷⁰ *SG*, 20 February 1869; *MM*, 20 March 1869.

⁷¹ *SG*, 13 February, 6 March 1869; *MM*, 13 March, 20 March 1869.

not absolute and not unthinking. That no Baptist was excommunicated for not voting Liberal is evidence that the Nonconformist voters knew that they had more to fear from their employers than from their chapels.

An editorial in the *Star of Gwent* on 28 November 1868 put it much more strongly than that. After referring to the expected Liberal victory in Monmouthshire based on 'the sympathies of a large majority' of the people and 'the promises which had been given to the canvassers for the candidate' the newspaper claimed that the Monmouthshire election demonstrated the 'ascendancy of our aristocracy even in the day when democratic rule is made the bugbear on the hustings', and it was futile to try to obtain 'an honest, unbiased, uninfluenced, unintimidated, unreserved collective vote from the constituency of this great county'.⁷² There were not enough voters in industrial Monmouthshire to overcome the powerful influence that the candidates of the ruling houses of Tredegar and Beaufort had over rural Monmouthshire in the persons of C.O.S. Morgan and P.G.H. Somerset. Even the entreaties for industrial voters to 'plump vote' for the Liberal candidate failed to achieve the desired result.⁷³

Expectation of a Liberal victory in Monmouthshire in 1868 was high, not least among the Dissenters who had been working for it since 1862.⁷⁴ The disappointment felt by the supporters of Colonel Clifford, the Liberal candidate, from Blaenafon to Newport was palpable and produced the riots in Blaenafon, Abersychan, Pontypool and Newport after the results were declared.⁷⁵ If Baptist ministers were open and eloquent supporters of the Liberals, it was no more than the expression of their desire for an expected outcome which alone could deliver disestablishment of the Church in Ireland and voting by secret ballot in the next Parliament. Speakers said as much in the meeting of Liberals in the British schoolroom in Pontypool on

⁷² *SG*, 28 November 1868.

⁷³ Margaret Escott, 'Parliamentary Representation', in *The Gwent County History*, vol 4, pp. 265-290 on p. 275.

⁷⁴ See next section on 1862 Conference.

⁷⁵ *MM*, 28 November 1868; *PPF*, 28 November 1868.

Friday 13 November 1868. The Chairman, Mr. Charles Davies, ironmonger, urged the meeting to vote for Colonel Clifford if only for his advocacy of 'the ballot', while his son, Ebenezer H. Davies, also an ironmonger and trainee Baptist minister, called upon the electors to vote only for men who would hasten the disestablishment of the Irish Church.⁷⁶

In a meeting in November 1868, with its usual four resolutions duly proposed and seconded and unanimously agreed, Thomas Thomas, who had already made clear his commitment to Colonel Clifford, spoke as the seconder of the first resolution that 'proper representation in parliament is an important privilege to a constituency'.⁷⁷ Thomas said that it was very important for the country to have a Liberal government at that time because 'the history of Toryism was the history of tyranny in Church and State'. Thomas commended Gladstone as an 'honest, intellectual, practical philanthropist and Christian...a man who feared God and loved his neighbour...and ought to hold the helm of public affairs'. The Tory candidates in Monmouthshire were good landlords, thought Thomas, but that did not qualify them to represent the county in Parliament, and speaking of a Baptist Tory was like speaking 'of an honest rogue or a pious sinner'.⁷⁸ The other proposers and seconders and speakers at the meeting were mostly Dissenters associated with Thomas Thomas in the work of the Liberation Society in Pontypool: John Havard and Thomas Brooks Smith, John Daniel, William Conway, Evan Prosser and the Revd Jason Jenkyns, an Independent minister.⁷⁹

There was no doubt about the political allegiance of the Pontypool subscribers to the Liberation Society in 1868. They reflected the position expressed by the Society itself as it approached the General Election in its 'consideration of those grave questions affecting the relations of religious communities to the State'.⁸⁰ Monmouthshire Liberationists knew that they

⁷⁶ *PFP*, 21 November 1868.

⁷⁷ *PFP*, 21 November 1868.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* This was the oxymoron that Mathetes adopted and developed in 1869.

⁷⁹ A/LIB/385

⁸⁰ *Ibid*

had to vote Liberal to achieve their desire for disestablishment when Octavius Morgan, one of the Tory candidates, had already vowed determined opposition to the disestablishment of the Church in Ireland.⁸¹

Thomas Thomas had preached to his congregation at Crane Street chapel on Sunday 8 November on 'the duties of Christian citizens in reference to the General Election'. The sermon has not survived but its text was taken from Philippians 1, verse 27: 'Only live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that...I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind'.⁸² Thomas's congregation knew exactly how he would cast his vote and most of them probably did the same, but he would not have expressed himself in such political terms in his sermon as in his speech in the British school on the following Friday and there was certainly no threat of expulsion from the chapel for those who did not follow his example.⁸³

The Monmouthshire English Baptist Association set up by Thomas Thomas, as described in the next chapter, met in Abergavenny in April 1869. The Association thanked those who had voted Liberal as recommended by the conference in Ebbw Vale a year earlier 'in anticipation of measures having an important bearing on the rights and liberties of Nonconformist churches' in the next Parliament. The conference condemned 'the want of fidelity to those principles evinced by some members of the denomination' who voted for candidates openly opposed to the disestablishment of the Church in Ireland. There was no threat of expulsion from any of the churches.⁸⁴ The *Star of Gwent* concluded that the only remedy for such disappointment was the secret ballot which was eagerly expected in November 1868, but was out of sight when the ASCA began its work in 1844. In 1868 there was no secret

⁸¹ *MM*, 14 November 1868.

⁸² NLW, MS 21923G 4B, Thomas Thomas, Texts of 6,000 Sermons.

⁸³ Thomas Morgan, *The Life and Work of the Rev. Thomas Thomas*, p. 62.

⁸⁴ *MEBA, Circular Letters 1857-65*, ed. Thomas Richards (Newport, 1947), Ebbw Vale, April 1868, Resolution 10; Abergavenny, April 1869, Resolution 11.

ballot in parliamentary elections and a mixed reception for politicisation in many self-governing churches of the Baptist and Independent denominations. At the same time, many churches wanted disestablishment as an early unrealisable catch-all solution to their grievances.⁸⁵

From his statistical review of Welsh representation at the founding conference of the ASCA in 1844, Ieuan Gwynedd Jones reveals the strong representation of twenty-two delegates from Wales, eight of them from Monmouthshire, the largest delegation in Wales, and twice as many as came from Glamorgan.⁸⁶ Three of the eight were Baptist ministers: Revds Thomas Thomas and Edward Evans of Pontypool and D. Rhys Stephen of Newport. The laymen were from Newport, Pontypool, Ebbw Vale and Abergavenny. Of the forty-three Welsh representatives on the General Council of 500, the Revd Hugh Jones of Tredegar, the predecessor of the Revd Evan Jones (Ieuan Gwynedd) at Saron Independent chapel until 1845, was there, together with fellow-Independent ministers, Hugh Griffiths of Brecon and David Rees of Llanelli, but they were outnumbered by Baptists.⁸⁷

J.P. Ellens has claimed that only the Baptists sent official representatives to the founding conference of the ASCA and that many leading Dissenters, laymen and ministers, withheld their support through fear of radicalism and secularism. It was feared that the spirituality of evangelical Dissent would be threatened by involvement in the political programme of the ASCA. Edward Miall, himself would argue in 1850 that

the Churches would lose nothing of their spirituality in such increased attention to temporal affairs, so long as their own motive and end were spiritual...⁸⁸

⁸⁵ *SG*, 28 November 1868.

⁸⁶ Ieuan Gwynedd Jones, *WHR*, 2 (1961) pp. 203-204. He does not name the delegates but gives only the statistics.

⁸⁷ Liberation Society Minutes, A/LIB/275, Proceedings of the First ASC Conference, April 30, May 1 and 2, 1844.

⁸⁸ Ellens, *Religious Routes to Gladstonian Liberalism*, pp. 89-90. Edward Miall, *The British Churches in Relation to the British People* (London, 1850) p. 295.

Thomas Thomas said as much on 9 November 1847 in the first of those published lectures in Pontypool:

It surely cannot be foreign to the purposes of the Christian ministry to point out to the people their duties and dangers as members of a civil community...The evil they have to dread is such an anxious and disproportionate attention to secular matters as must interfere with the proper discharge of the higher duties of their office...⁸⁹

The Revd William Roberts (Nefydd) as south Wales agent of the British and Foreign School Society in the decade after 1853, complained that the influence of Thomas Thomas against the acceptance of government grants for schools had prevented the building of British Schools in industrial Monmouthshire where Nonconformists predominated but there was a proliferation of National schools

and that chiefly through the influence of our great voluntary educationist, Thomas Thomas DD, Pontypool College....This fact would be worthy of Mr. Miall's notice, who is the great director of Dr. Thomas's thought.⁹⁰

That was in January 1862 and not the first entry in Nefydd's diary to express his frustration over the influence that Thomas had on the Nonconformist industrialists who refused to agree to the building of state-aided schools for the children of their Nonconformist workmen in spite of Nefydd's best efforts on their behalf.⁹¹ The whole incident highlights the influence of Thomas Thomas as a Voluntarist in industrial south Wales as late as 1862. It also suggests that Nefydd, a fellow Welsh-speaking Monmouthshire Baptist minister, who had collaborated with Thomas in the work of the College, believed that Thomas was a disciple of Edward

⁸⁹ Thomas Thomas, *The Duty of Religious Men to study the times in which they live and to apply their energies to the right conduct of public affairs* (London, 1848) p. 8.

⁹⁰ NLW Nefydd MSS 7106E, 30 January 1862.

⁹¹ NLW Nefydd MSS 7106E, 2 May 1859.

Miall.⁹² Miall and Thomas had much in common and Thomas was a very useful member of the Liberation Society for thirty years, but it all seems to have been for a purpose that he had already perceived, and was not undertaken under the influence of a former English Congregationalist minister with whose views he agreed. Miall and his Liberation Society were important to Thomas and his colleagues as a means of achieving their own goals. It was not so much what Thomas and his Voluntaryists did for the Liberation Society and its aims, but it was more a case of what the Liberation Society could do to obtain freedom from their Nonconformist disabilities for Thomas and his fellow-Baptists, whose ultimate goal was disestablishment.⁹³

Thomas Thomas was active in the Society from the time of its first conference in 1844. He was proposing motions and getting himself elected to the committee as a country member. That saved him from having to attend the fortnightly meetings of the committee in London where it was sometimes left to the London members to struggle to get a quorum.⁹⁴ He corresponded fairly frequently with the Society over the years, particularly in the 1850s, as did the Conway brothers, William and Charles, and their nephew John of Abergavenny. After 1850 the Revd Thomas Price, by then established in his ministry in Aberdare, had joined the correspondents. Sadly the Minute Books of the Society record only lists of correspondents and reveal nothing of their letters.⁹⁵ Exceptions to this rule had to wait until 1868 when the Secretary, John Carvell Williams recorded in full the letters he received from Mr. Gladstone

⁹² NLW Nefydd MSS 7779E, 17 October 1851; Pontypool Baptist College, *Annual Report 1863* (Aberdare, 1863). W. Roberts, Blaenau, had preached at the Annual Meeting in 1859 and was a member of the Central Committee of the College, pp. 4 and 11.

⁹³ Ellens, *Religious Routes to Gladstonian Liberalism*, p. 126.

⁹⁴ Liberation Society Minutes, A/LIB/ 2, 21 December 1855.

⁹⁵ LSM, A/LIB/1, vol.2, M25,M31,M329,M391,M404,M444,M461,M529,M575, M748,M761,M909,M919,M942.

and the promoters of the compulsory Church Rate Abolition Bill which was passed into law on 31 July 1868.⁹⁶

Gladstone's reply generously acknowledged the part that had been played by the Liberation Society outside Parliament, though he was less sanguine than the Society that the last had been heard of Church rate.⁹⁷ The parliamentary committee of the Liberation Society expressed the hope that the spirit of conciliation which had marked the passage of the Compulsory Church Rate Abolition Bill through parliament would be manifested in the practical working of the measure and would lead the Church of England to a greater appreciation of the value of 'Christian willinghood' in its own affairs.

That 'just and eirenic spirit' had been the aim of the Liberation Society from its inception; it was endorsed by Thomas Thomas when he commended the work of the Liberation Society in Pontypool.⁹⁸ At its founding conference in 1844 it was envisaged that the Society would hold annual meetings and triennial conferences. Thomas was certainly present at all the triennial conferences. At the ninth triennial conference on 2 May 1871 he moved the proposition that the conference approved the efforts of the executive committee to secure for Nonconformists the right to bury in the parochial churchyards of England and Wales with their own services instead of the Burial Service of the Book of Common Prayer. In his speech on that occasion Thomas expressed the hope that Mr. Osborne Morgan MP would be vigorously supported in his efforts to carry the Burial Law Amendment Bill 'as a valuable practical measure admitted to have been framed in a just and conciliatory spirit'.⁹⁹ As with all the legislation supported by the Society its members had to be patient. The Burials Act did not reach the statute book until 1880. Thomas had retired from his post as President of the Baptist

⁹⁶ LSM,A/LIB/4, M156.

⁹⁷ LSM,A/LIB/4,M165, 14 August 1868.

⁹⁸ *Nonconformist*, 28 November 1849.

⁹⁹ LSM, A/LIB/391, Ninth Triennial Conference, 2 May 1871.

College four years before that. He had been warmly thanked by John Carvell Williams in a letter expressing admiration for 'the steadfastness with which you have supported the society in its work'.¹⁰⁰

The Liberation Society Conference of 1862

The last section examined the importance of the Liberation Society in the programme of the Monmouthshire Baptists and analysed the contribution made to the Society by Thomas Thomas and his colleagues in Pontypool. However, another important diversion on the progress of the Society's work in south Wales still needs further investigation: this was the significant two-day Conference in Swansea in September 1862.¹⁰¹ The Conference marked the bi-centenary of the Great Ejection of Nonconformist clergymen from their livings in the Church of England after the Act of Uniformity imposed by Charles II. The 1760 incumbents ejected could not be regarded as the pioneers of disestablishment because they had accepted the State Church, but they were honoured as martyrs of conscience for refusing to accept the religious settlement imposed on them. The only motive for the Conference, when it was proposed in February 1862, seemed to be the need to promote the Society's work in south Wales where many subscriptions were overdue, and where there was a vacancy in the Society's agency. The economic depression in the Lancashire cotton industry at that time meant that the Society had need of an alternative source of income.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Cardiff Central Library MS 4.432, 1 April 1876.

¹⁰¹ A second conference was proposed for north Wales, but that was postponed.

¹⁰² A/LIB/3 Minutes of Executive Committee, 1862-1867, Minute 23, Wales. Ieuan Gwynedd Jones, 'The Liberation Society and Welsh Politics', *WHR*, 1 (1961), pp. 216-219.

More positively, as Ieuan Gwynedd Jones has noted, there was a need to improve the contribution that might be made to the Society's parliamentary programme by the Liberal MPs for the Welsh constituencies where the population was overwhelmingly Nonconformist. Devout Nonconformists had been urged to vote for MPs who signally failed to support Liberationist motions in parliament, particularly on the disendowment of the established Church, University reform, qualifications for public office and Nonconformists' burials. The need to remedy this was well-expressed by the third resolution of the Conference:

That this Conference is of opinion that Welsh Nonconformity has never been adequately represented in the House of Commons-that while the population of Wales contains a much larger proportion of Dissenters than is to be found in England, Ireland or Scotland, the relative number of their Parliamentary representatives is much less than in either of those countries; and that, even of those Welsh members who attach themselves to the Liberal party, the majority are in the habit of treating questions deeply interesting to the friends of religious liberty with culpable remissness; that this Conference is constrained to admit that, for these reasons, the parliamentary influence exerted by Wales for the advancement of the voluntary principle has been comparatively small, and having such a conviction, the Conference is earnestly solicitous that practical steps should be taken for so improving the Welsh representation as to bring it into harmony with the views and feelings of the population.¹⁰³

Both Edward Miall in a long speech, and Mr. John Carvell Williams in the paper he read to the Conference, spoke effectively in favour of this resolution, which was seconded by the Revd Thomas Price of Aberdare. In that speech, reported more fully in the *Nonconformist* than in *The Cambrian*, Price acknowledged it as an indubitable fact that 'the great bulk of the people of Wales are Nonconformists'.¹⁰⁴ He then went on to make what *The Cambrian* called 'a sensible speech',¹⁰⁵ and Canon E.T. Davies described as 'one of the few occasions when Price was in a moderate mood'.¹⁰⁶ Ieuan Gwynedd Jones, in his study of Dr. Thomas Price, admired Price's speech, which he described as:

¹⁰³ *Nonconformist*, 1 October 1862, p. 830.

¹⁰⁴ *Nonconformist*, 1 October 1862, pp. 831-832.

¹⁰⁵ *Cambrian*, 26 September 1862

¹⁰⁶ Davies, *Religion in the Industrial Revolution in South Wales*, p.88.

remarkable for its quality of political realism, distinguished in this respect from most of the other speeches, and by implication critical of that of Carvell-Williams who had analysed the shortcomings of the Welsh members of Parliament.¹⁰⁷

In fact, Carvell-Williams had analysed the shortcomings very accurately and clinically, and his speech followed that of Edward Miall in the same vein. They were speaking to the same resolution that Thomas Price was both seconding and contradicting. Price stated eloquently that

Three out of every four of the electors of the Principality are under the thumbscrew of one or other of two parties, either the ground landlords, or the iron and coal proprietors, so that they can screw three out of every four of the electors from Cardiff to Holyhead..... (and) it is impossible for us to get members to vote aright upon our questions while the thumbscrews of the landowners and employers are exerted in the opposite direction. Let us work for a few years, and the result will be different from what it is now.¹⁰⁸

Price also drew attention to what Ieuan Gwynedd Jones called:

The lack of ready supply of suitable candidates and the need to hold fast to those few who were true to their constituents despite differences of creed...it was politically unrealistic and morally and socially dangerous to whip up enthusiasm for political causes or to advocate philosophies and courses of action which could not be personified in actual candidates at the hustings.¹⁰⁹

Yet, as Price himself admitted in his speech, Liberal members of Parliament had been returned by 'purging the registers' and urging Nonconformists so qualified to vote Liberal. As Carvell-Williams showed in his speech, timid Liberal MPs were constrained to support their Nonconformist constituents when Nonconformists actively demonstrated in their own interests, such as over Church rate or Endowed schools, and

¹⁰⁷ Jones, 'Dr. Thomas Price and the Election of 1868 in Merthyr Tydfil', part 2, p. 259.

¹⁰⁸ *Nonconformist*, 1 October 1862, pp. 829-831.

¹⁰⁹ Jones, 'Dr. Thomas Price and the Election of 1868 in Merthyr Tydfil', part 2, p. 260.

Much of the laxity of the Welsh Liberal MPs was the result of abstinence from out-door agitation. Where external pressure had been applied the result was different.¹¹⁰

Thomas Price did later have the courage to stand as a Welsh Nonconformist Liberal candidate at Brecon in January 1866, though he retired before the election after testing the young aristocrat who was the alternative Liberal candidate. Price despaired of the voluntaryists there being likely to return a Welsh Nonconformist to Parliament.¹¹¹

The Conference of 1862 was a significant reminder of the Great Ejection of Nonconformist ministers on 24 August (St. Bartholomew's Day), 1662,¹¹² but it had greater significance as a prelude to what happened later. In 1868 Henry Richard, prominent at the Swansea Conference, became one of the MPs for Merthyr Tydfil together with Richard Fothergill, supported by Revd Thomas Price. This resulted in the defeat of H.A. Bruce as MP for Merthyr in spite of Thomas Price's insistence at the Conference in 1862 that Bruce was one of the two MPs whom he would not exchange 'for any two men I know in Wales'.¹¹³

Ieuan Gwynedd Jones acknowledged that Thomas Price never recovered his former leadership in Welsh Nonconformity after 1868. His own social conservatism got the better of him. Jones praised him for being more realistic in his political attitudes, but claimed that it was a realism 'totally out of harmony with the idealistic stage of Welsh political Nonconformity at that time'. But 'without the vision the people perish'.¹¹⁴ A comparison of Thomas Thomas and Thomas Price is instructive. The former had been teacher, guide and mentor to the latter for decades. Thomas Thomas was an ideologue. He never entered the political fray as a candidate in elections for Boards of Guardians, Health or Schools as Thomas Price did. He never presented himself as a parliamentary candidate or became prominent in secular Friendly

¹¹⁰ *Nonconformist*, 1 October 1862, p. 829.

¹¹¹ Ieuan Gwynedd Jones, 'Dr. Thomas Price', part 2, pp. 260-261.

¹¹² The day on which the Act of Uniformity came into force.

¹¹³ *Nonconformist*, 1 October 1862, p. 832. Ieuan Gwynedd Jones, 'Dr. Thomas Price', part 2, pp. 266-269.

¹¹⁴ Proverbs 29, verse 18.

societies, and for that reason perhaps, 1862 was a watershed for him as much as for Thomas Price.¹¹⁵

When E.T. Davies wrote of the Swansea Conference he said that

it was the Baptists rather than the Independents who stole the political thunder in the persons of two local leaders and ministers, Thomas Thomas of Pontypool, and Thomas Price of Aberdare.¹¹⁶

The contrast between the contribution of Thomas and Price to the Conference is significant because it highlights Thomas's stance. Thomas Price delivered a short effective speech based upon personal knowledge and practical experience, and upon his close involvement in local politics and industrial life in Aberdare. Thomas Thomas read a very long paper that he had carefully prepared, described by *The Cambrian* reporter as 'interesting' and by the *Nonconformist* as

A voluminous and eloquent paper on 'The Importance of developing the Power of Welsh Nonconformists to promote the Liberation of Religion from State patronage and control'. In the course of his observations Dr. Thomas said he anticipated that one result of this conference would be the revival of the cry about 'political Dissenters'; but were not politics the morals of nations? And what was a political Dissenter but a Christian Nonconformist honestly doing his duty to God and man?¹¹⁷

Most of what Thomas said in his voluminous paper he had said before in the published papers already discussed. He instanced the Nonconformist grievances over Church rate, rights of burial in parish churchyards, removal of the University tests, abolition of the Maynooth Grant and the Irish *Regium Donum*, removing bishops from the House of Lords and the abolition of State interference in religion. He pointed out the anti-Scriptural character and evil effects of all Church Establishments and the dangers of nominal Christianity being allied with the secular power. He reiterated the numerical disproportion between the Church of England

¹¹⁵ Jones, 'Dr. Thomas Price' part 2, p. 266.

¹¹⁶ Davies, *Religion in the Industrial Revolution in South Wales*, p. 88.

¹¹⁷ *The Cambrian*, 26 September 1862. *Nonconformist*, 1 October 1862, p. 829.

and the Nonconformists in Wales and he urged the need for closer co-operation between Baptists, Independents, Congregationalists and Methodists who were in favour of disestablishment. He also urged the importance of the press and the need to translate the tracts of the Liberation Society into Welsh. He talked again about the abuses of government grants for education and the need to 'render to Caesar the things which are Caesar's and to God the things which are God's'. He urged more Nonconformists to 'Qualify and Register' in order to produce hundreds of Liberal votes

And the constituencies thus enlarged will, it is hoped, find the candidates of sound principle, and be prepared to make the needful efforts and sacrifices for their return.¹¹⁸

That was certainly more idealistic than Thomas Price was prepared to be, but in his final paragraph Thomas Thomas said clearly:

We do not under-rate the formidable difficulties yet to be surmounted and the powerful classes and interests arrayed against us. The contest is sure to be sharp and, perhaps of longer duration than the more sanguine among us anticipate.¹¹⁹

Thomas Price had said nothing that Thomas Thomas did not also say, but the latter had read a long paper in a conference of long papers and speeches, and brevity might have been better.

At the same time, political activists needed thinkers, and one paragraph in Thomas Thomas's paper was different and is worth quoting in full:

Look, now, at Wales. What has the Establishment done for religion or our people, which would not have been much better done without it? [While the character and talents of its four prelates command respect, they now enjoy upwards of £17,000 per annum beside the patronage of several hundreds of 'livings'. Ireland lost nothing by the extinction of ten bishoprics by Lord Derby; and that government would deserve well of our countrymen who would take a similar course in reference to the four Welsh bishoprics.] The people generally look upon the established Church as a worldly institution. And although...a considerable improvement has of late years taken place in

¹¹⁸ *Nonconformist*, 5 November 1862, p. 928. Thomas Thomas, *The Importance of developing the Power of Welsh Nonconformity for the Liberation of Religion from State Patronage and Control*, (London, 1862), p. 9.

¹¹⁹ *Nonconformist*, 5 November 1862, p. 930; Thomas, *The Importance of developing the Power of Welsh Nonconformity*, p. 11.

the administration of ecclesiastical affairs, yet the evils inherent in a State Church still predominate. Wales refutes the argument often urged with effect in England-that though the Voluntary principle may succeed in large towns and amidst a dense population, yet it is inadequate to the support of religion in rural districts where the people are few and poor. We say, look at poor Wales, with less than half the population of London, scattered over thirteen counties, and behold the thousands of chapels, ministers, and schools, with colleges and missions, all created and sustained by Christian willinghood, not only without State aid, but with the disadvantage of the proximity and opposition of the endowed Church.¹²⁰

In 1862, years before any government ever thought that modern Wales was worthy of separate legislation, and before any suggestion had been made that Wales could go it alone on disestablishment without England, Thomas Thomas had the vision to see that it could be done.

Thomas's vision was not shared by the Liberation Society at that time. The Society may have been 'the most important means whereby staunch Nonconformists became political activists', as described by John Davies, who claimed that was 'a central fact in the political history of Wales in the second half of the nineteenth century'¹²¹. The political action took a long time to achieve and the Liberation Society was neither ready for Thomas's initiative nor supportive of any attempt to seek disestablishment for Wales ahead of England for at least two decades after 1862. John Davies recognised the failure of the Liberation Society to support the attempt of Watkin Williams, MP for Denbigh, to introduce a measure in the Commons for the disestablishment of the Church in Wales in May 1870.¹²²

As William B. George observed in an article to mark the golden jubilee of Welsh disestablishment in 1970:

Although the Society used the disestablishment issue as a means of attacking the establishment in a general way, it displayed a definite reluctance to advocate separate legislation for Wales, preferring instead a simultaneous end to ecclesiastical privilege in England as well as in Wales.¹²³

¹²⁰ *Nonconformist*, 5 November 1862, p. 929.

¹²¹ John Davies, *A History of Wales*, (Penguin 1990) p. 393.

¹²² *Ibid*, p. 433.

¹²³ William B. George, 'Welsh Disestablishment and Welsh Nationalism', *JHSCW*, 20:25, 1970, p. 77.

The Policy of the Liberation Society at that time was for wholesale disestablishment of the Church of England; Wales contained four dioceses which overlapped with England and could not be separated from it. The Society's aim at the Swansea Conference in 1862 had been well expressed by John Batchelor, the chairman on its first day, as being called:

to decide upon the best mode by which the Welsh people can assist in achieving the objects for which the Liberation Society has been established...the liberation of Religion from all state patronage and control [and to help] in creating a majority in favour of disestablishment.¹²⁴

Welsh newspapers and magazines had reported demands for disestablishment in Wales as early as the 1830s. Complete opposition to the Established Church was expressed in one newspaper in north Wales two years before Edward Miall published the first edition of his *Nonconformist*.¹²⁵ Yet there was little reporting of the Swansea Conference in Wales apart from a fairly full report in *The Cambrian* of 26 September 1862. The magazines *Y Diwygiwr* and *Seren Gomer* which had always printed abbreviated reports of the annual meetings of the Liberation Society as well as articles on disestablishment, published only brief reports of the Conference. The former magazine, edited by the Congregationalist minister, Revd David Rees, reported that Dr. Thomas Thomas, Pontypool, had read his:

*Papyr hynod o alluog ar y pwys o ddadblygu gallu anghyddfurfiaeth yn Nghymru a'i ddwyn i arweddu ac ryddhad crefyddol.*¹²⁶

[remarkably able paper on the importance of developing the power of Welsh Nonconformity for bringing about religious freedom]

Of the contribution of Dr. Thomas Price to the conference, David Rees wrote:

¹²⁴ *The Cambrian*, 26 September 1862.

¹²⁵ R. Tudur Jones, 'The origins of the Nonconformist Disestablishment Campaign', *JHSCW*, 20:25, 1970, pp. 43-46, 70.

¹²⁶ *Y Diwygiwr*, Hydref 1862, p. 317.

*Yna siaradodd y Parch T. Price, Aberdar, ar y cynyg (sic) oedd o flaen y gynadledd er y dydd o'r blaen, yn ddoniol ac yn hwylus yn ol ei arfer.*¹²⁷

[Then spoke the Revd T. Price, Aberdare, on the proposal in front of the conference since the day before, in his usual humorous and easy way]

The Baptist newspaper *Seren Gomer* reported that Dr. Thomas, Pontypool, had read a paper:

*Yr oedd traethawd Dr. Thomas ar "Y pwysigrwydd o ddadblygiad o allu Anghydfurfiaeth Y Cymru" yn neillduol o dda*¹²⁸

[Dr. Thomas's essay on the importance of developing the power of Welsh Nonconformity was particularly good]

Seren Gomer did not even say that Dr. Price had attended the Conference. In 1862 Dr. Thomas Price was the co-editor of *Seren Cymru*, but no mention was made of his contribution in its short report of the Conference on 10 October 1862. The report did however refer to 'papurau da a gwerthfawr iawn' ['good and very valuable papers']¹²⁹ from Dr. Thomas Rees, a leading Independent minister from Swansea, Dr. Thomas Thomas, Pontypool, Mr. John Carvel Williams and the Revd Thomas Levi, a leading Calvinistic Methodist minister in Morriston.

It has been noted by Ieuan Gwynedd Jones that 'none of the established English weekly newspapers published locally were favourable to the aims of the Association' and this hampered the work of the Liberation Society in south Wales.¹³⁰ Yet the Welsh press did not

¹²⁷ *Y Diwygiwr*, Hydref 1862, p. 318.

¹²⁸ *Seren Gomer*, Hydref 1862, p. 348.

¹²⁹ *Seren Cymru*, 10 Hydref 1862.

¹³⁰ I.G. Jones, *WHR*, 1961, vol. 1(2), p. 210.

give much account of this Conference. Apart from *The Cambrian*, the Liberation Society had to depend upon its own publications to communicate the importance of the Conference.

Ieuan Gwynedd Jones was the first person to raise the profile of Revd Thomas Price at the Conference.¹³¹ *The Cambrian* described Dr. Price's contribution as 'a sensible speech'. As reported in *The Cambrian* the speech was shorter than the report of Price's speech in the *Nonconformist*, though the latter made no comment on the speech. Thomas Thomas's paper was published in full by the *Nonconformist*. When the Liberation Society published Thomas's paper in Welsh and English, two sentences from the paragraph to which attention was drawn earlier in this chapter, were omitted.¹³² The second of those sentences was the more significant, because it urged the government, 'to take a similar course in reference to the four Welsh bishoprics' as Earl Grey's government had done by the abolition of ten bishoprics in the Church of Ireland in 1833. In 1862 the Liberation Society would not countenance such a suggestion, even from such a loyal supporter as Thomas Thomas, though it agreed to the setting up of the South Wales Committee of the Society, of which Thomas Thomas was a member. The Liberation Society conference of 1862 was perhaps most notable for the arrival on the Welsh political scene of Henry Richard, who came to play a prominent part in the affairs of the Liberation Society in south Wales in preparation for the 1868 election.¹³³ Henry Richard met Thomas Thomas at the Swansea Conference and was clearly impressed by Thomas, seven years his senior and saying so much with which Richard agreed. Six years later, when Richard wrote to Thomas about the forthcoming election, he reminded Thomas that he had already met him:

¹³¹ Jones, 'Dr. Thomas Price and the Election of 1868 in Merthyr Tydfil, Part 2', *WHR*, 2, pp.251-270 on pp. 258-259.

¹³² *Cambrian*, 26 September 1862. *Nonconformist*, 1 October 1862, 5 November 1862. The two sentences are those in brackets in Thomas's speech quoted above.

¹³³ *Nonconformist*, 12 November 1862, for members who spoke at the first meetings of the South Wales Committee at Cardiff and Pontypool; Jones, 'The Liberation Society and Welsh politics 1844-1868', *WHR*, 1 (1961), pp. 193-224, on p. 218.

I had the pleasure of meeting you at Swansea at the Conference of the Liberation Society when I went down with Mr. Miall and Mr. Carvel Williams.¹³⁴

Thomas Thomas continued to support the Liberation Society after 1868 but his admiration for Gladstone's leadership increased and he realised that the Liberal Party held the best hope for Nonconformity in Wales.¹³⁵

Conclusion

Pontypool Baptists played a major part in the work of the Liberation Society in south Wales. In this chapter an attempt has been made to show the indebtedness of the Nonconformists of south Wales to the Liberation Society. It has also been suggested that Thomas Thomas was not simply a disciple of Edward Miall. Thomas had his own programme of operations which would pave the way for future disestablishment in Wales.

Thomas wanted disestablishment because he was a consistent Voluntaryist in church as well as in school even when others whom he respected were not, like William Roberts or James Mursell. Thomas was anti-State Church and not anti-Church or even anti-bishop as such but anti-prelacy. He was a militant (activist) Voluntaryist and not simply a moderate Voluntaryist with a Protestant dislike of Roman Catholicism. His attitude towards the setting up of the Roman Catholic hierarchy in England and Wales demonstrates his consistency of principle that this was an internal matter for an independent disestablished Church in this country and no

¹³⁴ Cardiff MS 1.707.

¹³⁵ See David Bebbington, 'Gladstone and the nonconformists: a religious affinity in politics', in *Church, Society and Politics* ed. Derek Baker (Oxford, 1975), pp. 369-382.

cause for anti-papal hysteria. The issue divided evangelicals and even the supporters of the ASCA for a time.

Nothing threatened the cohesiveness of the circle of Voluntaryist friends around Thomas in Pontypool. They endorsed the arguments of his letter to the *Nonconformist* in December 1850, which were reinforced by Edward Miall in his editorial. If that suggested that Thomas Thomas was merely a disciple of Edward Miall, this chapter nevertheless argues that there is enough to show that Thomas Thomas was his own man. He expressed his views before Edward Miall wrote his editorial. Thomas Thomas expressed himself clearly about the necessity for Christian ministers to be involved in political and social affairs without detriment to their spiritual responsibilities and integrity. Thomas had written as much years before Edward Miall's contribution in 1850. Above all, Thomas Thomas held to his own belief that Wales could seek disestablishment independently of England and had a better chance of achieving it. The Liberation Society did not agree with him and so removed those challenging sentences from his published address to the Swansea Conference in 1862.

The Liberation Society acknowledged the consistent support it received from Thomas Thomas and his circle for three decades. The Monmouthshire Baptists knew that the Liberation Society provided their best hope of achieving their desired reforms over that period. What was really being achieved was what J.P. Ellens called 'Religious Routes to Gladstonian Liberalism'. By 1868 it was clear that Gladstone had become more important than Edward Miall among the Monmouthshire Baptists. Universal manhood suffrage and the secret ballot had become the two points of the Chartist Petition that Thomas Thomas and his friends most wanted to achieve by 1868. Thomas knew that they could only be achieved peaceably in accordance with the approved policy of the Liberation Society.

CHAPTER FIVE

Pontypool Baptist College, 1836-76

Here I am, in good health and sound spirits, perched up among the mountains of Monmouthshire, in a theological college which commands from every side of it but one a most romantic prospect. Walking up and down in front of this neat and respectable building, with a bright sky overhead, and well-wooded mountains right before me, I have spent the morning in reading the *Nonconformist*.¹

The literary propensities of Edward Miall are well-illustrated by this extract from his letter to his wife on his first visit to Pontypool Baptist College on 12 October 1848. Miall has described perfectly the location of the College without dwelling on the view from its most significant side, the one that did not present a romantic prospect but one dimmed by smoke. This was the prospect of the town of Pontypool itself. Miall saw Pontypool on a good day when most fit young men under forty would have gone out to explore, but he spent the morning reading the newspaper that he had founded in 1841. He had come on a mission, to promote the principles of the British Anti-State-Church Association (ASCA) that he had established in 1844. His host was the Revd Thomas Thomas, the Principal of the Baptist College, better-known in 1848 as the President of the Theological Institution.²

This chapter focuses on the importance of the Baptist College in the development of the Parish of Trefethin where it was strategically placed on Penygarn Hill. The very fact that such a distinguished leader as Miall made a visit to the College is evidence of its importance. The chapter also argues that the Baptist College has wider significance in that it produced leadership for the benefit of communities

¹ Arthur Miall, *Life of Edward Miall*, (London, 1884) p. 131

² ODNB sub Miall, Edward, 1809-1881 (ref:odnb/18647); Annual Reports of the College. The importance of Miall in the life of Thomas and the Baptist College was discussed in the previous chapter.

throughout south Wales and beyond. This leadership depended upon the Dissenting ministers of whose importance contemporaries and historians leave us in no doubt.³ That so little has been written of their backgrounds and their training is part of the reason for this chapter. The preparation of young men for the Baptist Ministry is closely examined at a period when the majority of ministers were not College-trained.⁴ The chapter also examines the part the College played in the re-organisation of the Baptist denomination in Monmouthshire. Previous chapters have already shown the growing confidence of the Dissenters through their united efforts in the struggle for religious equality. It will be seen that the College provided a base for greater confidence in their fight for freedom from their social restraints. The Baptist College depended upon its own voluntary efforts to finance its challenge to the status quo. To this end its leadership brought together like-minded leaders in a network of relationships who were bound by ties of marriage and friendship to develop freedom of worship, education, social and political expression, which helped towards their goal of the disestablishment of the State Church. This chapter first examines the history of the College and its personnel before turning to the details of the ministerial training provided and the extra-curricular activities in which the College was involved.⁵

The Baptist College, as it became known, and continued after 1893 as the South Wales Baptist College, began its official life in Abergavenny in 1807 as the Abergavenny Academy with the Revd Micah Thomas as its President.⁶ In January

³ Thomas, *The importance of developing the power of Welsh Nonconformity*, p.10; Davies, *Religion in the Industrial Revolution*, pp. 64-65.

⁴ Brown, *A Social History of the Nonconformist Ministry*, p.60.

⁵ D.M. Himbury wrote a short history of the College to mark its 150th anniversary in 1957. It has no footnotes, index or bibliography and deals with the Principalship of Thomas Thomas in 15 short pages. Himbury notes the salient facts in the life of the College from an internal standpoint with no reference to the significance of the College in its social context. It is nevertheless a valuable account and it has been supplemented by former Principal Hugh Matthews's account in *From Abergavenny to Cardiff* (Llandysul, 2007).

⁶ See Chapter 1. When the Baptist academy in Penygarn, associated with the name of Miles Harry, came to an end in 1770, there was no Baptist college in Wales until Abergavenny opened in 1807. It

1807 Micah Thomas combined his appointment as minister of Frogmore Street Baptist church Abergavenny with his post as President of the Baptist Academy, of which he remained the only tutor until his resignation in 1836.⁷

When he succeeded Micah Thomas as President, Thomas Thomas described the condition of the College as 'ruinous'.⁸ More correctly, that is how he remembered it forty years later at the meeting to mark his retirement. The chairman of that presentation evening, the Baptist high-court judge, Sir Robert Lush, spoke of 'the difficulties (Thomas) had to encounter with that institution (the College) in the state in which it was'.⁹ Micah Thomas had resigned on grounds of ill-health, but he continued as minister of Frogmore Street Baptist church in Abergavenny for another seventeen years; the pressures that were placed on Micah to resign from the College have been discussed in Chapter One. These included not only the way in which he administered the College but the theological content of the education which had departed from high Calvinism to embrace the more liberal theology of Andrew Fuller. Micah Thomas was even accused of Arminianism by associating with the writings of John Wesley. As Densil Morgan has indicated, it was Micah Thomas's refusal to teach any Welsh in the College that finally turned against him the Welsh Calvinist Baptists under their leading theologian, Revd John Jenkins of Hengoed.¹⁰

As noted in Chapter One, the Welsh Calvinists tried to remove Micah Thomas from his post, but the College Committee supported him. The same College Committee welcomed Thomas Thomas to Pontypool to continue as President of the

moved to Pontypool in 1836 and transferred to Cardiff in 1893. A second college began in Haverfordwest in 1840, moved to Aberystwyth in 1894 and amalgamated with Cardiff and Bangor in 1899. The north Wales college, formed in Llangollen in 1862, transferred to Bangor in 1892.

⁷ DWB *sub* Thomas, Micah, pp. 958-59.

⁸ SWDN, Presentation to the Principal of Pontypool College, 20 September 1876, p. 10.

⁹ SWDN, 20 September 1876, p. 4.

¹⁰ D. Mervyn Himbury, *The South Wales Baptist College, 1807-1957* (Llandysul, 1957), pp. 29-34; D. Densil Morgan, 'Conflicting Commitments? Baptist Identity and Welsh National Consciousness, 1649 to the Present', in *Baptist Identities*, ed., I.M. Randall, Toivo Pilli and Anthony R. Cross (Paternoster, 2006), pp. 45-55, on p. 53.

College in 1836, but the same suspicions of being too liberal in theology and neglecting to use the Welsh language continued to be entertained by Welsh Baptists. How Thomas Thomas overcame these accusations will be seen in this chapter. It was Micah Thomas's primary role to prepare young Welsh Baptist ministers to preach and minister effectively to English-speaking congregations, and the importance of this task continued to be at the forefront of the programme in Pontypool under his successor. Many Welsh-speaking Baptists seemed unaware that young Welsh applicants to the Baptist colleges at Hoxton and Bristol were rejected because their command of the English language was weak.¹¹

As indicated in Chapter One, Thomas Thomas had been sponsored by Tabernacle Welsh Baptist church in Cardiff to be one of Micah Thomas's eight students at Abergavenny for two years from September 1822.¹² On his admission to the Academy Thomas Thomas believed that he was a Calvinist. At the College Thomas greatly improved his command of English, his ability to preach in the language and his knowledge of New Testament Greek. He left in 1824 to spend four years at Stepney College, London, which later became Regent's Park College. In Stepney Thomas greatly extended his knowledge of Greek, to which he added Hebrew, and read widely in Theology.¹³ Mervyn Himbury observed that the syllabus used by Micah Thomas at Abergavenny owed much to the courses that had been offered in Bristol Academy, while the first curriculum at Pontypool was indebted to Stepney College.¹⁴ Thomas Thomas acknowledged that he was trained by some very

¹¹ Bassett, *The Welsh Baptists*, pp. 125-126; Himbury, *The South Wales Baptist College, 1807-1957*, p. 49; Brown, *A Social History of the Nonconformist Ministry in England and Wales*, p. 69; R. Tudur Jones, 'Nonconformity and the Welsh Language in the Nineteenth Century', *The Welsh language and its Social Domains 1801-1911*, ed. Geraint H. Jenkins (Cardiff, 2000), pp. 239-263 on p. 248.

¹² Diary of the Revd Micah Thomas, GRO, D853/2, 2 September 1822. Morgan, *The Life and Work of the Revd Thomas Thomas DD*, p. 17.

¹³ Morgan, *The Life and Work of the Revd Thomas Thomas DD*, pp. 17-19, 'truly believing those doctrines which are commonly denominated Calvinistic'.

¹⁴ Himbury, *The South Wales Baptist College 1807-1957*, pp. 123-124.

distinguished Baptists at Stepney: Dr. William Newman, Revd Dr. William Murch and the Revd Solomon Young. Charles Stovel, his fellow-student, was an influential friend.¹⁵ What Thomas Thomas owed to Abergavenny Academy may have been deeper still. Micah Thomas was a political activist, a liberal thinker whose Calvinism was brought into question by his own students in 1835, and someone whose vision of the Church's mission was broader than most Baptists at the time.¹⁶ In appointing the young Thomas Thomas to be the President in 1836 of the Institution that started in Abergavenny in 1807, the College committee was preparing the way for involvement in social and political activity and providing leadership in movements for social justice and wider Christian co-operation across the separated churches. By 1848 that programme was already well under way. The previous chapters have shown the quality of that leadership in the disputes over compulsory Church rate and state-aided education as well as the support for the Liberation Society. Thomas Thomas had also shown leadership in two published sermons as well as his published Circular Letters and his lectures in 1847.¹⁷

Thomas Thomas's infant son, Llewellyn, laid the foundation stone of the new College building on 3 August 1836.¹⁸ The 'romantic prospect' of Pontypool Park that Edward Miall viewed in 1848 was the home of the Lord Lieutenant. The Baptist College became the symbol and focus of the ending of the age of romance and the beginning of the changes that would lead to a more democratic society. For the moment, on the very day that the foundation stone of the College was laid, the

¹⁵ Himbury, *The South Wales Baptist College*, p. 124; *SWDN*, 20 September 1876, Presentation to the Principal of Pontypool College, p. 14.

¹⁶ David Williams, *John Frost* (Cardiff, 1939), pp. 292-294; *Trafodion Cymdeithas Hanes Bedyddwyr Cymru* (Caernarfon, 1950), 'Professor David Williams, Micah Thomas and the Chartists', pp. 28-31; Bassett, *The Welsh Baptists*, pp. 125-128, 142.

¹⁷ Monmouthshire Baptist Association, *Conference Report 1842*; Bassett, *The Welsh Baptists*, p. 144. Wallace, *Organise! Organise! Organise!*, pp. 32 and 62, but Thomas did not write 'tracts attacking the Corn Laws'; he published a sermon in support of the poor.

¹⁸ Morgan, *Life and Work*, p. 33.

members of 'the Loyal Hanbury Lodge of Odd Fellows', a friendly society, 'processed through the Park and enjoyed with the highest satisfaction the scenery of which that enchanting demesne presents a view'.¹⁹

The Baptist College was completed within a year under the supervision of Robert Carter of Pontypool, who built the workhouse at Coed-y-Gric a year later. The workhouse was the reminder of the harshness of life for the industrial workers of Pontypool and a symbol of the fear that formed the background to Chartism.²⁰ The Lord Lieutenant, Capel Hanbury Leigh, gave the land for the workhouse, but the Baptist College was built on land owned by Mrs. Davies of Caerleon. The Lord Lieutenant's contribution was limited to some stones to the value of twenty-five pounds and a pathway to provide access to the site on Penygarn below the Baptist chapel built in 1727.²¹ Its first minister Miles Harry (Harris) had been associated with the small academy for training ministers in Trosnant in the mid-eighteenth century, but by 1836 Tabernacle chapel on Penygarn had been upstaged by a new Welsh Tabernacle in Crane Street.²² Hanbury Leigh's gift was eclipsed by a number of others, including those of John Jenkins, Charles Conway and William Williams Phillips.²³ In providing stones for the building, Hanbury Leigh might later have reflected that he had helped to finance a Trojan horse from which would come forces to fight the battles to reform parliamentary representation and improve the conditions of the poor.

¹⁹ Hanbury Tenison, *The Hanburys of Monmouthshire*, p.238; *MM*, 6 February 1836.

²⁰ Brian Foster, *A History of Pontypool Union Workhouse, 1838-1930* (Pontypool, n.d.), p. 6; Jones, *The Last Rising*, p. 28.

²¹ Bradney, *A History of Monmouthshire*, Vol. 1, part 2B, Abergavenny p. 452; Hanbury Tenison, *The Hanburys of Monmouthshire*, p. 238. The Lord Lieutenant's gift continued to be acknowledged as late as 1880: *The Annual Report of the Committee of the Baptist Theological Institution at Pontypool* (Pontypool, 1880), p.6

²² Bradney, *Monmouthshire*, Abergavenny, p. 452. See also the Introduction to this thesis.

²³ The Lord Lieutenant contributed £25. William and Charles Conway gave £610, J and W. Jenkins gave £272-5s. and W.W. Phillips contributed £71.

Thomas Thomas strengthened his position as leader during the course of these disputes as protagonists relied on his opinions and trusted his judgement and worked alongside him, not least in the Committee of the Baptist College. Networking through the local Baptist families, close-knit by ties of marriage, was a constant feature of the life of the Baptist College. The Revd Stephen Price, married to Mary Conway, was the Secretary to the College Committee by 1840 and continued in that post for the next thirty-seven years. Until his death in 1860, William Williams Phillips, senior, was College Treasurer while he occupied the same office at Crane Street Baptist church where he was senior deacon. He shared the job at the College with William Conway James after 1851.²⁴ The College Committee was further swelled by old students of the College, who also became members of Crane Street Baptist church in 1865, and other deacons at Crane Street such as John Havard and Charles Davies, both of whom had already been active in opposition to compulsory Church rates.

Ministerial training

Many of the students of Pontypool Baptist College had received little formal education above primary level and ministerial education had to be provided alongside ministerial training. Like Baptist churches, Baptist theological institutes for training ministers were laws unto themselves.²⁵ There was no agreement between the separate colleges about the curriculum of study or training programme required. For the first five years of his time as President, Thomas Thomas was the sole tutor and trainer of the students. The syllabus was predominantly Divinity and Classics and Thomas

²⁴ James was the son of Mary's sister, Elizabeth, who had married William James. Other members of the same family on the College Committee were, William Conway, John Harris Conway, Benjamin Conway and W. Jenkins of Ponthir.

²⁵ Brown, *A Social History of the Nonconformist Ministry*, p.86.

taught everything from systematic theology, Christian doctrine and Biblical studies, including elements of Hebrew and New Testament Greek, to Philosophy, including Logic and Ethics, and Church History, though that was largely restricted to the first century. There were weekly sermon preparation classes and practice in the delivery of sermons. Examiners were appointed to make an annual inspection and to provide written reports which were published in the Annual Report of the College Committee in May. A summary of the Examiners' report was also published in the *Monmouthshire Merlin*.²⁶ Typical of these reports was the one that appeared on 10 June 1843 for the examination of 28 May. The Revd D. Rhys Stephen, Baptist minister of Newport, had spent four hours 'unshirkingly' testing the Junior students on the subjects of Creation, physical science and geology. He went on to test the senior class on the doctrine of the Trinity and heresies about the Person of Christ, the miracles of Christ and the Atonement. His assistant examiner was George D. Daniell of Bristol and the report concluded that 'the students acquitted themselves well' and they 'had good training and laboured assiduously'.²⁷

Criticism, from both contemporaries and later commentators, has been levelled against the content of syllabuses provided in theological training at that time. The courses were blamed for being repetitive and the tutors were accused of encouraging the learning of facts by rote in the same way as Jelinger Symons experienced in the schools of Monmouthshire.²⁸ Such criticisms are often facile. The training provided for ordinands in any of the Christian Churches in the first half of the nineteenth century was patchy and poorly recorded. In the course of describing the

²⁶ Once again emphasising the central importance of the *Merlin* as a platform for Baptist activity.

²⁷ *MM*, 10 June 1843; Himbury, *South Wales Baptist College*, pp. 43-44; Morgan, *Life and Work*, p. 30.

²⁸ Brown, *Nonconformist Ministry*, p. 78. J.E.B. Munson, 'The Education of Baptist Ministers, 1870-1900', *The Baptist Quarterly Review*, 24 (July 1976), pp. 320-327. Pontypool Baptist College provides evidence that Munson exaggerated the improvements made after 1870.

training of candidates for the Nonconformist Ministry in England and Wales in the period 1800-1860, Kenneth D. Brown has written:

College trained men were at something of a premium among status-conscious congregations who had the added incentive of striving to show that their particular churches were in no whit inferior to those of the Anglican Establishment which could call upon the products of the ancient universities to man its pulpits.²⁹

In fact Kenneth Brown's comment not only presents the position of the Anglican Establishment in an over-optimistic light, particularly in Wales, but it does not recognise that there was, at least in Wales, a suspicion of 'the college-groomed, bookish, unworldly minister'³⁰ in Nonconformist circles. In the Diocese of Llandaff as late as 1870, more than one third (130) of the 366 clergymen were simply literates (non-graduates) while 'the products of the ancient universities' (Oxford and Cambridge) numbered only 43 in the industrial parishes of the diocese, though there were a further one hundred in the rural parishes. The remainder had received training elsewhere, forty-nine of them having been trained at St. David's College, Lampeter.³¹

In the absence of proper comparative figures for the mid nineteenth century, it remains true that the religious denominations faced the same problem of adequate ministerial training. Russell Davies has recognised that 'the formalisation of training for Nonconformity assisted the development of a remarkable coterie of new leaders' and 'many of the stars of the Nonconformist pulpit were almost all college-trained', but he goes on to say that 'some still protested that, with the professionals, came the end of passion'.³²

Against this background of a more formalised educational training which included much Greek and Latin and even Mathematics, Thomas Thomas provided his

²⁹ Brown, *Nonconformist Ministry*, p. 73.

³⁰ Russell Davies, *Hope and Heartbreak* (Cardiff, 2005) p. 337.

³¹ Wilton D. Wills, 'The Clergy in Society in Mid-Victorian South Wales', *JHSCW*, 29 (1974), p. 34.

³² Davies, *Hope and Heartbreak*, p. 337.

own particular passion for social, political and religious awareness of what was appropriate for those whom he was training. This included a full exposition of the 'voluntary principle'. The students were in no doubt about the importance which their President placed upon this principle and his consequent desire for the disestablishment of the State-Church and the prevention of all state interference in the affairs of Nonconformist churches and schools. They were also aware of the *Nonconformist* newspaper and the activities of the Anti-State-Church Association. After the Manchester Conference in 1841, Thomas joined the Complete Suffrage Union, set up by Joseph Sturge, in 1842 and he promoted its activities.³³

By that time Thomas was no longer the College's sole tutor. In line with other similar colleges, the College committee at Pontypool had recognised that the days were gone when it was enough for

A few candidates for the ministry...[to be] gathered under the roof of a laborious man...whose courses ranged from original sin to Jupiter's satellites, and from Tacitus to the principles of church polity.³⁴

Those words were written by R.W. Dale, a prominent Congregational minister, in 1861, but twenty years before that, a second tutor, George Thomas, had been appointed to Pontypool College to assist Thomas Thomas with the teaching of the syllabus.

The Revd George Thomas was born in Whitland in Carmarthenshire about 1799, the son of a farmer; he returned there to retire in 1870. George was almost the invisible man at the College during his time there. He lived at first in lodgings in Abergavenny and then out of College as a lodger in Pontypool. He was unmarried and he was paid much less than Thomas Thomas. After twenty years as Classical tutor

³³ Bassett, *The Welsh Baptists*, p. 144; Wallace, *Organise! Organise! Organise!*, pp. 62, 68.

³⁴ Watts, *The Dissenters*, vol 2, p. 276.

George was paid £64-2s. in 1861 when Thomas Thomas's salary was £200.³⁵ Yet George Thomas became indispensable to the College in those twenty years, and by 1874 he and Thomas Thomas were receiving the same amount. Without George Thomas, Thomas Thomas could not have given so much time to his important and considerable extra-mural activities, which will be discussed later in the chapter. The two Thomases shared the same religious and political beliefs. They were united in their aims for the College and in their desire for religious and civic freedom and equality. In his lecture of 1847, referred to in Chapter three, George Thomas expressed his fear of the centralisation of authority and the need for independence in religious affairs.³⁶ Nothing else that George Thomas wrote seems to have survived, but he was held in high esteem both by the students and by Thomas Thomas himself. In his own retirement speech in September 1876, Thomas Thomas described George Thomas as

A man of massive intellect, sound learning and most admirable disposition, with whom I worked in unbroken harmony and affection for thirty years³⁷

George Thomas had been a student at Bristol Baptist College. The Committee of Pontypool College appointed him as Classical Tutor³⁸ and he taught Classical Greek and Latin, New Testament Greek and Hebrew and also Mathematics. Thomas Thomas continued to teach Theology, Philosophy and Church History. Their division of the teaching labour in the College is best illustrated by reference to the Annual Reports. The surviving Reports start in 1863 and that year's Report gives many details of the contents of the syllabus and its division between the two tutors. The year started with thirty-seven students in College, the highest number ever, and reduced to thirty-

³⁵ NLW, SWBC, Account Book, 9, 1861; Morgan, *Life and Work*, pp. 33-34.

³⁶ George Thomas, *Religious Equality essential to Civil Liberty* (London, 1848).

³⁷ Morgan, *Life and Work*, p.33; SWDN, 20 September 1876, p. 15.

³⁸ Himbury, *The South Wales Baptist College*, p. 42.

three by the end of the year as students became ministers for the first time. Thomas

Thomas described his teaching in Theology in the following general terms:

A class of Seniors devoted their chief attention to the Evidences of Divine Revelation and to Mental and Moral Philosophy. The second and most numerous class employed the first Session in the study of History of the New Testament, comprising the Harmony of the Four Gospels; and the second Session, in the study of the leading Doctrines of Christianity, comprising the Existence, the Unity, and the Attributes of God; the Trinity; the Fallen Condition of Mankind; the Decrees, the Providence, and the Moral Government of God; the Pre-existence, Deity, Incarnation, Work, Atonement, Resurrection, Glorification and Intercession of Christ; the Judgment Day; the final state of the Righteous and the wicked; Forgiveness and Justification; and the Extraordinary and Ordinary Work of the Spirit of God. The Junior Students have composed Essays and attended Lectures on the Mosaic Creation; the Original State of Man; the Fall; the Deluge; the Patriarchal Revelations; the Exodus; the Mosaic Laws; the Conquest of Canaan; the Administration of the Judges; the Kingdom of Israel under Saul, David and Solomon; the Revolt; and the 2 Kingdoms of Israel and Judah to the Captivity.

George Thomas described the teaching he had done that year in the following words:

The senior classes read in *Latin* nearly the first forty chapters of the 21st Book of Livy, the last half of the Second Book of the Aeneid of Virgil, and the whole of the sixth. A portion of the De Senectute of Cicero, and the first fourteen chapters of the War of Jugurtha, by Sallust. They read in *Greek* the whole of the Apology of Socrates by Plato, and the first eighteen chapters of his Phaedo, written on the Immortality of the Soul; the first and the third books of the Iliad of Homer, and the two last chapters of the Anabasis of Xenophon. They read in *Hebrew* four chapters in Genesis, several of the Psalms, the eleventh and the three following chapters of Isaiah. Two of the classes read in *Latin* most of the first Aeneid, the first half of De Senectute. They read in *Greek* several chapters in the New Testament, and the first nine chapters of the first book of the Anabasis, and they have commenced to read *Hebrew*. The Junior classes read in *Latin* the fourth Eclogue, the first book of the Aeneid, and about 300 lines of the second, and some of the lives written by Cornelius Nepos. They read in *Greek* several of the chapters written by Luke and John, and two of the classes have gone through a large portion of the Greek and English Exercises in the Elementary Grammar of Dr. Raphael Ruhner.

We can state that some of the young men paid considerable attention to the Mathematics, a few of them have gone over the first four books of Euclid, and have begun the fifth.³⁹

Mervyn Himbury noted 'the great stress laid upon the teaching of Greek and Latin' in the College at this time and claimed that, 'more time was taken in reading

³⁹ *The Annual Report 1863* (Aberdare, 1863) p. 13.

the texts of classical authors than in studying the texts of the Old and New Testaments'.⁴⁰ That observation seems doubtful because we do not know how long the students spent on the study of the Bible, not only in lectures but also in classes for sermon preparation and in devotional reading. The Classical content does not seem intense, but when the whole teaching syllabus is taken together with the training, the course is considerable. Graduates in Classics at Oxford and Cambridge were ordained into the Ministry of the Church of England at that time without any formal study of Theology. It is interesting that the social and political radicalism of Pontypool Baptist College did not cause it to depart more from the traditional subjects of academic study. No student ever recorded how George Thomas taught Vergil; we have only the examiners' reports on the work of the students themselves.

The 1863 Report had some explicit comments to make. The Revd Daniel Morgan of Blaenavon, a member of the Central Committee and later one of the College secretaries, expressed his satisfaction with the senior classes he examined in Hebrew because of the knowledge they had 'acquired in the construction and reading of the ancient language in which the Prophets spoke'. The Revd John Rhys Morgan (Lleurwg), also an old student by that time, examined the students in Theology and Moral Science. His report concluded that the examination 'reflected great credit upon the students themselves, and proved the efficiency of your excellent Institution'. The Classical examination was conducted by the Revd Charles Short, M.A., of Swansea. He was pleased that two of the Senior students could read Plato, 'which they did with intelligence and accuracy'. Phaedo was likewise read in such a way as to show how diligently they had studied him. Short thought that the Junior classes had done very

⁴⁰ Himbury, *The South Wales Baptist College*, p. 44. There was a great emphasis on the classical languages for Welsh Anglican ordinands at the same time. See, Frances Knight, 'The Cultural Aspirations of the Welsh Clergy' in *Modern Christianity and Cultural Aspirations*, ed. David Bebbington and Timothy Larsen (Sheffield, 2003), pp.124-138 on p. 138.

well to have read and translated Latin and Greek so that 'the progress they have made is such as to entitle the College and the Tutors to the continued and hearty support of the Churches and the Public'.⁴¹ That students whose educational attainment on entering Pontypool College was so basic had learned so much in two or three years was an outstanding achievement. Who these students were and what kind of ministers they became will be described in the next section of this chapter.

The Students

On 31 January 1844 a letter appeared on the first page of the *Nonconformist* signed by all the students of the Baptist Theological Institution, Pontypool. Some of the signatories to this letter would become important leaders in the Baptist denomination during the next thirty years. The fact that they all signed the letter shows their cohesiveness and unanimity on the subject of disestablishment at this time. The letter stated that the students,

deeply impressed with the consideration of the fearful evils...resulting from the union of church and state ...desire to record their cordial approbation of the proposed conference of dissenters of different denominations. They regard such a conference...as eminently calculated to diffuse information...on the great question of national establishment of religion-to encourage pastors generally to discuss more frequently and fully the principles of Christian liberty, in the course of their ordinary ministry...to consolidate the power and resources of the nonconforming committees throughout the land-and to commence a course of prudent and peaceable, but earnest and uncompromising agitation for the ultimate dissolution of the undoubted connexion between church and state.⁴²

The letter was signed by the fifteen students then resident at Pontypool Baptist College as follows: John Jones, David Davies, John W. Todd, Evan Meredith,

⁴¹ *The Annual Report 1863* (Aberdare, 1863), p. 14.

⁴² *Nonconformist*, 31 January 1844.

William Richards, William Lewis, Evan Thomas, Nathaniel Thomas, Thomas Price, Thomas Evans, John Morgan, John Morris, David J. Davies, Lot Lee and Edward Roberts. These were all young men, born about 1820, mostly in Wales, though John Todd had been born in Scotland. They had all passed the entrance examination for the Baptist College after being recommended by the church to which they belonged as well as by the minister and two neighbouring ministers who had heard them preach. They had been considered eligible by the Central Committee of the College before being examined by the House Committee and placed on probation for six months. After successfully completing their probations the students were members of the College for three years, which could be extended to a further year for the most able students. There were no free places at the College. All students had to subscribe 'a minimum of ten shillings' every year and also to make collections on behalf of the College. Preference was given to 'any young man, properly recommended and qualified, bringing a donation of £20 to the funds of the Institution'. These regulations, like the College curriculum, were devised by Thomas Thomas.⁴³

The student signatories to the letter to the *Nonconformist* in 1844 were clearly aware of the importance of the London conference to initiate the Anti State-Church Association. Their letter reveals that they were a very able group of young students clearly influenced by the principal of their theological college. This point will be pursued later in an analysis of the cohorts of students who were trained for the Baptist ministry during the forty years that Thomas Thomas was principal at Pontypool. Details of those students will be found in the table in Appendix 1.

Of the fifteen signatories to the letter in 1844, nine contributed thirty pounds or more to the funds of the College and at least four of them would come to serve on

⁴³ *The Annual Report 1863* (Aberdare, 1863), pp. 3-4 and 9.

the College's Central Committee. At least seven of the fifteen came to prominence in the life of the Baptist denomination; three of them became chairmen or presidents of the Baptist Union of Wales, and the same number became doctors of philosophy or divinity. At least three of them, Thomas Price, Evan Thomas and John Jones, are known to have had very little education before they entered Pontypool College, and Nathaniel Thomas began work in a colliery at the age of seven. At the same age, Thomas Price was working on a farm, as was John Jones, son of a tenant farmer in Radnorshire who was also a Baptist pastor at Llanbadarn Fawr. Evan Thomas had worked as a boy at the chain works in Pontypridd and all fifteen students, with the possible exception of John Todd, were from families with little money. Evan Thomas, who became a great Baptist preacher, was the son and nephew of preachers, but he was one of twelve children. Thomas Price saved his own money to buy an apprenticeship to a painter and plumber and walked to London to become a journeyman before entering the College in 1842. John Rhys Morgan (Lleurwg) became a well-known preacher and historian but he too was one of twelve children. His publications in later life were extensive and he was poetry editor of *Seren Cymru*. Like Thomas Price and Nathaniel Thomas (and his wife), John Morgan would find an entry in the *Dictionary of Welsh Biography*, while Evan Thomas would be numbered among the great Baptist leaders of the Victorian era commemorated by Vyrnwy Morgan who had also written a biography of Edward Roberts.⁴⁴

A year later, on 6 January 1845, they would be joined by Thomas Lewis, an eighteen-year-old student from Breconshire who would later describe many of those

⁴⁴ *Annual Report 1863*, pp.9 and 11. DWB sub Morgan, John Rhys (pp. 648-49); Price, Thomas (p. 792); Thomas, Nathaniel (p. 959); Vyrnwy Morgan, *Welsh Religious Leaders in the Victorian Era*, pp. 161-173. Benjamin Evans, *Bywgraffiad T. Price* (Aberdar, 1891), pp. 17-28: on p. 28 Evan Thomas is described as *tywysog pregethwyr Cymru* (prince of Welsh preachers). For John Todd, see NLW, SWBC, 29 (250). For John Jones, see NLW *Welsh Biography on line*, John Jones 1820-1907 (wbo.llgc.org.uk/en/s3-JONE-JHN-1820).

who were members of the college in his historical writings. He thus, for example, described one of the signatories, William Lewis, a native of Holyhead, who

was lame and walked on one side. He was an able man. A dry preacher, but wet as to beer. He was very greedy for it when in College...failed everywhere through his besetting sin.⁴⁵

If William Lewis was a drunkard, his fellow-signatory, Lot Lee, was described by Thomas Lewis as a glutton whose thin frame belied the amount of food he consumed. He was the 'Lean Man and the Great Eater'.⁴⁶ Thus are we indebted to Thomas Lewis for these thin scraps of information about students whose common names make it difficult to distinguish them in the crowd of about two hundred and sixty students who were trained by Thomas Thomas at Pontypool College in the forty years after 1837.⁴⁷ In the later years, a number of students went on to Regent's Park College, then affiliated to London University, and obtained external London degrees. These included Thomas Thomas's own successor, William Edwards, who became Principal of Pontypool College in 1880, and Thomas Witton Davies who followed William Edwards as a student at Pontypool and Regent's Park and later as a tutor at Haverfordwest Baptist College. Witton Davies held lectureships at Nottingham and Leipzig before moving to Bangor as Hebrew tutor at the Baptist College there. He retired as Professor of Hebrew at University College Bangor in 1921. Witton Davies received only elementary education and worked in an ironworks before entering Pontypool Baptist College in 1872; his parents were illiterate.

Thomas Lewis was not the only author to emerge from Thomas Thomas's early students at Pontypool, as Lewis himself acknowledged. Lewis described Dr. Edward Roberts of Pontypridd as 'a wonderfully round man-he knew very much of

⁴⁵ D. Hugh Matthews, *From Abergavenny to Cardiff, History of the South Wales Baptist College*, (Llandysul, 2007) p. 70.

⁴⁶ NLW,SWBC 27 (146).

⁴⁷ SWDN, Presentation to the Principal of Pontypool College, 20 September 1876, p. 15. See Appendix 1.

many things ... was a lecturer on anatomy, an astronomer, an architect, and author of many essays'. Edward Roberts had published a book of songs for the young, *Caniedydd Ieuanc* as well as articles on tonic solfa. He was known as a preacher of detailed expository sermons, not unlike those of Thomas Thomas. He was active in the cause of education and was fiercely opposed to the Education Act of 1870. He served on a committee with Nathaniel Thomas to encourage denominational teaching outside school hours while giving only limited Bible teaching in school. As a native of Merionethshire, Roberts supported the use of teaching through the medium of Welsh.⁴⁸ Together with Nathaniel Thomas, John Rhys Morgan and Thomas Price, Roberts retained both his love of his first language and his friendship with Thomas Thomas for many years after he left Pontypool College. For almost thirty years Edward Roberts was Baptist minister of Carmel, Pontypridd.

John Rhys Morgan (Lleurwg), became a distinguished preacher, historian and eisteddfod adjudicator.⁴⁹ Nathaniel Thomas edited *Y Bedyddiwr* while he was Minister of Tabernacle Welsh Baptist Chapel in Cardiff.⁵⁰ Thomas Price wrote extensively in Welsh and was co-editor of *Y Gwron*, *Y Gweithiwr* and *Seren Cymru*.⁵¹ All three ministers were active in the same social, educational and political concerns that they had first learned at Pontypool Baptist College. Their fellow-signatory, John Jones, who succeeded his father as pastor of the Rock Chapel, Llanbadarn Fawr in 1860, conducted a day school, and built further chapels while travelling widely to pay off the debts incurred in building them. He also published his *History of the Baptists in Radnorshire* in 1895.⁵²

⁴⁸ NLW, SWBC, 27(147); Bassett, *The Welsh Baptists*, pp. 258, 261, 269, 273. The omission of Edward Roberts from the DWB is surprising.

⁴⁹ DWB *sub* Morgan, John Rhys, pp. 648-649.

⁵⁰ DWB *sub* Thomas, Nathaniel, p. 959.

⁵¹ DWB *sub* Price, Thomas, p. 792.

⁵² NLW, *Welsh Biography on line*, John Jones, 1820-1907(wbo.llgc.org.uk/en/s3-JONE-JHN-1820).

One of the most prolific writers among those fifteen signatories to the letter was never ordained to the Ministry although he successfully completed his period of training. He was Evan Meredith, whose views on the virtues of disestablishment were overtaken by his aversion to Christianity itself, and within a year of leaving the College 'had "quietly" turned his back on Christianity'.⁵³

Most of the fifteen signatories to this letter on 31 January 1844 not only survived the course of training under Thomas Thomas, but were successful in their ministries and grateful for their training. At least seven of them were invited to return to preach at the annual meetings of the Society over the next thirty years. Among the list of annual preachers were John W. Todd (1858), Evan Thomas (1866), Nathaniel Thomas (1867), John Morris (1869), Thomas Price (1871), David Davies (1872) and Edward Roberts (1874). They all remained associated with the College throughout their lives.⁵⁴ Five of them were among those who spoke at Thomas Thomas's funeral in Pontypool on 13 December 1881. On that occasion Thomas Price summed up by saying,

I believe the happiest years of my life were spent at the College, and during those years I found in Dr. Thomas a model man in all senses of the word.⁵⁵

This is further testimony not only to the important part played by Pontypool Baptist College in the formation of future Baptist leaders in south Wales, but also to the personal influence exercised upon those leaders by Thomas Thomas himself. The Revd Dr. Thomas Price, to whose expansionist policies in Aberdare eleven Baptist chapels owed their existence, and whose influence in Aberdare was greater than any other minister, found his model in the principal of Pontypool College. Among modern historians, E.T. Davies drew attention to the influence of Thomas Price in Aberdare

⁵³ D. Hugh Matthews, *From Abergavenny to Cardiff* (Llandysul, 2007), p. 65.

⁵⁴ Details from the *Annual Report* (Pontypool, 1880), p. 4.

⁵⁵ *SWDN*, 13 December 1881.

but Price owes his enhanced reputation among the nineteenth century Dissenters to the writings of Ieuan Gwynedd Jones.⁵⁶

The missionary drive that was demonstrated by Thomas Price, John Morgan, John Jones, Edward Roberts and others, was not something that would have been expected from the closed-shop attitudes to which high Calvinism could lead. The engagement with social, political and educational matters outside the normal job-description of a Dissenting minister was certainly what a number of students, including Thomas Price, Nathaniel Thomas, Edward Roberts and John Morgan learned from Thomas Thomas and practised later. This was not common among Baptist ministers in the 1840s.⁵⁷ The involvement of ministers in educational affairs in England in 1870 was thought to require explanation when they were seen to be 'in closer contact with social problems'.⁵⁸ Certainly none of those fifteen students who signed the letter had any doubt about the need for 'uncompromising agitation for the ultimate dissolution...between church and state'. They believed with Thomas Thomas that the disestablishment of the Church was essential to the future well-being of their churches.

Attention was drawn earlier in this chapter to the criticism of Micah Thomas's theological teaching by those who wanted to undermine the provision of college training for ministerial candidates. Micah Thomas was also criticised by some of his own students. No such misfortune faced Thomas Thomas because his students supported him when his critics attacked him. An example of that was provided in December 1845 when a letter appeared in *Y Bedyddiwr* signed by the fifteen students

⁵⁶ Davies, *Religion in the Industrial Revolution in South Wales*, pp.65 and 69; Ieuan Gwynedd Jones, 'Dr. Price and the Election of 1868 in Merthyr Tydfil: A study in Nonconformist Politics', part 1, *WHR*, 1964,2, pp.147-172; part 2, *WHR*, 1965,3, pp. 251-270; Watts, *The Dissenters*, vol 2, pp. 263-264, 476, 492-493.

⁵⁷ Brown, *A Social History of the Nonconformist Ministry*, pp. 202-203.

⁵⁸ Munson, The Education of Baptist Ministers, 1870-1900, *The Baptist Quarterly Review* (July 1976), p.320.

in the Baptist College that year and endorsed by the editor with the words, '*Dyma yw tystiolaeth unfrydol yr hen fyfyrwyr hefyd*', ('this is the unanimous evidence of the old students also'). The students' letter was in answer to a letter in October 1845 from William Norton of Dalston, London, accusing the principals of the Baptist colleges of Pontypool and Haverfordwest of believing and teaching the practice of 'open Communion', admitting to communion those who had not been baptised by believers' baptism. Norton went on to make the extreme claims that

*'Y mae hefyd y fath wrth-farnau yn cael eu dal gan rai o'r rhai a fuont yn fyfyrwyr yn ddiweddar, yn gystal a'r rhai ynt yn bresenol yn eich hathrofeydd, i'r hyn a broffesir gan yr eglwysi, ac a argreffir hefyd ar llythyrau eich cymanfaoedd bob blwyddyn, fel ag y mae yn sicr y bydd y rhan amlaf o honynt i arfer eu dylanwad i raddau helaeth, er dymchwelyd y golygiadau hyn. Cefais gyfeillach fy hunan a rhai myfyrwyr Cymreig, y rhai a wadent yn gyfangwbl yr athrawiaeth o ras cadwedigol neillduol yn gystal ag iechydwriaeth effeithiol wedi ei gweithio allan trwy farwolaeth Crist.'*⁵⁹

('there are also views held by some of those who have recently been students as well as those who are presently in your colleges, that are contrary to those professed by the churches and also printed in the letters of your associations every year, so that it is certain that most of them use their influence to a large extent to overthrow those views. I myself have been in the company of some Welsh students, who denied altogether the doctrine of particular saving grace as well as effective salvation achieved through the death of Christ.')

This was clearly an attempt to go back to the accusations levelled against Micah Thomas of denying the doctrines of hyper Calvinism. The Pontypool College students simply denied the truth of Norton's accusations. In a very short letter in reply to William Norton's long epistle, the fifteen students said:

*...yn merthynas i Gymundeb Cymysg. Yr ydym ni Myfyrwyr Athrofa Pontypwl, yn dymuno hysbysu nad oes neb o honom yn taenu, amddiffyn nac yn coleddu yr athrawiaeth o Gymundeb llac na Chymysg...nad ydynt ein parchus Athrawon, erioed wedi arfer unrhyw ddylanwad er ein darbwyllo i goleddu yn athrawiaeth dan sylw. Ac os ydynt hwy yn bleidgar iddi, y mae hyny yn hollol anwybodus i ni.*⁶⁰

⁵⁹ *Y Bedyddiwr*, 14 October 1845, p. 330;

⁶⁰ *Y Bedyddiwr*, December 1845, p. 366.

(‘in relation to the mixed Communion. We are the students of Pontypool College; we wish to inform you that none of us spreads or holds or protects the doctrine of open or mixed Communion...nor have our respected teachers ever used any influence to persuade us to cultivate the doctrine in question. And (if they have any bias in this matter) it is completely unknown to us’).

The fifteen students who signed this letter were two academic years on from the signatories of the first letter, but seven of them were the same students: Thomas Price, Thomas Evans, J.R. Morgan, John Morris, Lot Lee, Edward Roberts and John Jones. The remaining eight had joined the College since January 1844. These were E. Evans, J. Jones (the second), J. Jones (the third), R. Davies, G. James, T. Williams, T. Lewis and D. Morgan. The first three of these eight cannot be identified. Like so many of the hundreds of students of Pontypool Baptist College during the forty years when Thomas Thomas was principal, their common Welsh names and lack of information leave them in obscurity. Yet that is not so for a number of them and it is possible to say enough about a fair sample from each decade of those forty years after 1836 to enable historians to have a fuller picture of the personalities and activities of those who were Baptist ministers during the golden age for Baptist ministers in Wales. In 1851 Baptists constituted the largest Christian body in Monmouthshire and a major contributor to the nation of Nonconformists.⁶¹ The debt of the Baptist denomination to Thomas Lewis, signatory to this letter, and Baptist minister and historian, has been indicated earlier in this chapter. He it was who told us what we know of the character of Rees Davies, Baptist minister at Penyfai, Bridgend, ‘a truly blameless character’ for whom ‘preaching was his chief delight’. Lewis described George James, Baptist minister at Bewdley, Worcestershire, as ‘quiet, friendly and harmless as a lamb’, while Thomas Williams, minister at Llangloffan, Pembrokeshire,

⁶¹ Henry Richard, MP, *Letters and Essays on Wales* (London, 1884), p. 2.

‘stood high as a preacher and a good composer of sermons’.⁶² Daniel Morgan became well-known among the Baptists in Monmouthshire, first, because Thomas Lewis wrote about him as a ‘good scholar in Greek and Hebrew and French’ and more importantly, ‘he was a godly man and sound preacher’.⁶³ Secondly, Daniel Morgan became known through the work that he did for the Baptist College as a member of its Central Committee, an examiner in Hebrew, a preacher at one of the annual services of the Institution and for some years one of the two secretaries of the College. Thirdly, Daniel Morgan spent most of his ministry in Blaenafon as an English Baptist minister at Horeb chapel, apart from an interval of four years between 1857 and 1861 when he was minister of Tabernacle chapel, Crane Street, Pontypool. Morgan left Tabernacle because the older members of the church would not agree to having more services in English to meet the needs of the newcomers to Pontypool. A decade later, Tabernacle learned its lesson, changed to English services, and began to grow again.⁶⁴

The fate of the Welsh language in Monmouthshire has been discussed in the first chapter of this thesis. It was so important in the lives of the Baptist churches in Monmouthshire and of those who were training for their ministry, that it will be discussed again later in this chapter. In Appendix 1 at the end of this thesis is a table of seventy students, about one third of the total, who make a representative sample from each decade of the life of Pontypool College during the time that Thomas Thomas was its principal. It has been possible to compile these lists of students from the published Annual Reports of Pontypool College to provide dates and places of birth and dates of ordinations together with their occupations at the time of their entry into the College, or, failing that, the occupations of their fathers. There is not

⁶² NLW, SWBC MSS. 27, Thomas Lewis, Obituaries of former students.

⁶³ *ibid.*

⁶⁴ Pontypool Baptist College, *Annual Reports*; NLW, Minor Deposit 1209B, Blaenavon; Jones, *Sowing Beside All Waters*, p. 13.

sufficient evidence in the surviving Reports to be able to do this with certainty for all the students during this period, but this is the first attempt that has been made to find such information and to build up a clearer picture of the students' backgrounds.⁶⁵

Since so many of the students at Pontypool came from Welsh-speaking homes, the College had first to ensure that they could communicate clearly in English. Of these seventy students, sixty-three were born in Wales, only fourteen of whom were born in Monmouthshire. Monmouthshire depended upon clergy and ministers from west Wales to staff its churches. That was true for the Anglican Church as much as for the Baptist churches. At the same time, over the life of the Baptist College in Pontypool, the number of students born in Monmouthshire increased and a number of students born in west Wales moved into industrial Monmouthshire and were commended to the Baptist College by Monmouthshire churches. Fifteen of the students were born in Glamorgan. Twenty-eight of the seventy students in the table were born in Cardiganshire, Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire, Breconshire and Radnorshire; only five were born in north Wales, one fewer than the English-born students. One only, John W. Todd was born in Scotland, as we noted earlier, but he served his entire ministry in England. England gained ministers from Pontypool College. Twelve of the seventy students in the table were first ordained there and many others went to England after a first appointment in Wales. Only one student, Evan Meredith, was not ordained to the ministry, although a number of others took other jobs to supplement their incomes as their families became larger, or changed their occupation altogether. This seems to have happened to only six of the students listed in our table. Griffith Havard became a chemist in Narberth by 1870, while John Morris became a shoemaker. Evan Jenkins was a draper in Madeley for at least

⁶⁵ Personal family details have been obtained from decennial censuses.

twenty years of his long ministry there; when he retired he described himself as a 'retired Baptist minister'. Thomas Cocker did business as a shoe-dealer for twenty years while he was a minister in Cwmbran. At the same time Thomas H. Davies became a surveyor in Swansea. Edward Morse reverted to his former occupation as a farmer in the 1880s when he had seven children to support. By 1891, approaching fifty, he had become a full-time minister again.⁶⁶

Some former students enhanced their incomes through marriage: Thomas Price in Aberdare, Nathaniel Thomas in Cardiff and John Wood Todd in Salisbury and Sydenham. Martha Todd was the principal of a Ladies' College, Laura Thomas did much good work in Cardiff in her own right but had inherited money from her family, as had Ann Price in Aberdare. Many students served for some or all of their ministries overseas, not to seek their fortune but inspired by the strong emphasis on the work of the BMS (Baptist Missionary Society) in the College. Thomas Evans from Pembrokeshire went from Penygarn to Calcutta in 1855 and remained in India for thirty years, returning home from time to time to visit the College and talk to Crane Street church. At least five other students, not listed in the table, served some of their ministries in India, including one who rejoiced in the name of Edmund Bombay Edwards. Other students went to America, like Thomas Dyll, who went from Monks Kirby to Ohio in the 1860s and Stephen Howells who went from Middlesborough to Noank Connecticut in 1866. Stephen Price's nephew Richard Jones, left Pisgah, Talywaun in 1879 to serve in New Zealand and later moved to Australia. Philip Williams from Zion church in Pontypool became a missionary in Jamaica. Yannah El Cary who came from Jerusalem to be a student in the College in 1863 returned to Palestine as a missionary at Nablus.

⁶⁶ Details are taken from the College's *Annual Reports* and the decennial censuses.

With few exceptions the students in Pontypool Baptist College came from poor homes.⁶⁷ They had nothing except the money that they received from the churches that sponsored them or that they collected themselves from preaching tours. It is far from true to say that they came mainly from farming backgrounds in west Wales⁶⁸ or that they were all miners and colliers.⁶⁹ Fifteen of the seventy came from the former and fourteen from the latter. About eleven more were industrial workers in factories on the docks or on the railway. About seventeen of them were small tradesmen or shop-keepers. One student had been a sailor, one a school-teacher and Francis Johnson, ordained in St. Helier Jersey in 1879, was the son of a Baptist minister who also kept a school at Raglan. Francis's own son Aubrey became a distinguished Old Testament scholar and a professor at Cardiff.⁷⁰

The achievement of the students is admirable not least for the difficulties that many of them overcame to qualify for entrance to the College. The starkest evidence of this appeared in the obituary of John Howell, 1843-1895, written by his friend Owen James of Pennsylvania in the *South Wales Daily News* on 19 July 1895. Howell was the son of Dissenters, but he had attended the Church school at Llanboidy, Carmarthenshire until he was eleven because it was the only school and it was free if he went to church on Sunday. As teenagers Howell and James worked as farmers' boys until they moved to Aberdare and found work at Bwllfa colliery, Cwmdare. They attended Mill Street Baptist chapel. Every evening at their lodgings in Windsor Street they translated books from English to Welsh, but they could not pronounce the English words. With the help of tuition from a local Unitarian, Howell, 'a splendid

⁶⁷ Probably poorer than the students at St. David's College Lampeter at the time: D.T.W. Price, *A History of St. David's University College Lampeter, Vol. 1: to 1898* (Cardiff, 1977), pp. 207-210.

⁶⁸ Davies, *Religion in the Industrial Revolution*, p. 160.

⁶⁹ Watts, *The Dissenters, Vol ii*, pp. 262-263.

⁷⁰ Pontypool College, *Annual Report* (Cardiff, 1940), p. 4.

miner', qualified for entry to Pontypool College, sponsored by Mill Street church, in 1872. Owen James described Howell as 'a great favourite of President Thomas'.⁷¹

The willingness to engage in political activity for the sake of religious and social equality was so obviously encouraged by Pontypool College that it is no surprise to find the old students subsequently involved on Liberal platforms or liberationist causes. Such involvement certainly characterised the ministry of William Edwards who succeeded Thomas Thomas as Principal of the College, as also that of Nathaniel Thomas, John Rhys Morgan, Thomas Price and others.⁷² James Rowe who went from Penrhyncoch to be minister of Moriah chapel, Risca in 1842 until his return to Fishguard in 1859, was active in setting up a British school in Risca, fighting a compulsory Church rate for the rebuilding of the parish church there in 1851, which a complete poll of the parish prevented him from achieving, and establishing an English Baptist church there.⁷³ It became commonplace to find Baptist ministers seeking election to school boards throughout Wales after 1870 with their names usually near the top of the list of those elected. Only two of the students in the table seem to have been involved actively in Liberal politics. None of the Pontypool students stood for Parliament, though all the Baptist MPs in the nineteenth century were Liberals.⁷⁴ At a local level, Dewi Bevan Jones, known as David Jones when he was an apprentice tailor in Llandysul in 1851, was active as a Liberal councillor and chairman of the UDC in Caerleon for a large part of his sixty-two year ministry in the Baptist church there after 1866.⁷⁵ Andrew Mills, who became Andrew Fuller Mills for his public persona, served as a Liberal County Councillor for Carmarthenshire,

⁷¹ *SWDN*, 19 July 1895.

⁷² See DWB *sub* Edwards, William, p. 199; see also footnotes 49, 50, 51.

⁷³ J.H.A. Roberts, *A View From the Hill, A history of Risca and Moriah Baptist Church* (Llandysul, 2010), pp. 117-130.

⁷⁴ D.W. Bebbington, 'Baptist MPs in the nineteenth century', *Baptist Quarterly* (January, 1981).

⁷⁵ Primrose Hockey, *Caerleon Past and Present* (Risca, 1981), p.8; *College Annual Report* (Cardiff, 1939), p. 10. Jones was also Secretary of the Baptist College, 1879-1930. Appendix 1, C.

Chairman of the County Council, and Mayor of Carmarthen on at least three occasions.⁷⁶

College Developments: building and behaviour.

By 1844 the Baptist College had become a settled and confident institution in Pontypool. The original building was small. It consisted of accommodation for the Thomas family and a dining hall which also served as a library and a place for daily worship. There were also ten study-bedrooms for students, which were fully occupied by 1838. By that time the original cost of £1,400 had been fully paid. A library had to be built at a further cost of £400 because that was the condition for receiving the books bequeathed to the College by the Revd H.H. Williams of Cheltenham. By 1844 there were fifteen students, some of whom had to live in the rooms provided for the Thomas family. The success of the College was recognised by its enlargement on the golden jubilee of the original Academy in Abergavenny in 1857. This provided further accommodation for students who numbered twenty in 1858 and thirty-three by 1865.⁷⁷

It never seemed possible for all the students to be accommodated within the College building at Pontypool. Some students always had to 'lodge out', obviously at some inconvenience and extra cost to themselves, since some were living as far away as Abergavenny. In January 1861, thanks to the proposal of Daniel Morgan, seconded by Nathaniel Thomas, the College Committee voted to permit the students who 'lodged out' to dine in the College, to be allowed fifteen pounds each for their support and to have access to the books in the Library together with all the privileges of the

⁷⁶ College, *Annual Report* (Cardiff, 1939), p. 12; Appendix 1, D.

⁷⁷ *SWDN*, 20 September 1876, p. 15; Morgan, *Life and Work of Thomas Thomas*, pp. 35-36.

other students in the College. By July Thomas Price and Edward Evans secured an increase in the outdoor relief from fifteen to twenty pounds per student.⁷⁸

Thomas Thomas took the opportunity in 1857 to make slight revisions to the Rules he devised in 1841 for the government of the internal life of the College. These Rules were necessary for a community of young men who had no previous experience of life in the disciplined environment essential for their training. They were also needed by the President and his family to limit the strain that was placed upon their personal lives by living in a residential college where the President's wife was also matron and supervisor of the domestic arrangements. In time these strains took their toll on Thomas and particularly on his wife, and in 1874, when he proposed that the College be moved to Cardiff, he strongly recommended that it should not be residential.⁷⁹

Thomas Thomas was someone of great personal authority and discipline but he was also a democrat. His Rules recognise his power to enforce and interpret them subject to the House Committee. In his speech at his retirement from the College on 20 September 1876, Thomas acknowledged 'the invaluable aid I have received from the kind thoughtfulness and fidelity of the house committee in the internal government of the institution'.⁸⁰ Thomas appointed a Monitor from among the students to be the officer through whom he dealt with domestic matters. This office was held by every student in rotation and involved the chore of ringing the bell to get the students up in the morning by 6.30 a.m., or 7 o'clock in winter. Each student had to present himself 'fully dressed' before the monitor. Any absentee was fined three pence and his name noted in a book. Morning worship started at eight o'clock and was followed by breakfast. Evening worship started at nine o'clock and was followed

⁷⁸ Glam.RO, Minute Book, Pontypool Baptist College, MS 3.442, 1861.

⁷⁹ Himbury, *The South Wales Baptist College*, pp. 127-129.

⁸⁰ *SWDN*, 20 September 1876, p. 15.

by supper which finished by ten o'clock. The Monitor had to lock the students' entrance door at ten o'clock every evening and take the keys to the President; it was the Monitor's responsibility to pay the Treasurer the fines he had collected from the students for breaking the Rules. Fines of six pence were imposed by the Monitor on every student who was absent from evening worship without the President's permission and ten pence were levied for being out all night without that permission. The Monitor himself was fined six pence if he forgot to ring the bell. Thomas hated tobacco and the smoking of it 'or any other herb, in the College, or any part of the premises' was forbidden.⁸¹

At the end of his complimentary report in May 1863, the examiner Charles Short wrote that the College was entitled to 'the continued and hearty support of the churches and the public'. That was always essential if the College was to continue to be independent, practising and preaching Voluntaryist principles that were expensive to maintain. The College was always short of money in spite of collections and frequent appeals. Thomas Thomas addressed many appeals for money during the course of forty years. Such a letter has survived in the extensive manuscripts of Nefydd, Revd William Roberts of Blaina, which Thomas wrote on 17 October 1851 to remind Roberts that he had 'hinted' that he 'would probably make the collection for the Academy in the course of a month' and urging him to do it as 'an essential service to the institution' because the bank had stopped payments to the College.⁸² That was one of the many successful appeals. The bank resumed payments and Revd William Roberts was invited in 1859 to preach at the College's Annual Meeting.⁸³

⁸¹ Himbury, *The South Wales Baptist College*, pp. 128-129; NLW, SWBC, 10, Monitor's Book with names and fines.

⁸² NLW, Nefydd MSS, 7779E.

⁸³ College, *Annual Report*.

In 1863 the College Report asserted that the Treasurer's account would show that the College could not afford to support 33 students. Six students would be leaving College, but there were twenty applications for admission. They would become a 'subject of anxious deliberation' because expenditure had already exceeded income by about £181. Some churches had not kept their promises to make collections for the College, but the Committee was grateful for what had been received. The important place of the Baptist College in the training of the increasing number of young men seeking admission depended upon the financial security of this completely independent institution.⁸⁴

An English college in Wales

The important question of language has been discussed in Chapter 1, where it is suggested that the description of 'an English college in Wales' would not apply exclusively to Pontypool Baptist College. Daniel Parry-Jones applied it to St. David's College, Lampeter, founded in 1827, when he went there as a Welsh-speaking student in 1903.⁸⁵ Patrick Baker, an English-speaking Baptist minister currently working on the history of Haverfordwest Baptist College, said that the description could certainly be used of that college.⁸⁶

It could be claimed that Pontypool was not the college to which that epithet mainly applied. The College was not so 'aggressively English' as has been suggested.⁸⁷ The Welsh language was not actually taught at Pontypool as it was at

⁸⁴ *The Annual Report 1863*, pp. 12-13.

⁸⁵ D. Parry-Jones, *Welsh Country Upbringing* (Batsford, 1948), p. 117.

⁸⁶ Patrick Baker, 'Haverfordwest Baptist College (1)' in *Trafodion, Cymdeithas Hanes Bedyddwyr Cymru* (2014-15), pp. 29-46.

⁸⁷ Jones, 'Language and Community in Nineteenth Century Wales', in *Mid-Victorian Wales* (Cardiff, 1992), pp. 54-79 on p. 67.

Lampeter, but there was a sermon in Welsh as well as English at every annual meeting, and the students read out the essays they had written in Welsh. On one rare occasion, when the essay in Welsh was omitted in 1858, the Revd Nathaniel Thomas of Tabernacle, Cardiff, was quick to move disapproval of the omission at the next meeting of the College Committee. He was seconded by the Revd Edward Evans of Dowlais.⁸⁸ The subject was a sensitive one because Thomas and George Thomas had been attacked four years earlier in *Seren Gomer* by Eiddil Ifor for not teaching Welsh grammar in the College:

Cymry ydynt eill dau...ond ar yr un pryd yn cadw eu myfyrwyr yno trwy eu tymor heb gael cymaint a gwers yn y Gymraeg! (They are both Welsh speakers...but at the same time they keep their students there throughout the term without so much as a lesson in Welsh!)⁸⁹

There is evidence of the purchase of a 'Welsh Grammar' in the College account book for 2 September 1857,⁹⁰ but that could not have been the first, and a more prompt response to the criticism was, once again, provided by a student, Joseph Lewis. He sent to *Seren Gomer* for publication the article in Welsh on 'Constantine the Great' that he had read at the annual meeting of the College in 1854. Mr. Lewis assured readers that the teachers and Committee of the College fully supported the Welsh language.⁹¹

Thomas always insisted that he had no intention of undermining the work of the Church of England. He claimed that he was not hostile to any Christian denomination or church, but he was opposed to the patronage and privileges that had been conferred by the state upon one Church to the exclusion of all the others, particularly when that Church served only a minority of the population.⁹² The

⁸⁸ Glam.RO, Baptist College Minute Book, MS 3.442, 19 May, 1858.

⁸⁹ *Seren Gomer*, rhif 465 (Mehefin 1854) p. 247: Diwylliant y Werin Gymreig.

⁹⁰ NLW:SWBC, Account Book, 8 (2 September 1857).

⁹¹ *Seren Gomer*, rhif 466 (Gorffennaf 1854) 'Bywyd ac Amserau Cystenyn Fawr', pp. 289-94.

⁹² PFP, 26 November 1859.

numerical argument went on being used in Wales throughout the nineteenth century.⁹³ As for another argument, that the Church of England was *Eglwys Loegr*, whose leaders were English-speaking outsiders, Thomas never used it.⁹⁴ His College was intended to prepare young men to minister and preach effectively in English, particularly to the English-speaking immigrants who swelled the population of Monmouthshire and Glamorgan decade on decade, and reduced the percentage of Welsh speakers in the second half of the nineteenth century in the district of Pontypool from half the population to no more than one tenth by 1901.⁹⁵ Thomas's first language was Welsh and he often preached in Welsh, but he communicated in English, even when he wrote letters to fellow Welsh-speaking ministers, like William Roberts (Nefydd).⁹⁶ When he went to Llanover at the invitation of Lady Llanover, the 'Bee of Gwent' to lecture on one of his favourite subjects, teetotalism, Thomas delivered his lecture in Welsh, but he quoted statistics in English from so many newspapers that he provoked one listener to write a letter of objection to the *Monmouthshire Merlin* where Thomas's address was reported entirely in Welsh.⁹⁷

The message mattered most. That was the unspoken response of Thomas and the College at Pontypool to all the critics from Eiddil Ifor, to 'anonymous' of the *Monmouthshire Merlin*. It would also have been his answer to Lady Llanover with whom Thomas was happy to join forces in the cause of total abstinence, but disestablishment was a bridge too far for her. The Bishop of Llandaff would have

⁹³ Bell, *Disestablishment in Ireland and Wales*, pp. 273-277.

⁹⁴ Morgan, *Freedom or Sacrilege?* Penarth (1966) p. 12.

⁹⁵ Williams, 'The Welsh Language in Industrial Monmouthshire c.1800-1901' in *Language and Community in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Geraint H. Jenkins, pp. 203-229.

⁹⁶ NLW MS 7779E *Nefydd*, Letter of Revd Thomas Thomas to Revd W.R. Roberts (Nefydd) 17 October 1851. Many Welsh Nonconformist ministers did the same.

⁹⁷ *MM*, 2 February and 16 February 1855. The anonymous correspondent called himself 'A humbled Welshman'. Thomas advocated total abstinence rather than simply temperance because he believed, like Dr. Johnson, that abstinence was as easy to him, as temperance would be difficult. On Lady Llanover, see Celyn Gurdin-Williams, 'Lady Llanover and the Creation of a Welsh cultural Utopia', unpublished Ph.D thesis (Cardiff University, 2008).

found it much easier to deal with Thomas Thomas over the appointment of Welsh-speaking clerics in Monmouthshire than he did with Llanover House.⁹⁸

The influx of monoglot English industrial workers had placed English in the ascendancy in most of Monmouthshire by 1857. The two languages operated side by side until the 1850s and worship continued to be conducted in Welsh in many of the churches in industrial Monmouthshire until late into the nineteenth century. At the same time Pontypool was unique in having an Anglican church that opened for worship only in English as early as 1821.⁹⁹ By 1848 there were ten Baptist chapels in Monmouthshire where the worship was conducted entirely in the English language, none of which belonged to the Monmouthshire Baptist Association (Cymanfa Bedyddwyr Mynwy) because that association clung to the Welsh language, although six member-churches held their services in English and two held bi-lingual services.¹⁰⁰

Thomas Thomas supported the Monmouthshire (Welsh) Baptist Association, but he realised that it was not serving the 'English' churches in Monmouthshire and East Glamorgan. When he was in the chair at a meeting of the Association in Newport on 6 May 1857, a proposal to invite members to attend a conference at the Baptist College Pontypool a fortnight later was unanimously accepted. This had clearly been well worked out with the purpose of forming an Association of the English Baptist churches in Monmouthshire and, originally, East Glamorgan. It was already agreed that Revd S.R. Young of Abergavenny should be the Secretary. The Conference took place at the College when the decision to form the Monmouthshire

⁹⁸ E.T. Davies, Two Disputes over advowsons, *JHSCW*, 32, 1990, pp. 70-77. Advowson is the legal right of presentation of a clergyman to a parish. Lord and Lady Llanover strongly supported the appointment of Welsh-speaking clergymen to parishes where there were Welsh-speaking parishioners.

⁹⁹ St. James's church in Pontypool was built by public subscription on land given by Capel Hanbury Leigh: Bradney, *Abergavenny*, part 2, p. 451.

¹⁰⁰ D.J. Thomas, *A Short History of the Monmouthshire English Baptist Association* (Newport, 1957), p.8.

English Baptist Association was made. Thus the MEBA was born at Pontypool Baptist College 'with the Principal taking the leading part in the proceedings'. The Association continued in the words of its historian to not only 'take a keen interest in the College, but also to regard itself, during its early formative years, as almost an integral part of it'.¹⁰¹

That close relationship between the MEBA and the College continued until the retirement of Thomas Thomas as principal in 1876. Thomas was three times president: at its inception in 1857, when it had 610 members in 11 churches: in 1866 when there were 1,507 members in 24 churches: finally in 1876 when there were 3,121 members in 32 churches. His addresses to the Association's meetings were published as *The things that are most surely believed among us*, (1866) and *The Leaven of the Modern Pharisees and Sadducees* (1877).¹⁰²

Extra-mural activities

The inception of the MEBA at the College in 1857 is evidence enough of the influence of Pontypool College on the Baptist denomination in the county and beyond. The new Association helped to cement the importance and influence of the College on the developing campaign for disestablishment. It also demonstrated the concern of Thomas Thomas and his colleagues for the missionary outreach of the College through involvement in outside organisations. It was convenient to deal with the MEBA under the heading of the language issue, but as early as 1841 George Thomas's appointment to the College came just in time to support Thomas Thomas as he became embroiled in the issues of compulsory Church rate in Pontypool together

¹⁰¹ Ibid, pp. 7, 13.

¹⁰² Thomas Richards, ed., *Monmouthshire English Baptist Association, Circular Letters, 1866-1906*, (Newport, 1947).

with the preparations for the great conference of ministers that had been planned to take place in Manchester in August in support of the repeal of the Corn Laws.¹⁰³

After 1839 the influence of the Anti-Corn Law League had been widespread throughout Britain. Its influence in Wales was eclipsed by Chartism until 1841, but by that time leadership was being provided for the ACLL in north Wales through Walter Griffith, and Baptist congregations in Monmouthshire took up the moral crusade of the League.¹⁰⁴ Whereas Griffith and the ACLL emphasised the economic arguments, what mattered more to the Monmouthshire Baptists in 1841 was the moral argument for the poor in the face of the hardships brought to them by Protectionism.¹⁰⁵ Like the dispute over the levying of a compulsory Rate for the maintenance of the Established Church, the Corn Laws were seen as the support of a privileged class at the expense of the working classes.¹⁰⁶ As Timothy Larsen observed, for the Nonconformists free trade became another term for religious equality.¹⁰⁷

The Baptist College felt that it needed representation at the ACLL Conference in Manchester in 1841: the annual meeting decided to send Revds Micah Thomas, Thomas Thomas, D. Rhys Stephen, D.D. Evans, Stephen Price and D. Lloyd Isaac as Monmouthshire representatives to the conference from 17 to 20 August. In the event, Revd Micah Thomas decided not to go. Thomas Thomas served the conference as a member of the executive committee and seconded a vote of thanks to Dr. Thomas Cox who had chaired one of the sessions. The Address by the Committee that formed

¹⁰³ *Report of the Conference of Ministers of all denominations on the Corn Laws, held in Manchester, August 17, 18, 19, 20, 1841* (Manchester and London, 1841).

¹⁰⁴ Wallace, *Organise! Organise! Organise!*, p. 13. I. G. Jones, 'The Anti-Corn Law Letters of Walter Griffith', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 28 (1978) pp. 95-128. Griffith visited Pontypool as late as December 1842, when he lectured in English at Abersychan and in Welsh at Tabernacle Chapel, Pontypool. Thomas Thomas was the Chairman. *MM*, 10 December 1842.

¹⁰⁵ When the Corn Laws were repealed in 1846 the outcome did not turn out as anticipated.

¹⁰⁶ Norman McCord, *The Anti-Corn Law League, 1838-46* (London, 1958) pp. 15-33. Thomas Thomas, *A Proper Consideration of the Cause of the Poor* (Pontypool and London, 1841), pp. 11-12. See below.

¹⁰⁷ Larsen, *Friends of Religious Equality*, p. 121.

the introduction to the published Report of the Conference said that 'a dignified and high moral bearing characterised the proceedings throughout'.¹⁰⁸

Thomas Thomas submitted the longest piece of evidence from Wales in preparation for the Conference and it was included in the Report. In it he showed that he was well aware of the reality of working-class life in Pontypool in 1841. He described the extremely depressed state of trade with hundreds of families reduced to the deepest distress. Collections had been made among the local congregations and much private charity had been shown. He said that few of the two hundred people to whom the Board of Guardians had recently issued orders for admission to the workhouse had agreed to go there. Some of them had 'received temporary relief from Christian charity'. He observed that there had actually been a reduction of three thousand in a previously rising population during the past two years because of local unemployment. He knew the exact weekly wages paid to all classes of workmen in the parish and he claimed that the actual wages paid to the men were considerably reduced because 'many who are employed are not in full work'. Wages had not risen with the price of food because wages were affected by the demand for labour and not by the price of food. Some people thought that wages should be paid to agricultural labourers according to the number of children in their families, but that was not the case, said Thomas, before he went on to comment that

The condition of the labouring population, as a class, is very far worse now than at any former period within my limited experience of five years in this town.¹⁰⁹

Of the state of the middle class, Thomas said that it had deteriorated in the last year or two. Builders, grocers, carpenters, ironmongers, painters and drapers found that their businesses had stagnated, and the owners of workmen's cottages had seen their

¹⁰⁸ *MM* 28 July 1841. *Report of Manchester Conference*, pp. 16-17 and Introduction p. iv.

¹⁰⁹ *Report of Manchester Conference*, p. 220.

incomes greatly reduced. The congregation of his church had not diminished as a consequence, said Thomas, but there were fewer children attending Sunday School, allegedly because of the poverty of their parents.¹¹⁰

Short reports on their districts were presented as evidence to the Conference by the Revd D. Lloyd Isaac, for his Welsh church in Trosnant, and Revd D.D. Evans for his church at Pontrhydyrun. Both reported a reduction in employment. Similarly in Talywaun and Abersychan, Revd Stephen Price reported that the stoppage at the Varteg Ironworks had thrown about 1600 or 1700 men out of work and in the British Ironworks at Abersychan, five or six hundred men were unemployed. Scores of families were in a state of starvation and collections had been made in local churches for their relief. Price described the labouring population as 'much worse than I remember it to have been'. A great many traders had failed and there had been a decrease in attendance at Sunday school.¹¹¹ When Stephen Price was listening at the Manchester Conference to accounts of similar distress in the Lancashire cotton mills, he stood up to say that he came from the 'iron manufacturing district of Monmouthshire' where wages had been reduced by twenty-five per cent and many were unemployed. He said that he had been able to administer relief in the previous month to more than a hundred families 'in as great distress as any of whom we heard this morning' because of 'the benevolence of some kind friends'¹¹²

Thomas Thomas knew that it would take far more than 'the benevolence of some kind friends', important though that was, to improve the 'condition of distressed individuals and families' in local areas. That is what he said when he preached his sermon in Pontypool on 2 September 1841. The sermon was intended to put forward the objects of the Manchester Conference and Thomas was asked to publish it. The

¹¹⁰ Ibid, pp. 220-221.

¹¹¹ Ibid, pp. 218-219, 221-222.

¹¹² Ibid, pp. 62-63.

Ministers at the Manchester Conference had been made aware of 'the prevalence of deep distress' among the poor throughout Britain and Ireland, especially in manufacturing districts. They were suffering from hunger through inadequate employment. There were many causes of their poverty that needed to be investigated

But the proximate cause of the existing distress, is the operation of the Corn Laws. Such is the declared opinion of nearly 650 ministers of religion who met at Manchester; and of many hundreds who were not present on that occasion, but fully approved of the principle on which the Conference acted.....they concluded that the produce of the earth, ...is amply sufficient for the wants of all its inhabitants; and that the provision laws render food scarce and dear, while they diminish trade, lower wages, and cause multitudes to be thrown out of employment.¹¹³

Thomas had no doubt about the remedy for this state of the poor. It was the 'immediate abolition of the accursed Corn Laws'. Thousands of petitions with hundreds of thousands of signatories should be addressed to both houses of parliament for their repeal.¹¹⁴

As noted earlier in this thesis, Thomas used the long preamble to this sermon to explain his reasons for preaching about issues affecting social conditions and political affairs. He encouraged Christian ministers to direct people to public affairs 'and show the application of Christian principles to their civil duties and rights'. The Bible teaches us how to act in our human relationships, he said, and more than half the Bible is concerned with politics. What Prophets and Apostles boldly proclaimed could not be timidly watered down by Christian Ministers.¹¹⁵

In the face of criticism from those who disagreed with him in 1841, Thomas Thomas obviously thought it necessary to offer some justification for his application of Christian principles to social and political issues. It is just as well that he did if it encouraged his hearers to have the courage of their convictions. It is just as well also

¹¹³ Thomas Thomas, *A Proper Consideration of the Cause of the Poor, a test of righteous character, A Discourse* (Pontypool and London, 1841), p. 8.

¹¹⁴ Ibid p. 11.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, pp. 4-5.

since it assists us to engage with the historiography that seems to have underestimated the involvement of Dissenters in society in south Wales in the nineteenth century.

The evidence of the activities of the Baptists associated with Thomas Thomas and his College in 1841, contradicts the claims of Canon E.T. Davies in his pioneering study of *Religion in the Industrial Revolution in South Wales*, that

The leading Welsh Nonconformist denominations in this industrial society...were almost completely indifferent to the social problems which affected thousands of their members and tens of thousands of their adherents...[and] Nonconformity in its official pronouncements revealed little or no concern for local problems.¹¹⁶

By 'official pronouncements' E.T. Davies meant the resolutions of the Monmouthshire Baptist Association published in the Circular Letters that have survived of that Welsh association of a number of Baptist churches, all independent of one another. There were also the Circular Letters of the Monmouthshire English Baptist Association, founded in 1857.¹¹⁷ From the evidence of two Circular Letters of that Association in 1883 and 1898, which expressed concern for the victims of the coal-mining disputes, Davies concluded that 'it was the English and not the Welsh Baptist Association which first showed awareness of local social problems'.¹¹⁸ In fact the Monmouthshire English Baptist Association as indicated above, was entirely the brain-child of Thomas Thomas, conceived and born in his College in Pontypool in 1857.¹¹⁹ Until that time Thomas was a member of the Monmouthshire (Welsh) Baptist Association. The Circular Letter of that Association in 1847, was written by Thomas Thomas and was described by Dr. Thomas Richards, the historian of the Association, as 'a substantial and cogent production, one of the most massive in the whole series of

¹¹⁶ Davies, *Religion in the Industrial Revolution*, p. 91.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, pp. 82-92.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, p. 86.

¹¹⁹ See below.

200' between 1832 and 1947.¹²⁰ The subject of that Circular Letter was a condemnation of state patronage of the Church, regarded as an ecclesiastical and political injustice by Thomas Thomas, though not the social injustice which E.T. Davies wanted. Davies quoted the Letter at length without acknowledging its authorship. Nor was he aware of Thomas's concerns for the poor and his attendance at the Manchester Conference and subsequent sermon.¹²¹

'Thomas Thomas drew attention to the conference in a sermon' is all that the historian of the Welsh Baptists has to say about the Manchester Conference.¹²² By October 1841 Thomas Thomas had decided that there was little point in waiting for Peel's government to repeal the Corn Laws or produce any programme of reform that might deliver the democratic demands of the Chartists or improve social justice in Britain. He wrote to the *Nonconformist* to state his conviction that

Organic must precede commercial reform...so as to secure...the permanent commercial prosperity of the nation ...there is no good expecting the removal of commercial restrictions by the present parliament.¹²³

Peel repealed the Corn Laws in 1846. Their repeal did not solve the problems described at the Manchester Conference.¹²⁴ In the meantime Thomas Thomas and his friends had turned to political solutions in the shape of Joseph Sturge's Complete Suffrage Union.¹²⁵

Thomas Thomas saw the CSU's potential for good in Pontypool. He welcomed to Tabernacle Baptist chapel the Revd Thomas Spencer, curate of Bath, who lectured at length to eight hundred people on the work of the CSU. Thomas Thomas chaired the meeting and gave his full support to all that was said. Joseph

¹²⁰ ed. Richards, *Monmouthshire Baptist Association Circular Letters*, p. 7.

¹²¹ Davies, *Religion in the Industrial Revolution*, p. 83.

¹²² Bassett, *The Welsh Baptists*, p.144.

¹²³ *Nonconformist*, 20 October 1841.

¹²⁴ K.Theodore Hoppen, *The Mid-Victorian Generation 1846-1886* (Oxford, 1998), p.297.

¹²⁵ Wallace, *Organise! Organise! Organise!*, pp. 56-62. The aim was to extend manhood suffrage. See p.67.

Sturge's aim was certainly realised in Pontypool at that time. In a town where middle-class shopkeepers and tradespeople had feared Chartism, where a major dispute over the payment of compulsory Church rate was already under way, it was 'surprising and interesting to observe how deeply the sentiments expounded by the lecturer have already taken root'.¹²⁶ An association of the CSU was formed at Pontypool as a result of this meeting. Plans were made for monthly lectures and the distribution of tracts. The influence of Thomas Thomas brought the students of the Baptist College and other local ministers on board in support of the CSU. Branches of the Union were also formed at Newport and Abergavenny.

By the following January the Pontypool Association of the CSU was responding enthusiastically to the parliamentary activities of W.S. Crawford MP, whose plan, supported by the local Monmouthshire MP, Reginald Blewitt and others, was 'to move amendments on supply motions until the grievances of the people are heard and addressed'. 'We are all here delighted' was their report to the *Nonconformist*.¹²⁷ The plan failed to fulfil its promise and its end was disappointing. At the same time, it was for Thomas Thomas a means to an end and not the end itself. Nor for that matter was his membership of the Anti-Corn Law League. After the Manchester Conference, the sermon and the petitions to parliament, Thomas does not seem to have been much involved in the activities of the League, nor did he attend the Conference in Caernarfon in November 1841. He did however, welcome Walter Griffith to Pontypool a year later when Griffith lectured on behalf of the ACLL in Pontypool and Abersychan.¹²⁸

Thomas's gaze was directed east. By January 1844 when the work of the CSU was being so well received in Pontypool, Thomas Thomas was helping to prepare for

¹²⁶ *Nonconformist*, 1 November 1843. Ryland Wallace, *Organise! Organise! Organise!* p. 61.

¹²⁷ *Nonconformist*, 24 January, 28 February 1844.

¹²⁸ *MM*, 10 December 1842.

the great Anti State-Church Conference of 1844 which was so warmly welcomed by the students of the College. Thomas was placed on the Conference's General Provisional Committee of about two hundred Nonconformist Ministers from all over Britain. The only other Welsh members were Revd Micah Thomas of Abergavenny, Revd D.Rhys Stephens of Newport and Revd Thomas Davies of Merthyr Tydfil, who became the principal of Haverfordwest Baptist College in 1856.¹²⁹ All the Welsh members were Baptists, just as they had been at the Manchester Conference. For Thomas Thomas, opposition to the Established Church and the desire for disestablishment was certainly a priority. He saw the need for disestablishment as part of the social justice that was essential in a democratic society. This could only be achieved by an extension of the franchise and the return to parliament of Nonconformist MPs of whom there was not one in 1850.¹³⁰

The part played by Thomas Thomas in the work of the Liberation Society was explored in the previous chapter. His conviction that disestablishment was essential to the achievement of religious and social freedom and could only be achieved by electing to parliament MPs who would deliver it, developed in the 1850s. Thomas gave his support publicly to the Liberal Party to achieve that end. By the late 1850s he was the proposer of the Liberal candidate for one of the two county seats in Monmouthshire in opposition to the Beaufort-family candidate, Colonel Poulett George Henry Somerset.¹³¹ Thomas's candidate was unsuccessful because of the limitations of the franchise at that time. The same thing happened in 1868 in spite of the new Reform Act, when Thomas spoke warmly in support of the Liberal candidate, Colonel Henry Clifford, because of Clifford's support for disestablishment in

¹²⁹ DWB *sub* Thomas, Micah, pp. 958-59, Stephen, David.Rhys, p 923, Davies, Thomas, p. 154; T.Witton Davies, 'The Revd Thomas Davies DD', in *Welsh Political and Educational Leaders in the Victorian Era*, pp. 495-517.

¹³⁰ *Nonconformist*, 24 January 1844.

¹³¹ *PFP*, 1 July 1859.

Ireland.¹³² Clifford was unexpectedly beaten into third place by the candidates from the two families of Beaufort (Somerset) and Tredegar (Morgan). Pontypool refused to accept the result and riots ensued.¹³³

Within the College in 1868 the teaching load of George Thomas was lightened by the arrival of James Sully MA as a Classical tutor. Sully had attended Regent's Park College and obtained London University degrees.¹³⁴ He was a philosopher who later became an eminent psychologist. His father, James Wood Sully, a Bridgewater coal merchant and ship owner, was a member of the Pontypool College Committee and a subscriber to its funds. One of his daughters, Ellen, married Thomas Thomas's surviving son Thomas Henry Thomas in 1866. Thus the close-knit world of the Baptist College was again strengthened by the extended family relationships of its members.¹³⁵

Conclusion

Pontypool Baptist College was of paramount importance in the religious and political life of the Baptist denomination. For forty years after 1836, the College was a focus of support for organisations and individuals who fostered religious, social and political liberty. Without its presence and support the programme of the Baptists in Monmouthshire to achieve social equality, justice for the poor and effective evangelism in the churches would have been very difficult. The College contributed greatly to the lives of the local Baptists enabling them to acquire confidence to take

¹³² *PPF*, 29 August 1868. See previous chapter.

¹³³ *PPF*, 19 September, 21 and 28 November, 12 December 1868. See next chapter.

¹³⁴ *Annual Report* (Cardiff, 1869), p. 12.

¹³⁵ *Annual Report* (Cardiff, 1869), pp. 7 and 10; ed. Christabel Hutchings, *The Correspondence of Thomas Henry Thomas, Arlunydd Penygarn* (Newport, 2012), p. 234.

on the vested interests in society. It was an essential companion to the specific studies of Church rate and the debates over Education in 1847 described in this thesis. By its training of young men for full-time residential ministry, the College provided settled leadership in churches and communities. This study of the life of the College during the presidency of Thomas Thomas has revealed much about the backgrounds and personalities of the students, their education and training and their interaction in the training that they received in Voluntaryism and the work of the Liberation Society.

The College survived through a network of relationships which produced teaching colleagues, members of the College Committee, examiners, preachers, students and even marriage-partners. Not least it was a springboard for the mission of the Church in this country and overseas and a means of obtaining the finances to make all its work possible.

This detailed study of Pontypool Baptist College has shown its social significance in the life of Pontypool and district. It was one alternative power base in Pontypool society. The other was Crane Street chapel to which the final chapter of this thesis will now turn.

CHAPTER SIX

Crane Street Baptist Chapel

Crane Street Baptist chapel, Pontypool, stands to-day where it has been since 1847. Its religious and social significance has declined, but it is still one of the finest buildings in the oldest industrial town in Gwent. To appreciate its splendour the visitor must not stop at the classical façade and portico but go inside to see how that façade is replicated in the design of the fine wooden pulpit where the Bible lies open on a large platform-pulpit, unlike other Nonconformist pulpits of that period. Designed by Thomas Thomas himself, together with the glass ceiling above, the platform-pulpit is a symbol of the centrality of the chapel to his life and thoughts. Beneath the pulpit is the baptistry where hundreds were baptised by Thomas Thomas and became members of the church, the body of Christian believers who worshipped in the chapel.¹ The central place occupied by the Bible symbolises its total authority over all matters of belief and worship in the life of the chapel. Baptism by immersion after an act of faith in that Bible's God was standard practice in all Baptist chapels at the time, but in many other respects Crane Street chapel was unusual.²

The purpose of this chapter will be to show for the first time how remarkable was the place that chapel occupied in the religious, social and political development of Pontypool, the contribution that it made to the organisation of the Baptist denomination in Monmouthshire, the part that it played in the growth of political Nonconformity, and its relationship with other Christian churches. This chapter presents the inner-workings of a Baptist church in mid-

¹ Anthony Jones, *Welsh Chapels* (Sutton Publishing Ltd., 1996), pp. 51, 55, 109; D. Huw Owen, *The Chapels of Wales* (Bridgend, 2012), pp. 272-274; C. B. Turner, 'Church and Chapel', in *The Gwent County History, vol. 4, Industrial Monmouthshire, 1780-1914*, eds. C. Williams and S. R. Williams, p. 211. See the account of Thomas Thomas's life by his son Thomas H. Thomas in *Welsh Religious Leaders in the Victorian Era*, ed. J. Vyrnwy Morgan, pp. 127-160, on p. 147.

² Stephen R. Holmes, *Baptist Theology* (T. and T. Clark International, 2012), pp. 4, 90, 108-109.

nineteenth century Monmouthshire and the microcosm of its peculiar culture reveals the 'gender and generational' relations in response to a previously unresearched agenda.³ The chapel's involvement with the ruling Hanbury family in Pontypool will be examined as part of the analysis of the chapel's integrity. The extent of the chapel's value in the changing lives of the various communities of which it formed a part over a period of forty years in our present study depended upon the structures of those communities and the characters of their leaders. As its minister for thirty-seven years, Thomas Thomas's leadership was clearly important to the successful development of Crane Street chapel. It will be argued in this chapter that settled and consistent leadership over such a long period of time is a key to understanding the chapel's significance in mid-nineteenth century Monmouthshire at that time. This chapter provides a clear picture of the life of a Dissenting church in its golden age as well as a rare opportunity to view the life of a minister and his wife in the context of the church community.⁴ For the purposes of this thesis, the chapel also contributes to our understanding of the kind of diffused leadership exercised by Thomas Thomas in conjunction with his joint responsibility for the Baptist College as well as for his wider leadership beyond Pontypool in the networks of relationships in which he was involved. Crane Street chapel was not only the laboratory for his own religious and social developments, but was also the power-base that complemented his work in the Baptist College.

In Chapter Four it was shown that Thomas Thomas was a firm advocate of disestablishment by 1847. He was not the first person in Pontypool to advocate the need for disestablishment: that honour must go to Charles Conway of Pontnewydd (1797-1860).⁵ Charles Conway called so fervently for disestablishment at a meeting in Pontypool in January

³ Davies, *Religion in the Industrial Revolution*, p. 150; Cragoe, *Culture, Politics and National Identity in Wales, 1832-1886*, p. 278.

⁴ The Minute Book of Crane Street Church is an essential primary source for this: GRO, D 3598/1.

⁵ Bassett, *The Welsh Baptists*, p. 147; Jones, *Sowing Beside All Waters*, p. 102; Derek Garwood, *God of our Fathers, Pontrhydyrun Baptist Church, 1815-1965* (Pontypool, 1965), pp. 7-9.

1834 that his local curate reported him to the Bishop of Llandaff who complained to his diocesan chancellor that Conway's speech had 'done a vast deal of mischief among the lower classes' of Pontypool.⁶

Nor was Thomas Thomas the first Baptist minister to seek the adjournment of a Church rate in Monmouthshire. That was done, unsuccessfully, by the Revd Micah Thomas at Abergavenny in November 1836, as we saw in Chapter Three.⁷ At that date Thomas Thomas had been resident in Pontypool for only six months. The Baptist College was being built at Penygarn; students had transferred from the Academy at Abergavenny and were being tutored by Thomas in a house on the Crumlin Road, and Thomas was leading the small Baptist church that had started worshipping in 1835 in the former Friends' Meeting House in lower Trosnant, Pontypool. Those Baptist friends would continue meeting in that building until they entered their new chapel at Crane Street in 1847. From its inception the worship of the church was entirely in English.⁸

Beginning in Trosnant

To understand the importance of Crane Street chapel in the development of religion and society in Pontypool, it is necessary to describe its origin and early development. In their description of Wales in the nineteenth century, D.W. Howell and C. Baber have claimed that Nonconformity and the Welsh language were 'central in shaping the distinctive character of

⁶ R.L.Brown, ed., *The Letters of Edward Copleston, Bishop of Llandaff, 1828-1849* (Cardiff, 2003), p. 156 (Letter 170).

⁷ *MM*, 5 November 1836.

⁸ MS History of Crane Street Baptist church, GRO, D.2174.151; Crane Street Church Minute Book, pp.3-4; Dilys M Thorne, *Crane Street Baptist Church, Pontypool, 1836-1986* (Pontypool 1989), p. 12; Himbury, *The South Wales Baptist College, 1807-1957*, pp. 40-41.

Welsh society'.⁹ Nonconformity and the Welsh language were certainly two very strong features of nineteenth century Wales, but they were not always locked together in that apparently inseparable way in the emerging society of industrial south Wales. Part of the reason for explaining the origin and early development of Crane Street chapel is to show that while the establishment of another Baptist chapel in Pontypool was typical of what was happening all over south Wales in the first half of the nineteenth century, the chapel's development was conditioned by the peculiarities of its local community.

That the new chapel held its worship in the English language may have seemed unusual in industrial Monmouthshire in 1836, though it was not unique. Apart from Micah Thomas's church at Abergavenny and the Baptist church at Abersychan where Stephen Price had ministered since 1831, there was the Baptist church of the Conways at Pontrhydyrun after 1815, when George and Jane Conway and their children had been dismissed from Frogmore Street, Abergavenny. The church grew from the workers at the Conway tinplate works and the children in the school founded by the Conways at Pontrhydyrun. By 1836 the church had a membership of more than eighty and the chapel was pulled down and rebuilt on a grander scale by August 1837. The first two ministers at the chapel were Welsh-speaking and the second, D.D. Evans, was editor of *Seren Gomer*, but he married Sarah Conway. The Conways wanted worship in English for their workers and the worship of the church seems to have been entirely in English.¹⁰

The difficulties of communicating clearly in English at this time were clear from the Reports of the Educational Commissioners in 1847, analysed in Chapter Three. The desire for worship in English was not motivated by opposition to the Welsh language, but was part of the

⁹ D.W. Howell and C. Baber, 'Wales', in *The Cambridge Social History of Britain, 1750-1950*, ed. F.M.L. Thompson (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 281-354, on p. 329.

¹⁰ Jones, *Sowing Beside All Waters*, pp. 65-66, 102-103, 104; Garwood, *God of our Fathers*, p. 20.

growing reality of the need to provide worship in the language that the majority of the worshippers wanted, as will be seen later in this chapter. There were Methodist churches at Sowhill, Pontypool, Varteg and Abersychan, where the worship was conducted in English, and the Anglican church of St. James in Pontypool had been set up in 1821 specifically and uniquely for worship in the English language alone. That indicates the number of those who could speak no Welsh among the five thousand or so immigrants to Pontypool in the two decades before 1821.¹¹

In nearby Newport in 1836 criticism was made of the Bishop of Llandaff for failing to provide proper worship and pastoral care for monoglot Welsh-speakers 'from the interior of Wales'. Newport already had five Nonconformist chapels which provided Welsh-language services. In Pontypool there were two Baptist chapels providing worship in Welsh, at Tabernacle and Trosnant. There were also Welsh services in Methodist and Independent churches as well as in the Established church at Trevethin.¹²

The growth in the number of Baptist chapels providing worship in English in this part of Monmouthshire in the first part of the nineteenth century happened partly because of the influences of the Conway family and William Williams Phillips, as noted in Chapter One. In 1835 Williams was able to rent the Quakers' Meeting house in lower Trosnant where he and his friends, who had previously worshipped at Abersychan, were able to have English services with the help of some local ministers and the students from Abergavenny Baptist Academy.¹³

When Thomas and Mary Thomas arrived in Pontypool in the summer of 1836, they were drawn into this nascent church of which he would have oversight as part of his dual role

¹¹ Ieuan Gwynedd Jones and David Williams, eds., *The Religious Census of 1851*, vol. 1, *South Wales* (Cardiff, 1976), pp. 72-80; Sian Rhiannon Williams, 'The Welsh Language in Industrial Monmouthshire 1800-1901', in *Language and Community in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Geraint H. Jenkins (Cardiff, 1998), pp. 203-229, on p. 207.

¹² *MM*, 19 November 1836; Jones and Williams, *Religious Census*, vol. 1, *South Wales*, pp. 73-80, 100-105.

¹³ *PFP*, 6 September 1862; Jones, *Sowing Beside All Waters*, pp. 102-104.

of President of the Baptist Academy and minister of a Baptist church in Pontypool. On 2 August they entered into the agreement or covenant for the formation of the church, as was the custom of Baptist churches. They covenanted together with fourteen other people, including their niece Jane David who had come from Cardiff to help them and was dismissed from the Tabernacle church there. William Williams Phillips, senior, his wife and daughter and six others dismissed from Abersychan Baptist church, one from Penygarn Baptist church, two from Caerleon Baptist church and one from a Baptist church at Bristol, made up the sixteen original members of the church. At the service in the former Friends' Meeting House on 2 August 1836 the Revd Stephen Price gave the opening prayer and thus began an involvement with Thomas Thomas that would last for the next forty-five years. Also involved in that service were the Revd D. Rhys Stephen of Swansea, soon to move to Newport, the Revd David Phillips of Caerleon and the Revd Thomas Morgan of Birmingham. They had all been students at the Baptist Academy in Abergavenny, whose former tutor Revd Micah Thomas addressed Thomas Thomas at what was his induction into the new church. The sermon was preached by Thomas Thomas's former tutor at Stepney College, Dr. Murch.¹⁴

Also participating in this service was William Williams Phillips senior, who gave an account of 'the providential circumstances which led to the formation of this church'. The recorder of the event had no doubt about the important part played in its achievement by Williams, 'to whose instrumentality under God's blessing, this infant cause is chiefly indebted for its existence'. Phillips himself took no credit for the occasion, but believed that

We were graciously directed by the peculiar Providence of God to him who is, this evening, to be set apart as our pastor, and we hope ever to cherish feelings of gratitude to our heavenly Father for sending him amongst us and to be enabled to walk in comfort and peace with our beloved friend as long as it shall please our heavenly Father to allow us to continue together.¹⁵

¹⁴ Crane Street church Minute Book, pp. 3-4; Thorne, *Crane Street Baptist Church Pontypool, 1836-1986*, pp. 12-13; DWB *sub* Stephen, David Rhys, p. 923.

¹⁵ Crane Street church Minute Book, p. 4.

Phillips's expression was truly prophetic. It also reveals his maturity. What was coming together on that occasion was a combination of congenial, like-minded people who could conspire together with a clear conscience. That was very important for Baptists for whom conscience and the freedom of the individual believer under the Lordship of Christ was paramount.¹⁶ By association with other Baptist churches in the area, particularly through the networks of the Conway family and the Baptist College, they would come to modify the apparent absolutism in Baptist thinking about the primacy of the local church in the Baptist understanding of the Church.¹⁷ There is no monolithic Baptist church: there are Baptist churches. At the same time there have always been associations of churches, and what was achieved by Thomas Thomas and his circle of friends and associates around Pontypool happened by extending the fellowship of the local church to an association with other Baptist churches, and beyond them to other Nonconformist churches, and even to collaboration with some Anglican churches in the wider causes of temperance and further education. This will be made clearer later in this chapter. It happened particularly when the elephant of disestablishment was not too clearly in the room.

Something of this wider vision quickly became visible through the family of William Williams Phillips himself. His son of the same name as himself became an Anglican, as was his brother, the magistrate E. H. Phillips, though neither was baptised as an infant. W.W.Phillips, Junior, was baptised as an adult, together with his brother Henry, his sister Ann and five other people in Penygarn Tabernacle Baptist chapel, in front of a crowded gathering in July 1837. Thomas Thomas performed the baptisms and it was stated specifically in the record that Mr. W. Phillips was baptized 'with the view of communicating in the Established

¹⁶ Holmes, *Baptist Theology*, pp. 119-139.

¹⁷ Holmes, *Baptist Theology*, pp. 95-97.

Church'. The other seven were admitted into full fellowship with the new Baptist church in Trosnant. Henry Phillips went on to become as distinguished a Baptist leader as his father; W.W. Phillips, Junior, became a churchwarden in the Parish of Trevethin, and a magistrate like his uncle, Edward H. Phillips.¹⁸

Thomas Thomas's church in Trosnant was founded on what were understood by him as democratic principles. This would be so important in bringing greater religious and civic freedom to the town of Pontypool and the parish of Trefethin. Given the fact that so few men in the town of Pontypool had the vote at that time, and certainly no woman, the democratic vote by secret ballot for all the members of the new church, including the women, was a major breakthrough in a town ruled by the Lord Lieutenant and a few henchmen among the guardians of the poor. That the women members were allowed to vote as well as the men, only becomes clear in 1847 when the Minute Book states that 'it was resolved to take the vote of the whole church' on the question of Open Communion. The votes were 27 in favour and 27 against.¹⁹ Since there were unlikely to have been 54 male members of the church at that date, it seems clear that 'the whole church' meant men and women. Thomas Thomas himself said as much in the speech that he made at the celebration of the paying off of the chapel debt in November 1867. Thomas gave as the first reason for the harmony and peace of the church that

This church has always rested on the broad basis of Christian democracy, and has been governed by universal suffrage, including that of the female members. The ballot has been resorted to on the most important occasions, as in the decision of the communion question and always in the election of officers...²⁰

¹⁸ Crane Street church Minute Book, 30 July 1837, p. 10.

¹⁹ Church Minute Book, 1 November 1847.

²⁰ *PFP*, 16 November 1867.

Thomas Thomas's friend Charles Stovel was the first to advocate the balloting of male and female members in his book, *Hints on the Regulation of Christian Churches*.²¹ Fewer than a hundred men in Pontypool had the vote at that time.²² The church meeting was not democratic for the sake of democracy, but in order that all the members collectively could discern the mind of Christ, whose Lordship over them was paramount.

That Lordship was supremely present in the church through the 'ordinance of the Lord's Supper' or Holy Communion. It is an interesting indication of the new church's priorities that the first recorded action of its new pastor on their first Lord's Day together on 7 August 1836, was that he 'administered the ordinance of the Lord's Supper to the newly formed church', when, as the Minute Book so poignantly records, 'it is believed the presence of the Lord Jesus was imminently (sic) present'²³. It is clear that spirituality was important to the life of this church and was not compromised by its political involvement. Thomas Thomas continued to administer the 'ordinance', a term he preferred to 'sacrament', once a month until his retirement from Crane Street chapel at the end of 1873. The Minute Book recorded the 'last ordinance of the Lord's Supper administered by Dr. Thomas to the church as its Pastor' on 7 December 1873 when 'a larger number than usual of the church members' attended²⁴. In 1836 the church members decided that the Holy Communion service would be held on the fourth Sunday morning of every month, just as they decided that they would hold their monthly meeting on the Tuesday evening before that fourth Sunday. They also decided that they would pay their contributions towards the pastor's salary on that last Sunday of every month when they received Holy Communion. They would pay their money to the deacon, William Williams

²¹ Published in London in 1835. Stovel and Thomas had been students and ministers together in London and they had both campaigned for the abolition of slavery. See *SWDN*, 20 September 1876. Stovel was President of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland in 1862 and 1874. See, Ernest A. Payne, *The Baptist Union*, p. 258.

²² *The Register of persons entitled to vote at any election of a member or members to serve in Parliament for the County of Monmouth, 1843-1844, Pontypool Polling District*, pp. 127-134.

²³ I think the word intended is 'immanent', really present, as opposed to 'transcendent'. Church Minute Book, August 7 and 16 1836.

²⁴ Church Minute Book, Sunday 7 December 1873.

Phillips, senior, whom they elected by secret ballot after giving a week's notice of their intention to vote. Phillips was the treasurer of the church as well as of the Baptist College. He was the church's only deacon for three years after his election in 1836, and he continued as senior deacon after the members had elected other deacons.²⁵

The members of the chapel lived with the consequences of their democratic decisions. They voted to ask Thomas Thomas to request the Baptist church at Caerleon to dismiss two members who should have been among the first members of the new church, John Gould and William Wise. This was done, and the two new members were welcomed into the fellowship on 28 August 1836. They were likewise democratically excluded in November 1839. John Gould was dismissed for drunkenness and William Wise for being 'too much implicated in the measures of the Chartist rioters'²⁶ when he took part in the march on Newport in that month. Thomas Thomas's sermon on the Sunday after the Chartists' march on Newport revealed his opposition to the activities of the local Chartists because of their 'lawless abandonment' though he was in sympathy with the Charter. He preferred instead:

Appeals to the reason and conscience of the legislature and the nation [and] unceasing efforts to enlist the sympathies of the population in the cause of the oppressed; and especially by a *passive* obedience to bad laws, and moral resistance to the encroachments of unconstitutional power.²⁷

Although Thomas had opposed the Chartist Rising, he had expressed in the same sermon his earnest prayer that

Our rulers, by a course of *increasingly liberal and vigorous policy*, may speedily remove the grievances, silence the complaints and concede the rights of the poorer classes.²⁸

²⁵ Church Minute Book, 16 August 1836.

²⁶ Church Minute Book, Thursday 16 November 1839.

²⁷ Thomas Thomas, *The Civil Duties of Christians: a sermon occasioned by the late outrages at Newport Monmouthshire, preached at the English Chapel Troisant, Pontypool* (London 1839), p. 24.

²⁸ Thomas Thomas, *The Civil Duties of Christians*, p. 26.

Those were his thoughts in 1840. The eighteen-forties were to show how much the Monmouthshire Baptists would have to show 'passive obedience to bad laws' and take the consequences, as revealed in Chapter 2.

Thomas Thomas taught the members of his church to live with the consequences of their decisions, which they continued to do after they moved into their new chapel in Crane Street in 1847. In September of that year they received a request for admission to Holy Communion from Mrs. Read, who had been a communicant with the Baptist church at Helstone in Cornwall, but she had not been 'baptised according to our views of the ordinance' by total immersion. As we noticed earlier, an advertised ballot on Open Communion in Crane Street in November 1847, produced twenty-seven members' votes in favour and twenty-seven against, and there the matter remained, without any attempt being made to open Communion to those who had not been baptised as Baptists.²⁹ As a minister in London, Thomas Thomas had been used to Open Communion in his church at Henrietta Street³⁰. Yet he never forced the matter or used a casting vote to break the democratic tie in Pontypool. Thomas's style of diffused or distributed leadership, which respected the worth and conscience of every individual member of the church, was important to the success of Crane Street.

In respect of their vote on Open Communion the church members might have seemed rather conservative, but they had made a democratic decision. In some Baptist circles Crane Street might have seemed conservative because the minister alone administered the Lord's Supper for them and he seems to have carried out all the baptisms, amounting to 242 after the first baptism he had carried out in the open air at Trosnant on 23 October 1836. Nor were the

²⁹ Church Minute Book, 16 and 28 August, 1836 (pp. 5-6), 16 November 1839, 27 September, 4, October 1847. Page numbers in the Church Minute Book ceased after page 13.

³⁰ T.H. Thomas, 'The Revd Thomas Thomas DD' in *Welsh Religious Leaders in the Victorian Era*, p. 147.

church members allowed to preach the sermon during Sunday services in Crane Street chapel unless they were candidates for the ministry.³¹

In many other respects the life of the chapel was ahead of its time. Deacons were engaged in far more than arranging the financial affairs of the church, paying the minister's salary or keeping important documents, like the registration certificate for marriages to be solemnised in the chapel under the new Marriage Act. William Williams Phillips, senior, was solemnly charged to keep this certificate, which represented an important breakthrough in granting Nonconformists the right to be married in their own registered buildings in the presence of a Registrar, which had previously been denied to them.³² Thomas Thomas did not believe that everything should be done by the minister even in the worship in the chapel. Deacons could be involved in reading lessons and praying in church services, superintending and teaching in Sunday School, and visiting people who applied for membership or had lapsed from attendance. There were occasions when deacons visited chapel members who had been bereaved and were reported to be in need of help from the money that the chapel kept for the relief of people in distress. All the deacons were male, but Thomas encouraged all the church members to share their gifts in the service of the church. Female members were included in the visiting teams whose work was extended to a general 'superintendence of the members' after January 1841. The delegation of duties and leadership to church members encouraged responsibility and ownership and gave confidence to members as they became involved in activities outside the chapel.³³

³¹Church Minute Book, 23 October 1836, p.7 and 27 March 1854.

³² The Pontypool Registry in Trosnant was opposite the former Friends Meeting House, and it was a deacon at Crane Street church, Thomas Brooks Smith, who eventually became Registrar of Marriages for Pontypool.

³³ Church Minute Book, 16 August, 20 September 1836, 27 November 1837, 9 January 1838, 4 January and 22 July 1841, 29 January 1844, 15 September 1845, 30 June 1868, 8 January 1871, 26 October 1873. Sunday School teaching was very important in the life of Crane Street church from its beginning in Trosnant. In its first year 30 children attended the Sunday School. Thomas Thomas, *The Inaugural Address at the Annual Session of the Baptist Union, April 1872* (London 1872), p. 6.

In May 1837 the church meeting 'resolved that the Pastor be requested to apply to join the Monmouthshire Association of Baptist churches'.³⁴ Thomas, of course, complied with the resolution and the new church duly joined the Monmouthshire Particular Baptist Association. The Particular Baptists were Calvinists who 'turned their eyes from the problems of this world'.³⁵ Revd Francis Hiley of Llanwenarth had written the Letter of the Monmouthshire Baptist Association in 1840 without any reference to what had been happening in Monmouthshire since November 1839. He and his associates were criticised for that, as well as for lacking 'the enterprising outlook for a Forward Movement in the forties'.³⁶ Thomas Thomas was not a high Calvinist and his church certainly promoted what might be described as a Forward Movement in the forties, as this chapter will reveal.

From its inception in 1836 the church was outward-looking and generous. It had a Sunday School, formed after the church members had canvassed the area, that had more than doubled in numbers by 1840. It had collected money to finance the Sunday School as well as the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS) and the Baptist College, whose foundation stone had been laid in August 1836.³⁷ The building fund for the new chapel had been started with £15 in the Pontypool Savings Bank in January 1839. Thomas Thomas shared leadership with the deacons who were always carefully chosen by democratic secret ballot, as we have observed. By 1840 Mr. William Willams Phillips, at his own request, had been joined by the second deacon, Mr. Charles Davies.³⁸

Charles Davies had been elected 'by a large majority' at the regular church meeting on 17 September 1839. The desirability of electing a second deacon had been put by William

³⁴ Church Minute Book, 2 May 1837.

³⁵ Thomas Richards, ed., *Monmouthshire Baptist Association, Circular Letters 1832-1945*, p. 6.

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ Church Minute Book, 8 November, 13 November, 1836 (p.7), 9 January 1838 (p.11), 24 January 1839, 1 March 1841.

³⁸ Church Minute Book, 27 January, 20 August 1839, 17 September 1839.

Phillips to the church meeting in August, but Davies was a reluctant player; it took him until November to accept the post. He had come suddenly upon the scene at the beginning of that year from central London where his three children had been born, though he and his wife, Rebecca, hailed from Abergavenny.³⁹ The family had worshipped at the Baptist church in Eagle Street near Chancery Lane, from which they received an 'honourable dismissal' to the Pontypool church in January 1839. The new church saw their arrival in Pontypool as the act of 'Divine Providence', words used again in November to describe Monmouthshire's delivery from the evils of the Chartist Rising.⁴⁰

The advent of Charles Davies proved providential to the plans for the new chapel. He became a key leader in the life of the church while he settled down as an ironmonger in Pontypool as well as being a brazier and tin-plate worker, employing twenty-three men in his business. He lived with his family in very respectable Upper George Street, next-door to William Conway, with whom he worked closely and to whom, through his wife, Rebecca, he was related by marriage.⁴¹

Attention is being drawn here to the arrival of Charles Davies in the new church to show that the development of leadership depended upon initiatives that were more than the willing response of Thomas Thomas to the democratic decisions of the chapel members. Thomas took his own initiatives as well as seeking responses from the members in the organisation and worship of the chapel. In July 1838 he had promoted the use of the new collection of hymns by the Revd David Phillips, Baptist minister at Caerleon. The profits of sale were being given to the Baptist College and the church, of course, agreed to buy them. When Thomas later realised that the quality of the hymn-singing was poor, he set up a

³⁹ Church Minute Book, 17 September, 15 October, 12 November 1839. 1851 Wales Census, PRO HO 107/2449, Trevethin, Pontypool, 34.

⁴⁰ Church Minute Book, 17 January, 14 November 1839.

⁴¹ PRO HO 107/2449, 34, Trevethin, Pontypool. GRO, 218D567/11.

committee to try to improve it, as he did when he wanted members to show greater pastoral care of the church in January 1841, and similarly to collect money for the BMS.⁴²

More important was his initiative in the early 1840s to persuade the members to take steps to build a new chapel. That was where Mr. Charles Davies came into his own. At the regular church meeting in January 1842, Thomas Thomas reminded the members that they must make decisions about the new building. Charles Davies proposed the appointment of a committee to help him to carry out the work. The committee, including William Conway and nine local businessmen, changed its membership over the next three years. On 15 September 1845 Thomas Thomas reported to the church meeting that the provisional committee had negotiated with the owner, Mr. John Griffiths, the sale of an eligible site in Crane Street on the Blue Boar Field. The church meeting agreed to purchase the ground which was surrendered to Mr. Charles Davies on behalf of the chapel Trustees. These Trustees were: Charles Davies, William Conway, Charles Davies, junior, William Conway James, Thomas Thomas, William W. Phillips, Henry Phillips, John Williams (Deacon since September 1843), Charles Conway, Isaac Hiley, David Lawrence, John Havard (Deacon since September 1843) and John Lewis.⁴³

The names of almost all the Trustees have become familiar through being associated with other causes in the district of Pontypool, especially the battle over the Church rate, analysed in chapter two. In May 1845, Charles Davies had supported William Conway's demand for a poll of the whole parish before the Church rate was fixed. Davies refused to pay the Church rate⁴⁴ as did William Conway, Thomas Thomas, John Havard, Isaac Hiley and John Lewis. They must have all been very conscious of the fact that the Church rate levied for the rebuilding of Trefethin parish church was being enforced on Nonconformists at the same time

⁴² Church Minute Book, 24 July 1838, 4 January 1841, 29 January 1844.

⁴³ Church Minute Book, 31 January 1842, 15 September 1845; Thorne, *Crane Street Baptist Church Pontypool 1836-1986*, p. 2.

⁴⁴ See Chapter 2, pp. 9 and 16; *MM*, 24 May, 7 June 1845.

as they were trying to raise the money to complete the purchase of the site for Crane Street chapel from voluntary contributions.⁴⁵

The new church in Crane Street

The new church in Crane Street was a continuation of the one that began in Trosnant and moved half a mile up the road to an impressive new building in 1847. The themes of the chapter cannot be kept tightly to chronology. It has already been necessary to stray into the continuing life of the Church in Crane Street to emphasise the way in which the church members lived with their democratic decisions even when they resulted in stalemate. The question of temperance or teetotalism, the abstention from alcoholic beverages and the extent to which that was required of church members will be left to the next section of the chapter, because it involved relationships outside the chapel walls. The way in which the church's relationships with the ruling Hanburys of Pontypool were affected by the celebrations in the Park in 1853 will be analysed in this chapter because the incident highlights the intrinsic integrity of Crane Street church and its place in the battle for religious freedom at the time.

The opening of Crane Street chapel was marked by special preaching services between 7 and 11 April 1847. On Wednesday evening, 7 April, the first two sermons were in Welsh, by Rev Francis Hiley of Llanwenarth and Rev David Roberts of Tredegar. More than half of the population of Pontypool spoke Welsh in 1847, though they all aspired to be bi-lingual. The language of the chapel was English, but it still belonged to the Welsh Baptist Association. On Thursday, 8 April, there were sermons in English, morning, afternoon and evening, from Rev

⁴⁵ See Chapter 2, pp. 17-19; *MM*, 14 November 1845.

F.A. Cox of Hackney, Rev Micah Thomas of Abergavenny and Rev B. Parsons of Ebley, Gloucestershire. Parsons also preached on the following Sunday, but he was assisted in that service by four local Baptist ministers from Ponthir, Caerleon and Newport, as well as Dr. Cox and the Welsh agent of the Baptist Mission Society and, of course, Thomas Thomas.⁴⁶

That shows the trouble that was taken in the arrangements for the launching of this important new chapel on the people of Pontypool. The first services were all well-attended and the first one thousand pounds of the total cost of £2,200 had been raised by the end of the services. On the 17 April the *Monmouthshire Merlin* reported that a meeting had been held 'in the new English Baptist chapel Pontypool' on the previous Tuesday to form a literary society or Mechanics' Institute. Thomas Thomas was the chairman of that first public meeting to be held in Crane Street chapel in a cause close to his heart and in which he would continue to be closely involved in Pontypool. Though it has been estimated that only a small percentage of Nonconformist Ministers was involved in any matters outside the concerns of their own chapels at this time, Thomas Thomas was publicly involved from his arrival in Pontypool in 1836. It is not therefore surprising that his first meeting in the new chapel was involved with extra-mural activities.⁴⁷

The cause of adult education, to which reference will be made later, was merely a sideline to the heated debate over education in which Thomas Thomas and his associates were involved in 1847. These years were not only the 'hungry forties'; in Pontypool they were the frantic forties. The long debate over the Education Council's proposals and the public meetings held in Newport and Pontypool, have been analysed in chapter three. The very same issue of the *Monmouthshire Merlin* that reported Thomas's meeting about the Mechanics' Institute, also

⁴⁶ Church Minute Book, April 1847; *MM*, 3 April 1847.

⁴⁷ *MM*, 17 April 1847; Munson, 'The Education of Baptist Ministers, 1870-1900', in *The Baptist Quarterly*, 26, July 1976, p. 320. There seems to have been an earlier Mechanics Institute in Pontypool which did not survive: See G.S.Kenrick, *The Population of Pontypool and the parish of Trevethin, situated in the so-called 'disturbed districts'; its moral, social and intellectual character* (London, 1841), p. 374.

reported the petition sent from Pontypool to Lord John Russell, 'headed by the Lord Lieutenant of the County (Capel Hanbury Leigh) and other respectable and wealthy inhabitants of the Parish of Trevethin' in favour of the Minutes of Council. The same *Monmouthshire Merlin* reported the petition of the Clerical Society of the Deanery of Abergavenny in favour of the government scheme of education and signed by sixteen clergymen. The report claimed that they represented a population of 80,000. The Monmouthshire Baptists would certainly have disputed that.⁴⁸

The battle-lines were being drawn. That same issue of the *Monmouthshire Merlin* reported the public meeting held in Pontypool in opposition to the government education scheme and the Resolutions passed unanimously at that large meeting at Tabernacle Baptist Chapel, Pontypool, when Charles Conway was in the chair.⁴⁹ The British School of the Voluntaryists had been open in Pontypool since 1843, providing day-school education for three hundred pupils, with no government support. It was strongly supported by Thomas Thomas and his friends, William Williams Phillips, senior, William Conway and others, and it would soon earn high praise from no less an adversary than Jelinger Symons. Significantly, the school's opening had brought to Pontypool Thomas Brooks Smith to be its headmaster for the next forty-eight years. The school opened with seventy pupils in Merchants Yard, Pontypool in July 1843. It moved to a new building in George Street, Pontypool in June 1847. In the following year Thomas Brooks Smith married, and his wife, also a teacher, was soon in charge of the infants' department at the school. They depended upon monitors to staff the school, but in time they were joined by their daughter Ellen, who became a pupil teacher at the school. T.B. Smith was elected a deacon of Crane Street chapel in 1855. As well as being the Registrar

⁴⁸ *MM*, 17 April 1847.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

for Marriages in Pontypool, he was also the Sunday School superintendent at Crane Street and later President of the Sunday School Union in Pontypool and Crane Street's Choirmaster.⁵⁰

In April 1847 the rebuilding of Trevethin parish church was almost complete. Ironically that same issue of the *Monmouthshire Merlin* reported the generous gift to 'the new parish church' of a new font made of Painswick stone 'of exquisite design and workmanship'. The donor was Charles Williams, junior, a Pontypool solicitor.⁵¹ The *Monmouthshire Merlin* praised his generosity when it reported the opening of Trevethin church by Bishop Coplestone (sic) of Llandaff in its edition of 10 July 1847. Near to the new font was the baptistry, described by the *Merlin* as 'doubtless an interesting relic of the primitive church'.⁵² Doubtless also an interesting imitation of the baptistries in many Baptist chapels, including Crane Street, where at least one Trevethin churchwarden had been baptised.⁵³ This was not missed by one anonymous Baptist minister in Pontypool who told the *Monmouthshire Merlin* that the baptistry in Trevethin church would

Henceforth bear its unequivocal testimony to the effects that the Baptists, so much spoken against, have always practically maintained the right mode of administration.⁵⁴

When Bishop Edward Copleston came to consecrate the rebuilt parish church at Trevethin he was approaching the end of his episcopate. He did not mention the baptistry, but it was praised by his successor, Alfred Ollivant, who saw it as a valuable aid to Anglicans as an alternative legitimate means of baptism and a means of preventing parishioners from going to the Baptist church for the sacrament. In support of the Vicar of Trevethin, who had arranged for twelve people to be baptised 'in the modes prescribed by the Church of England', six of

⁵⁰ E.J. Smith, *A Useful Life: Memorials of the late T.B. Smith* (Pontypool, 1892), pp. 50-54, 64, 68-69; *PPF*, 4 December 1891; Church Minute Book, 3 June 1855, 25 September 1870, 1 January 1871; *Kelly's Directory of Monmouthshire 1871*, p. 84.

⁵¹ *MM*, 17 April 1847.

⁵² *MM*, 10 July 1847.

⁵³ Church Minute Book, 30 July 1837, p. 10

⁵⁴ *MM*, 19 February 1847.

them by immersion in the baptistry pool and six of them by pouring water over their heads at the font, Ollivant said that it would be

well if all our churches were provided with the same means of meeting the wishes of scrupulous persons as yours is.⁵⁵

From a historical point of view, the words 'so much spoken against', in the letter of the anonymous Baptist minister are more important than his theological opinion about immersion as the unique means of Baptism. It would also seem to be historically valid to say that the Anglicans were providing baptistries in new or restored churches in Victorian south Wales in imitation of the successful Baptists. Trevethin may well have been the first, thanks to Crane Street chapel, but a number of other churches in the diocese later followed suit.⁵⁶ Whether baptism was by immersion or affusion, (pouring water) or sprinkling, made no difference to the theology of Baptism for Anglicans. There was a theological issue for Baptists, which prevented them from baptising infants, because infants could not make a confession of faith for themselves. It seems to have been only Anglican churches that provided baptistries in imitation of the Baptists at this time.

All this was wasted on the reporter of the *Monmouthshire Merlin* who was more interested in the generosity of the young Pontypool solicitor who presented the font and most interested in the involvement of the Lord Lieutenant, Capel Hanbury Leigh who had 'munificently contributed towards this desirable object' (the new church). In return for his contribution of £500 Capel Hanbury Leigh acquired the whole north transept of the church as his family pew. Beneath this 'pew' was the vault in which the Hanbury family was buried. As

⁵⁵ *PFP*, 1 October 1859.

⁵⁶ After Trevethin, baptistries were built in a number of new or restored parish churches in the diocese of Llandaff, such as nearby Llanfrechfa in 1874, St. Catwg Gelligaer, 1867-68, St. John Baptist Cardiff, 1890, St. Mary Nolton, Bridgend, 1885-87, Llantrisant, 1894 and St. Michael and All Angels, Maesteg, 1895-98.

John Newman observed, 'The Hanburys of Pontypool Park used it (Trevethin parish church) as their estate church'.⁵⁷

Capel Hanbury Leigh's first wife, Molly Anne (Mackworth) died childless in June 1846 while the men of the Pontypool estate were removing the coffins from the family vault in Trevethin church to transfer them to a deeper vault in the north transept. Capel Hanbury Leigh was away from Pontypool until the end of April 1847. In August, aged seventy-one, he married his second wife, Emma Elizabeth Rous, aged thirty-two. Two daughters were born in 1848 and 1850 followed by the long-awaited son and heir on 14 May 1853. John Capel Hanbury was born in London. There was much rejoicing when the news reached Pontypool and 'a committee was soon set up to plan and carry out suitable festivities'. The committee of fourteen local men was headed by Joseph Firmstone who, with Edward Dimmack and John Thompson, ironmasters from Staffordshire, had just acquired the lease on the Hanbury ironworks with mines, houses and several farms, because the ironworks had been making a heavy trading loss.⁵⁸

Festivities in celebration of the birth of John Capel Hanbury in 1853 were fulsome. What was reported in the *Monmouthshire Merlin* for a month after the birth and also reached the *Hereford Times* was a full-scale public event incredible to modern readers and suggesting an occasion touching the royal house. The 'royal' family of what the *Merlin* called 'The House of Hanbury Leigh' returned to Pontypool on 9 June 1853 for the celebration of the birth of their son and heir. All the shops in Newport and Pontypool closed on that day and special trains were provided from Newport to return there at 11 p.m. There was a reminder in the local press that trains on the railway between Newport and Pontypool operated on Greenwich Mean Time, twelve minutes ahead of local time, and station doors would be closed three minutes before the

⁵⁷ PFP, 10 July 1847; John Newman, *The Buildings of Wales, Gwent/Monmouthshire* (Penguin, 2000), p. 580.

⁵⁸ Hanbury Tenison, *The Hanburys of Monmouthshire*, pp. 258-262, 269-270; MM, 27 May, 10 June 1853.

departure of each train. Sports were held in Pontypool Park and a large ox was roasted on a spit in the market and taken in procession to Pontypool Park where it was alleged to have fed, not five thousand, but twenty thousand.⁵⁹

The various trades associated with the Pontypool iron works held their own meeting of about 1,500 workmen, to decide to send two men from each trade to march in procession and present an address to the Lord Lieutenant in the following order: Colliers, Miners, Foundrymen and Furnacemen, Refiners, Forgemen, Puddlers, Tinnerns, Carpenters, Masons, Smiths, Woodmen and Boatmen, Farm Bailiff and servants. Capel Hanbury Leigh responded with thanks for their presentation and he expressed his sorrow that he had to relinquish the conduct of the ironworks. The Mayor of Newport, six councillors and the Clerk of the Council also paid their respects. There was no Mayor or Council in Pontypool. The Lord Lieutenant promised to build a town hall to commemorate his son's birth after an address delivered by Dr. Edward Phillips J.P. who had presided over the proceedings as lieutenant to the Lord Lieutenant, chief magistrate and chairman of the celebrations.⁶⁰

These details of the festivities have been given to emphasise the portentous nature of the events. The first address to be presented to Capel Hanbury Leigh was the one that calls for most attention in the context of this chapter. It was signed by 3,878 children and presented by Richard Greenway, a local solicitor, on behalf of the four hundred children of the Pontypool Town (National) School, one hundred and twenty children who attended the Infants' school financed by the Lord Lieutenant himself, and children from the Church, Wesleyan, Primitive and Calvinistic Methodists, Independent, Congregationalist and Welsh Baptist Sunday schools in Trevethin parish. The children all marched in procession, four abreast, down Clarence Street Pontypool to Park House, led by their Sunday school superintendents and the Ebbw Vale band.

⁵⁹ *MM*, 17 June 1853; *Hereford Times*, 15 June 1853.

⁶⁰ *MM*, 27 May, 10 June 1853.

They were described as 'a fine assemblage of the rising generation'. The Sunday School of Crane Street Chapel was not there.⁶¹

At the regular Church meeting at Crane Street on 30 May 1853, after arrangements were made to receive the collections towards the repayment of the chapel debt and an agreement to clean and paint the chapel that summer, Thomas Thomas drew attention to the 'character of the approaching demonstration in honour of the birth of the heir of Pontypool Park', and the invitation sent to the Sunday Schools to attend the event. After discussion, three resolutions were carried unanimously expressing surprise and regret at the character of the proceedings and the attempts to secure 'the countenance and attendance of the Sunday Schools in the neighbourhood'.⁶²

The Church meeting said that it yielded to none in its respect for the public position and private worth of the Lord Lieutenant of the County, but it emphatically condemned the 'degrading and demoralizing sports and amusement' contemplated on this occasion. The meeting claimed that they tended to 'degrade the common people and to counteract the efforts made for their intellectual and moral improvement'. The proposed celebrations were considered to be out of harmony with the age, dignity, character and private feelings of the Lord Lieutenant. They would involve 'an absurd and reckless waste of a large amount of money', which would be better spent on 'some lasting memorial of the auspicious event', honourable to the family and permanently beneficial to the town's inhabitants. The meeting's main objection was that the proposed celebrations were 'incompatible with the spirit and claims of the Christian religion' because of their excessive 'revellings'.⁶³

⁶¹ *MM*, 10 June 1853.

⁶² Church Minute Book, 30 May 1853.

⁶³ *Ibid*.

In conclusion, the meeting entreated the superintendent and teachers of the Sunday School of Crane Street chapel to decline the invitation to join the proposed procession. This they did. Thomas Thomas and Charles Davies, the deacon, were requested to 'wait on Mr. Dimmack with these resolutions', which they did⁶⁴. Such a decision was not easy in the face of so much general and almost unanimous rejoicing in an event which urged congratulations and whole-hearted celebration. The refusal of Crane Street Sunday School to participate demanded great courage and discipline by the teachers and members of the Sunday School in complying with the entreaty, which was not an order.

Although Crane Street chapel was the newest in Pontypool, its leadership did not leave the matter there. Armed with the resolutions of their own meeting on Monday, they sought the support of 'a meeting of teachers and friends of Sunday Schools' on Tuesday evening (31 May) in the Town School, with a local chemist, Mr. William Wood, in the chair. The resolution of Rev. Thomas Thomas was seconded by a Primitive Methodist Minister, Revd James Warn, and carried unanimously. This resolution recommended

the teachers of the Sunday schools in the district, respectfully to decline the invitation of the Pontypool Committee; and that a Bible, to be purchased with a penny subscription of the teachers and scholars, be presented to the Lord Lieutenant for the infant heir, at a convenient time, when all the schools shall assemble for the purpose, and have such a treat and entertainment as may be deemed most suitable to the occasion.⁶⁵

A committee was set up to carry out the objects of the resolution. It met two days later and unanimously agreed to communicate the resolution 'immediately' to all the schools in the district. Their communication gave reasons for the resolution in words that were almost exactly the same as the resolution recorded in the Crane Street Minute Book for their meeting on 28 May. The committee also agreed to publish the resolution with the reasons for their objections

⁶⁴ Church Minute Book, 25 April 1853.

⁶⁵ *MM*, 3 June 1853.

in the local press. The published announcement appeared on page eight of the *Monmouthshire Merlin* of 3 June 1853, six days before the planned event and too late to avoid disappointing so many children who were already looking forward to games followed by ‘some thousand buns with wine’.⁶⁶

Whether the resolutions of the Crane Street chapel meeting, communicated so politely to Mr. Dimmack, the works manager, by Charles Davies and Thomas Thomas, in any way inspired the Lord Lieutenant’s offer to provide Pontypool with a town hall, will never be known. The resolutions expressed fear that the children of the Sunday School might become affected by the indulgent extravagances of the celebrations in the Park. There was a resistance to the idea that the Sunday School of Crane Street chapel should fall in behind activities planned elsewhere and not in keeping with their highest purpose. The Lord Lieutenant’s authority in civic matters was not in doubt, but he did not have the right to direct the activities of Sunday schools. The proposed festivities were viewed as a waste of money at a time when government grants for the British School were being refused. The Lord Lieutenant’s money was being given to the parish church at the same time as a Church rate had been demanded from Nonconformists in the Parish of Trevethin and distraint made on their goods for their refusal to pay the rate. Motives were complex and the battle for religious freedom remained uncertain.⁶⁷

None of the reports of the dissatisfaction felt by the planned ‘demonstration at Pontypool Park’ mentioned the ‘buns with wine’ for the children, nor the large ox with ‘one hundred barrels of cwrw da’(good local ale) for the workmen and their families, provided by the Pontypool Iron Company and the local inhabitants. The cause of total abstinence from alcoholic beverages, espoused by Crane Street chapel, to which reference will be made later,

⁶⁶ *MM*, 3 June 1853.

⁶⁷ See Chapter 2.

could not have been sanguine about so much alcohol. The reasons for the protest, expressed in the words of Thomas Thomas, were simply that the proceedings involved ‘an enormous waste of money, which might be usefully devoted to the erection of a public building’ instead of the ‘low and questionable sports and pastimes’ that were being offered.⁶⁸

The protest did not go unnoticed. At the end of the business in the magistrates’ court in the following week, the chairman was very pleased to state that not one single case of drunkenness or disorderly conduct had been brought before the magistrates ‘from the festivities on Thursday last...after a concourse of at least 25,000 persons...’ The reporter noted that the ‘remarks of the worthy magistrate appeared to give much satisfaction to all in court’.⁶⁹ The worthy magistrate was, of course, Edward Harris Phillips, Esq., who had presided in the principal capacious marquee in Pontypool Park, proposed the toast to the Queen with champagne after two hundred gentlemen had eaten the ‘sumptuously laid *dejeuner*’. After a further toast to the new son and heir of Pontypool Park, a toast was proposed to E.H. Phillips for his part in the day’s arrangements and for presiding in the number one marquee, only one of five erected in the park that day by a firm from Bristol. In the reply to his toast, Phillips announced that he would shortly be leaving Pontypool to live in Bath. With so much at stake for his legacy, he would make sure that the Pontypool Dissenters did not spoil the celebrations.⁷⁰

None of this would have surprised Thomas Thomas and his associates. On the state of the nation in 1841, Thomas had written, ‘The present constitution is aristocratic, a mere modification of feudalism.’⁷¹ Thomas had seen the possibility of closer co-operation between

⁶⁸ Church Minute Book, 30 May 1853; *MM*, 3 June, 10 June 1853.

⁶⁹ *MM*, 17 June 1853.

⁷⁰ *MM*, 10 June 1853.

⁷¹ *Nonconformist*, 20 October 1841.

the middle and working classes when he was advocating support for the Complete Suffrage Union and the repeal of the Corn Laws. He had said then that

There are strong ties of interest and sympathy between the middle and operative classes; and if the former will abandon their apathy and subservience to the covert schemes of powerful oppressors, and the latter will utterly repudiate the monstrous and wicked doctrine of physical force which has so much damaged their cause, I see no insuperable obstacle...⁷²

Thomas had been impressed by the progress made in Pontypool through the work of the Complete Suffrage Union.⁷³ Many of his hearers would have been Dissenters who came to a deeper understanding of class co-operation in the cause of civil and religious freedom through their membership of local chapels, not least in the community that built Crane Street chapel by 1847. Those who protested against the presence of Sunday School children in the Great Demonstration in the Park had nothing but 'sincere respect for the character and position of the late Lord Lieutenant and his family', as Thomas Thomas said in 1867, but the decision to command the attendance of Sunday School children at the demonstration in the Park had been done without previous consultation with the Sunday Schools themselves and with no consideration of the aims and purposes of the Sunday Schools.⁷⁴ From the secure position of Crane Street chapel in 1867, with its building-debts paid, Thomas viewed the celebrations in the park in a better light:

We knew too, they were not really approved in high quarters, but were obtruded by the subordinates of the Company and others who had no sympathy for the higher objects which we had in view. The course we then took subjected us to a good deal of animadversion and reproach; but we look back upon our protest with entire satisfaction, and believe that our conduct on this occasion must commend itself to the judgment and conscience of intelligent and Christian people.⁷⁵

⁷² Ibid

⁷³ *Nonconformist*, 1 November 1843 See Chapter 5.

⁷⁴ *PFP*, 16 November 1867.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

Crane Street was not the only Sunday School that did not take part in the celebration. All the English Baptist Sunday Schools were absent as were some of the Independents; the new parishes of Pontnewynydd and Talywaun sent four hundred children, and the Wesleyan and Primitive Methodists in Pontnewynydd, Abersychan, Garndiffaith and Varteg sent over a thousand children.⁷⁶ The Welsh Baptist Sunday Schools at Noddfa, Abersychan, Pisgah, Talywaun and Trosnant also participated.

Crane Street chapel continued to be part of the Monmouthshire Welsh Baptist Association into the eighteen-fifties when the church meeting resolved to invite representatives of the other English Baptist churches in Monmouthshire to a meeting at Pontypool to celebrate the bi-centenary of the Welsh Baptist Association that had met first at Abergavenny in 1653. The meeting was intended to bring closure to membership of the Association as far as Crane Street was concerned. The members resolved to form an English Association for Monmouthshire. The inaugural meeting of the Monmouthshire English Baptist Association did take place at Crane Street Chapel on 21 May 1857, but the first meeting of the MEBA did not take place there until Wednesday 11 November. At first sight the reason for setting up the English Baptist Association might have seemed language alone, but by the eighteen-fifties Thomas's religious thinking had taken him beyond the Calvinist beliefs of the Particular Baptists.⁷⁷ As noted in Chapter 5, the rapid increase in the number of Baptist churches that joined the MEBA from 11 to 32 in the two decades after 1857, shows the importance of Crane Street chapel at the centre of this growing network of churches. Thomas Thomas encouraged district associations of churches and he praised their development in his presidential address to the Baptist Union in 1872.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ *MM*, 10 June 1853.

⁷⁷ Church Minute Book, 27 June 1853, 24 June 1857.

⁷⁸ Thomas Thomas, *The Baptists and Christian Union* (Manchester, 1872), p. 5.

Not only was the autonomy of each local church preserved by the new Association, but by 1860 two laymen had to be elected 'for each minister so that the regulation of affairs is more in the hands of members than of the ministers of the churches'.⁷⁹ The Association was set up to promote the broadest vision of the mission of the Church at home and overseas, but the integrity of each local church was preserved as well as the importance of its lay members. This was a principle in advance of other Christian denominations in Monmouthshire at the time.

By 1853 Crane Street chapel was already punching above its weight. The Religious Census of 1851 had shown it to be numerically the smallest of the seven Baptist churches in the Parish of Trevethin as well as the most recent to be built. On that Census Sunday the Baptists headed the list for attendances at worship in the whole of Monmouthshire. In most cases the number of people attending services (gwrndawyr) far exceeded those who were the members of the chapels (Aelodau/ aelodaeth). This was not so at Crane Street. Its membership by baptism or dismissal from other churches was about one hundred and twenty in 1851. The number of people who attended the two services in Crane Street on Census Sunday was no more than 160, compared with 366 at Tabernacle chapel, Crane Street and 474 at Pischah, Talywaun, both Welsh churches.⁸⁰

Some commentators have claimed that the numbers attending Nonconformist services on Census Sunday were boosted by attenders who had flocked to the chapels at the time of the Cholera outbreak in 1849 and produced a religious revival which was not long sustained.⁸¹ Cholera came to Pontypool in 1849 and stayed from Whitsun until September, but its effect was small compared with other towns in south Wales. Sixty-one people died of the disease in Pontypool compared with figures of 209,223,203,245 for Newport, Aberystwith, Tredegar and

⁷⁹ Thomas Richards, ed., *Monmouthshire Baptist Association Circular Letters 1832-1945*, pp. 7-8.

⁸⁰ Ieuan Gwynedd Jones and David Williams, eds., *The Religious Census of 1851, vol. 1, south Wales*, pp. 72-81. See Chapter 1 for attendances at other Baptist chapels in Pontypool in 1851.

⁸¹ Davies, *Religion in the Industrial Revolution*, p. 58.

Neath respectively and 396 in Cardiff.⁸² There was anxiety in Pontypool as elsewhere and a Fast Day was held in the Methodist church and also in Trosnant Welsh Baptist chapel at the end of July. At the church in upper Trosnant, the galleries and vestry as well as the floor of the chapel were 'literally crammed' with people, 'and scores of people were standing outside'. The meeting was characterised by 'great solemnity and fervidness' with addresses by the ministers of Trosnant and Tabernacle churches and prayer offered by William Williams Phillips of Crane Street.⁸³ The members of Crane Street decided at that time that their meeting held 'every alternative Sabbath' evening after their service, should be 'converted into a prayer meeting'. At that time there were no galleries in Crane Street that could have accommodated many attenders to the services, but there was a clear increase of fifteen new members added to the church during that year.⁸⁴

Crane Street chapel had a growing membership. By 1864 there were 185 members, but attendances never reached the dizzy heights of chapels like Calfaria, Aberdare, where more than a thousand people attended the Sunday evening services of Thomas Thomas's disciple, Dr. Thomas Price.⁸⁵ In the Monmouthshire English Baptist Association Crane Street's membership was second to that of Commercial Street, Newport under the Revd J.W. Lance. Ministers made a difference. On Census Sunday, when Thomas Thomas characteristically kept well clear of the Census, his deacon, Charles Davies, explained in response to the Census questionnaire that the numbers attending Crane Street chapel that day were smaller than usual because the Pastor was absent.⁸⁶

⁸² G.Penrhyn Jones, 'Cholera in Wales', *NLWJ*, 10 (Summer 1958), p.13

⁸³ *MM*, 21 July 1849.

⁸⁴ Church Minute Book, 30 July, 25 November 1849.

⁸⁵ Benjamin Evans, *Bywgraffiad y T. Price Aberdar* (Aberdar 1891), p. 76; Jones, 'Dr. Thomas Price and the Election of 1868 in Merthyr Tydfil, Part 1', *WHR*, 1964, 2, pp. 147-172, on p. 153. Calfaria was built because Carmel, Pen-y-pound, was too small to contain the congregation of 840 in 1851; I.G.Jones and D. Williams, *The Religious Census of 1851*, vol. 1, p. 186; R.Ivor Parry, 'Aberdare and the Industrial Revolution', in Stewart Williams' *Glamorgan Historian*, vol. 4 (Cowbridge, 1967), pp. 194-204, on p.203.

⁸⁶ *MEBA Report of Meeting at Ebbw Vale*, 14/15 April 1868, p. 7; ed. I.G. Jones and D. Williams, *The Religious Census of 1851*, vol. 1, south Wales, p. 77.

The numerical strength of the Nonconformists was certainly an argument used in favour of greater religious and social freedom and was a case for disestablishment. Thomas Thomas used the argument himself.⁸⁷ Yet in his own style of church leadership numbers were not important. On the contrary, they were counterproductive if they indicated lack of commitment.⁸⁸ More than once Thomas insisted that the membership roll of Crane Street church should be revised because members had been absent for some time or had moved too far away from the chapel to be able to attend services on Sundays.⁸⁹

Ten years after the great demonstration in Pontypool Park, a prize essay in Abersychan Eisteddfod recorded the membership of the Dissenting churches in the Parish of Trevethin in 1863 as 2482 in twenty-seven churches. The seven Baptist churches had a total membership of 954, but the distribution of members had changed since 1851. The Welsh Baptist churches were smaller because services in the English churches were becoming more popular. Zion Chapel Trosnant, which had been set up by a breakaway group from Trosnant Chapel, had decreased in membership and would be absorbed into membership with Crane Street chapel in 1878.⁹⁰ Trosnant chapel itself had received a shock when its minister Revd David Lloyd Isaac, announced his conversion to the Church of England in 1853 and left the chapel. After 1859 their minister was the Revd David Roberts, literally a second-comer, since he had been minister there before 1828. For his second appearance he continued until 1874. His ministry coincided with much of Thomas Thomas's time at Crane Street and for years the two of them were the only resident Baptist ministers in Pontypool. The differences in style of ministry between the two men was considerably more than the language of their services, though it was said that Mr. Roberts was too old at the age of 66 'to apply himself to English and Welsh preaching in

⁸⁷ Thomas, *The Liberation of Religion from State Patronage and Control*, p. 8.

⁸⁸ T. Thomas, *Inaugural Address at the Annual Session of the Baptist Union* (London 1872), pp. 5-6.

⁸⁹ Church Minute Book, June 25 and 30 1855, 29 January 1867.

⁹⁰ 'History of Dissent in the Parish of Trevethin', *PFP*, 9, 16 and 30 December 1865, 6 and 13 January 1866; Church Minute Book, 7 July 1878.

the same meeting' in a church that by 1859 was 'beginning to suffer considerably from the bilingual difficulty' ⁹¹ In Tabernacle Welsh Baptist chapel, Crane Street, the ministry was unsettled after 1849 by the refusal of the older members to hold their services in English. The chapel easily changed to English services when Crane Street chapel requested permission to use Tabernacle in 1870 while Crane Street Baptist chapel was being enlarged. Tabernacle shared its services with Crane Street and never again provided services in the Welsh language. ⁹²

The verdict of the Eisteddfod prizewinner on Crane Street chapel in 1863 was that

Its progress had been rapid and its influence great among the trading portion of the community. A Sunday School has been held in connection with the chapel since its foundation. ⁹³

Of the other English Baptist church in the parish, that of Abersychan, where the Revd Stephen Price was the minister, the essayist claimed that 'some of the most respectable inhabitants of the village belong to the congregation'. They might well have been encouraged by having Mary Conway as the lady of the manse. With all this suggestion of middle class Baptists in a county where the Baptists before 1837 were designated as consisting of more than eighty per cent of lower-skilled, depressed or unskilled workers with 70.4 per cent of Monmouthshire Baptists being miners, it is time to look at the social mixture of the people who were members of Crane Street chapel when Thomas Thomas was its minister. ⁹⁴

⁹¹NLW MS Minor Deposit, 1213B f.63. David Roberts seems to have confined his activities to the services in his own chapel. He had been expelled from his pastorate in Sirhowy in 1845; Bassett, *The Welsh Baptists*, p. 195; Tony Hopkins, *Upper Trosnant Baptist Church 1776-2001* (Pontypool, 2001), pp. 6-7. D. Lloyd Isaac had been a student of Micah Thomas at Abergavenny and was one of the first students in Pontypool Baptist College. He was not a Calvinist and his practice of Open Communion was controversial at Trosnant Welsh Baptist church at the time. He supported Thomas Thomas and his colleagues in their stand against the enforced Church Rate in the parish of Trevethin in 1845 and distraint was made upon his property.

⁹² Church Minute Book, 30 June 1868, 11 September 1870; Jones, *Sowing Beside All Waters, The Baptist Heritage of Gwent* (Cwmbran, 1985), p. 13.

⁹³ PFP, 16 December 1865.

⁹⁴ Ibid.; Watts, *The Dissenters*, vol.2, pp. 323, 325, 786.

Brynmor Pierce Jones described Crane Street as one of the ‘gentlemen’s chapels’ because it was designed by an architect.⁹⁵ He also said it was ‘the forum for major issues to be discussed in front of its middle class and professional membership’ at its ‘week night society’.⁹⁶ E.T. Davies similarly described the ‘number of professions, trades and crafts represented in the town’ when he wrote that:

The Baptists made a shrewd move when they moved their theological college from Abergavenny to Pontypool in 1836 and in the following year they were able to build a chapel for an English congregation at a cost of £2,000 as the result of middle class leadership.⁹⁷

Canon Davies was contrasting the class structure of Pontypool with that of the *Blaenau* of Monmouthshire where the Welsh workmen had only lowly positions in the iron works. As this thesis has already illustrated, in terms of the social position of ironworkers in Trefethin, Davies may have been exaggerating. Moreover he dates the building of Crane Street chapel incorrectly. We have seen that it took the first members a decade to be able to acquire a site to start building the chapel. The debt of £2,200 was not paid up until 1867. By that time the chapel was too small, and the members turned with determination towards its enlargement, which included the galleries they had long anticipated for the accommodation of ‘hearers’ at the Sunday evening services.⁹⁸

What Brynmor Pierce Jones describes as ‘middle class and professional membership’ and E.T. Davies designates ‘middle class leadership’ now need to be examined for exaggeration on their parts. The chapel membership under Thomas Thomas extended over a period of nearly forty years after 1836 and it was frequently changing as members were admitted, often as teenagers, by Baptism, or transferred their membership by letters from other chapels, or had

⁹⁵ The architect was J.H. Langdon: Anthony Jones, *Welsh Chapels* (Sutton Publishing, 1996), p.55.

⁹⁶ Jones, *Sowing Beside All Waters*, pp. 95-96, 103.

⁹⁷ Davies, *Religion and Society in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 15.

⁹⁸ Church Minute Book, 15 September 1845, 30 June 1868, 11 September 1870; *PFP*, 16 November 1867. See letter of Mary Thomas below.

their membership transferred from Crane Street by similar letters as they moved out of Pontypool. Crane Street made an effort to keep an accurate list of its members, which was often revised, but there were still people who were frequently associated with the life of Crane Street chapel, whose names are not on the list of members, to say nothing of the hundreds of people who were simply attenders at its services.⁹⁹ A significant thesis of 2003 includes Pontypool in its description of the growth of the middle classes in three small towns in south Wales during the forty years after 1850. The evidence for this growth is extended in the thesis well into the first decade of the twentieth century.¹⁰⁰

The Church Minute Book and the separate Crane Street church Register for the years 1836-1881 reveal that there were 190 members over that period, including seventeen Baptist College students who became members after 29 January 1861, when the church invited the students to take part in all the meetings while they were at the college. Of the remaining 173 members it is possible to identify about 120 with some certainty. Only 53 of those were males, in spite of its description as a 'gentlemen's chapel'. As has been recognised, the chapel certainly owed its origin to the happy 'peculiar providence' that brought together William Williams Phillips with his determination to establish an English Baptist church in Pontypool, and the tin-manufacturing tribe of Conways, with their unswerving Baptist allegiance, and the young Thomas Thomas, newly-appointed Baptist College principal, whose salary depended upon being pastor of a Baptist church. Of the sixteen names of those who first covenanted together to form the church in 1836, only two were still alive in 1867.¹⁰¹ They were Thomas Thomas and his wife, Mary, newly-arrived from a London pastorate. They were joined by Mrs. Thomas's niece, Jane David, who had been a member of Tabernacle Baptist church in Cardiff.

⁹⁹ GRO, D 3598.7.1, Church Membership Register.

¹⁰⁰ Julie Light, "...of inestimable value to the town and district?" a study of the urban middle classes with particular reference to Pontypool, Bridgend and Penarth c. 1850-1890 (unpublished Ph.D. thesis Swansea University, 2003)

¹⁰¹ *PFP*, 16 November 1867.

William Williams Phillips brought from the Baptist church at Abersychan his wife and daughter and also Henry and Ann Gibbon, George and Sarah Howells, Benjamin James and Susannah Westbrook. Mary Probyn came with the recommendation of Penygarn Welsh Baptist church, William and Hannah Evans were recommended by the Baptist church at Caerleon, and Mary Nicholas came from a church in Bristol. Benjamin James and Mary Probyn, both in their sixties, were described as 'independent' in 1841. William Evans was a stone mason and Susannah Westbrook the wife of a machine weigher, who also became a member of the church. Thomas Thomas could be regarded as professional and William Williams Phillips was described as a 'gentleman' as was his son Henry who followed him as a bank manager and later became a merchant. Typically at the time the Trustees of the new chapel in 1847 were all men. The Pontypool ironmonger, Charles Davies, who did so much to acquire the site on the Blue Boar Field, was joined by his own son, Charles Davies, junior. William and Charles Conway were joined by their cousin, William Conway James, another tinsplate manufacturer. Thomas Thomas, William Williams Phillips and Henry Phillips were obvious trustees. They were joined by Isaac Hiley, a local draper, son of a Baptist minister and one of the Church rate refusers in 1847. John Havard, a young local grocer already identified with the radicals, was a trustee, as were John Williams and John Lewis, local tradesmen, and David Lawrence, the young Pontypool GP who was always supportive. There were no solicitors or JPs among the thirteen trustees.¹⁰²

Since assumptions have been made about the middle class composition of the church that worshipped at Crane Street chapel, the table in Appendix Two shows in summary form the occupations of the members as far as they may be discovered from decennial censuses and

¹⁰² Church Minute Book, pp.3-5; Census 1841 HO/107/749.

Crane Street records. This chapter will now show some of the ways in which the names in the table made a difference to the development of Pontypool as a liberal reforming community.

It is certainly true that Crane Street chapel had some professional and middle class leadership from the start. How best to define 'middle class' in Pontypool during the forty years after 1836 is less of a concern for this thesis than it was for Julie Light in her study of the middle class at a slightly later period. She regarded 'shopocracy', a 'pejorative term' for some, as simply a convenient way of describing a growing number of retailers who were filling an important social purpose and becoming identified as a separate class in small towns like Pontypool.¹⁰³ Situated where it was in Crane Street, surrounded by shops and close to the Market that opened in 1846, it is not surprising that Crane Street chapel was associated with shopkeepers. It is also true that skilled tradespeople featured among its members, as the local eisteddfod essayist observed in 1863.¹⁰⁴ Shopkeepers, tradespeople and their wives accounted for about a third of the church's membership. That they were outnumbered by working class members challenges the assumption that they were all middle class, but this analysis of Crane Street's membership certainly belies any assumption that Baptists represented only a lumpen proletariat.¹⁰⁵

The membership comprised a variety of occupations. The farmers and agricultural labourers represent the town's rural hinterland. The lone railway worker and his wife from Coed-y-gric reveal the nascent railway community that developed in Griffithstown after 1865. There were at least ten unmarried women among the members whose occupations are impossible to determine.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Julie Light, 'mere seekers of fame'? personalities, power and politics in the small town: Pontypool and Bridgend c.1860-95, *Urban History*, vol.32 part 1, May 2005, p.92.

¹⁰⁴ *PFP*, 16 December 1865.

¹⁰⁵ Watts, *The Dissenters*, vol. 2, p. 323; Brown, *A Social History of the Nonconformist Ministry*, p. 29.

¹⁰⁶ Griffithstown had its own churches after 1870 and became a separate parish by 1898.

That is how the church community would have wanted it. According to a widespread Welsh convention they used occupations only to differentiate members with the same names, so that there were at least four members named William Williams at Crane Street. William Williams, carpenter, and his wife obliged by emigrating to America. They left William Williams, puddler, William Williams, engineer, and William Williams, collier. The last two, both from Abersychan, became deacons together in 1871. The integrity of the church at Crane Street is clear from its well-kept Minute Book with minutes like the following in July 1867:

During the last month the church had lost by death one of its most esteemed members, Mary Ann Richards who died on 27 June, aged 40 years.¹⁰⁷

Mary Ann Richards was blind.¹⁰⁸ She earned her living as a basket-maker. Her sister Rebekah was a dressmaker who used to take her to chapel until she died herself in 1864 at the age of twenty. Their father was a haulier at the colliery in Abersychan. Mary Ann had a twin-brother John, who worked as a gardener, and a younger brother, Samuel, who was a farm labourer. They were all employed. In the same house lived members of the same family of different occupations.¹⁰⁹ Over the years the occupations of the same church members changed as their fortunes improved. Defining people according to a strict sociological category over a period of forty years was difficult. The concept of class was too flexible to be static. There was a concern in the church for those members who were experiencing financial hardship, and male and female members were appointed to administer the fund for the relief of members in need.¹¹⁰ There were clearly fluctuations in trade according to the state of industrial markets and these changes also affected Crane Street church. The members failed to pay the generous annual stipend of £200 it had allocated to Thomas Thomas's successor in 1874 because of the state of

¹⁰⁷ Church Minute Book, 2 July 1867.

¹⁰⁸ Cardiff Central Library, MS 4432, Letter of Mary Thomas, 23 February 1864.

¹⁰⁹ RG 9 4007. *PPF*, 14 February 1864. Thomas Thomas preached a special sermon to the young people of Crane Street chapel on the occasion of the death of Rebekah Richards, 21 February 1864, NLW MS 21924B, 4220.

¹¹⁰ Church Minute Book, 26 November 1855.

local trade at that time. It did meet that figure a couple of years later, and there were many chapels in south Wales where the stipend was lower. Some of the chapel members clearly became more prosperous over time. When Joseph Goodenough, his wife and daughter, became members in 1846, Joseph was a butcher. During the next ten years he became a farmer at Glascoed. He continued to give good leadership to Crane Street church and in 1871 he was elected a deacon. Ten years later, a little old for farming, Joseph was a tax-collector, living in his new villa in the new suburb of Sebastopol. When he died in 1891 he was described as a 'gentleman'.¹¹¹

Goodenough was a member of the Building Committee of fifteen men proposed by Thomas Thomas in January 1871 to assist in planning for the removal of debt on the chapel after the extensions that had just been completed. The committee included Goodenough's fellow-deacons, John Havard, William Williams and Thomas B. Smith, headmaster, church secretary, Sunday school superintendent and director of music, together with John Bevan, Sunday school secretary and furniture dealer, Henry Howells, rent-collector, and Peter Eckersley, clog maker. There were also David Thomas, the carpenter of Crane Street, Francis Morgan, a leather merchant who lived in Trosnant, John Howells, Edwin Jones, Daniel Morgan, Frederick Phillips and William Rees, as well as the omnipresent William Conway.¹¹²

Most of the all-male committee were local shopkeepers and tradesmen. At the same time there was a Ladies' Committee, which organised the domestic affairs of the church, arranged teas, especially to raise money to relieve the debt on the building, and notably to arrange for the two-hour tea-party at Crane Street for 150 people to mark the retirement of Thomas Thomas from the pastorate in January 1874. The Ladies' Committee then presented

¹¹¹ Church Minute Book, 15 January 1871, 24 January 1875; HO 107/2449, RG 10/5332; Register of Deaths: Pontypool, 11a 106.

¹¹² Church Minute Book, 8 January 1871. RG 10 5332.

to his wife, Mary, 'a very handsome time-piece, bearing a suitable inscription'. Miss Margaret Morgan of Mamhilad made the presentation of the clock. The Ladies Committee consisted of twenty-three members, mostly wives sisters and daughters of deacons and church members. The committee included Mrs. Havard, Mrs. Smith, Mrs. Phillips, Mrs. Morgan, Mrs. Rees, Mrs. Eckersley, Miss Bevan, Miss M.Morgan, Miss Conway and Miss Havard. Miss Sheppard, an elderly companion to the wife of Henry Phillips, Park Terrace, was also a member. Two young schoolteachers, Miss E.A. Jones and Miss M. Jones, were on that committee as well as Mrs. Maria Wayman, wife of the parish clerk, Mrs. Miriam Lewis, married to the local butcher, Mrs. Davies, a farmer's wife, Mrs. Amelia Dauncey and Mrs. Mary Fowler, wife of Edwin, founder of Fowler's tailoring business. Mary Thomas was not a member of that, or of any other committee, but her niece, companion and house-keeper after 1867, Miss Anne David, was.¹¹³ Anne David was a remarkable lady in her own right. She never married but remained with Thomas and Mary Thomas throughout their retirement in Cardiff where they celebrated their Golden Wedding in 1880. After their deaths she stayed on as the housekeeper and companion to their only remaining son, Thomas Henry Thomas. Anne David had gone to the Baptist College in Pontypool in 1867 because Mary Thomas had suffered a stroke that left her incapacitated until she died on 18 March 1881.

Mary Thomas was an essential part of the life of the Baptist College as well as of Crane Street chapel, not least as wife and mother, supporter and encourager, but also because for more than thirty years she was the housekeeper, matron, cook and servant to the Baptist College as well as being the longest surviving member of Crane Street Baptist church. Scholars have recognised how little we really know about the backgrounds of Nonconformist ministers in the nineteenth century.¹¹⁴ The same is true in any detail of the composition of Baptist churches,

¹¹³ Church Minute Book, 8 January 1871, 29 January 1874.

¹¹⁴ Brown, *A Social history of the Nonconformist Ministry*, p.20. See introduction to this chapter.

and that is a major reason for examining the church at Crane Street in some detail. The pastor's wife was a key figure in that community, though the records, in true Victorian fashion, made her invisible.¹¹⁵

We learn most about Mary Thomas from her few remaining letters and the few letters that were sent to her surviving son, Thomas Henry Thomas after her death. One old student of the Baptist College reminded T.H. Thomas that 'Your mother was very much liked as you know'.¹¹⁶ In a letter that Mary Thomas wrote to her son in 1860 she spent most time telling him about his father's activities. He had been to Madeley to officiate at an old student's wedding. He had gone to Llantwit Major to make arrangements to set up an English Baptist church there. Then he was going to Cardiff 'collecting for the College'. Mary Thomas went on to describe life at Crane Street chapel:

Attendance at the chapel is still good, but people are in a fix about the galleries. They are afraid that the money cannot be had. They are going to have a meeting on Thursday about it. I sincerely hope that it will be done, for I have no doubt but that they would be filled in the evening.¹¹⁷

So it proved to be, but ten years were to pass before there was enough money to provide the galleries. The chapel then had to arrange for the visitors in the galleries to be supervised and provided with hymn-books.¹¹⁸

When Margaret Morgan presented the clock to her in January 1874, Mary Thomas was not there. She was too ill to attend. Her husband received it and replied on her behalf. In presenting her sincere thanks for the gift he praised her good qualities as a wife and her help 'in enabling him to discharge his arduous duties'.¹¹⁹ Mary's friends had long been aware of

¹¹⁵ Christabel Hutchings, ed., *The Correspondence of Thomas Henry Thomas* (Newport, 2012), p.5; Cragoe, *Culture, Politics and National Identity in Wales 1832-1886*, pp. 173,178.

¹¹⁶ Hutchings, ed., *The Correspondence of Thomas Henry Thomas*, Doc 542.

¹¹⁷ Cardiff Central library MS, 4.432.

¹¹⁸ Church Minute Book, 24 January 1875.

¹¹⁹ Church Minute Book, 29 January 1874.

the strain imposed on her by her position in the Baptist College. For that reason a proposal had been made by the Revd J.W. Todd at the annual meeting of the College in May 1867, which was seconded by J.H. Conway, for setting up a special committee to confer with the College House Committee to remove or greatly lessen the domestic responsibilities of Dr. and Mrs. Thomas in the College.¹²⁰

In 1871 three young servants were living with the Thomases as well as Mary's niece, Annie David. There were still a visitor and four students living in their house. When Thomas Thomas first advocated the removal of the Baptist College to Cardiff in 1874, he argued that it should not be residential 'in view of the strain placed on the personal and family life of the President'. When Thomas spoke at his farewell presentation as principal of Pontypool College in 1876, he referred to the

quiet ever watchful care of my beloved partner in life in the management of the domestic affairs of the household, a matter of no small difficulty and delicacy...whose prudence and gentleness, forbearance and firmness entitle her to a large share of the honour conferred on her husband and who through years of affliction...is still the unobtrusive but guiding and controlling power of the collegiate household.¹²¹

At the celebration to mark their Golden Wedding in Cardiff in 1880, Thomas Thomas referred in similar vein to his wife. An anonymous 'lady' had written a poem entitled 'Hitherto' especially for the occasion. This was read by the Revd W. Lance of Newport. This was recalled at Mary's funeral service at Penygarn Baptist chapel before her interment in the family vault there. Five hours after leaving Cardiff at 8 a.m. the cortege reached Pontypool where it was met by 'a large number of the friends of the deceased and her husband'. The principal of the Baptist College, Revd William Edwards, the Revd John Williams, minister of Crane Street chapel and the Revd Nathaniel Thomas, minister of the Tabernacle chapel, Cardiff, took part

¹²⁰ *Annual Report, 1867* (Cardiff 1867), p.15.

¹²¹ RG 10, 5332. *SWDN*, 20 September 1876; Himbury, *The South Wales Baptist College, 1807-1957*, p. 128.

in the service, while their friend, the Revd Dr. Todd of London, preached the sermon. He again referred to Mary as a 'fit companion and helpmeet for Thomas Thomas'. He did refer to the intense bitterness Mary had experienced through the loss of two sons, Llewelyn and William, in early manhood, followed by the deaths of two nieces who lived with the family at the College.¹²²

Even in the liberal and reforming social outlook that was brought to Pontypool through the Baptist College and Crane Street chapel, Mary Thomas did not move far beyond the article on womanhood written by Dorothy Rees in *Y Tywysydd a'r Gymraes* in July 1862:

Pa le ei chylch? Cartref.Yr unig ffordd i ni gael chwaraeteg ydyw bod ein cylch fel benywod yn ostyngedig a llafurus a glanwedd a duwiol...Ceisiwn dduwioldeb fel y prif beth.

[Where is her place? Home...The only way in which we can ensure fair play is that our role as women is submissive and hard-working and pure and godly...Let us strive for godliness above all else.]¹²³

The members of the Ladies' Committee of Crane Street chapel had an opportunity for social fellowship through that committee as well as developing skills that could serve them in the wider community. They never became deacons and their opportunities for making their voices heard outside the chapel were few. The establishment of both the Ladies' and the Building committees in 1871 reflects not only the settled nature of the chapel community where the members had belonged to the chapel for decades by that date, but also the growing social importance of these families in the public life of Pontypool.

¹²² *PPF*, 25 March 1881; Thomas Henry Thomas, 'The Rev. Thomas Thomas DD,' in *Welsh Religious Leaders in the Victorian Era*, p. 147.

¹²³ Sian Rhiannon Williams, 'The True 'Cymraes': Images of Women in Women's Nineteenth Century Welsh Periodicals', in *Our Mothers' Land, Chapters in Welsh Women's History 1830-1939*, ed. Angela V. John (Cardiff 1991), pp.69-91, on p. 80.

The church in the world

It is to that aspect of the life of Crane Street chapel that this chapter will now turn in its closing pages. Before the chapel was built in Crane Street its members had become involved in social and political affairs, but this involvement became more frequent as the century progressed. As we have seen earlier, Thomas Thomas led the chapel members to share his concern for the poor through his involvement in the work of the ACLL,¹²⁴ followed by his interest in the Complete Suffrage Union and the branch of the CSU that he pioneered in Pontypool. Promises were made about follow-up to the successful meeting of the CSU in Pontypool in 1843¹²⁵, but the interest does not seem to have been sustained any more consistently than that expressed at the setting up of the Church Rate Abolition Society on Thomas's proposal in 1837.¹²⁶ Support for both the CSU and the CRAS was soon absorbed into the Liberation Society. The Pontypool branch of the Liberation Society had twenty-three subscribers in the 1860s, compared with fifteen in Newport.¹²⁷ Most of them were members of Crane Street chapel.

Thomas Thomas was asked to chair the public meeting of the Liberation Society at Crane Street in November 1859, the first meeting of the society there for some years. The guest speaker was the society's Dr. Foster, and the Revd E. Jacob of Swansea spoke in Welsh. Thomas took his usual trouble to explain to the audience that the aim of the society was not to destroy the Church of England but to disestablish it. The usual conspirators from Pontypool were there to support him. The Independent minister, Herbert Daniel, proposed the motion

¹²⁴ Thomas Thomas, *A Proper Consideration of the cause of the Poor, a test of righteous character. A discourse designed to advance the objects of the Manchester Conference, delivered at Pontypool, 2 September 1841.* (London 1841).

¹²⁵ See Chapter 4.

¹²⁶ Bassett, *The Welsh Baptists*, p. 148.

¹²⁷ Liberation Society, A/LIB/385. See Chapter 5.

approving the principles and objects of the Liberation Society, which Charles Davies seconded. Stephen Price proposed the vote of thanks to the speakers, which was seconded by William Conway, who said he had lately doubled his subscription to the society, which had done 'more work in proportion to its funds, than any society in existence'.¹²⁸

When the first meeting of the south Wales committee of the Liberation Society met in Cardiff in November 1862, Thomas Thomas was a member. Its next meeting was held in Crane Street chapel, when William Conway was its chairman. Thomas Thomas was the first speaker, followed by George Thomas and Stephen Price. At a later meeting of that committee at Crane Street chapel in May 1866 it was unanimously resolved that the Letters of Mr. Henry Richard to the *Morning Star* should be published in Welsh and English.¹²⁹ It is a tribute to the place that Crane Street chapel had come to occupy in south Wales that such an important publication by a rising influential political figure was launched there.

The prominence of Crane Street chapel in the public sphere was owed chiefly to its highly esteemed minister. In March 1859 Thomas Thomas attended a meeting in the Town Hall, Pontypool to oppose the proposals put forward by Disraeli in that year's Reform Bill. Thomas was opposed to making a man's right to vote dependent upon a property qualification. He said he would give every man a vote, 'every man of full age, sound mind and unimpeachable character.' William Conway seconded Thomas's proposal. Stephen Price proposed the second resolution demanding a 'large extension of the county and borough franchise, vote by ballot, and a redistribution of members more equally to population and property.' Charles Davies seconded that proposal.¹³⁰ Crane Street chapel was well used to secret ballots in its democratic process, which included women members, as we have seen. Thomas was chairman of a meeting

¹²⁸ *PPF*, 26 November 1859.

¹²⁹ *Nonconformist*, 12 November 1862, p. 947; Henry Richard MP, *Letters and Essays on Wales*, (London 1884) p.127.

¹³⁰ *PPF*, 12 March 1859. Universal Manhood Suffrage, Secret Ballot and Equal Electoral Districts were three points of the People's Charter in 1838.

in the Town Hall in 1872 when the case was put for the Women's Suffrage movement before the meeting agreed to petition Parliament on the subject.¹³¹

It is interesting to note how many Pontypool men listed by Julie Light in her thesis on the urban middle classes in Pontypool, Bridgend and Penarth, attended Crane Street chapel, though she does not discuss this. They were all Liberals when Thomas Thomas was the minister there, but Julie Light does not mention him either.¹³² In fact Crane Street chapel comprised a fair section of the Liberal party in Pontypool. By 1881, when William Conway was the chairman and E.H. Davies, son of Charles, was secretary, the County Liberal Association was holding its meetings at Crane Street chapel.¹³³ In one respect at least they 'made a difference', commended by the local press in 1868. After the riots on polling day in Pontypool and other Monmouthshire towns in November, when much damage was done to the properties of local Conservatives by the mob in Pontypool, the *Pontypool Free Press* commented:

Too much credit cannot be given to Mr. Conway and the members of the Liberal Committee who exerted themselves to the utmost to restore peace.¹³⁴

The aims of the Chartists were approved; their methods were not.

Two other matters, partly related, remain to be discussed at the end of this chapter. The first concerns relationships with other churches across the denominations after 1850. Wilton D. Wills has written at length about this, though not as it affected Pontypool, and his conclusions have been analysed in the first chapter of this thesis.¹³⁵ In terms of adult education,

¹³¹ *PFP*, 22 November 1872; Ryland Wallace, *The Women's Suffrage Movement in Wales, 1866-1928* (Cardiff, 2009), p. 18.

¹³² Julie Light, '...of inestimable value to the town and district?' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Swansea University, 2003), p. 424.

¹³³ *PFP*, 11 March 1881. No Minute Books for the Liberal Association at this time have survived.

¹³⁴ *PFP*, 28 November 1868. The names of William Conway with Thomas Thomas, John Havard, E.H. Davies (son of Charles) and Thomas B. Smith are prominent in the report of the Liberal Meeting in the British School room a week earlier, *PFP*, 21 November 1868.

¹³⁵ Wilton D. Wills, 'The Established Church in the Diocese of Llandaff 1850-1870: A Study of the Evangelical Movement in the South Wales Coalfield', *WHR*, 4 (June 1969), pp. 235-267.

public health, public assistance in times of accident or distress and in non-doctrinal religious matters, Thomas Thomas and his church willingly co-operated with all comers. Thomas preached and attended religious services outside his own denomination as well as giving support widely within the Baptist denomination where he was the nearest they had to an episcopal minister in his day.¹³⁶ He worked with the Vicars of Trefethin and Panteg as a Vice-President of the Working Men's Institute of which William Williams Phillips, senior, was the President. He also attended meetings of the Scripture Readers' Association with the same people, and he spoke in favour of the association's work. Thomas contributed to the Literary Association he helped to establish, and he attended meetings in the Town Hall to organise relief for the poor in a time of local distress in January 1861.¹³⁷

In that same month Thomas attended the opening of the new Temperance Hall in Pontypool, in that very building where Crane Street church had first started, the old Friends' Meeting house in Trosnant, which had since become the County Court building.¹³⁸ Thomas had attended the opening of Temperance Halls with clergymen of other denominations all over south Wales.¹³⁹ His work in that cause had been well known since 1840 when he signed the pledge at a meeting with the industrialist G.S. Kenrick and William Williams Phillips.¹⁴⁰ Mention has been made in Chapter one of the lecture in Welsh that Thomas gave at Llanofor on 'total abstinence' in February 1855 when he concluded that 'total abstinence' was easier than moderation. He had a prominent place in the meeting of the South Wales Total Abstinence Association that was held in Newport in September 1859.¹⁴¹ When he addressed the Scripture

¹³⁶ See list of sermons by Thomas Thomas and places where they were preached, NLW MSS 21924 A and B.; Reports of annual meetings of MEBA, Newport Library M000,286.1. Thomas was President of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland, 1872-73.

¹³⁷ *PFP*, 23 April, 19 November 1859, 19 January 1861, 17 December 1864.

¹³⁸ *PFP*, 12 January 1861.

¹³⁹ Lambert, *Drink and Sobriety in Victorian Wales c.1820-1895*, p.136; Evan Powell, *History of Tredegar* (Tredegar, 1902), p.71.

¹⁴⁰ D.J. Thomas, *The Temperance Movement in Newport, Mon. 1837-1937* (Newport, 1937), p.16.

¹⁴¹ *PFP*, 4 July 1840, 1 October 1859; Thomas Thomas, *A Discourse on Ephesians V: 18-20* (Cardiff 1850).

Readers' Association meeting in Pontypool Town Hall in November 1859, Thomas advocated the work of the Association but turned his attention to the 'adequate places' in all the local churches and chapels as revealed by the Religious Census. Thomas clearly saw the need for religious revival, which he associated with teetotalism as he had recently experienced it in Tredegar where 4,000 people signed the pledge and large numbers were added to all the churches.¹⁴² Thomas said that he hoped that 'more people would follow in our own parish' encouraged by the pastors and leading men throwing their influence into the cause of teetotalism. Cholera did not strike Monmouthshire in 1859 and the religious revival had less impact than in Glamorgan, but the revival in Tredegar, assisted by American evangelists, was associated with the Temperance Movement and provided the incentive to build a Temperance Hall. Pontypool had to be satisfied with the conversion of an old building for use as its Temperance Hall, but the intervention of Thomas Thomas in the cause of Temperance was appreciated by his audience at the Scripture Readers' Association and he 'resumed his seat amid great applause'.¹⁴³ Thomas's influence ensured that the Baptists were ahead of the Calvinistic Methodists and the Independents in their support for Temperance in Monmouthshire.¹⁴⁴ In 1859 Thomas Thomas was years ahead of the formation of the Baptist Temperance Society in Wales and Bands of Hope, where members pledged to abstain from alcohol, had not yet been established in churches.¹⁴⁵ As far as Crane Street chapel was concerned, its members included publicans as long as they didn't open for business on Sundays. The communion wine used in the chapel was alcoholic until Thomas offered to pay for

¹⁴² Lambert, *Drink and Sobriety in Victorian Wales*, p. 130, claims that 'nearly 7,000 people signed the pledge' in Tredegar. See also, Christopher Ben Turner, 'Revivals and Popular Religion in Victorian and Edwardian Wales', (unpublished PhD thesis, Aberystwyth, 1979), Chapter 4, pp. 222-230. Turner says that revivals 'provided only a partial explanation for the strength of Nonconformity in nineteenth century Wales', Ibid p. 109, though he attributes the increase in Baptist membership in Monmouthshire between 1857 and 1861 to the revival of 1859: See, Christopher B. Turner, 'Church and Chapel', in *The Gwent County History*, vol 4, eds. C. Williams and S.R. Williams, pp. 205-225, on p. 217.

¹⁴³ *PPF*, 12 November 1859.

¹⁴⁴ Lambert, *Drink and Sobriety in Victorian Wales*, p. 151.

¹⁴⁵ Bassett, *The Welsh Baptists* (Swansea, 1977), p.341; Jones, *Sowing Beside All Waters*, p.239.

unfermented communion wine himself and they accepted his offer in 1864. When Thomas retired as their minister ten years later, Crane Street church voted to continue his practice.¹⁴⁶

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to show how the vision and stability of Thomas Thomas's leadership for thirty-seven years after 1836 created the significant place occupied by Crane Street chapel in the religious, social and political development of Pontypool. That leadership had to be shared with the Baptist College and it was diffused leadership of necessity and through conviction. The two institutions were inseparable, but the chapel presented the more accessible face in society. Both institutions developed that essential network of relationships that contributed so much to the programme of Liberal reform that helped to achieve Nonconformist ambitions.

Crane Street chapel provides clear evidence of the successful organisation of a Baptist church in industrial Monmouthshire in the middle of the nineteenth century. The way in which leadership was shared between minister, deacons and members, male and female, provides a rare picture of a harmonious and dynamic Dissenting church community as recorded in a well-kept Minute Book. The Minute Book is an invaluable source for tracing the development of this growing church against the background of industrial and social change.

The part that Crane Street played in the organisation of the Baptist denomination in Monmouthshire is shown by its relationship with the Baptist College through its students and staff and especially through its Principal who was the undoubted highly esteemed leader of Crane Street for thirty-seven years and proved very hard to replace when he retired. Such long

¹⁴⁶ Church Minute Book, 31 March 1863, 4 August 1864, 27 August 1867.

continued settled ministry was rare in Nonconformity at that time. It gave stability to the whole Baptist community in Monmouthshire, especially through Thomas's preaching and teaching and his leadership in the MEBA, where he was requested in 1866 to tell the Baptists of Monmouthshire what they believed.¹⁴⁷

The chapel's place in the social and political development of Pontypool arose from the democratic nature of its internal government which gave confidence to its deacons and members to participate in civic affairs and to become involved in projects in favour of their Dissenting principles. The battle over the raising of the compulsory Church rate provided an example of this in Chapter Two and a further example was provided in this chapter over the attempt to enforce social conformity to an event that, however worthily, was organised without prior consultation with Dissenting churches whose integrity was compromised. Crane Street's example of peaceful resistance encouraged other churches to follow their example and so promoted greater co-operation across the denominations in matters of mutual social concern.

The style of its leadership must be accounted the main reason for the success of Crane Street chapel in nineteenth century Monmouthshire. This insisted upon uncompromising respect for the integrity of its beliefs and the consciences of its members. There is no escaping the fact that the use of English in all its services from its inception in 1836 anticipated future developments in Pontypool as surely as the democratic nature of its leadership.

¹⁴⁷ Thomas Thomas, *The things that are most surely believed among us*, Circular Letter of MEBA (Cardiff, 1866).

CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis has been to analyse the influence of the Baptists upon the religion and society of Monmouthshire in the mid-nineteenth century and to assess their contribution towards the campaign for disestablishment. As indicated in Chapter One the activities of the Baptists centred on Pontypool took place during a period of immense and rapid changes in industrial Monmouthshire: socio-economic, demographic, religious, linguistic and political.

The justification for this thesis is the massive historiographical gap in the subject, as indicated in the Introduction. This is partly understandable because of the paucity of surviving personal letters for which great search has been made in every depository. Some Welsh Nonconformists seem to have been very careless in preserving their records. At the same time, rich, lengthy and detailed reports of the activities of the Monmouthshire Baptists have been uncovered in the *Nonconformist*, the *Monmouthshire Merlin* and other English newspapers, though fewer in the Welsh-language press. These reports have for the first time been analysed to reveal attitudes at the time. One purpose of the thesis has been to explore the theological arguments that were used to justify the activities described.

It has been demonstrated that the influence of the Baptists was greater than that of any other religious denomination at the time; they provided the leadership and the institutions to influence the development of Monmouthshire and much of south Wales by 1880 through their wider associations and networks, before the official programme for the disestablishment of the Church of England in Wales had even begun. This thesis indicates that the progress of the campaign for disestablishment had reached such a point of no return by that time that it had become unstoppable.

The Baptists based in the Afon Llwyd Valley, centred on the town of Pontypool, were able to overcome the forces of the establishment from the hegemony of the Hanburys to the

encroachments of the government's educational commissioners. Baptist leadership succeeded where that of the Chartists had failed; it was forceful but passively submissive. The avowed aim of the Liberation Society to proceed politely was pursued alongside the programme of the Society, as long as it suited the plans of the Pontypool Baptists. In their search for religious and social liberation, the Baptists had supported a number of societies, from the Complete Suffrage Union to the Anti-Corn Law League, before throwing in their lot with the Anti State-Church Association, which became the Liberation Society. They always remained true to themselves or, as they would have said, true to God. Their unique contribution was that they used politics in the interests of religious freedom without losing their religious integrity. Only through a sympathetic parliament could their aims for greater religious and social freedom be achieved. They realised by 1868 that this would mean extending the franchise even further in Monmouthshire, but by 1884 political representation had come as far since 1832 as their own activities in the public sphere.

In 1840 the injustice and unfairness of life in Monmouthshire had just found expression in the failure of the Chartist Rising on Newport. Pontypool Baptists had already petitioned the government over their own grievances after a meeting in the town in January 1834. Charles Conway advocated the disestablishment of the Church;¹ he declined to become a magistrate a year later because he could not accept an established Church.² Associated as it was with Capel Hanbury Leigh's ascendancy to the office of Lord Lieutenant of Monmouthshire, Charles Conway's refusal to become a Justice of the Peace was the action of a bold Baptist from a family, or tribe, of bold Baptists. The important part played by the Conway family in the activities of the Monmouthshire Baptists demonstrates the close ties created by marriage in the wide network of Baptist relationships. Throughout this thesis it has been seen that the Conway

¹ Bassett, *The Welsh Baptists*, p. 147.

² *Seren Gomer*, January 1848, p. 62.

most conspicuous in the political activities of the Pontypool Baptists has been William, son of John Conway and Ann Harris Conway.³ William the young chemist of Pontypool, who first appeared against Edward Harris Phillips, JP, in the Church rate dispute in 1845, was an indispensable member of the Pontypool Baptist front row. His attempts with other members of the Pontypool Liberal Association to control the rioters in Pontypool after the 1868 Election has been noted earlier. The political activities of William Conway and his associates are further evidence of what has already been noted in Welsh history: that success for a party in parliamentary elections had depended upon its prior control of local government.⁴

In identifying the members of what has been loosely called the 'Pontypool Baptists', this thesis has noted the parts played by local Baptist and other ministers, mostly Independent or Congregationalist, during the years 1840-1880. In Pontypool these included the minister at Tabernacle Baptist chapel, Edward Evans, and those at Upper Trosnant, David Lloyd Isaac, David Edwards and David Roberts. In Newport they ranged from the scholar, writer and preacher David Rhys Stephen who died of consumption in 1852 at the age of forty-five, to his successors at Commercial Street chapel, William Allen and J.W. Lance. At Abergavenny there was Micah Thomas, until his death in 1853, and Sidney R. Young, minister of Lion Street chapel and a secretary to the Baptist College, as well as to the Monmouthshire English Baptist Association. The Baptist College brought scores of Baptist ministers to support the cause by teaching in the institution, serving on the College Committee, preaching at its services, examining its students or sustaining it with their subscriptions.⁵

Independent ministers associated with the Pontypool Baptists included Thomas Bright of Newport, Evan Jones (Ieuan Gwynedd) of Tredegar and Herbert Daniel of Pontypool. The

³ William Conway, 1819-1891, was the grandson of George and Jane Conway. He was the youngest brother of John Harris Conway of Abergavenny and the nephew of Charles Conway, 1797-1860, mentioned above.

⁴ I.G. Jones, *The Valleys: The Making of Community*, in *Communities* (Llandysul, 1987), pp. 139-157, on p. 152.

⁵ See Chapter Five.

Methodists did not take part in the battle of the Church rate, but they were collaborating by the 1850s and Thomas Thomas often preached in their churches.⁶ Good working relationships with clergymen of the established Church have been indicated during the 1850s over matters of general interest and concern, such as temperance, the Total Abstinence Association, the Scripture Readers' Association and the Mechanics' Institute as well as collections for the needs of the poor.

All this indicates that the Baptists were not an exclusive society with a single-minded concern to make progress in their own religious interests alone. They are certainly revealed in this thesis as a community in which great importance was attached to their lay members who had been nurtured in the local church to be faithfully committed to practising what they believed in chapel and society. By being allowed participation and leadership in the democratic micro-community of Crane Street church, its members were prepared to express themselves outside the chapel and to exercise leadership whenever opportunities were presented. In the circumstances of mid-Victorian society in Monmouthshire, this opportunity was more readily available to the male members of the chapel, whose names are easily identifiable among the leaders of Pontypool's emerging middle-class community. Their wives and daughters also played a full part in the life of the chapel as Sunday school teachers, visitors and members of the Ladies' Committee. In the church meeting they had the same democratic right as the men to vote on every decision that affected the life of the church, but they did not serve as deacons although their minister was a pioneer in Pontypool in supporting the right of women to be able to vote in parliamentary elections.⁷

By that time Thomas Thomas had become President of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland in 1872. His long and settled leadership of chapel and college during the

⁶ NLW, MS 21923B.

⁷ MM, 22 November 1872.

previous thirty-six years had created a climate of permanent stability and influence which extended throughout south Wales. This thesis has shown that Thomas Thomas depended upon a wide circle of support for his success in the joint ministry that he exercised in chapel and college from his arrival in Pontypool in 1836. William Williams Phillips and Charles Conway were already seeking religious and social improvements for Baptists. When the cudgels were being taken up against the payment of compulsory Church rate, it was Thomas Thomas who first proposed in one of his first meetings with his collaborators in January 1837, that they should form the Pontypool Church Rate Abolition Society, and the proposal was accepted.⁸ The battle of the Church rate, described in Chapter Two, extended over five years in Pontypool and revealed the firm, clear-headed and intelligent leadership given by Thomas Thomas and his capacity to win co-operation from several quarters. He and his colleagues remained passively submissive in the face of injustice.

That is a principle he had taught carefully through his sermon against the Chartist Rising in November 1839. The sermon revealed the character of the preacher. He did not simply condemn the methods of the Chartists and defend Nonconformists against the false charge that they were mainly responsible for the Rising, even at the risk of underestimating the number of Nonconformists involved. Nor did he assert 'the right to disobey misgovernment' as the most recent commentator on that sermon claimed.⁹ What Thomas asserted was the right to render to God what belonged only to Him, namely, religious worship, which was not within the jurisdiction of the magistrate to determine. No other commentator responded to the Chartist Rising in that way. Thomas did not believe that the government could determine the religion of its citizens. His authority for that belief was found in the Bible where there was no evidence of a state Church and where Jesus had taught a clear distinction between what belonged to

⁸ Bassett, *The Welsh Baptists*, p. 148.

⁹ Keith B. Jones, 'The Religious Climate of the Chartist Insurrection at Newport Monmouthshire, 4 November 1839. Expressions of Evangelicalism', *JWRH*, 5 (1997), pp. 57-71, on p. 67.

Caesar's jurisdiction and what belonged to God's. In the face of such injustice, Thomas advocated simply 'passive submission' to the government, which meant taking the consequences of passive disobedience.

What that meant, as this thesis has shown, is that Thomas moved away from those radicals represented by the Chartists, who wanted immediate upheaval to change society, and he went back to the ideas of liberty held by the old Puritan Dissenters. Liberty, for Thomas and his fellow-Dissenters, was the freedom to live and worship without the interference of the state. Thomas extended this understanding of freedom to the debates about education analysed in this thesis. He and his associates believed that the acceptance of government grants to provide a state system of education was as unjustifiable and oppressive as a state Church, because it would allow the free schools of the Nonconformists to be infiltrated by government inspection and state religion. Voluntaryism provided the solution for schools as well as for churches. Thomas caused consternation to his Nonconformist colleagues, like William Roberts (Nefydd) who realised the need for government grants to support the British schools that could not be built in those areas where Thomas's influence prevailed. Thomas never changed his mind about the acceptance of government grants, though he was eventually outvoted in his own school at Pontypool, and he was wrong to resist the inevitable failure involved in trying to provide universal education from inadequate voluntary donations.

This thesis has shown that the strength of the Pontypool Baptists did not derive from the leadership of Thomas Thomas alone, but Thomas's leadership was important to them because it was strong, collaborative and visionary. It was visionary in a prophetic sense, even when its aims could not immediately be realised. A comparison between Thomas Thomas and two of his contemporaries in other Churches might help to clarify Thomas's significance.

Lewis Edwards, born in 1809, became a Calvinistic Methodist preacher in 1829, the year after Thomas became a Baptist minister in London. In 1836 when Thomas returned to Pontypool, Edwards returned from Edinburgh University to Bala, full of academic honours, to marry the grand-daughter of Thomas Charles and initiate Bala College with his brother-in-law David Charles. During fifty years as principal of Bala College, Edwards provided the 'Welsh Calvinistic Methodist pulpit with intellectual distinction and wide culture as well as spiritual depth'.¹⁰ Like his Independent contemporary, Revd David Rees, 1801-1869, Edwards believed in the power of the press and he established the first non-denominational quarterly, *Y Traethodydd* ['The Essayist'] in 1845. Edwards wrote a series of articles in *Y Traethodydd* called 'The Consistency of Faith' in which he attempted to reconcile the apparent antithesis between God's absolute sovereignty and the complete freedom of the human will. Edwards's essays created a new way of doing theology among Welsh Calvinistic Methodists.¹¹

Thomas Thomas was admired as a great preacher, like Edwards, but he was not a great writer of theology nor even an editor. At the request of the MEBA in 1865, he did produce a summary of Baptist belief.¹² As President of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland in 1872, he revealed that he was not a Biblical fundamentalist when it came to the prophecies of the Old Testament:

The literal interpretation of parts, at least, of Ezekiel's vision of the temple, priesthood and services is absurd and its realisation physically impossible. So are the predictions of other prophets respecting the gathering of all the nations of the earth to the feasts at Jerusalem.¹³

¹⁰ D. Densil Morgan, 'Theology among the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists, c.1811-1914', in *The History of Welsh Calvinistic Methodism 111: Growth and Consolidation c.1814-1914*, ed. John Gwynfor Jones (Presbyterian Church of Wales, 2013), p. 77.

¹¹ D. Densil Morgan, *Lewis Edwards* (Cardiff, 2009), pp.146-147.

¹² Thomas Thomas, 'The Things which are most surely believed among us', *MEBA, Circular Letter*, April 1866 (Pontypool, 1866).

¹³ Thomas Thomas, *The Inaugural Address at the Annual Session of the Baptist Union* (London, 1872), pp. 8-9.

What Thomas shared most obviously with Edwards was a determination to strengthen the integrity of the Christian message in the context of ministerial education and training for mission in the free churches. They shared their abhorrence of the 'Treachery of the Blue Books' while seeming to acknowledge the truths contained in the Commissioners' *Reports*.

The radical Llanelli Independent leader, David Rees, was another eminent contemporary.¹⁴ Rees accepted the Charter but had doubts about universal manhood suffrage because it was not possible at that time. When it seemed impossible to finance British schools without government grants and an agent was appointed for the British Schools, David Rees began to change his hard-line Voluntaryist view.¹⁵ Not so Thomas Thomas. He kept before his followers the vision of universal manhood suffrage and he never accepted the reality of the need for government grants for education. As late as October 1872 in his second address as President of the Baptist Union, Thomas linked 'the public patronage of sectarian education' with 'the unhallowed alliance of Church and State' as objects for the Baptist Union's disapproval.¹⁶ Thomas's inaugural address to the Baptist Union in April 1872 had devoted more than half of its treatment of 'the unworldly character of the Christian religion' and 'the spirituality of the kingdom of Christ' to 'the great question of National Education'.¹⁷ Thomas reiterated his view that it was not the function of a government to provide education for its citizens. He expressed his disappointment with the Education Act of 1870, which was the death-knell of Voluntaryism, and he condemned the 'educational State Church' that had thus been established. The views analysed in Chapter Three of this thesis about education as a perceived antidote to crime were again considered, but Thomas concluded that 'crime is the attendant of knowledge as well as of ignorance' and 'the main cause of crime is drunkenness,

¹⁴ For a detailed study of Rees, see Rhodri Glyn, 'Cynhyrfer! Cynhyrfer! Cynhyrfer! David Rees, Y Diwygiwr ac Arwainiad Gwleidyddol Ymneilltuol 1835-1865' (unpublished PhD thesis, Aberystwyth University, 2010).

¹⁵ Watts, *The Dissenters*, vol.2, p. 516; Leslie Wynne Evans, *Education in Industrial Wales 1700-1900*, pp. 308-309.

¹⁶ Thomas Thomas, *The Baptists and Christian Union* (Manchester, 1872), pp.13-14.

¹⁷ Thomas Thomas, *The Inaugural Address* (London, 1872), pp. 3, 11-24.

or rather the drink-traffic from which it immediately flows'.¹⁸ Thomas said that that was his conviction after 'careful enquiry and somewhat extensive observation during a pastorate of 44 years'. His view was based as much on social and health grounds as it was upon Biblical condemnation.¹⁹

Whilst David Rees strongly supported the disestablishment of the Church and the work of the Liberation Society, he never advocated the disestablishment of the Church in Wales alone. As Rhodri Glyn concluded in his chapter on David Rees and the disestablishment of the Church:

Er hyn, rhaid pwysleisio nad galw am ddatgysylltu'r Eglwys yng Nghymru a wnaeth Rees, eithr galw am ei datgysylltu'n llwyr, trwy Brydain oll.

(Despite this, it must be stressed that Rees made no call for the disestablishment of the Church in Wales but a demand for its disestablishment entirely through the whole of Britain).²⁰

Thomas Thomas's vision went further than this. The long address that Thomas gave to the conference of the Liberation Society in Swansea in September 1862, analysed in Chapter Five, shows that he was one of the first people to believe that Wales should seek disestablishment on its own merits. Thomas was realistic enough to believe that disestablishment might not happen in his lifetime, but 'our hope is strong that God and the Bible are on our side'.²¹ Thomas, like David Rees, thus claimed the moral high ground for his arguments for disestablishment. His use of Biblical references and repeated appeals to divine authority in urging people to take action portrayed the disestablishment campaign as a moral crusade, the work of God in Wales.

¹⁸ Ibid p.18; Kenrick, *The Population of Pontypool and Trevethin*, pp. 18-20.

¹⁹ Lambert, *Drink and Sobriety in Victorian Wales c.1820-c.1895*, pp. 117-119, 151. Lambert acknowledges Thomas's part in the Baptist leadership of temperance in Monmouthshire.

²⁰ Rhodri Glyn, *Cynhyrfer! Cynhyrfer! Cynhyrfer! David Rees y Diwygiwr ac Arweiniad Gwleidyddol Ymneilltuol 1835-1865*, Pennod 5, p. 194.

²¹ Thomas Thomas, *The Importance of developing the power of Welsh Nonconformity for the Liberation of Religion from State Patronage and Control* (London, 1862), p. 11.

Thus also spoke David Rees in his articles in *Y Diwygiwr*. David Rees did not attend the conference in Swansea and he gave only brief mention to Thomas's address, but Thomas's remarks about the importance of the Welsh press in communicating the ideas of the Liberation Society were a timely reminder that 'the literary contributions of a larger number of our ablest anti-State Churchmen' needed to be increased.²² Thomas was eloquent in his praise of the contribution that the press could make to the cause of disestablishment. In an interesting aside, however, Thomas contrasted England and Wales in this respect. 'If in England', he said, 'the pulpit succumbs to the press, it certainly is not so here'.²³ He went on to argue the importance of the pulpit in Wales, where its power was pre-eminent, in the service of the Liberation Society. He insisted that there should be no party politics in the pulpit, but he clearly believed that the pulpit was the arena for moral leadership, which included condemning the spiritual evils of establishmentarianism.

David Rees owed his success as one of the leaders of Nonconformist opinion and influence in nineteenth century Wales to his articles in his monthly periodical *Y Diwygiwr*. The Revd Thomas Thomas also knew the power of the pen, which he used to produce letters and articles that were very well-written and clearly expressed, even allowing for purple passages. His letters were usually the last word on the subject, as revealed in Chapter Three, when his letter on the state of education in Pontypool ended the protracted correspondence between the Merthyr Unitarian Thomas Stephens and the Monmouthshire Voluntaryists.²⁴ Thomas's letters to the *Nonconformist* were masterly. That applied to his summary of the need for collaboration between the middle and working classes in Wales in 1841.²⁵ Thomas knew that the working class needed middle class leadership. The people also needed 'general suffrage and vote by

²² Ibid, p. 9

²³ Ibid, p.10.

²⁴ *MM*, 21 April 1847.

²⁵ *Nonconformist*, 20 October 1841.

ballot' to overcome the injustice of their inadequate parliamentary representation. Thomas also encouraged cooperation between the Nonconformist denominations to overcome the injustice of the established Church supported by the landowners. Although his writings emphasised that there was nothing personal in his attacks on the establishment, and the Pontypool Baptists felt nothing but loyalty to the Lord Lieutenant and his family, Thomas's effective advocacy of Dissenting grievances meant that he said many things that would have annoyed the establishment in Church and State.

Like most of his fellow Nonconformists and many evangelical clergymen in the Church of England, Thomas did not like the influence of the Tractarian, high Church clergy, popularly known as Puseyites. It followed that Thomas's opinion of the Roman Catholic Church was lower than his attitude to the ritualism of the Puseyite priests in the Church of England. Yet Thomas was wholly consistent when the Roman Catholic hierarchy was restored in England and Wales in 1850. Many in Britain, not least in Monmouthshire, were hysterical in their denunciation of the Roman Catholic bishops in their new sees as an affront to the Queen and the established Church. Thomas wrote to the *Nonconformist* to question the way in which his Baptist friend, the Revd J.P. Mursell had condemned the Roman Catholic bishops.²⁶ Thomas supported the restoration of the hierarchy as the action of an independent disestablished Church with the same right to the freedom to manage their own religious affairs as any disestablished denomination. The editor of the *Nonconformist* endorsed his view.²⁷

Unlike David Rees, Thomas never edited a newspaper; he set all his store by the work that he did through Pontypool Baptist College and Crane Street chapel. Of course that brought him many opportunities to preach far and wide and to provide leadership in many public spheres from the meetings of the Monmouthshire English Baptist Association, where he was

²⁶ *Nonconformist*, 4 December 1850.

²⁷ Ibid; G.T. Machin, *Politics and the Churches in Great Britain 1832-1868* (Oxford, 1977), p. 222.

lionised as their creator and three-times president, to the conferences and committees of the Liberation Society and the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland. Thomas's greatest influence as a religious leader in nineteenth century Wales came, not from his pen, but from his presidency of the College, his pastoring and his preaching.

Very few of Thomas's sermons have survived, but the printed sermons, circular letters and addresses were all delivered orally and received originally by an audience. By means of the spoken word Thomas influenced thousands of people to support the causes he espoused to achieve greater religious and social freedom for Nonconformists during the mid-nineteenth century. Like all his fellow Nonconformist radical leaders in Wales, Thomas had first to convince his listeners that Christians must not be afraid to get involved in politics in order to stand up for their principles. Thomas believed that members of the established Church were always being 'politically religious' by belonging to a Church which had bishops in the House of Lords and a direct relationship with civil government. Nonconformists should become 'religiously political' for the sake of freedom and popular rights by serving as members of the Board of Guardians or the Town Council and seeking to improve the elective franchise for their fellow citizens.²⁸ What was true for all Christians must surely be the right course for Christian ministers who had a duty to 'direct the attention of their flock to the position of public affairs, and show the application of Christian principles to their civil duties and rights'.²⁹ The training of Christian ministers was thus one of Thomas's most important contributions to the Baptist programme in nineteenth century Wales. He saw those ministers as the key to Baptist success and the greatest asset of the Baptist denomination in its fight for freedom.

Ministers made a difference to churches and denominations and to the communities where they served, as Thomas knew. The men he trained and the methods he used for

²⁸ Thomas, *A Proper Consideration of the cause of the Poor*, p. 4.

²⁹ Ibid.

forty years in nineteenth century Monmouthshire have been shown in Chapter Five. Thomas kept his own spiritual integrity while teaching his students to do likewise while having a high profile in the public sphere in a way not common before his time.³⁰ He overcame the tensions created by the commitment to services in the Welsh language and to Calvinist theology in the Monmouthshire Baptist Association by his inspirational lead in the setting up of the Monmouthshire English Baptist Association, where the provision of services in the English language increased membership and encouraged missionary enterprise in the new industrial communities. The Baptist College provided the ministers for those communities, and in time those industrial communities produced ministers for themselves rather than rely mainly on recruitment from rural Wales. The answer to the question about whether the Baptist College was cause or effect of the Baptist strength in Pontypool, would be that the College gave even more to its community than it ever received and the movement of the College to Cardiff, wise though it was for the denomination, was a great loss to the Monmouthshire Baptists.

Throughout this thesis the constant and consistent cry of the Pontypool Baptists for disestablishment has been described. Their battles for piecemeal redress of their disabilities were long and painful. They knew that they could only achieve the religious and social equality they sought when the Church of England was merely another denomination like the rest. Progressive democracy and assertive individualism were encouraged by their theology and their chapel culture. They wanted privilege and patronage to be replaced by equality and individual independence. Yet ironically, as this thesis has shown, the Pontypool Baptists learned that they were most effectively true to their individual consciences when they acted together for a common purpose described by the *Nonconformist* as 'The Dissidence of Dissent

³⁰ D. Mervyn Himbury, 'Thomas Thomas 1805-1881', *The Baptist Quarterly*, October 1955, p. 148.

and the Protestantism of the Protestant Religion'. Thomas Thomas was able to claim proudly in 1872 that,

There are very few churches, Welsh or English, from Cardiff to Holyhead, and from Monmouth to Milford, which do not belong to some county or district association.³¹

Thomas went on to show in that address how Baptists and all evangelical denominations and free churches could achieve their aims more effectively when they acted together corporately.

Historians from Gwyn Alf Williams to Matthew Cragoe have argued about the true identity of Wales and whether its recorded history faithfully reflects the historical experience of the people. This thesis has faithfully reflected the experience of an important part of the people of Wales in the border county of Monmouthshire over a significant period in the nineteenth century. This has revealed that the causes of disestablishment did not arise from common country-wide circumstances to produce a global brand, but were produced and developed regionally for the benefit of the local market. When to Gwyn Alf's title, *When was Wales?* Is added the important question *Where was Wales?*, the different experiences of the separately unfolding regions of Wales need to be considered consistently to achieve the true picture of the historical experience of the whole nation of Wales.³² The seminal works of scholars like E.T. Davies, Ieuan Gwynedd Jones and Sir Glanmor Williams have raised questions to which answers might be sought from research into the religious history of churches and chapels and their relationships in the different regions of Wales. As Matthew Cragoe observed, 'the subject lacks historiographical coherence' and we are in danger of being left with a picture of Wales as fragmented as the experience of the participants in the struggles for freedom and equality described in this thesis. That so much religious, social and political

³¹ Thomas Thomas, *The Baptists and Christian Union* (Manchester, 1872), p. 5.

³² Gwyn A. Williams, *When was Wales?* (Penguin Books, 1985), Chapters 8 and 9; Matthew Cragoe, 'Wales', in *A Companion to Nineteenth Century Britain*, ed. Chris, Williams (Blackwells Publishing, 2004), pp. 521-533.

history has been written without proper reference to the Baptists of Pontypool is sure evidence that the whole story has not previously been told.

This thesis ends before the beginning of the third act in the disestablishment drama in Wales. This act began in 1886 and led to bills for Welsh disestablishment being introduced in Parliament. The final act in the drama was performed in the changed context of the twentieth century.³³ Liberal candidates were easily successful in the county seats of Monmouth West and Monmouth North after 1885. In the former constituency the percentage of the vote won by the winning candidate was the highest in Wales, while in the latter Reginald McKenna became the MP. As Home Secretary, McKenna introduced the fourth and final disestablishment Bill passed in 1914 and postponed until 1920.³⁴

Thomas Thomas did not live to see the final acts, but of the significant contribution towards preparing their way made by Thomas and his fellow-Baptists there is no doubt. In the end what Edward Miall wrote of the Liberation Society holds true also for them, that

Though comparatively unknown...[they] were content to gain victories for religious freedom, the laurels of which will be gathered by other hands.³⁵

³³ Frances Knight, 'The Disestablishment Campaign 1850-1920' in *The Welsh Church* eds. Sir Glanmor Williams, William Jacob, Nigel Yates and Frances Knight (Cardiff, 2007), p.316. Frances Knight calls the four acts 'phases' of the campaign.

³⁴ Arnold J.James and John E. Thomas, *Wales at Westminster, A History of the Parliamentary Representation of Wales 1800-1979* (Llandysul, 1981), pp. 84-109; P.M.H. Bell, *Disestablishment in Ireland and Wales*, pp. 242-259; Kenneth O. Morgan, *Freedom or Sacrilege?* (Penarth, 1965), pp.26-28.

³⁵ *Nonconformist*, 7 May 1868, p. 433. Quoted by David M. Thompson, 'The Liberation Society 1844-1868', in *Pressure from Without in early Victorian England*, ed. Patricia Hollis (London, 1974), pp. 210-238, on p. 236.

APPENDIX ONE

Pontypool Baptist College Students

Note: The occupation is that of the student on entering College or that of his father

A. 1836-1850

	Names	Born	Place of birth	Occupation	Ordained
1	Rees Davies	1819	Cilycwm, Carms.	Agricultural Labourer	Penyfai, 1847
2	Griffith Havard	1825	Garthbrenge, Brecks.	Shoemaker	Blaenafon, 1850
3	David Lloyd Isaac	1818	Llanwennog, Cards.	Farming	Neath, 1838
4	George James	1822	Carmarthen	Shoemaker	Llanfihangel Crucorney, 1848
5	John Jones	1820	Cefn-llys, Radnorshire	Farming	Gladestry, 1847
6	Richard Johns	1817	Cowbridge, Glam.	Carpenter	Abercanaid, 1848
7	Lot Lee	1821	Llangollen, Denbs.	Schoolmaster	Newport, Pembs. 1847
8	Thomas Lewis	1823	Llandeilo'r fan, Brecks.	Woollen Mill worker	Llanddewi Rhydderch, 1848
9	Daniel Morgan	1823	Penllyn, Glam.	Chain maker	Blaenafon, 1849
10	John Rhys Morgan	1822	Lisvane, Cardiff	Farming	Bangor, 1846
11	John Morris	1817	Merthyr Tydfil, Glam.	-----	Aberaman, 1850
12	Rees Price	1823	Cayo, Carms.	Farming	Manordeifi, 1849
13	Thomas Price	1820	Llanhamlach, Brecks.	Painter, Glazier, Plumber	Aberdare, 1846
14	Edward Roberts	1820	Corwen, Merionethshire	Farming	Pontesbury, 1847
15	John Rogers	1827	Newport, Mon.	Wharffman	Margate, 1850
16	James Rowe	1810	Fishguard, Pembs.	Stone mason	Penrhyncoch, 1840
17	Evan Thomas	1819	Peterstone-super- Ely, Glam.	Chain worker	Nebo, Ebbw Vale, 1845
18	Nathaniel Thomas	1818	Llansamlet, Swansea	Coal miner	Cilfowyr, Carms. 1846.

19	John Wood Todd	1820	Kinclaven, Perth.	_____	Stratford-on-Avon, 1845
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B. 1850-1860

	Names	Born	Place of birth	Occupation	Ordained
1	Thomas Clarke	1837	Pontypool, Mon.	Shoemaker	Usk, 1858
2	Isaac Edwards	1836	Penrhyncoch, Cards.	Domestic Servant	Llanidloes, Monts., 1861
3	Thomas Evans	1827	Newport, Pembs	Sailor	Penygarn, 1853
4	Thomas Francis	1829	St. George's, Glam.	Coal-mining	Wotton-under-Edge, Gloucs. 1859
5	Cornelius Griffiths	1829	Llanelli, Carm's	Shoemaker	Aberavon, 1857
6	Richard Hughes	1821	Tredegar, Mon.	Book-binder	Maesteg, 1851
7	Joel Hawkins Hill	1826	Cheddar, Soms.	Carpenter	Swansea, 1858
8.	Evan Jenkins	1833	Narberth, Pembs.	Carpenter	Madeley, Salop 1858
9	Abel Jones Parry	1833	Rhyl, Flints.	Painter and paper-hanger	Cefnmawr, Denbs. 1858
10	Morgan Phillips	1837	Cilycwm, Carm's	Miner	Aberdare, 1860
11	John Rowlands	1825	Anglesey.	Farming	Cwmavon, 1851
12	John Williams	1833	Merthyr Tydfil, Glam.	Iron worker	Dowlais, 1859
13	Sidney R. Young	1830	Newport, Mon.	Timber worker	Newtown, 1854

C. 1860-1870

	Names	Born	Place of birth	Occupation	Ordained
1	Thomas Cocker	1843	Henllys, Mon	Shoe-dealer	Llantwit Major 1867
2	William Cope	1841	Middlesex	_____	Oakham, 1863
3	Thomas H. Davies	1842	Swansea	Joiner	Rugby, 1866
4	Thomas Dyll	1838	Shoreditch, Middlesex	Hairdresser	Monks Kirby, 1863

5	David George	1838	Cardigan	Agricultural Labourer	Milford 1865
6	David Griffiths	1840	Swansea	Labourer	Aberafon, 1865
7	Stephen Howells	1842	Llanboidy, Carms.	Coalminer	Middlesborough, 1863
8	James Hughes	1838	Blaenafon	Coalminer	Ashton-under Lyne, 1865
9	Isaac James	1841	Llangammarch, Brecs.	Coalminer	Beaumaris, 1864
10	Dewi Bevan Jones	1843	Llandysul, Carms.	Tailor	Canton, Cardiff, 1865
11	Richard Jones	1832	Aberystwyth, Cards.	Stonemason	Pisgah, Taliwaen 1866
12	David R.Morgan	1840	Aberafon, Glam.	Tinworker	Usk, 1865
13	John Morgan	1840	Aberystwyth, Cards	Farming	St. Brides, 1862
14	William Morris	1843	Treboeth, Swansea	_____	Treorchy, 1869
15	Edward Morse	1842	Ewenny, Glam.	Farming	Treforest, 1863
16	John Nicholas	1841	Gelligaer, Glam.	Miner	Newbridge-on-Wye, 1864
17	Phillip Phillips	1836	Llanelli, Carms.	Agricultural Labourer	Maescanner, Llanelli, 1864
18	Thomas Phillips	1840	Builth, Brecs.	Agricultural Labourer	Blaenau, 1864
19	John Prichard	1837	Amlwch, Anglesey	Farming	Noddfa, Abersychan, 1863
20	William Prosser	1841	Brecon	Stonemason	Newbridge, Mon. 1864
21	William C.Taylor	1837	Liverpool	Leatherworker	Uley, Gloucs. 1866
22	Joshua Thomas	1841	Blaenafon	Iron miner	Zion, Cefn Mawr, 1868

D. 1870-1880

	Names	Born	Place of birth	Occupation	Ordained
1	James Berryman	1843	Cornwall	Plate-layer	Nantyglo, 1872
2	Thomas (Witton) Davies	1851	Nantyglo	Ironworker	Merthyr Tydfil, 1879

3	William Edwards	1848	Login, Pembs.	Monumental mason	Haverfordwest, 1872
4	Amaziah Griffiths	1842	Maenclochog, Pembs.	Iron miner	Llanfyrnach, Pembs. 1871
5	John Howell	1843	Llanwinio, Carms.	Coalminer	Cwmparc, 1875
6	Jabez Jenkins	1853	Aberdare	Coalminer	Welshpool, 1873
7	Francis Johnson	1858	Garway, Herefs.	Baptist Minister	St. Helier, Jersey, 1879
8	Caleb Joshua	1851	Pontypool, Mon.	Railway Cleaner	Desborough, Northants. 1878
9	Isaac Lloyd	1853	Blaenafon	Coalminer	Briercliffe, Lancs. 1877
10	William Maurice	1849	Llanfyrnach, Pembs.	_____	Michaelstone-y-Fedw 1875
11	Joseph Miles	1853	Llanstinan, Pembs.	Farm Servant	Cardiff, 1882
12	Andrew Mills	1848	Tydu, Mon.	Grocer	Neath, 1870
13	John Meredith	1855	Llanwenarth	Labourer	Kensington, Brecon, 1877
14	Owen Owens	1857	Holyhead, Anglesey	Farming	Porth, 1880
15	Enoch E. Probert	1855	Nantyglo	Shoemaker	Abercarn, 1877
16	Isaac Richards	1841	Abergavenny	Stonemason	Goetre, Mon. 1872

APPENDIX TWO

Crane Street chapel members 1836-1881

occupation	men	wives	women	unmarried sisters	unmarried daughters	unmarried sons
professional/ independent	8	3	2			
shopkeepers	12	9		3		
skilled tradespeople	13	8		1	4	1
white collar	3	3				
iron workers	3	3				
tin workers	2	2				
coal miners	4	2			3	
farmers	3	4			2	
agricultural labourers	2	1				
gardeners	2	4				
brewers/innkeepers	2	1			2	
railway workers	1	1				
servants	1	1	3			
milliners			3			
dressmakers			1			
basket-makers			1			
housekeepers			2			
shop assistants			2			
Total 128	56	42	14	4	11	1

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