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Seion Chapel

The building

Seion Chapel is one of only two Wesleyan Methodist Chapels in Wales to be listed Grade II*. It is built in a local creamy-grey coloured stone, with red sandstone dressings to the window surrounds. On the front elevation there is a single storey entrance porch, with stair turrets either side, and on the rear a porch and vestry.



The chapel was designed by the architects Shayler & Ridge and completed in 1904. It is described by Richard Haslam as “massive Arts and Crafts Gothic with two stumpy towers and bold buttresses down the sides”. The railings and some of the other details are almost Art Nouveau in style, although



they are discreet and understated. This sort of mix of ‘Arts & Crafts’ and ‘Art Nouveau’ is sometimes known as Edwardian ‘Free Style’.

Shayler & Ridge were architects based and working on the Wales/England border at the beginning of the twentieth century. As well as Seion Chapel, they were also responsible for the ‘Free Library’ in Newtown (1902) and the Town Hall in Llanidloes (1908), along with other smaller buildings and projects in the area.

They were influenced stylistically by Richard Norman Shaw and by some of the ideas of the ‘Arts & Crafts Movement’. These ideas were based on the belief that the industrial revolution had effectively destroyed the creativity of vernacular building methods. Arts & Crafts architects sought to revive the use of traditional materials and the craft skills necessary to make beautiful things.

The solidity of the external stonework and the simple detailing of the oak doors, pews and joinery are all good examples of the ‘Arts & Crafts’ style.

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The galleried interior is stunning and remains one of the most complete chapel interiors of its type, giving it national significance.

Adjacent to the chapel is a large hall, which predates it by twelve years. This seems to have been the previous chapel, which was then converted to use as a hall when the chapel was built. This is a simple rectangular building, and was used as the chapel in the film 'The Englishman who went up a Hill and came down a Mountain'.

Internally, the hall has a slightly raised dais, with doors either side for the minister (one of which is now redundant because of the addition of the schoolrooms and house behind). The bench seats have hinged backs, so that they can face in either direction without being moved.



The people

The first Methodist meeting was held in Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant in 1801, and by 1804 a Wesleyan Fellowship was formed, and connected to the Llanfyllin circuit. Until 1834, meetings were held in a converted woollen mill on the bank of the River Rhaeadr, but this became too small and so a chapel was built on land given by Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn. This chapel was restored and enlarged in 1869.

The current chapel was built during the Welsh Revival of 1904, to serve an even larger congregation of new converts to Christianity.

The 'Arts & Crafts' style was inspired by a belief that craftsmanship should be valued, and that the use of traditional and natural materials would help counter the problems of over-industrialisation in society. How far the architects of the chapel actually signed up to this ideology is not clear. It appears that the builder, a local man, ended up making a loss on the project, and eventually committed suicide. His fate is all the more sad, when one considers the fact that the 'Arts & Crafts' movement was committed to respecting and valuing people who created and made buildings.