

EGWYDDORION ARFER
DA WRTH ADDASU
CAPELI AC EGLWYSI
SEGUR YNG NGWYNEDD



Introduction.

Historical background.

Nonconformism in Wales started in the seventeenth century when the first chapel was established in 1649 on the Gower peninsula.

The movement continued to grow, gathering pace and momentum over the next two centuries. To accommodate the services an increasing number of chapels were built and this continued up to the First World War. The last religious revival occurred in 1904 – 05 when there was an explosion of new chapels and, more importantly, the rebuilding of a large number of existing chapels.

This is why, when we look at chapels we invariably see the date as being the early 1900s. Chapels of earlier times, remaining largely unaltered, are rare and invariably listed.

The stranger to north Wales is always struck by the fact that every Welsh village, of whatever size, has at least three or four large chapels and one church.

In 1800 there were approximately 1300 nonconformist chapels in Wales; by 1850 there were 3800. Chapels opened at the rate of one a week and this continued up to the early 1900s; but by 1915 less than 10 chapels were built annually. Since that time very few new chapels were built.

The total for Wales stands at roughly 6200 nonconformist places of worship.

Current situation in Gwynedd.

Since the Second World War, the earlier trend of chapel building has been reversed completely. Declining congregations, lack of funding and high maintenance costs have forced many chapels to close. A large number of these are offered for sale or left to deteriorate until they eventually become dangerous structures and are demolished.

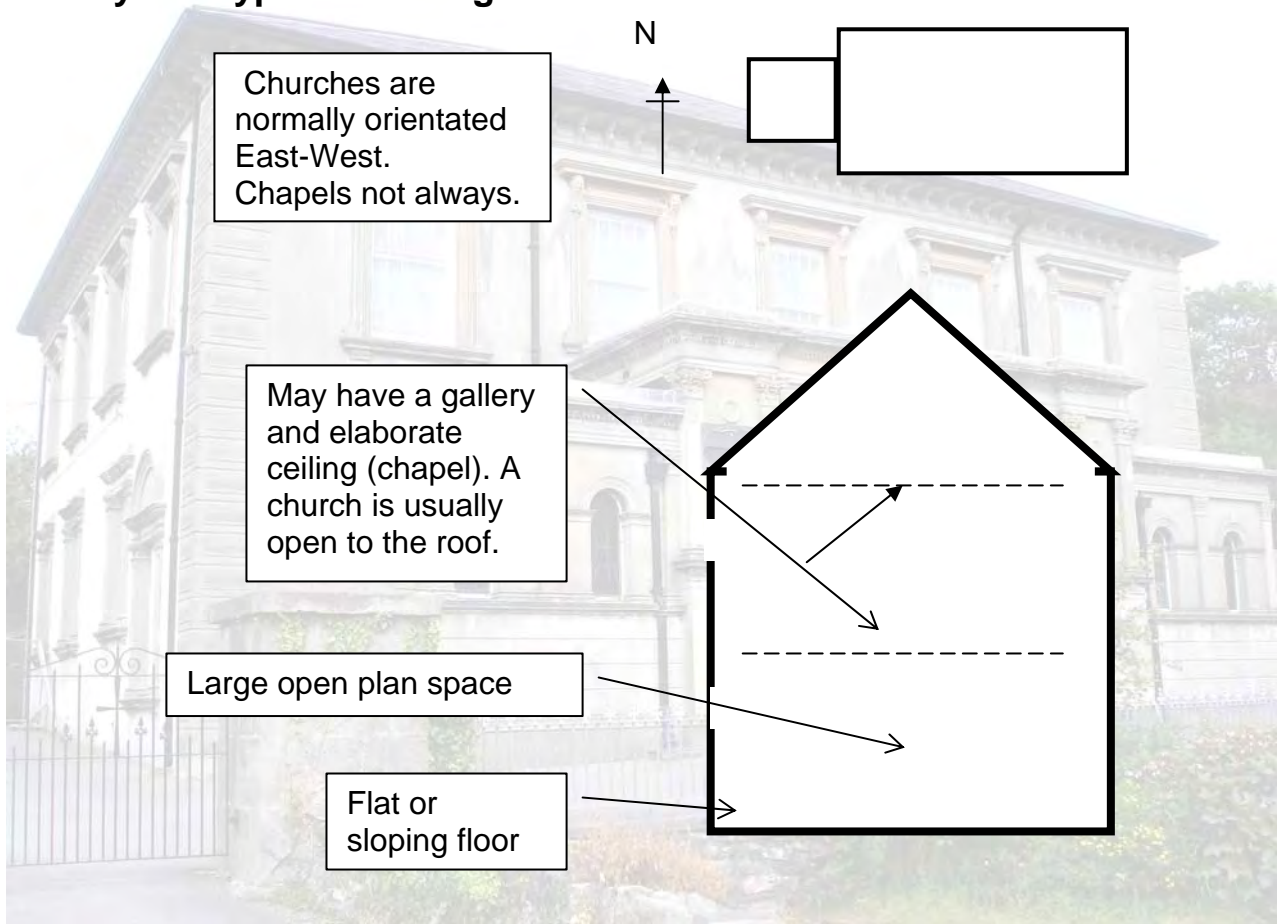
Gwynedd, like all other Welsh counties, has a large number of religious buildings, of which 151 are listed buildings (including 59 chapels, 69 churches and 10 church halls). Figures are not available for redundancy.

Chapels come on the market regularly and this leaflet is intended for prospective purchasers or owners of chapels or even churches to offer guidance on reusing or adapting these buildings for another purpose.

The guidance is particularly aimed at listed chapels or churches, although the basic principles will apply to most conversions.



Anatomy of a typical building.



Strong points

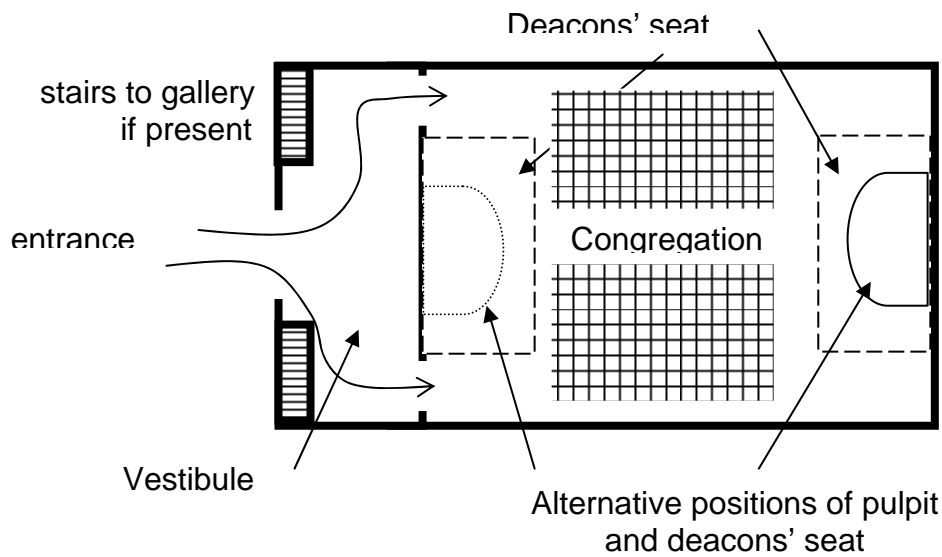
- Architecturally designed building, chapels usually in classical style; churches in gothic style.
- Large building, footprint may be up to 300sq.metres in area.
- Likely to be a listed building.
- Structurally sound - built in stone.
- Solid walls.
- Large open plan space.
- Usually well-maintained until redundant.
- Solid floor of tiles or flags may be overlaid with wood.
- Chapel floors may be sloping.
- Slate roof.
- Gallery (if present) indicates logical location for first floor.

Weak points

- Only basic services.
- No drainage.
- Poor thermal performance.
- Prone to dampness and condensation due to intermittent use.
- Large amount of furnishings and fittings to dispose of.
- If listed, sensitive design needed.
- May have large windows, churches may have elaborate East and West windows.
- Little or no external space around the building.
- Problem of access.
- May have a burial ground.
- If no gallery present, windows will be tall – problems with inserting a first floor.

Differences between chapels and churches.

Typical chapel



Chapels were all designed for a single function and therefore tend to be very similar in layout. They were also very plain without a great deal of ornamentation.

Externally the façade was given the strongest architectural treatment.

Entry was by one or two main doors into a vestibule. Entry into the chapel itself was usually by either of two doors, placed each side of the vestibule and leading down to the pews on either side. Staircases in the vestibule would lead up to the galleries, if present.

A small rural chapel may have room for 100 people, while a very large urban chapel, complete with galleries would seat 900.

The pulpit can be at either position as shown and is elevated above the level of the pews.

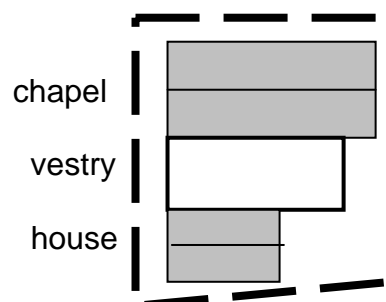


Capel Newydd, Nanhoron

The pulpit is surrounded by the large deacons' seating area.

The joinery is usually of high quality, mostly in pitch pine.

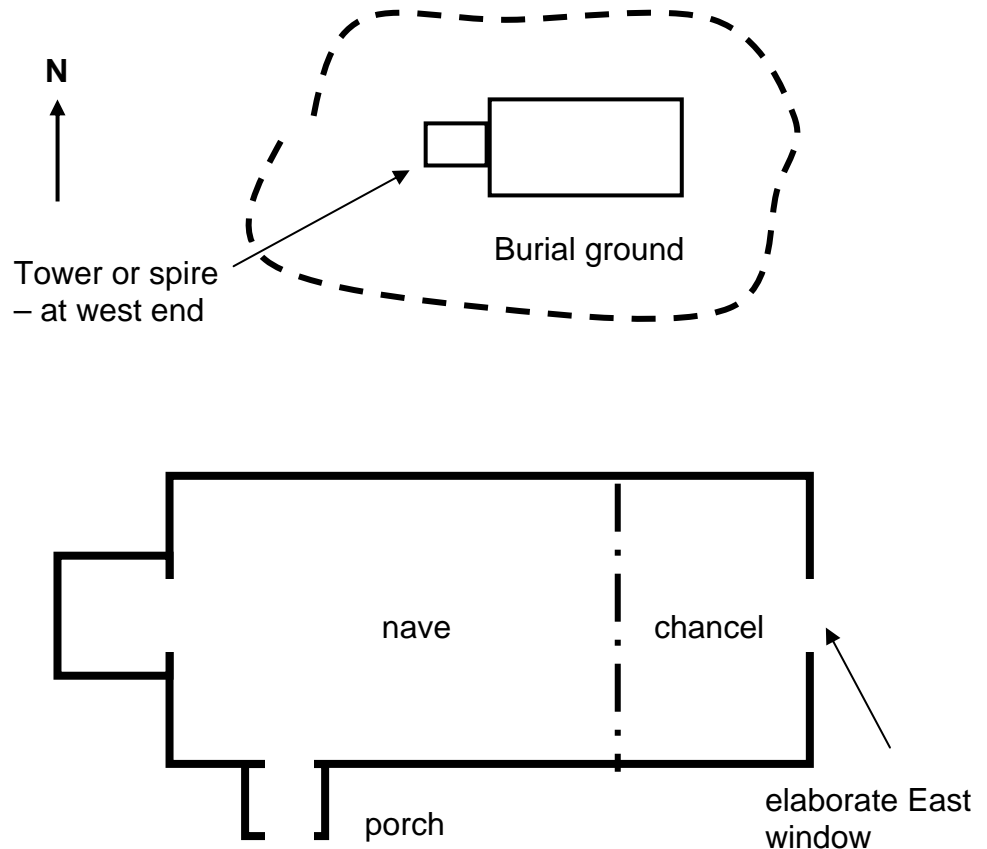
Small remote chapels may be as illustrated but the majority will have an attached vestry, hall or Sunday school and also an adjoining chapel house for the caretaker. They may be marketed as separate units.



Plot may be very small and may not have good access, particularly urban sites. Majority of chapels do not have attached burial grounds.

Typical church.

Historically, churches were built on a East-West orientation and would normally have a burial ground around them, surrounded by the churchyard wall. Entry may be through a simple gate or by a covered lychgate, depending on the age of the building.



There are far fewer Anglican churches in Wales than chapels, in 1851 there were 1,176 churches compared to 2,784 chapels.

Many churches date from medieval times or earlier and are invariably listed Grade 1. During the nineteenth century many new churches were built by the Dioceses to accommodate rises in population, particularly in industrial, urban areas. This is true for Gwynedd; the development of slate quarrying gave rise to a rush of church building. Many of these church buildings follow a 'pattern book' approach – using fairly standard designs for buildings of various capacities.

It is largely these urban nineteenth century churches that become redundant and are made available for purchase, with the occasional rural equivalent.

The presence of a burial ground may impose conditions on the building's usage and access requirements. The church in Wales may impose certain covenants on the building.

Churches can be extremely large internally and may be more challenging to convert sensitively than chapels.

The great majority of churches are listed buildings.

Principles of good practice in converting chapels or churches.

Building Exterior.

- 1. Maintain the external character and appearance of the building.** A church or chapel must clearly display its original use. As they were built to certain classical or gothic styles it is extremely important that none of this is lost. Do not create additional openings unless absolutely necessary. Always make use of existing doors and windows. Stained glass or leaded lights must be retained.
- 2. The size of the building does not usually need the construction of an extension,** but if it does it should be as small as possible and not dominate or take anything away from the original structure. The design must be sympathetic to the original, but not necessarily copy the style slavishly.
- 3. The existing rooflines should be respected;** for example, chimney stacks of brick or stone should not be added to the building. There may well be an existing chimney – which should be used. If no chimney is present a stainless steel flue should be used, painted grey or black and positioned discreetly out of sight.
- 4. Additional day lighting may be necessary.** The use of dormer windows of any kind should be avoided and even conservation rooflights must be positioned to be the least visually intrusive.
- 5. Blocking up of doors and windows.** If this needs to be done then recessed blocking should be used on the external side, so that the outline of the door or window is still visible. Windows and doors may also be blocked from the inside, using the same principle, but keeping the door or window intact.
- 6. Chapels usually have their names prominently displayed,** either a slate plaque or the name formed in render on the façade. On no account should this identification be removed.
- 7. All external walls should be retained with the original finish** or replaced on a 'like for like' basis. Brightly painted walls and external joinery seldom work satisfactorily and will diminish the character of the building.
- 8. New doors and fenestration** should be sympathetic in design to the existing and be correctly proportioned to the scale of the building. They should be located so that they do not conflict with the existing pattern of openings.
- 9. External features, such as gates and railings** within the curtilage of the building must be retained.
- 10. The construction of garages, sheds** or other features within the curtilage should be avoided if at all possible. If unavoidable they should be placed as inconspicuously as possible away from the building.

Building Interior.

1. **Try to retain as many of the room spaces as possible** without destroying their original form. Chapels and churches are largely open plan with a few small ancillary rooms and this should be the guiding principle.

2. **Try to retain the original vestibule**, if present, as original because it will fulfil its original function as a useful space for the transition from outside to inside and will help insulate the building from the weather.

3. **Every effort must be made to retain original staircases** in their positions. The same applies to galleries.

4. **Original fittings such as pews and seating, lighting etc.** should be retained as much as possible, or reused in other situations. Some unfortunately will have to be removed from the building.

5. **The insertion of a first floor can be technically challenging.** If a gallery is present this will make it easier to locate and the gallery supports may be utilised to hold up the new floor. Damage to the external walls must be kept to a minimum. It is often preferable not to support intermediate floors off the external walls but to use a free-standing arrangement using independent columns.

If there is no gallery then the windows will tend to be long and usually cut across the position of the intermediate floor. This gives rise to the problem of hiding the floor structure from the outside and also the need to provide adequate fireproofing against spread of flame upwards.

6. **The most important internal feature in most chapels is the ornate ceiling**, this must be retained, whether kept visible as a feature or hidden under a suspended ceiling. It is always preferable to keep the ceiling visible. A suspended ceiling will involve fixings being attached to the original ceiling and damaging it.

7. **Other internal features, such as ornate plaster covings, friezes, niches, screens** should be preserved and protected. Partitions etc. should be constructed in such a way as to avoid damage to these features.

8. **Finishes and fittings** should be appropriate and in harmony with the surroundings.

References.

- 'Chapels in Wales – conservation and conversion' CADW 1999
- 'Change of Use – the conversion of old buildings', Cunnington P, A & C Black .1988
- 'Rehabilitation and Re-use of Old Buildings', Highfield D, Spon. 1987

Planning Policies and national planning guidance

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and paragraph 3.1.2 of Planning Policy Wales emphasise that applications should be determined in accordance with the Development Plan, unless other material planning considerations state otherwise. You should read the policies of the Gwynedd Unitary Development Plan and Supplementary Planning Guidance (available on the website) and national planning guidance, prior to submitting an application.

Furthermore, if you intend to submit an application we advise prospective applicants to use the pre-application advice service provided by the Planning Service. You need to comply with the requirements of the Guidance Note : Pre-application advice service (on this website) prior to arranging an appointment to meet a Planning Officer.