

## Synagogue, Merthyr Tydfil

### HERITAGE ASSESSMENT APPENDICES

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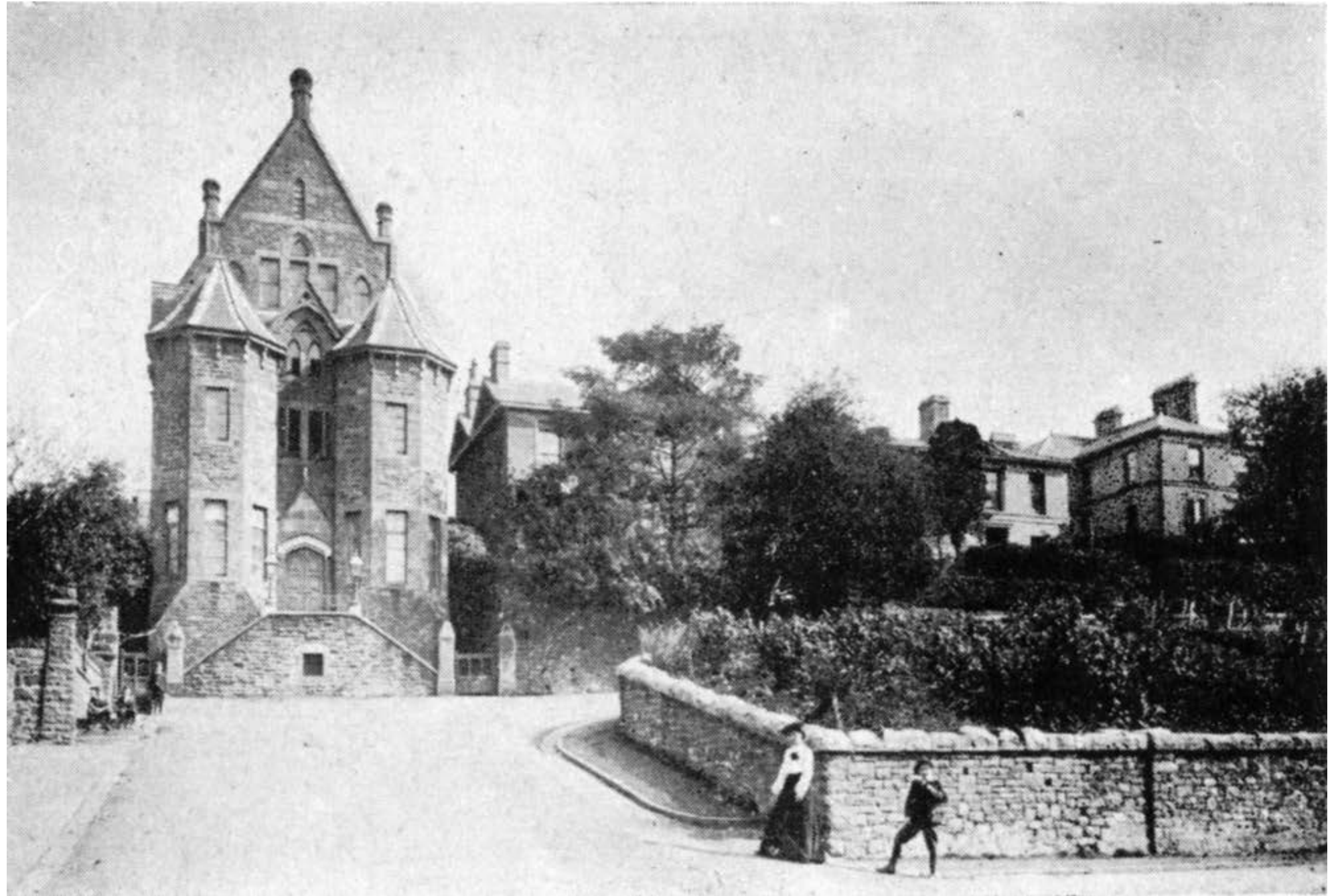
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*Historical view of Synagogue frontage from top of Church Street c. 1904 (source: 'alangeorge.co.uk' website)*



APPENDIX A - THOMASTOWN CONSERVATION AREA –  
CHARACTER APPRAISAL & MANAGEMENT PLAN (July 2014)

Relevant extracts:

“2. History and Location  
“2.1 Location and Etymology

“The Thomastown Conservation Area is located to the east of Merthyr Tydfil Town Centre. It sits on a steep slope on the eastern side of the Merthyr Tydfil basin and commands impressive views across the town and across the valley over the wider historic landscape. The area is particularly steep to the east of Union Street and a round hillock rises in the area between Church Street and Newcastle Street. Prior to the development of Thomastown, the area was separated into a number of parcelled fields.

“With no valuable outcrops, the area was not subject to excavation and was subsequently developed as a superior residential area. The streets are built in a grid pattern with the principal roads running alongside the hillside contours (from north to south). Church Street, Newcastle Street and Alma Street run from east to west connect the area to the town centre.

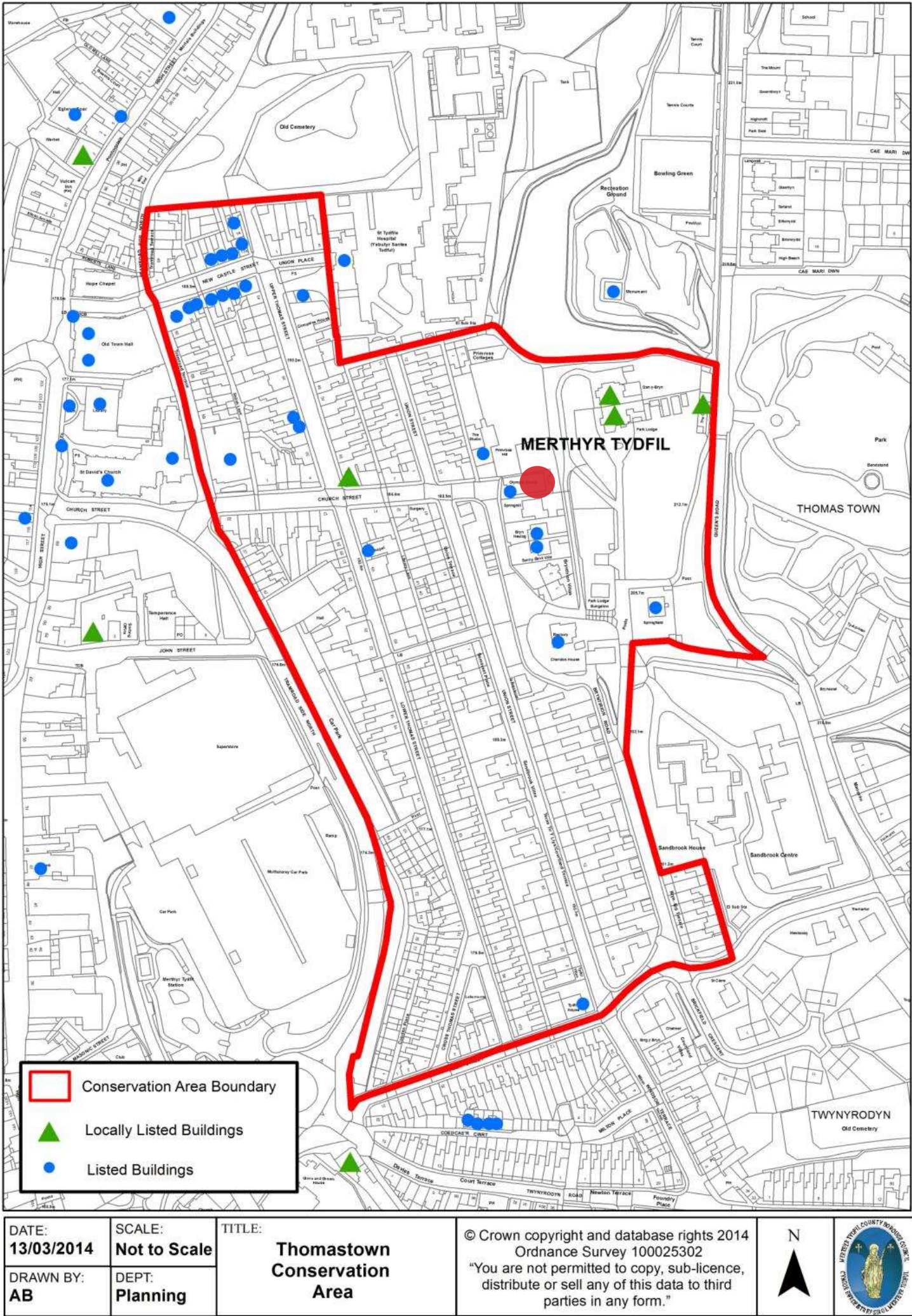
“Immediately to the west of the Conservation Area is the town centre, to north is the St Tydfil’s Hospital site (now vacant and allocated for residential use in the Local Development Plan), to the east, and further uphill, is a later residential area and Thomastown Park which overlooks the northern part of the conservation area. To the south is an area dominated by residential Victorian terraces known as Twynnyrobyn.

“The Thomastown Conservation Area contains a number of important historic sites, including the Former Miners Hall, Former Synagogue and Tydfil House. The area was developed during the industrial era of the 19th Century and is known as having one of the largest collections of Georgian homes in South Wales. It has historic associations with other surrounding sites, such as the Penydarren Ironworks and Penydarren Tramroad.

“The area of Thomastown is named after Dr William Thomas, who was a local magistrate and in 1822 was the Chairman of the select vestry; an organisation set up to supervise the running of Merthyr Tydfil. In 1828, he had purchased the Court House (a listed building located to the southwest of the conservation area) and a 172 acre estate. This estate would eventually become the Georgian development, of which he lent his name to.”

1811 Merthyr Tydfil by John Wood (1768-1838)  
(source: ‘viewer.library.wales’)

Map of Thomastown Conservation Area  
adopted in 1978  
with the Synagogue identified with a red dot  
(source: Character Appraisal & Management Plan  
(adopted July 2014) from ‘merthyr.gov.uk’)





## “2.2 History and development of area

“Thomastown is an integral part of Merthyr Tydfil town and lies immediately east of the traditional town centre and the oldest urban part of the town. The area developed during the industrial era of the late 18th and 19th centuries. As the town grew, Thomastown grew eastwards and uphill. The nearest part of the Conservation Area to the town centre is characterised by workers cottages built around 1800 (known as Tramroadside). Some of these have since been demolished. The central section of the Conservation Area is dominated by larger terraced dwellings built in the mid-1800s and the easternmost portion of the conservation area is dominated by larger detached dwellings set among what were rural lanes overlooking the town.

### “*The growth of Tramroadside*

“Thomastown began its evolution during the late 18th Century, at a time when Merthyr Tydfil had developed as a thriving town between the sites of several ironworks.

“The 1790s saw the main ironworks of Merthyr Tydfil begin the transformation from the reliance on the canal system to the use of tramroads as the principal means of transport. As part of this change, the Penydarren Tramroad was constructed. The tramway was initially built in 1799 where nine and a half miles of track had been constructed to serve the Dowlais, Penydarren and Plymouth Ironworks. The tramroad was subsequently expanded to incorporate settlements further to the south of the Borough.

“The success of this route resulted in a passenger service, carrying workers to their respective ironworks, and further south of Merthyr Tydfil as far as the canal at Abercynon. As a result of this, a number of worker’s dwellings were built alongside the tramroad in order to gain convenient access. This resulted in the construction of Tramroadside in 1805. Part of its northern section is retained in Thomastown Conservation Area; however, Tramroadside also stretches a mile to the south along the Penydarren Tramroad.

“The Penydarren Tramroad was the scene of the first journey of the world’s earliest steam locomotive in 1804.

### “*Later Georgian and Victorian development*

“By the mid-19th century, Merthyr Tydfil had become an industrial centre of worldwide significance. This rapid expansion had caused pockets of wealth to be created amongst the higher classes of society. This is emphasised in the development of privately owned areas. One of which being Thomastown.

“The central part of the Conservation Area was constructed between 1849 and 1865, and is the first known example of a middle-class residential area built in Merthyr Tydfil. The area was built in part of a 172 acre estate, owned by local magistrate, Dr William Thomas.

“Dr. Thomas had allowed for a number of spacious villas to be built on his estate, such as The Rectory (originally known as Courtland House until it was bought by the Church in Wales in 1921), Springfield Villa, Bryntirion (since demolished), Brynheulog and Sunnybank Villa. All of which date from the mid-1800s. This area was then known as Adulam Fields before the name Thomastown (named after Dr Thomas) came into common usage. A short time later, Thomas permitted groups of professionals to commission the construction of terraced streets within his estate. Work began on Thomas Street in 1840, and was described in the Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian as the ‘most elegant in architecture and most pleasant in situation’.

“Primrose Cottage and Upper Union Street were developed shortly afterwards. The latter terrace consisted of eleven Union Club owned houses which were built to complement the Union Workhouse, which was built in 1853, and subsequently rebuilt in 1870 (now the vacant St. Tydfil’s Hospital). These houses were erected by an association of small proprietors paying small instalments on a monthly basis.

“Newcastle Street and Courtland Terrace were constructed between 1850 and 1870, and stand as well preserved Georgian Terraces to date (many of which are now listed).

### “*Addition of Key Buildings*

“Later development occurred in Thomastown with religious buildings adding a new dimension to its character.

“In 1855, Wesleyan Reformers built Capel Salem on Newcastle Street. During this period, Shiloh Welsh Wesleyan Chapel (now the Former Miners’ Welfare Hall) was built on Church Street, as a replacement to its previous site which became the site of the Vale of Neath Railway Co station.

“The Wesleyan Chapel is attributed to Isambard Kingdom Brunel and is a rare surviving example of the very few Churches built by him.

“A Synagogue was built in the 1870s at the top of Church Street by the thriving Jewish community in Merthyr Tydfil. Many of which had arrived from Eastern Europe during the early 1800s. The building remains the oldest surviving synagogue building in Wales. This building was lastly used as a gym but is currently vacant.

“A Unitarian Chapel existed during the 19th Century, opposite the Court House occupied by Dr. Thomas. In 1901, a new Unitarian Chapel (today known as St Margaret’s Church and occupied by the National Spiritualists Union) designed by local architect E.A. Johnson and was built between the terraced homes in Lower Thomas Street.

“Primrose Hill on Church Street is a listed, early to mid-19th century 3-storey building, originally built as one dwelling house but now divided into flats. It is located at right-angles to the former synagogue and benefits from a backdrop of mature trees.

### “*20th Century Changes*

“Tramroadside North (boundary of the western edge of the Conservation Area) has become part of the town centre bypass and consequently some of the early workers’ cottages have been demolished. This highway is considered to signal a physical separation between the Conservation Area (dominated by residential development) and the town centre which is dominated by a mix of commercial and civic uses.

### “*Thomastown Park*

“Parkland surrounds the Conservation Area to the north and west. Although not within the Conservation Area, Thomastown Park, stretching either side of Queen’s Road, is intrinsically linked with the development of the area. The park contains the Boer War Memorial and affords views over the Conservation Area, town centre and across the valley.

### “*Potential Development*

“The St Tydfil’s Hospital site, which contains the Former Union Workhouse, is allocated for residential development in the adopted LDP (2006 – 2021) and has been recently vacated by the NHS.

“Sandbrook House is located immediately to the east of the Conservation Area and is vacant having been recently sold by the Council. This site contains buildings from the 1970s and 80s and mature trees. Part of the site is surrounded by a much older pennant stone wall.

“It should be noted the above is not an exhaustive account of the history of the development of the Area.



“3. Assessment of Special Interest

“3.1 The Thomastown Conservation Area is significant as it contains an important cross-section of Georgian style housing on land once owned by one of Merthyr Tydfil’s most famous patrons. Thomastown is reputed to contain one of the largest groups of late Georgian and early Victorian style buildings in Wales and is one of the first purpose-built residential suburbs in Merthyr Tydfil. Many of the facades are unified and classical in design with prominent buildings at corner locations. The area is therefore considered to be worthy of protecting. Thomastown Conservation Area was originally designated in 1978. Character Appraisals were undertaken in 2003 and 2007. Both of these devised 3 character areas (Georgian Tramroadside Cottages, Victorian Residential Area and High Ground to the East). The following statement captures the importance of the conservation area.

“The Thomastown Conservation Area includes some of the earliest examples of planned residential growth of Merthyr Tydfil for the working class, middle class and upper class who benefitted from the industrial growth of the town in the 1800s. The area also includes key sites with national importance such as the Penydarren Tramroad, the Former Synagogue and the Former Miners’ Welfare Hall.

View up Church Street to Merthyr Tydfil Synagogue  
(source: ‘walesonline.co.uk’)



Location & Context Map of  
Thomastown Conservation Area  
with the Synagogue identified  
with a red dot  
(source: Character Appraisal  
& Management Plan  
(adopted July 2014)  
from ‘merthyr.gov.uk’)





“3.3 Key Characteristics of the Conservation Area

- “Georgian and Victorian residential suburb interspersed with listed religious and community buildings.
- Distinctive architectural style that is repeated throughout the area on residential dwellings.
- Significant number of narrow alleyways giving access to rear of properties.
- Set on slope of hill overlooking town centre.
- Smaller, older properties nearer the town centre and larger, newer properties further away and uphill from the town centre.
- Rectangular grid street pattern with longer streets following the contours of the sloping land.
- Location of various distinctive and important buildings and events with national importance such as the Penydarren Tramroad and the oldest surviving synagogue building in Wales.
- Densely developed and lack of public open space within the Conservation Area. Not particularly well connected to parkland surrounding the Conservation Area to the east and north-east.”

The 2014 ‘**Character Appraisal and Management Plan**’ also includes the following on the character of the Thomastown Conservation Area:

“3.7 Character Analysis

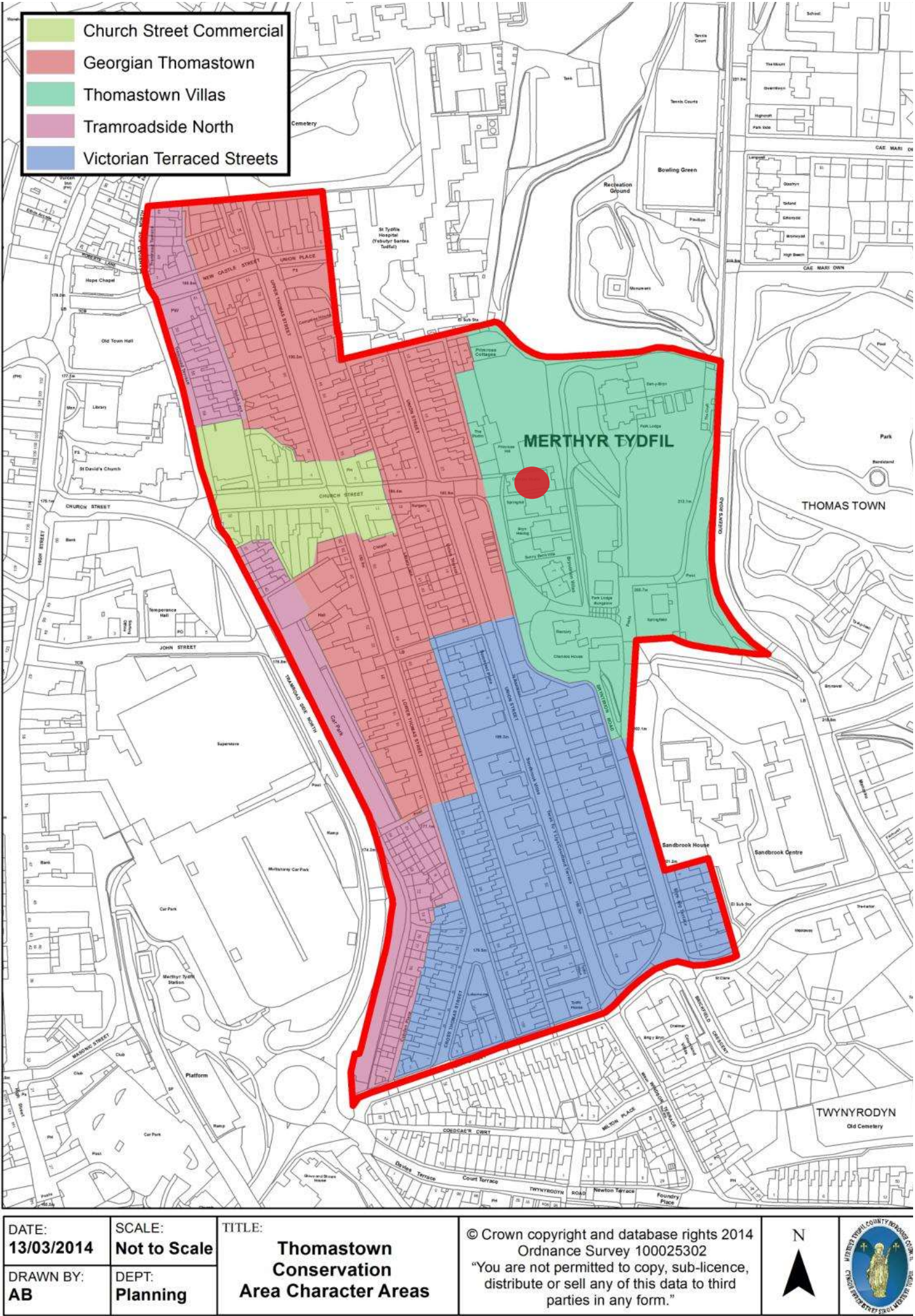
“3.7.1 Character and zones

“Previous conservation area appraisals have split the conservation area into 3 distinct character areas. These zones are dominated by the age of development that survives, the type of buildings, their size and scale, and the position of each zone on the hill slope. In the most recent analysis of the conservation area 5 character areas have been developed following careful analysis of the built-form of the existing Conservation Area, land uses and architectural style. These five areas are:

1. Church Street Commercial
2. Tramroadside North
3. Georgian Thomastown
4. Victorian Terraced Streets
5. Thomastown Villas”

The smallest of the character areas within Thomastown is ‘**Church Street Commercial**’ which is characterised by building use rather than building form. It contains the hub of commercial activity on Church Street which feels like an extension of the town centre. The ‘**Tramroadside North**’ area is dominated by small, terraced dwellings built for workers alongside the Penydarren Tramroad. The ‘**Georgian Thomastown**’ area is dominated by Georgian-style terraced houses, most likely built in the early Victorian period. Whilst the ‘**Victorian Terraced Streets**’ area is dominated by Victorian terraced dwellings, densely built-up and with no open public space.

Map of Character Areas within Thomastown Conservation Area with the Synagogue identified with a red dot (source: Character Appraisal & Management Plan (adopted July 2014) from ‘merthyr.gov.uk’)





Merthyr Tydfil Synagogue is within the **‘Thomastown Villas’** character area, which the 2014 ‘Character Appraisal and Management Plan’ describes as:

“5) **Thomastown Villas**

“This area is dominated by detached and semi-detached houses in spacious and wooded surroundings. The area is the easternmost extent and most elevated part of the Conservation Area. It is also an area where the formal layout of rectangular streets dissipates into shorter curved streets, back lanes and streets without footways. This area also contains many listed and locally listed buildings. Probably the most significant is the former Synagogue situated at the end of (and top of) Church Street with commanding views down to the town centre. The area is sparsely populated and is bounded by Thomastown Park to the east and north, and the grounds to the Sandbrook House to the south. The individual buildings have their own character and differ to the other character areas. This area has less of a sense of uniformity than the other character areas thanks to the individually designed buildings constructed at different times. However, they are all generally large in scale, especially compared to the other dwellings in the Conservation Area and some have extensive grounds.

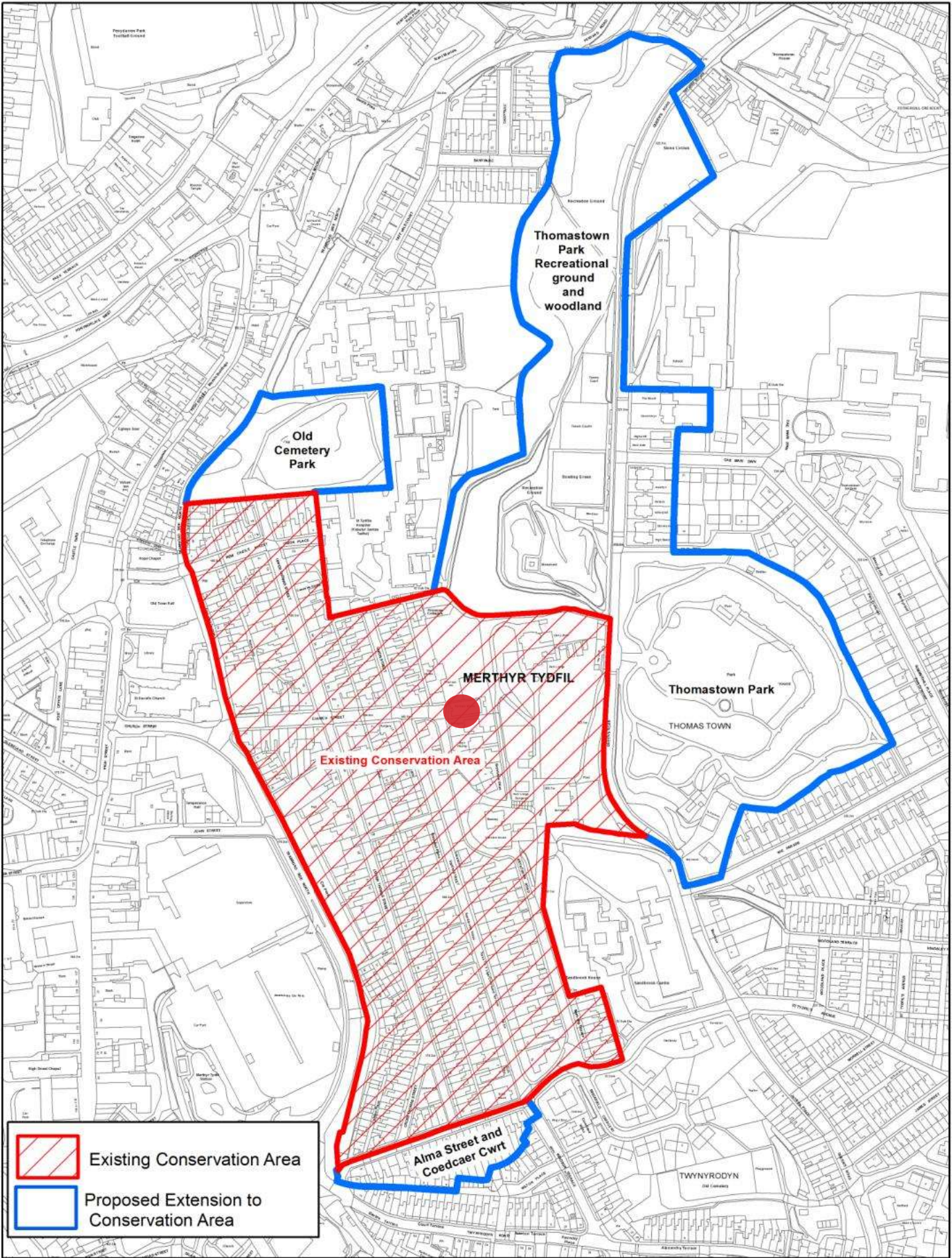
“Key buildings in this area include the former Synagogue, Primrose Hill House, Bryn Heulog and Sunny Bank Villa. The stepped lane between Bryntirion Villas and The Rectory also adds to the physical character of the area.”


The 2014 **‘Character Appraisal and Management Plan’** also proposed that the boundary of the Thomastown Conservation Area be extended to include Alma Street and Coedcae’r Cwrt, Old Cemetery Park, Thomastown Park, and Thomastown Park Recreational ground and woodland. This proposal must have been adopted, as the boundary for the Thomastown Conservation Area on the Merthyr Tydfil CBC Interactive Heritage Map on the ‘merthyr.gov.uk’ website includes these additional areas. This boundary extension created the following additional character areas:

- 1. Alma Street and Coedcae’r Cwrt
- 2. Old Cemetery Park
- 3. Thomastown Park

The street Tramroadside North forms the boundary between the **‘Thomastown Conservation Area’** to the east and the ‘Town Centre Conservation Area’ to the west, with Church Street straddling the two Conservation Areas.

**Map showing the extent of the boundary change to Thomastown with the Synagogue identified with a red dot (source: Character Appraisal & Management Plan (adopted July 2014) from ‘merthyr.gov.uk’)**



DATE: 13/03/2014	SCALE: Not to Scale	TITLE: Areas proposed to be included within conservation area	© Crown copyright and database rights 2014 Ordnance Survey 100025302 "You are not permitted to copy, sub-licence, distribute or sell any of this data to third parties in any form."	N ▲	
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## APPENDIX B HISTORIC MAP APPRAISAL

### B.1 1610 Map of Glamorgan Shyre by John Speed

The map of 1610 shows Merthyr Tydfil in the north-east corner of the county, with the placename “Martertiduil”. At this time the area would have been predominantly rural, made up of scattered farmsteads with enclosed fields on the lower slopes and open grazing beyond.

John Speed (1552-1629) was an English historian and cartographer, famed for his book “The Theatre of the Empire of Great Britaine” which was the first British attempt at creating a large-scale atlas and history of the British Isles. This atlas includes a map of Glamorganshire (spelt “GLAMORGAN SHYRE”) which is probably the oldest accurate plan of the area.

### B.2 1830 Parish Map of Merthyr Tydfil

This map recreates how the Parish of Merthyr Tydfil would have looked in 1830. The landscape has changed from green and rural to more industrial and urban, with four ironworks largely responsible for this change: Dowlais established in 1759 on land leased from the Earls of Pembroke; Cyfarthfa established in 1765 on land leased from the Dinefwr Estate; Plymouth established in 1763 on land leased from the Earl of Plymouth; and Penydarren established in 1784 on land dependent on the lease of Penydarren Farm.

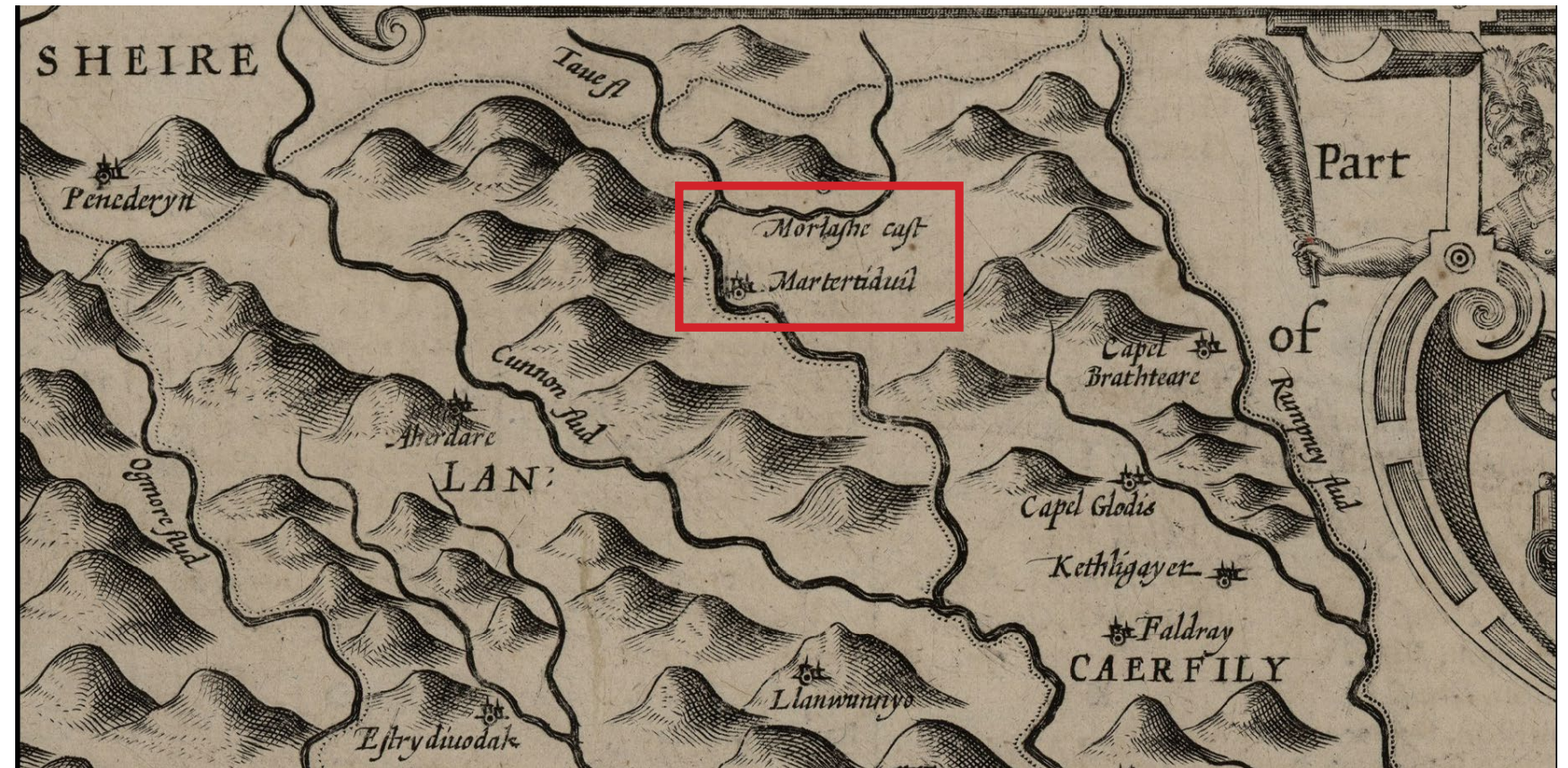
These Ironworks can be seen on this map of 1830: Cyfarthfa to the north-west of the parish; Penydarren further east; Dowlais to the north-east of the parish; and Plymouth to the south of them all. The placement of these works would have been determined by the location and accessibility of the raw materials needed for iron production – namely iron ore, coal, limestone and water. Housing settlements were established close to the ironworks to accommodate their workers.

The Glamorganshire Canal can be seen on this map, to the west of the River Taff, with the Canal Head at Cyfarthfa Ironworks. The first part of the canal between Cardiff and Abercynon opened in 1794, although it was another 4 years before the stretch between Abercynon and Merthyr was completed. The canal was built to improve the transportation of iron over the twenty-five miles from Merthyr Tydfil to the port of Cardiff. The principal shareholder of the Glamorganshire Canal was ironmaster Richard Crawshay of Cyfarthfa Ironworks, and as such he expected his products to take precedence at the canal head loading areas.

### B.3 1836 Plan of Merthyr Tydfil

The 1836 Plan of Merthyr Tydfil from Actual Survey shows that the early development of the town was primarily on the east bank of the River Taff, expanding outwards and upwards from St Tydfil's Church in the south. Expansion to the west was restricted by the demands of Cyfarthfa and Ynsfach Ironworks, whilst expansion to the south and east was restricted by the demands of Dowlais, Plymouth and Penydarren Ironworks. The availability and extraction of raw materials and tipping of waste products being the priority use for land.

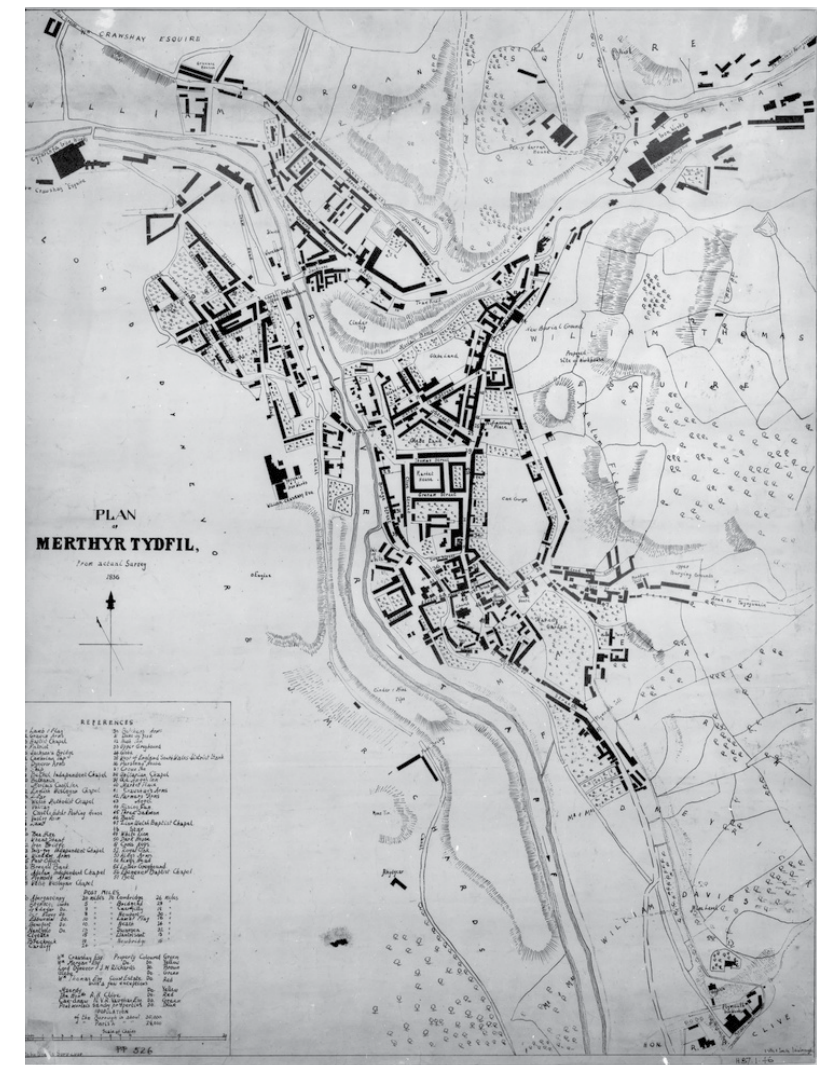
This plan shows that housing settlements had developed in close proximity to the ironworks, such as Williamstown (named after William Crawshay) and Georgetown (named after George Crawshay, the younger son of William Crawshay) to the south of Cyfarthfa on the west bank of the river. The plan also shows that High Street had developed as the commercial centre of the town, linking the residential areas to the north-west, north-east and south which were associated with the various ironworks.



1610 John Speed Map of Glamorgan Shyre (source: The National Library of Wales 'viewer.library.wales')



1830 (circa) Map of Merthyr Tydfil taken from 'History of the hamlet of Gellideg' by Pedler, F. J. (1930) (source: 'peoplescollection.wales')



1836 Plan of Merthyr Tydfil (source: 'alangeorge.co.uk')



**B.4 1850 Tithe Map – Plan of the Parish of Merthyr Tydfil**

In the early years of Queen Victoria’s reign, the government undertook a vast land survey of England and Wales between 1837 and the mid-1850s. The authorities used the information to create apportionment books which detailed the plots of land owned and occupied by all levels of society. These apportionments were then linked to detailed maps which identified the location of the plots.

On the 1850 Tithe Map titled ‘Plan of the Parish of Merthyr Tydfil in the County of Glamorgan 1850’ the various ironworks can be clearly identified with housing and cottages nearby:

- To the north-west of the map, on the west bank of the River Taff, we can see Cyfarthfa Ironworks (Field Number: 1603) and Yns Fach Works (Field Number: 1528) along with nearby Georgetown.
- North-east of Cyfarthfa Ironworks, on the east bank of the river, we can see Cyfarthfa Castle which had been built in 1825 (Field Number: 1811; Field Name: Cyfarthfa Castle; Land Use: House; Occupier and Landowner: William Crawshay). This grand house, home to the Crawshay family, had a large ornamental lake (Field Number: 1802) separating it from the river and ironworks beyond.
- To the north-east of the map, we can see Dowlais Ironworks (Field Number: 2093) with Barracks to the east of the ironworks. After the Merthyr Rising of 1831 soldiers were permanently barracked here to keep an eye on the growing town of Merthyr Tydfil.
- In the middle, between Cyfarthfa and Dowlais, is Penydarren Ironworks (Field Number: 2041).
- To the south of the town on the east bank of the river, we can see Plymouth Ironworks (Field Number: 950).

The site of Merthyr Tydfil Synagogue lies within Field Number 2009 with the Farm Name ‘The Court’. The land was owned and occupied by William Thomas, with the land being used for pasture. By 1850 William Thomas had become a prominent local magistrate and significant landowner. His original profession had been that of doctor, however, a newspaper article following his death in July 1858 said: “he aspired to the hand of the widow of Rees Davies Esq., of the Court; wooed and won the lady; and thus, in the year 1820 became the proprietor of the Court and Maerdy estates, and possessor of the large influence connected therewith.” Part of his estate was later developed into middle-class housing and named ‘Thomas Town’ in his honour.

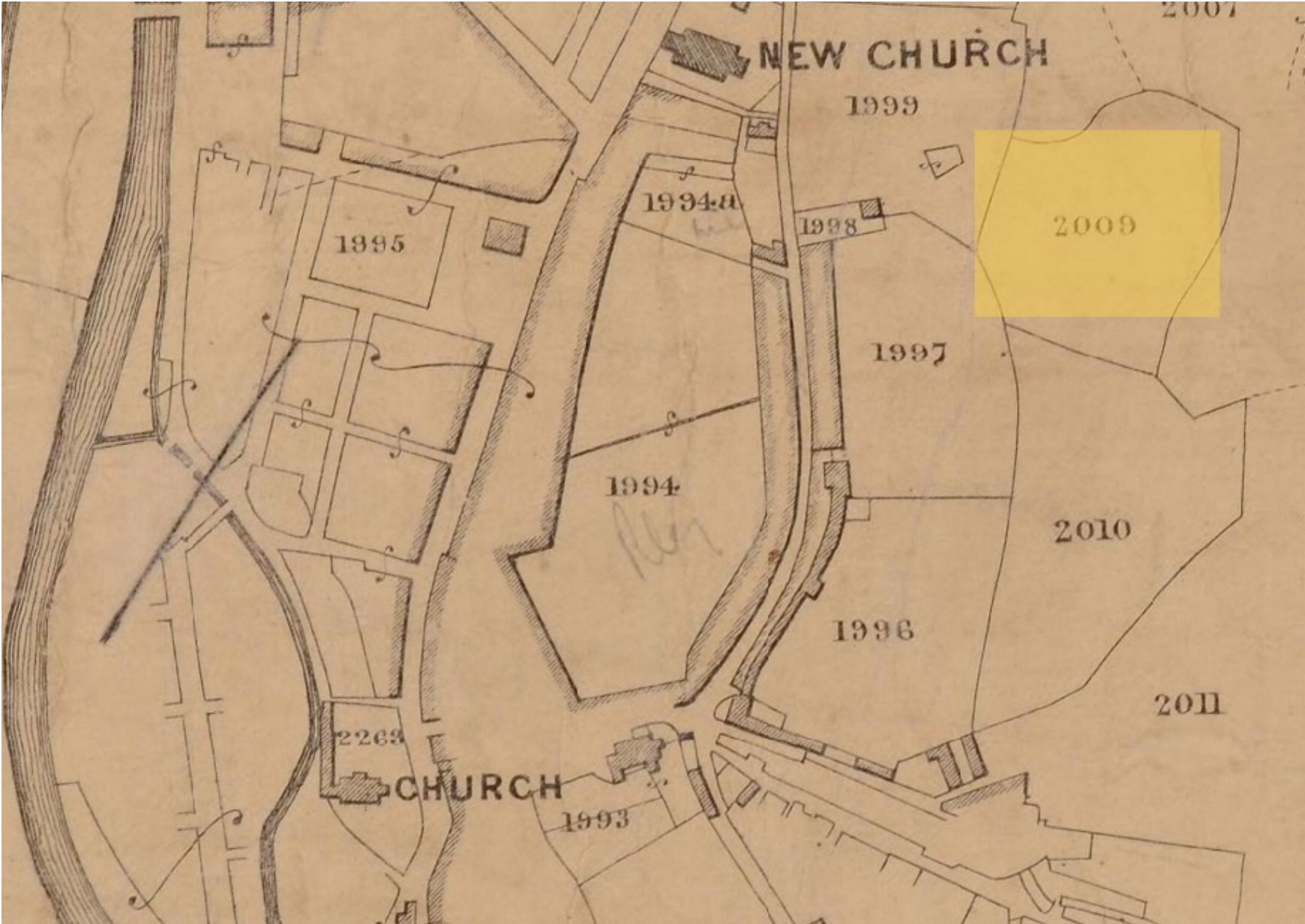
In 1850, Field Number 2009 was undeveloped pasture; as was the land to its north, south, east and immediate west. However, slightly further west was the developing Merthyr Tydfil Town Centre with High Street running north to south. In 1838, the conscious creation of a town centre had taken a major step forward with the building of the Market Hall and creation of a spacious Market Square, directly off High Street. The Market Hall and Square was an important area in the economic, social and political life of 19th century Merthyr Tydfil. The Market Hall can be seen on the map, being the rectangular shaded building to the right of the number 1995. Field Number 1995 was owned by William Thomas.

St Tydfil’s Parish Church can be seen on this map, at the southern end of High Street, in Field Number 2263, marked up as ‘CHURCH’ whilst the new church of St David’s, built in 1847, can be seen further north on High Street to the left of Field Number 1999, marked up as ‘NEW CHURCH’.

Taff Vale Railway Station can be seen to the south of St Tydfil’s Parish Church. The Taff Vale Railway (TVR) opened in 1841, with Isambard Kingdom Brunel as engineer, to provide a rail link from Merthyr Tydfil to the docks in Cardiff. It was intended to relieve congestion on the canal, caused in particular by the rise in coal traffic.



**Above: 1850 Tithe Map with red dot identifying location of future Synagogue (source: ‘places.library.wales’)**  
**Below: Extract of above with ‘Field 2009’ identified in yellow box - future home of Synagogue**





### B.5 1868-75 Ordnance Survey Map 6-inch (published 1885)

The 1868-75 Ordnance Survey Map shows Merthyr Tydfil in more detail than previous maps. The sustained development of the town between the 1830s and 1850s, and especially in the 1850s, being clearly visible.

The residential areas which had developed near to the various ironworks have now expanded and become more densely packed, reflecting the growth in population which came with Merthyr Tydfil becoming 'the Iron Capital of the World'. By 1851, Merthyr Tydfil was the largest town in Wales and remained so until 1871–81, when it was overtaken by Cardiff.

By the mid-19th century High Street was dominated by shops and offices and was firmly established as the main axis connecting the different residential districts. Two railway stations can now be seen on this map, the earlier Taff Vale Station to the south of the town centre and the later Vale of Neath Station to the east of the Market Square. The extension to the Vale of Neath Railway, which connected Merthyr to Aberdare via a long tunnel, opened in 1853 and was designed by Isambard Kingdom Brunel. The Vale of Neath Railway was built to connect the industrial centres of Merthyr Tydfil and Aberdare to Neath, and then on to the docks at Swansea.

To the east of the map, we can see Thomas Town, named after William Thomas (1794-1858) who had owned Court House and the 172-acre estate which came with it. Between 1849 and 1865, Thomas developed that part of his estate which lay closest to the town centre into a middle-class suburb, with a unified architectural character making it an important example of planned development. The area hadn't contained any valuable mineral resources, so had been untouched pastureland prior to its development into this superior residential district.

Several of the spacious villas built at Thomas Town in the mid-1800s are named on this map, such as Primrosehill House, Brynheulog Villas, Springfield Villa and Bryn-teg House. Others built but not named on this map include Springhall Villa and Courtland House (now known as The Rectory). Thomas also allowed groups of professionals to commission the construction of terraced streets on his land, such as Thomas Street in 1840, Union Street shortly afterwards, then New Castle Street and Courtland Terrace constructed between 1850 and 1870.

The cross-shaped Workhouse with Infirmary can be seen at the northern end of Union Street; built in 1853 and subsequently improved and enlarged in 1870. Upper Union Street consisting of a terrace of eleven Union Club owned houses were also built to complement the Union Workhouse.

The future site of the synagogue can be seen at the eastern end of Church Street, between Primrosehill House and Brynheulog Villas, with the site undeveloped at this time.



1868-75 Surveyed 1885 Published - OS Six-inch Map (source: 'maps.nls.uk') with red dot identifying location of future Synagogue



## B.6 1873 Ordnance Survey Town Plan (published 1875)

The 1873 Ordnance Survey Town Plan provides even greater detail, with each individual page covering only a small portion of the town. The future site of the synagogue can be seen at the eastern end of Church Street, on the page “GLAMORGAN MERTHYR TYDFIL SHEET XII. I. 24.” (heading in the right-hand corner).

On this Town Plan, the outline of each individual property can be clearly seen. The spacious villas which form the eastern boundary of the Thomas Town development are clearly shown and named: Primrosehill House, Springhill Villa, Brynheulog Villas, Bryn-tirion Villa, Courtland House, and Springfield Villa. The level of detail on this plan includes individual trees, curved garden paths and garden steps; all hinting at the beautiful, landscaped gardens from which the residents of these elevated villas would have looked out onto the town and valley below.

Between Primrosehill House and Springhill Villa is the undeveloped site that would become the location of the synagogue, at the eastern end of Church Street. The steep, sloping nature of the site is indicated by the steps at the front of the site, and at the side of the site. To the east of the site is an empty field and Old Quarry beyond.

As the town grew, so did the number of places of worship. Various churches and chapels can be seen throughout Thomas Town, Town Centre and beyond. SHEET XII. I. 24. – Methodist Chapel (Welsh Wesleyan) built 1855 on Church Street (now the Former Miners' Welfare Hall), Adullam Chapel (Welsh Independent) built 1857 on Lower Thomas Street; SHEET XII. I. 23. – Salem Chapel (Independent) built in 1855 on New Castle Street, Hope Chapel (Calvinistic Methodist) built in 1861 on High Street, St. David's Church (Chapel of Ease) built 1847 on High Street, Ynys-gau Chapel (Welsh Independent) built 1854 on Bridge Street; SHEET XII. 5. 4. – Unitarian Chapel (also known as Twynyrodyn Unitarian Chapel) built 1821 on Court Street, Zion Chapel (Baptist) rebuilt in 1841 on Twynyrodyn Road; SHEET XII. 5. 3. – Independent Chapel (also known as Market Square Chapel) built 1841 on Graham Street, Baptist Chapel (also known as High Street Baptist Chapel) built 1841 on High Street, and the historic St. Tydfil's Church on Mill Street.

The level of detail provided on this plan is also illustrated at the Union Workhouse, where details such as Dining Room, Men's Wards, Women's Wards, and Boys & Girls School Room are shown on each of the four wings.



1873 Surveyed 1875 Published - Town Plan (source: 'maps.nls.uk') with red dot identifying location of future Synagogue



**B.7 1897-98 Ordnance Survey Map 25-Inch (published 1904)**

The 1897-98 Ordnance Survey Map 25-inch shows the buildings in greater detail than the 1897-98 Ordnance Survey Map 6-inch Map (published 1901) which was also available.

The synagogue, built 1876-77, can be seen at the eastern end of Church Street and marked up as "Synagogue". The building is located between Primrosehill House and Springhill Villa, although neither property is named on this map. The rectangular synagogue building completely fills the south of its site: on its western front elevation, a double staircase can be seen leading up to the entrance between the two protruding turrets; further steps can be seen on the north and south side elevations; with another flight of stairs along its eastern rear elevation. All these stairs indicating the steep slope of the site. To the north of the synagogue remains an undeveloped area; newspaper articles from 1876 on the laying of the corner stone said, "The reader's house will be at the north east corner of the building, and at the back of all there will be a space left as a playground for the children."

Apart from the construction of the synagogue, there are no other significant changes within the immediate vicinity of the building between 1873 and 1897-98. However, in 1899 a new Infirmary building was added to the north of the workhouse and Cemetery, and to the north-west of the original Infirmary, which can be seen on the map.

The town of Merthyr Tydfil became an Urban District Council in 1894. An important expression of this new status was the building of a Town Hall in 1896-97. Although not referenced on this map, the new Town Hall building can be seen to the north-west of the synagogue with its front west-facing elevation on High Street, with New Castle Street to its north and Tramroad Side to its east.

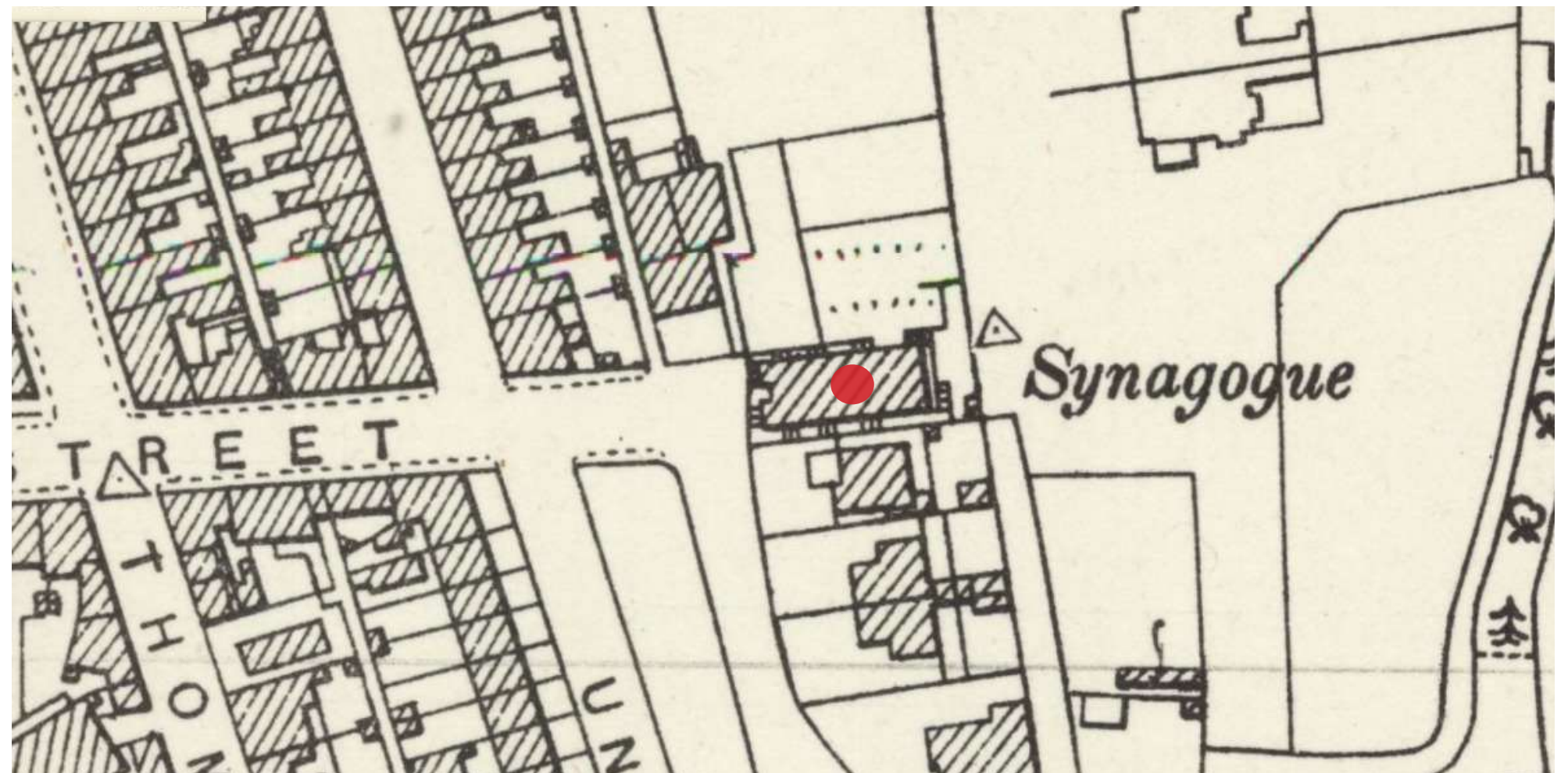
**B.8 1897-1911 Ordnance Survey Map 25-Inch (published c.1912)**

The 1897-1911 Ordnance Survey Map 25-inch is essentially the 1897-98 map which was partially revised in 1911 for Inland Revenue purposes. It shows that the synagogue building as unchanged.

To the north-east of the synagogue, we can now see the outline of a new large building, being 2 semi-detached houses, on what had previously been undeveloped land. However, the most significant change to the surrounding area is the creation of Thomastown Park to the east of the synagogue on what had been the site of an old quarry and waste tips. The park opened in 1903 at a cost of £5,000 and was the first public park in Merthyr Tydfil.



**1897-98 Revised 1901 Published - OS Six-inch Map (source: 'maps.nls.uk') with red dot identifying location of the Synagogue**



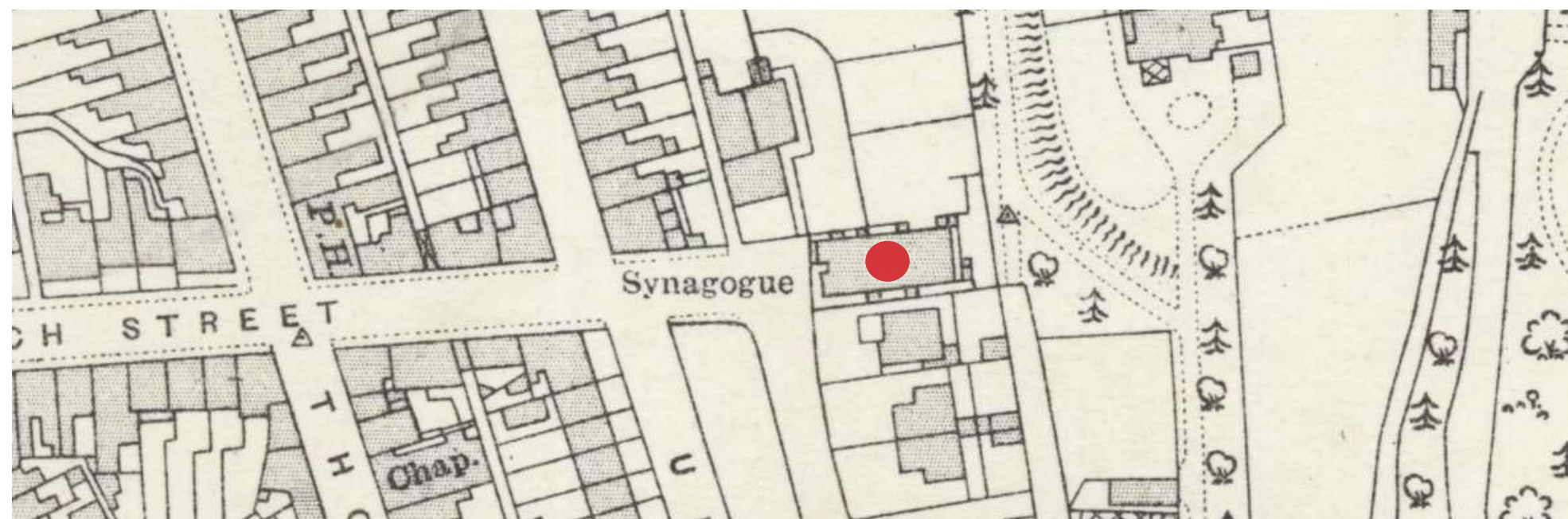
**1897-1911 Revised c.1912 Published - OS 25-inch Map (source: 'maps.nls.uk') with red dot identifying location of the Synagogue**



**B.9 1914-15 Ordnance Survey Map 25-Inch (published 1919)**

There are no noticeable changes to the synagogue building and surrounding area on the 1914-15 Ordnance Survey Map 25-inch compared to the previous 1897-1911 map.

Within the Thomastown Park the Band Stand and Monument are now marked up. Also, the additional Infirmary building added in 1899 has now been enlarged and extended.



*1914-15 Revised 1919 Published - OS 25-inch Map (source: 'maps.nls.uk') with red dot identifying location of the Synagogue*

**B.10 1938 Ordnance Survey Map 6-Inch (published c.1946)**

For 1938, only the Ordnance Survey Map 6-inch was available which shows buildings in far less detail than the 25-inch maps available for earlier years. On the 1938 Ordnance Survey 6-inch map, the synagogue is marked up as "Synagogue" but is shown only as a rectangular building, without details such as the two front projecting turrets or steps along the north and south side elevations and eastern rear elevation. However, there are no noticeable changes to the synagogue building and surrounding area between 1914-15 to 1938.



*1938 Revised c.1946 Published - OS Six-inch Map (source: 'maps.nls.uk') with red dot identifying location of the Synagogue*

**B.11 1948 Ordnance Survey Town Plan 6-Inch (published 1951)**

Once again, there are no noticeable changes to the synagogue building and surrounding area on the 1948 Ordnance Survey Map 6-inch compared to the previous 1938 map.



*1948 Revised 1951 Published - OS Six-inch Map (source: 'maps.nls.uk') with red dot identifying location of the Synagogue*



**B.12 1945 Google Earth Image**

The 1945 Google Earth images are very blurry. However, you can see that the areas immediately to the north (side), east (rear) and the north-eastern garden of the synagogue are very dark, presumably trees and woodland. The tree canopy obscuring part of the synagogue's roof to both the east and north. The 1948 OS Map does not indicate trees growing beside the synagogue or within its ground, which it does within Thomastown Park.

**B.13 2001 Google Earth Image**

The 2001 Google Earth image shows the area surrounding the synagogue densely packed with trees, especially to its eastern rear elevation and northern side elevation and garden, the tree canopy obscuring part of the synagogue's roof to both the east and north. This is the most noticeable change between 1948 and 2001. The 1948 OS Map does not indicate trees growing beside the synagogue or within its ground, with tree shapes only being shown within Thomastown Park.

There are no other significant changes to the synagogue or within the surrounding area.

**B.14 2013 Google Earth Image**

The 2013 Google Earth image shows the tree canopy becoming denser following 10 years additional growth. The only change to the surrounding area near the synagogue being the introduction of hard landscaping or tarmac to the east of Brynheulog Villas, an area which had previously been green.

**B.15 2023 Google Earth Image**

The 2023 Google Earth image shows additional development to the north of the synagogue, in the area to the north-east of Primrose Hill House. What had previously been a large green area with trees, presumably garden to one of the properties, has now been cleared. A rectangular property has been built to the north of the cleared site, with extensive landscaping in the area between the property and the boundary with the synagogue site. The landscaping including a garden pond and decking.

There are no other significant changes to the synagogue or within the surrounding area.



**1945 Aerial photo of site (source: GoogleEarth)  
with red dot identifying location of the Synagogue**



**2001 Aerial photo of site (source: GoogleEarth)  
with red dot identifying location of the Synagogue**



**2013 Aerial photo of site (source: GoogleEarth)  
with red dot identifying location of the Synagogue**



**2023 Aerial photo of site (source: GoogleEarth)  
with red dot identifying location of the Synagogue**



## APPENDIX C HISTORY & HERITAGE OF MERTHYR TYDFIL

Every place has its own unique history which creates its historic character; historic character being at the heart of local distinctiveness and sense of place.

A place is shaped by the activities of people over tens, hundreds, or even thousands of years. Many of the distinctive qualities of a place result from its history in the same way that the character of a person is formed over time. These can include its origins and significant periods in its history – how and why it developed and changed. It can also include particular activities and traditions, communities and people, or events associated with a place. These elements all contribute to historic character: we can see them in the form and fabric of a place as well as in the names, stories, art and culture associated with it.

### C.1 How Merthyr Tydfil Got Its Name

Merthyr Tydfil is said to be named after Saint Tydfil, with 'Merthyr' generally meaning 'martyr' in the Welsh language. However, in modern Welsh the meaning is close to the Latin 'martyrium' being a mausoleum or church built over a martyr's remains.

The Old Parish Church of St Tydfil's in Merthyr is located at the lower end of the High Street and was built to keep sacred the spot where Tydfil is believed to have been martyred because of her Christian beliefs. The present church was built in 1894, replacing the previous one built in 1808. However, it is thought that some form of church has stood on this spot for nearly 1,500 years with the first stone church believed to have been built in the 14th century.

According to legend, Tydfil was the 23rd daughter of King Brychan, ruler of Brecheiniog (a small kingdom in what is now the Brecon Beacons) in the 5th century. Tydfil chose the Taff River valley as her home and established an early Celtic monastic community there, leading a small band of men and women. She became known for her compassion and healing skills as she nursed both sick humans and animals.

Around 480 AD the aged King Brychan decided to visit his children one last time. He took with him his son Rhun, other family members and several servants. At this time, Wales was experiencing raids from Scottish Picts who had settled in Radnorshire, and Brychan was attacked during his journey to see Tydfil. Having reached Tydfil's community, the King's party were all murdered. Whilst most ran away or fought, Tydfil knelt and prayed, but she was killed also. Tydfil was buried in the church she had founded, and a Celtic Cross put up in a clearing near the Taff to mark the place where 'Martyr' Tydfil was slain, which became a site of pilgrimage.

Originally a medieval parish, Merthyr Tydfil developed into a major industrial town during the 19th century.

### C.2 The Industrial History of Merthyr Tydfil

When we think of the industrial history of Wales, coal and coal mining immediately come to mind. However, Wales has never been just about coal or 'black gold'. The iron and the metal industries have been integral to the development of modern Wales.

Up until the middle of the 1700s, Merthyr Tydfil was just a small rural hamlet probably comprising a series of scattered farms with enclosed fields on the lower slopes and open grazing beyond. However, the upper Taff valley contained all the necessary ingredients for a successful iron industry – iron ore, coal and limestone with mountain streams and the river Taff to provide waterpower, making it an ideal location for the relatively new ironwork industry that was leading Britain's Industrial Revolution. Agriculture began to play a subordinate role to industry, with landholdings being exploited for their mineral resources. By the end of the 18th century, iron had transformed Merthyr Tydfil into the largest town in Wales and the centre of the world's iron making industry.

The first iron furnaces and forges were built near the head of the Taff Valley between 1759-65, and by the early 1780s there were four great ironworks in operation, Dowlais (1759), Plymouth (1763), Cyfarthfa (1765) and Penydarren (1784). The entrepreneurs who controlled these four major ironworks all came from England – the Guest family at Dowlais, the Hill family at Plymouth, the Crawshay dynasty at Cyfarthfa, and the Homfray family at Penydarren.

The demand for iron was stimulated by the wartime need for armaments, first with the Seven Years' War (1756-63) and then the American War of Independence (1775-83). These ironworks provided employment for thousands of people and transformed Merthyr from a rural to an industrial economy, with Merthyr being recognised as 'the Iron Capital of the World'.



**St Tydfil's Old Parish Church , Merthyr Tydfil built 1894**  
(source: 'waymarking.com')

As the ironworks expanded, so did the population of Merthyr. From the mid-1830s, the proliferation of railways, both in Britain and around the world, ensured a hugely increased market for Merthyr iron until the end of the century. The first national census in 1801 recorded a population of 7,000; which increased to 24,000 in 1831; 46,000 in 1851; 70,000 in 1861; and almost 90,000 in 1910.

By the 1850s, Merthyr had become the largest town in Glamorgan with a population which was twice the size of Swansea and two-and-a-half times that of Cardiff. What had once been a village of just 40 homes in 1760 had grown into the iron capital of the world. It remained the largest town in Wales until the 1870s when it was overtaken by Cardiff.

The ironworks brought both prosperity and hardship to the town. Conditions in the homes of the working classes were a far cry from the luxury enjoyed by the families of the ironmasters such as the Guests and Crawshays. The working classes lived 'cheek by jowl', in dirt and squalor, where disease was rife and life expectancy low, in slums which became known as 'Little Hell' whilst ironmasters such as the Crawshays lived a comfortable life in their mock Gothic castle at Cyfarthfa built in 1825 for a reputed £30,000.



**Cyfarthfa Works Blast Furnaces c.1900** (source: 'alangeorge.co.uk')

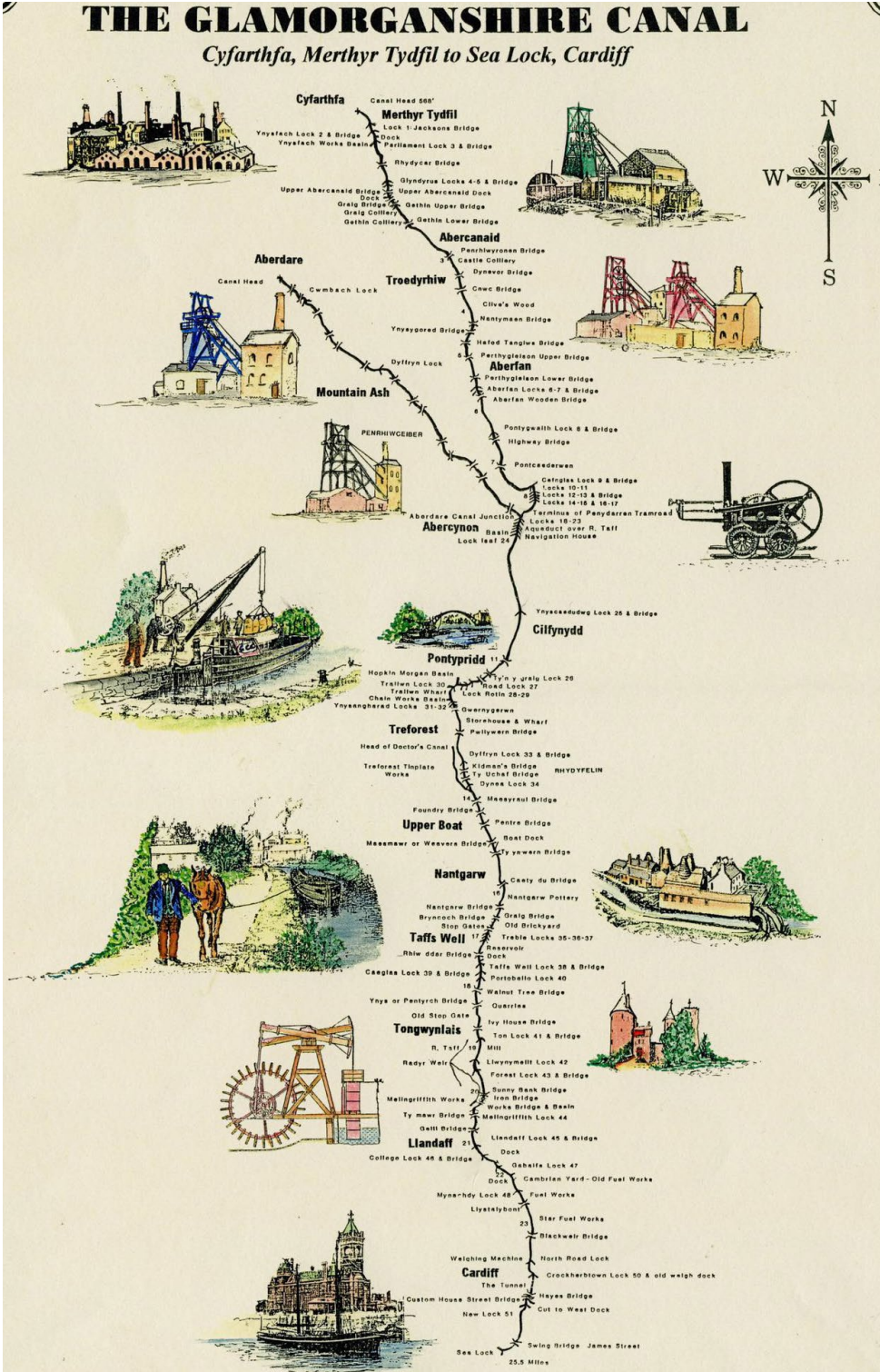


**Cyfarthfa Castle built in 1825, family home of the Crawshays, Merthyr Tydfil** (source: 'alangeorge.co.uk')



Glamorganshire Canal from Merthyr to Cardiff (1790-4)

By the 1780s Dowlais and Cyfarthfa had established their dominance, not only locally but in Glamorgan as a whole. The Crawshays of Cyfarthfa largely financed the Glamorganshire Canal from Merthyr to Cardiff, built 1790-4, which enabled the rapid distribution of iron products, reducing both the cost and time taken to transport raw materials and finished goods. The first part of the canal between Cardiff and Abercynon opened in 1794, however, it was another 4 years before the stretch between Abercynon and Merthyr was completed. By 1800, all the main valleys in South Wales had been linked to ports by canals, and it was these canals which enabled the spectacular growth of the iron and coal industries in South Wales.



Illustrated Map of Glamorganshire Canal with Merthyr at the top (source: ‘facebook.com’)

The Penydarren Tramroad (1800-2)

The ironmasters of Dowlais, Penydarren and Plymouth built this tramroad to avoid the upper stretch of the Glamorganshire Canal near the Cyfarthfa works due to the attitude of its owner Richard Crawshay. Crawshay had a controlling interest in the Glamorganshire Canal Company and insisted on preferential treatment at the Canal Head, to the detriment of the other ironworks.

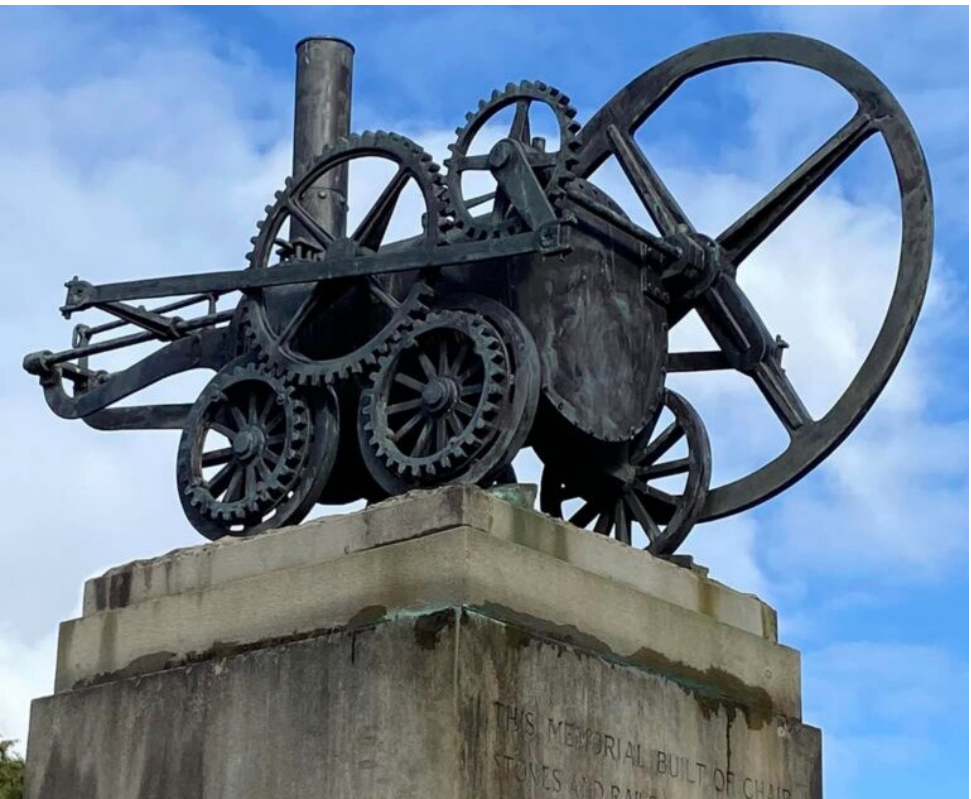
The tramroad opened in 1802 and was 9.75-mile-long (15.69 km). It connected the private lines belonging to the Dowlais and Penydarren Ironworks with the Glamorganshire Canal at Abercynon, also serving the Plymouth Ironworks along the way.

The Merthyr Tramroad is famous as the line on which Richard Trevithick’s experimental locomotive ran in 1804, being the first engine to pull a load on a railway and is more often referred to as the Penydarren Tramroad as Trevithick’s locomotive was built at those ironworks.

A memorial was erected on the corner of Penydarren Road and Penyard Road in October 1933. It is a miniature replica of the steam locomotive built by Richard Trevithick which traversed the spot on which this monument stands. The inscription on the front of the memorial reads:

“RICHARD TREVITHICK 1771-1833 PIONEER OF HIGH PRESSURE STEAM BUILT THE FIRST STEAM LOCOMOTIVE TO RUN ON RAILS. ON FEBRUARY 21ST 1804 IT TRAVERSED THE SPOT ON WHICH THIS MONUMENT STANDS ON ITS WAY TO ABERCYNON”

The Merthyr Tramroad was largely superseded when the Taff Vale Railway opened in 1841.



Trevithick Memorial erected 1933 (source: ‘glamorganstar.co.uk’)

1831 Merthyr Tydfil Rising

Merthyr’s fortunes had begun to waver with the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815, which had kept the demand for pig iron high. The stock market crash of 1825, triggered by speculative investments in the colonies, caused the market price of bar iron to drop significantly, and the big ironworks reduced production. By the end of 1830, a quarter of Merthyr’s furnaces had been forced to close resulting in unemployment and wage cuts across the board for those still working, whilst the price of goods skyrocketed. Thousands of families were thrown into abject poverty.

The low wages of the industrial workforce, poor living and working conditions, and the implementation of the ‘truck system’ by the iron masters, in which workers were not paid real money, but vouchers and tokens valid only in their masters’ own shops, contributed to ongoing social unrest.

The Merthyr Tydfil Rising of 1831 was the violent climax to many years of simmering unrest amongst the working-class population of Merthyr Tydfil and its surrounding areas. Iron workers and local miners reacted against the redundancies, rising prices and harsh action of bailiffs. Several thousand workers rioted, seizing control of the town for a full week, and flying the red flag for the first time on British soil as a symbol of workers’ insurrection. It required hundreds of professional troops to restore order, with mass arrests and deaths, but the budding trade union movement had already taken a firm foothold in South Wales.

Taff Vale Railway in 1841

With the advent of the railways, the ironmasters of Merthyr could see the advantages of a railway linking Merthyr with Cardiff Docks. It was intended to relieve congestion on the canal caused in particular by the rise in coal traffic. John Josiah Guest (Dowlais) and Anthony Hill (Plymouth) formed the Taff Vale Railway Company in 1836 and employed a talented young engineer from Bristol, Isambard Kingdom Brunel, to build the railway for them. Brunel completed the Taff Vale Railway in 1841, which enabled Guest and Hill to transport their iron and steel from Merthyr to Cardiff in less than an hour.

Further railways followed such as the Dowlais Railway in 1851, the Vale of Neath Railway in 1853, the Brecon and Merthyr Railway in 1868, and London and North Western Railway 1879. These provided Merthyr Tydfil with increased access to places such as Dowlais, Neath, Swansea, Brecon and Abergavenny. This railway network was developed mainly for freight, with passenger services being a secondary function.

As heavy industry declined, the railways lost their primary purpose and most routes closed in the 1950s and 1960s, leaving just one rail route – the Merthyr Tydfil to Cardiff service on the original Taff Vale Line. Road transport replaced the railways, with the construction of the Heads of the Valleys Road in the 1960s and A470 from Cardiff.



## The Decline of Iron and the Rise of Coal

In 1861 the population of Merthyr reached 70,000 but declined for several years thereafter. By 1870 the iron industry was under threat from two directions: many of the local raw materials were either running out or becoming harder to reach increasing the cost of mining them, and from 1856 the development of Henry Bessemer's revolutionary steel-making process. The transition from iron to steel gained pace, but was initially resisted by Merthyr's ironmasters, much to their cost.

Only Dowlais made the transition to steel production in 1865. The Penydarren works had closed and been sold to Dowlais in 1859 but were subsequently abandoned and in ruins by the 1870s. Plymouth was bought out in 1863 but closed in the 1880s. Cyfarthfa suffered crippling industrial disputes and temporary closure in the 1870s and re-opened as a steel works in 1884. The company merged with the Guest, Keen & Co.'s works at Dowlais in 1902 but effectively closed in 1910; and were finally abandoned in 1921 after a brief wartime flourish.

However, the decline of the iron industry is only part of the story. The mineral estates associated with the ironworks were also a valuable source of coal and in the late 19th century, it was the exploitation of coal that came to the fore and dominated the local industrial economy into the 20th century. The Plymouth mineral estate included several large collieries at Dyffryn and Graig; modern collieries on the Cyfarthfa estate included Castle, Abercanaid and Gethin; and on the Dowlais estate, Fochriw and Bedlinog.

During the 20th century, the need for direct access to the coast became ever more important, and Guest, Keen & Nettlefolds (as the firm became known in 1902) built coastal works at East Moors in Cardiff, and then at Port Talbot, finally abandoning steel production in the Merthyr area in 1936.

## The Great Depression 1929

The worldwide economic downturn, known as 'The Great Depression' began in 1929 and lasted until 1939. It was the worst economic downturn in the history of the industrialized world. It started in America after the stock market crash of October 1929, and quickly spread to the world.

Britain's world trade fell by half (1929-33) and the output of heavy industry fell by a third. The industrial and mining areas of the South Wales Valleys, Northern England, Scotland and Northern Ireland were the hardest hit and unemployment reached 70% in some areas at the start of the 1930s, with more than 3 million out of work nationally, and many families entirely dependent on payments from local government known as the dole. In the summer of 1932, 3.5 million were registered unemployed and many more only had part-time employment.

By 1930 unemployment in Merthyr Tydfil had reached 50%, and was 62.3% by 1932, even though the population dropped from 80,000 in 1921 to 63,000 in 1937. In 1939, there was even a Parliamentary Report recommending that Merthyr Tydfil be abandoned, its remaining inhabitants be relocated and a reservoir built on the site of the town.

Following Britain's withdrawal from the Gold Standard in September 1931 and the devaluation of the pound, interest rates were reduced from 6% to 2%. As a result, British exports became more competitive on world markets than those of countries that remained on the gold standard. This led to a modest economic recovery, and a fall in unemployment from 1933 onwards. After the Second World War, a climate of renewal developed, and new light industries were established in Merthyr Tydfil such as Hoover (1948), Thom Electrical Industries (1951) and the College of Further Education (1950-2). This transformed the town's dependence on a single industry and enabled it to flourish again.

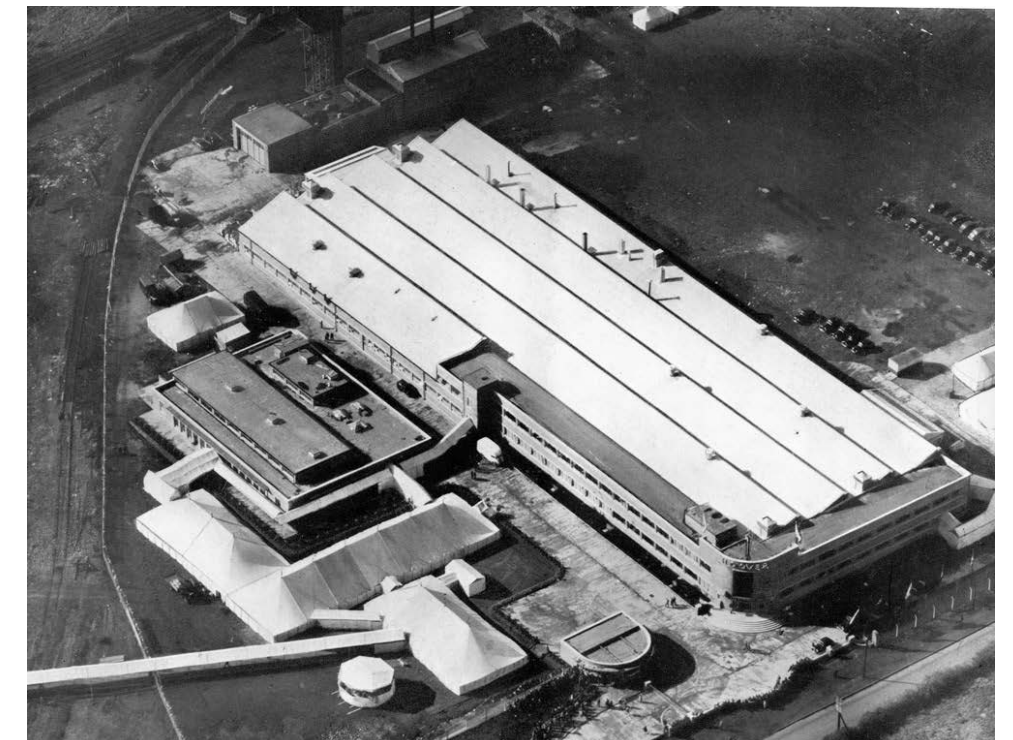
## The Hoover Factory, Merthyr Tydfil (1948)

The Hoover Factory opened at Pentrebach in October 1948 to manufacture washing machines. The factory was built on land that had been part of the Plymouth Ironworks. The initial workforce consisted of only 350 people but throughout the years, the growth of the company saw this figure rise to 5,000 in the 1960s and 70s. At its peak, the Hoover Factory was the largest employer in the borough.

Production at the Hoover factory in Pentrebach ceased in 2009, 61 years after it first opened following the sale of Hoover UK/Europe to the Italian-based company, Candy, in 1995.



**Hoover Factory under construction (source: 'alangeorge.co.uk')**



**Hoover Official Opening 1948 Aerial Shot (source: 'alangeorge.co.uk')**



### C.3 The Development of Merthyr Tydfil into a Town

Below is an extract from **'Merthyr Tydfil: Understanding Urban Character'** first published by Cadw in 2015.

**"That Metropolis of Iron Masters: Merthyr Tydfil Becomes a Town**

"The vast iron-working enterprises made great demands on the landscape for their successful operation, but they also required a huge labour force. By 1848, Cyfarthfa had 11 furnaces each of which required 400 men including colliers, miners and labourers; in the 1860s, Dowlais had 20 furnaces and employed about 5,000 men; Plymouth had 10 furnaces and employed 4,000 men. At its peak, Dowlais employed 9,000 men. The population of the town grew at a great pace to sustain the expanding outputs of the main works. It rose from 7,000 in 1801 to 24,000 in 1831, and to 70,000 in 1861. Merthyr Tydfil was the largest town in Wales by this time and remained so until 1871–81, when it was overtaken by Cardiff.

"This huge and growing labour force had to be housed and the need for housing made yet another demand on the landscape. The industries themselves often had the first call on available space, and housing development had to fit in where it could. Much of the earliest growth was informal and opportunistic, expanding out from the early core of settlement around the church, and in dispersed patterns of settlement on the margins of land, which was productive for either agriculture or industry. Examples of early settlement are now rare but Upper Colliers Row is an important survivor. The major ironworks tended to act as the nucleus for settlement too, where the ironmasters provided some housing for key workers. From the early nineteenth century, there were also more formal processes of settlement formation as planned urban developments got under way.

"Benjamin Malkin provides a good account of many of these strands of urban development in 1806: 'The first houses that were built were only very small, simple cottages... most of them built in scattered confusion without any order or plan. As the works increased, more cottages were wanted and erected in the spaces between those that had previously been built, till they became so connected with each other, as to form a certain description of irregular streets. Some streets, it is to be observed, have within these few years been built, and more are building, on a better plan, in straighter lines, and wider, having decent houses... In some of the early and rudely connected streets, we frequently see the small, miserable houses taken down, and larger and very seemly ones built in their stead... Shopkeepers, innkeepers, forge-men, some of them at least, and in no inconsiderable numbers, are making comfortable fortunes... Great improvements have been made in the past two years. Many new streets have been built, which are sufficiently straight and wide, and more have been laid out. The new houses are in general good, and some of the older streets have been rebuilt on an improved plan. Nearly the whole of the glebe has been laid out in regular streets for building'.



**1811 Merthyr Tydfil by John Wood (1768-1838)**  
(source: 'viewer.library.wales')

"Although very little early housing survives, many features of the distinctive pattern of settlement that developed from the end of the eighteenth century are still discernible. Much of the early settlement was essentially linear and followed roads, the canal, or tramroads: 'Almost the only assemblage of houses in Merthyr deserving of the name of a street – tramroads generally run along the lines of dwellings – is the High Street'. Settlement did follow other roads, such as Brecon Road, Twynyrodyn, and the road to Dowlais – there is early housing on all these routes – and the route of the Penydarren tramroad was particularly important as an axis of settlement. Early departures from this linear pattern have survived at the Quar, around a network of irregular streets, and in Morgantown; both are tightly defined areas of housing, suggesting that they were fitted into existing pockets of land – perhaps small fields.

"The early planned area-based developments described by Malkin in the area of Glebeland to the north of the church have not survived and others, such as Georgetown, have been redeveloped, but Thomastown is an important example of planned development from the middle of the nineteenth century. This more extensive pattern of development, in which whole new streets were laid down, became common practice thereafter. Penydarren represents another good example from the end of the century, when the former park was laid out in a series of planned housing schemes.

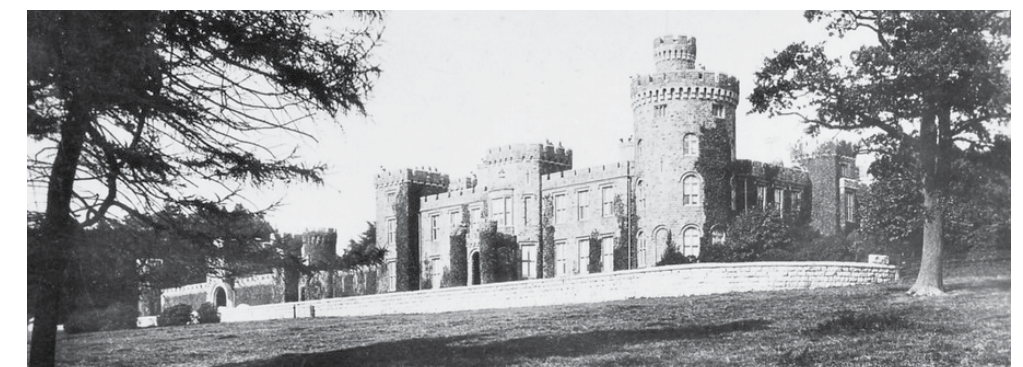
"Until the late nineteenth century, the fortunes of the iron industry were closely mirrored in the history of house building, with sustained development between the 1830s and 1850s, and especially in the 1850s. By the end of the nineteenth century, the iron industry had been overtaken by coalmining as the main driver of the area's industrial economy. By that time too, the town had also developed an urban economy of commerce and services, and it was probably this that encouraged the distinctive growth of more expansive, wealthy suburbs such as Penydarren, for example.

"These dynamics of settlement were allied to a distinctive settlement geography. Residential areas initially developed in fairly close proximity to individual ironworks where development was encouraged by the ironmasters – notably Williamstown and Georgetown for Cyfarthfa, and Pentrebach for Plymouth. High Street and Church Street at Penydarren, together with a cluster of housing at Penyard, were associated with the Penydarren Ironworks.

"The individual residential areas each had a strong social identity, and often had strong associations with particular immigrant communities. In 1847, the Royal Commission found that 'workers live together very much in clans, for example the Pembrokeshire men in one quarter, the Carmarthenshire men in another, and so on.' There was also some segregation by class and status, with skilled workers tending to live closest to the works in housing provided by the iron companies, and unskilled workers crowded in speculative housing to the north and south of the town centre. By contrast, Thomastown had a middle-class character and developed not in proximity to any particular works, but to the town centre itself. By the end of the nineteenth century, urban expansion had lost any direct association with individual works. The development of Penydarren Park included not only the first ventures into house building by the council, but also a substantial middle-class suburb.

"The preferences of the ironmasters were also influential on the geography of settlement. They too lived close to the sites of their works, but their increasingly affluent lifestyle required a more spacious context. Cyfarthfa House was built for Anthony Bacon in 1784, 'surrounded with fire, flame, smoke and ashes'.

"It was outclassed by Cyfarthfa Castle, built for the Crawshays in 1825, with a parkland setting still closely connected to the industry that funded it. The lake, for example, was linked to the water supply to the ironworks, which lay within the view from the castle. 'The south-west embraces, on the foreground, the terrace, park and River Taff, beyond which the great ironworks become conspicuous; these at night offer a truly magnificent scene, resembling the fabled Pandemonium, upon which the eye may gaze with great pleasure... At a distance from the castle, a walk along the river leads to the limestone quarry, where the high projecting rocks, combining with the river and wooded banks, form truly grand and picturesque objects... the style adopted at Cyfarthfa Castle is designed for the situation, standing alone in the midst of rising ground in a bold country'. Gwaelod y Garth House, built around 1810, was also briefly the residence of the Crawshays.



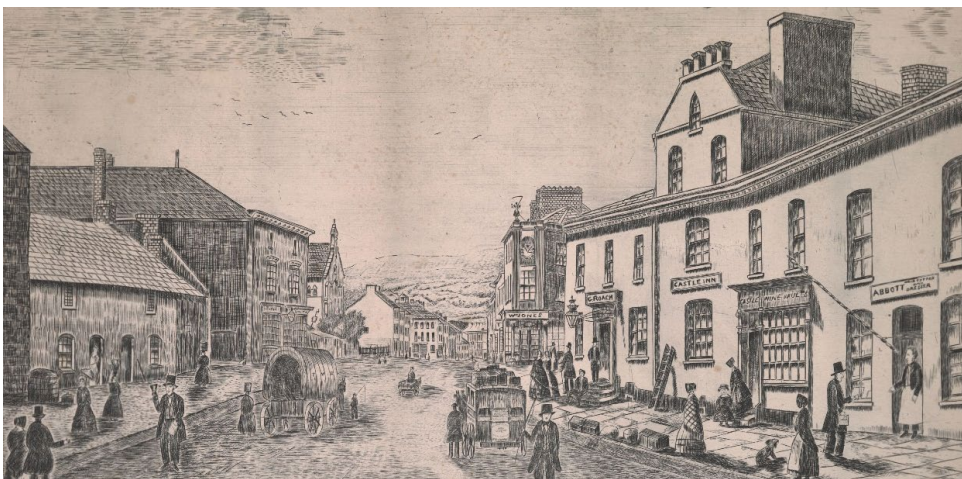
**Cyfarthfa Castle built in 1825, family home of the Crawshays, Merthyr Tydfil** (source: 'alangeorge.co.uk')



“Penydarren House, built in 1786, was also set in a substantial park: it was ‘large and elegant, with fine and well-planted gardens, green-houses, hot-houses, and all the accommodations befitting the residence of a wealthy family’. The house was close to the ironworks but, unlike Cyfarthfa, did not directly overlook it. Converted to a school, it survived until the 1960s but was eventually demolished and the site built over by the housing development at Penydarren Park.

“If, in the early years of expansion, Merthyr Tydfil mainly grew up as a series of industrial communities, it was not long before it began to take on the trappings of a town. The early core of settlement around the church and Court House was a nucleus for further development in the industrial period – nineteenth-century maps show a distinctive clustered settlement pattern to the south and east of the church. This haphazard plan suggests development crowding onto plots of land that had already been defined. The sinuous line of High Street running north was also already in existence and, like other early routes, formed the framework for linear development, which here quickly acquired a commercial character. To the north and west of the church, more formal development was also under way in the early years of the nineteenth century. As described by Malkin, this was an early example of town planning and established a regular grid pattern, most of which was lost in twentieth-century redevelopment.

“The conscious creation of a town centre took a major step forward in 1838 when the market hall was built, overlooking a ‘spacious square, which, in summer time, is frequently filled with exhibitions of all kinds’. The square assumed an importance in urban cultural and political life as a major meeting place, and the market itself was an important focal point: ‘the market-house, which is very capacious, may be termed “a bazaar of shops”’. The scene from six to ten o’clock every Saturday evening is one of the most extraordinary I have ever witnessed. In this interval what one might suppose the entire labouring population of Merthyr Tydfil passes through its crowded halls... It is not only the field of supply, but evidently the promenade of the working classes’. Other urban institutions followed, and their buildings provided other anchor points to demarcate the town centre, for example, the union workhouse of 1853. The fact that there were eventually two railway stations to the east and south of the town centre (The Vale of Neath Railway and the Taff Vale Railway respectively) further consolidated the role of the town centre from the mid-nineteenth century onwards.



**High Street, Merthyr Tydfil c.1850 engraved by Thomas E. Clarke (source: ‘wikimedia.org’ from National Library of Wales)**

“But above all, it was commerce that gave a particular character to the town centre. The line of High Street was firmly established as the main axis connecting different residential districts by the mid-nineteenth century, by which time there appears to have been a permanent middle class of tradesmen and shopkeepers. Shops, too, apparently increased as a result of the increasing population. By the end of the century, ‘the commercial quarters of the Merthyr Tydfil district still bear some evidence of belonging to a great centre of population which has been created in a hurry, later years have done much to improve the outward seeming of its leading shops and emporiums’. It had acquired a distinctive architectural character, marked by individualism and exuberance. This showed firstly the many hands involved in developing the town centre, where individual buildings or short terraces predominated, and secondly the ambition vested in it. Some of its most distinctive buildings date from the turn of the nineteenth century, at a time when the iron industry was in decline.

“Both the town centre and the satellite residential areas boasted an expanding number of churches and chapels – the town centre also acquired the first purpose-built synagogue in Wales in 1872-75. The building dates help chart not only the physical expansion of settlement, but also key periods in its improvement. The church of St Tydfil, for example, was rebuilt in 1820-21 but substantially remodelled between 1891 and 1901. On High Street, the Baptist Church was built in 1841, Soar was built at Pontmorlais in 1841 (replacing an earlier building of 1823), and St David’s Church was built in 1846-47. In Thomastown, the Welsh Wesleyan Chapel (later the Miners Welfare Hall) was built in 1853. At Twynrobyn, Seion Welsh Baptist Church was established in 1788, and rebuilt in 1841, and Penuel was built in 1860. On Plymouth Street, Ebenezer Welsh Baptist Chapel was built in 1829-31, whilst at Penydarren, St John’s in Church Street was built in 1858, and the church of St Mary on The Walk in 1893-94.

“By 1860, there were about 60 chapels across Merthyr Tydfil, as well as several churches. But the figures and the building dates tell only part of the story of the success and ambition of this new industrial town. Many of Merthyr Tydfil’s major religious and secular buildings were designed by leading architects of their day: Shiloh Welsh Wesleyan Chapel is thought to be an unusual commission by I. K. Brunel, and St David’s Church and the Baptist Church on High Street were both designed by T. H. Wyatt. When the church of St Tydfil was remodelled at the end of the nineteenth century, it was J. L. Pearson who got the commission.”

## “Civic Life, Politics and Society

“In many respects, civic institutions followed rather than led the development of Merthyr Tydfil as a town during the nineteenth century. In response to a rapidly growing population, a board of health was established in 1850, and was responsible for paving, lighting, drainage and water supply. From 1860, the board also required building plans to be submitted for approval. The characteristic layout of late nineteenth-century housing schemes, in which uniform rows of houses were separated by back lanes, probably reflects the influence of the board of health. Despite extensive urban growth, Merthyr Tydfil only became an urban district council in 1894; an important expression of this new status was the building of a town hall in 1896-97. Merthyr Tydfil received borough status in 1905, and its status was further enhanced three years later when it was made a county borough.

“By this time, the borough’s responsibilities extended across education, planning, housing, libraries, parks, baths and public health, including an important legacy of civic initiatives, specifically the creation of Thomastown Park in 1900 and the acquisition of Cyfarthfa Castle, to be opened as a school in 1913. However, it was the council’s involvement in house building that was particularly significant. Merthyr Tydfil boasts some very early council housing in Penydarren; Council Street and Urban Street were built by 1903. Other pioneering schemes included Garden City, Penydarren, which started as a private initiative in 1913. It was adopted by the council after the First World War and completed in 1920, then extended between 1920 and 1924. The Housing Act of 1919 led to further housing developments, beginning at Heolgerrig. By 1939, some 1,300 council houses had been built across the borough, mostly in relatively small-scale schemes. Building work was mostly concentrated in the 1920s as council finances suffered during the depression of the 1930s. After the war, renewed investment and a commitment to redevelopment saw larger-scale building programmes such as the Gurnos estate, and comprehensive redevelopment schemes such as at Caedraw and Georgetown.

“Mapped onto the geography of settlement and its key institutions was an urban culture; political radicalism was an important aspect of this. Riots in 1800 and 1816 were significantly overshadowed by the Merthyr Rising in 1831. Partly in reaction to a decision by William Crawshay to lower the wages of his employees, an angry crowd destroyed the Court House and laid siege to the magistrates in The Castle Hotel, at the corner of Castle Street and High Street, Pontmorlais (later the site of the Castle Cinema). In the subsequent confrontation, at least 20 members of the crowd were shot and killed, and the red flag was raised for the first time. The former Court of Requests building in Georgetown is also traditionally associated with the Merthyr Rising, and is said to have been broken into by Dic Penderyn. At the end of that decade, from 1839, Merthyr Tydfil emerged as a main centre for Chartism. Within its highly organized movement, Georgetown was a leading ward, and The Three Horse Shoes public house assumed particular prominence as a popular meeting place. The Chartists also used outdoor meeting places, such as the mountainside at Heolgerrig, and periodically occupied the town streets with processions.



“However, like the first attempts at an organized unionism, the Chartist movement was short-lived. Merthyr Tydfil’s radical credentials were once again asserted in 1900, when the first socialist Member of Parliament, Keir Hardie, was elected here. Hardie’s candidature was sponsored by the Labour Representation Committee (precursor of the Labour Party) and his victory was announced from the balcony of the town hall.”



**Carnegie Free Library & Town Hall, Merthyr, undated**  
(source: ‘alangeorge.co.uk’)



**Merthyr Tydfil Old Town Hall** (source: own)

#### C.4 The History & Development of Thomastown

Thomastown is located to the east of Merthyr Tydfil Town Centre on a steep slope overlooking the town and valley beyond. It is an important example of planned development from the middle of the 19th century. It is believed to be one of the largest groups of late Georgian and early Victorian style buildings in Wales and one of the first purpose-built residential suburbs in Merthyr Tydfil.

Prior to development, the area had been made up of parcelled fields. Due to the lack of valuable natural resources such as coal or minerals, the area had not been subjected to excavation. It was developed as a higher-status, middle-class suburb with a unified architectural character and developed not in proximity to any particular iron works, but to the town centre itself. With Church Street, Newcastle Street and Alma Street running from east to west, connecting the area to the town centre.

The area is named after Dr William Thomas (1794-1858), a doctor and surgeon who became a local magistrate and was Chairman of the Select Vestry in 1822; an organisation set up to supervise the running of Merthyr Tydfil. He owned the land on which Thomastown was built. William Thomas had married the wealthy widow of Rees Davies Esq. and became the proprietor of the Court and Maerdy estates through this marriage.

The area closest to the town centre is known as Tramroadside and is characterised by workers cottages built around 1800, some of which have since been demolished. The Penydarren Tramroad was built in 1800 to serve the Dowlais, Penydarren and Plymouth Ironworks, which also had a passenger service to carry workers to their respective ironworks. Workers’ cottages were built alongside the tramroad to gain easy access to the trams.

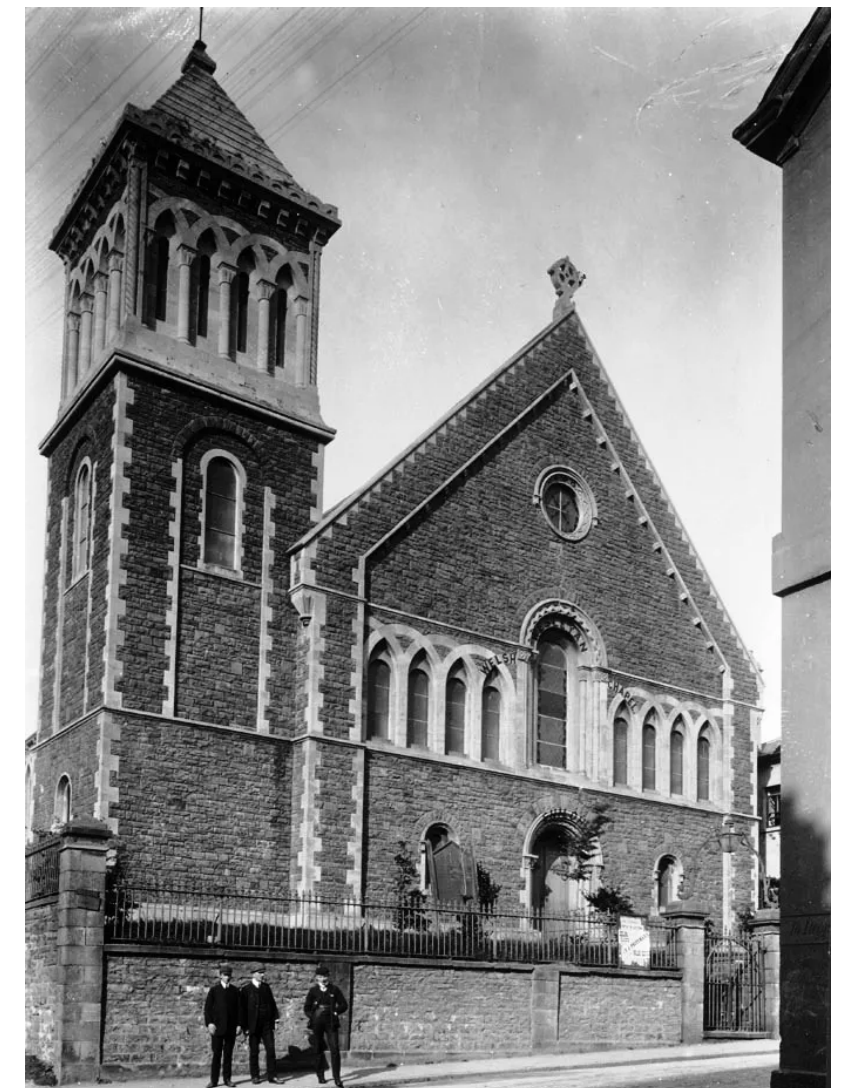


**Lower Thomas Street, Merthyr Tydfil 1898** (source: ‘alangeorge.co.uk’)

The central section of Thomastown is dominated by larger terraced dwellings built in the mid-1800s. It was the first known example of a middle-class residential area in Merthyr Tydfil. Groups of professionals were permitted to commission the construction of terraced streets. Work began on Thomas Street in 1840, with Primrose Cottage and Upper Union Street being developed shortly afterwards. Upper Union Street consisted of eleven Union Club houses built to complement the Union Workhouse which was built in 1853, and rebuilt in 1870. Newcastle Street and Courtland Terrace were built between 1850 and 1870 and still remain today as well-preserved Georgian terraces.

Religious buildings added a further dimension to the character of the area. These included Shiloh Welsh Wesleyan Chapel (now the Former Miners’ Welfare Hall) on Church Street which is attributed to Isambard Kingdom Brunel. With Merthyr Tydfil Synagogue being built at the top of Church Street in the late 1870s.

The easternmost part of Thomastown is dominated by larger detached dwellings set among what were rural lanes overlooking the town. Spacious villas such as The Rectory (originally known as Courtland House), Springfield Villa, Bryntirion (since demolished), Brynheulog and Sunnybank Villa all dating from the mid-1800s.



**Siloh Chapel (Miners Hall), Church Street, 1901**  
(source: ‘alangeorge.co.uk’)



## C.5 Dr William Thomas (1794-1858) – The Landowner

The '*Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian, Glamorgan, Monmouth, and Brecon Gazette – July 03, 1858*'

“MERTHYR AND NEIGHBOURHOOD.

“THE LATE WILLIAM THOMAS, ESQ.

“The town of Merthyr has sustained a severe loss in the death, on Saturday last, at the age of nearly 64, of William Thomas, Esq., of the Court House.

“Mr. Thomas was the son, according to our information, of Mr. Robert Thomas, who then held the Gwaelody-garth farm, and was connected on the mothers' side with one of the principal families in Ystradyfodwg (so named from Tyvodwg, an ancient British Saint). He was born at Gwaelodygarth, in the latter part of the year 1794; and was to use a favourite designation of his own “a thorough Merthyr Man.” The family after that removed from the suburb into the town, and resided at the old house “over the pond.”

“Mr. Thomas was one of two brothers, the youngest of whom went to live at Tredegar, and died there some seventeen or eighteen years ago. William Thomas was brought up to the medical profession; served his time as an apprentice with Dr. Davies, of Cyfarthfa, father of Dr. Edward Davies, whose medical and surgical reputation now reflects so much credit upon the town of Merthyr; and afterwards passed the usual examination in London. He practised for some time as a surgeon in this town; but whether he displayed much skill in that capacity we have not been able to ascertain; and all that is known of him in that character, is that he was always commonly called “Doctor Thomas,” even to the day of his death; that some of the older inhabitants held his opinion, in extreme cases, in much respect; and that “Dr. Thomas's Pills” are articles still in demand among the inhabitants.

“The Doctor, however, conceived a more ambitious project; aspired to the hand of the widow of Rees Davies Esq., of the Court; wooed and won the lady; and thus in the year 1820 became the proprietor of the Court and Maerdy estates, and possessor of the large influence connected therewith. The houses and properties known as the Court and Maerdy, are relics of the past, and may aspire to the dignity of having recognized positions in topographical history, and of having been retained in the hauds of the same family for a very long period. Indeed, we suspect, that the present possessors may claim a tolerably unbroken line of ancestry, male and female, from our day to the conquest and partition of Glamorgan, by Sir Robert Fitzhamon, in or about A.D. 1092. In that partition, the district of Senghenydd was given to an ancestor of IVOR BACH'S. This chieftain, otherwise known as Yvor Petit, flourishing about 1150, had his seat at Castell Coch; and that with other possessions was retained by his descendants for several generations, until his great-grandchildren were treacherously captured, and starved in Cardiff Castle.

“When Sir Richard de Clare performed this act of treachery, the youngest brother of Griffith ab Rhys ab Griffith ab Ivor, was then being brought up as a foster-son, as was customary in Wales in those early times. This person, named Howel Velyn, thus escaped the misfortune that befel his family; in him the lineage of Yvor Petit still survived; and of him, as old Rhys Meurig says, “God multiplied a great people.” He retained possession of Upper Senghenydd; and it was from him that the old proprietors of this part of the country sprung. The property remained intact for several generations, until one Rhys ab Llewelyn Vychan, the fourth in descent from Howel, divided the Merthyr properties between his two sons, giving his house at Pontrhun to his son Llewelyn, and the Court House to his other son Phillip. And we believe that the Reeses of this district may trace their descent from that Rhys ab Llewelyn. It would be tedious to go minutely through the whole pedigree; suffice it that the Court is mentioned as an “ancient house” in the time of Elizabeth; and the old house, before its recent rebuilding, had several features of Tudor architecture. Some old furniture Hill preserved may, from their carving, also claim an antiquity of some two centuries or more. Being thus the principal house in the district, and being connected with, and representative of, the ownership of a large part of the soil on which the town of Merthyr stands, and which adjoins it, it naturally confers much influence upon its possessors. This was seen to be the case in the subject of our biographic notice.

“Shortly after his marriage – that is, in the year 1831 – Mr. Thomas became one of the “great unpaid” magistrates of the county of Glamorgan. About five years afterwards he was made a deputy-lieutenant of the same county; and a few years after that he was named to be on the commission of the peace for the comity of Brecon. He was also nominally a magistrate of the county of Monmouth, but not having taken the required oaths, did not act in that capacity. He was also an ex-officio guardian of the poor, and a member of the Board of Health. In the discharge of his magisterial duties, Mr. Thomas was very assiduous; his knowledge of the Welsh language, his strong common sense, and his acquaintance with almost all the inhabitants, enabled him to render such services in the administration of justice as were creditable to himself and satisfactory to the public mind. In this capacity he acted in conjunction with Mr. Bruce Pryce, the late Mr. Meyrick, and with four successive stipendiary magistrates, namely, Mr. Hill, Mr. Wilson, Mr. H.A. Bruce, and Mr. J. C. Fowler, all of whom acted in harmony with him, highly appreciated his services, and were happy to avail themselves of his assistance.

“Off the bench, Dr. Thomas was the very incarnation of goof humour; and more given to jollity, perhaps, than was always becoming; de mortuis sit nisi bonum. His kindness of heart conciliated the good-will of all who come in contact with him; and he was both well known to, and generally liked by, all classes of the population. He felt a strong interest in the welfare and prosperity of the town and inhabitants of Merthyr, and was ever ready to promote both whenever that lay in his power.

“But however popular he may have been, it had been quite evident for several years past, that his lease of life was drawing to a close, and that he would soon have to depart for that journey from whence no traveller returns. Within the last few months all hopes of ultimate recovery had been given up; and when on Saturday last it was announced that the silver cord of life had been unloosed, the declaration was heard as one that had been daily expected. Over the popular rumour, and speculations now prevalent, we draw the veil of silence, for we have nought to do with private affairs. The management of the funeral was vested in our townsman, Mr. Robert Jones; it took place on Thursday, and the remains of Mr. Thomas were buried at Aberdare. The majority of the shops had a few shutters up all the week; and all closed on that day at an early hour. The funeral procession took the usual circuitous road, skirting the Aberdare mountain; but as the way is long, and large numbers attended the funeral, arrangements had been made to have special trains on the Vale of Neath Railway to run in connection therewith.”

The '*Merthyr Telegraph, and General Advertiser for the Iron Districts of South Wales – July 03, 1858*'

“THE LATE DR. THOMAS.

“In reference to the lamented death of the above gentleman, J. C. Fowler, Esq., expressed himself from the Bench in the following terms :– “I wish to take this opportunity of publicly expressing my regret on hearing of the death of Dr. Thomas, which has occurred this morning. He had for many years been in the habit of sitting on this Bench with me and my predecessors, and the greatest cordiality always prevailed between us. I'm sure that his well-known kindness of heart, and his love for his native place, will cause him to be much lamented by the people to whom he was so much attached”.”



## APPENDIX D HISTORY OF JEWS IN WALES

The following text is taken from the '[jewishheritage.wales](#)' website, the source being Cai Parry-Jones, author of '*The Jews of Wales: A History*' along with Susan Fielding of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales:

### “Discover the history of the Jewish people in Wales

“The population reached its peak around 1919, when the country was home to 19 congregations catering for approximately 5,000 people. However, from the 1920s onwards these communities witnessed a gradual decline.

“No settled Jewish communities existed in Wales prior to the 18th century, but there is some evidence of individual Jews in the Welsh Marches during the Middle Ages.

“The first Jewish community in Wales was established in Swansea in 1768, when a 99-year lease of land for a Jewish cemetery was granted to a German-born silversmith named David Michael.

“Over the years the community used various spaces for worship, including David Michael's sitting room in Wind Street, before erecting their very own synagogue building in Waterloo St in 1818. This was to be Wales's first purpose-built synagogue.

“During the first half of the nineteenth century, a small number of Jewish immigrants, numbering in their hundreds, also began to settle in other towns in South Wales such as Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil, Newport and Pontypridd. These were trading communities, whose members migrated to the United Kingdom from various states in Central Europe to escape poverty, economic restrictions, and religious persecution in their homelands.

“The quest for religious toleration and economic well-being were major motivations for migration to the United Kingdom. While most Jewish immigrants gravitated to Britain's larger cities such as London and Manchester, smaller numbers settled in South Wales because of the potential commercial opportunities on offer in a region that was at the early stages of industrialisation and urbanisation.

“As was the case with the rest of the United Kingdom, Wales's Jewish population soared in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with the arrival of Eastern European Jews who were fleeing economic hardship and anti-Jewish violence in the Russian Empire. An estimated 120,000 to 150,000 Eastern European Jews migrated to the United Kingdom between 1881 and 1914, of which approximately 4,500 settled in Wales, primarily in the south.

“In the second half of the nineteenth century, the coal industry dominated the Welsh economy and transformed South Wales from a largely rural region into one of Britain's major industrial centres.

“Like their predecessors, it was primarily the business and commercial opportunities provided by this burgeoning working-class centre that attracted Eastern European Jewish immigrants to the area. Their arrival resulted in more Jewish communities and synagogues springing up in South Wales in places like Aberavon, Aberdare, Brynmawr, Ebbw Vale and Llanelli.

“Smaller Jewish communities also emerged in the seaside resorts and market towns of North Wales such as Bangor, Llandudno and Wrexham, partly as an overflow from Liverpool and Manchester and made up of Jews who were looking for locations to conduct trade with less competition.

“By the end of the First World War, Welsh Jewry reached a peak of approximately 5,000 people and 19 communities of varying sizes, ranging from 70 individuals in Bangor to over 2,000 people in Cardiff.

“Whether they arrived in 1800 or 1900, most Jews began life in Wales extremely modestly, with male breadwinners typically starting out as pedlars as it did not require too much money to start or any special skills or experience. Slinging a pack of goods on his back, the itinerant Jewish pedlar became known far and wide in both Wales's farming and industrial communities, selling inexpensive jewellery, watches, textiles, household goods and the like from door to door on credit.

“Not every Jewish pedlar prospered – many remained poor itinerant traders or worked for business owners as employees – but others were able to build up their business a bit at a time before eventually establishing small businesses in Wales's high streets. Although most of these businesses were headed by men, their operation by and large remained a collective family effort, with wives and children often found working alongside husbands and fathers to help make ends meet.

“Small numbers of Jewish immigrant men in Wales did find themselves working in primary industries such as coal mining, but most were engaged as sellers and shopkeepers in trades such as clothing, furniture, glazing, jewellery, musical instruments, picture framing, tailoring, tobacco and watch and clock repairs. Many Jews in South Wales were also involved in the pawnbroking industry and some owned real estate, while in North Wales a number of Jews ran kosher guesthouses in seaside resorts like Llandudno and Rhyl.

“Jews found themselves working in these kinds of trades and industries because of the occupational restrictions they faced in both Central and Eastern Europe. In truth, the immigrant generation occupied a niche well suited to the skills they brought with them to Wales and this economic activity was to remain largely intact until the interwar period when younger generations began to spread among the professions.

“Over the last 250 years Jewish people have had the freedom to practice their religion openly in the country, with each community developing its own extensive range of religious, social, cultural, educational and welfare activities.

“It has been argued that the Welsh nonconformist nation adopted a 'reverential curiosity' towards the Jewish people.

“This has been explained as an affinity between two religious minority groups who had both suffered persecution, but also one of fidelity to scripture that led to Jews being perceived with pious admiration as the 'People of the Book'. In fact, many Jews who grew up in Wales came to feel that they and their coreligionists were a well-accepted part of the country's multid denominational nonconformist religious milieu.

“However, religious tolerance did occasionally give way to prejudices, and as was the case with other newcomers and ethnic 'others' in Wales such as the Irish, Jews occasionally faced hostility if they were perceived to be doing too well in difficult times or appeared to be benefitting from the misfortunes of members of the 'indigenous' community.

“In August 1911, 18 Jewish businesses were targeted for attack in Tredegar following unfounded accusations that some of the town's Jewish shopkeepers and landlords were financially exploiting customers and tenants during a period of social and economic upheaval in South Wales. The event sparked several nights of rioting and looting of other Jewish, and subsequently non-Jewish, businesses, in towns across eastern Glamorgan and western Monmouthshire in what became known as the Tredegar Riots.

“Wales's Jews have also made their own unique contributions to wider Welsh and British society in a range of endeavours, including commerce and industry, literature and the arts, in politics, academia and philanthropy. These include, among many others, individuals such as Dannie Abse, poet; Leo Abse, politician; Heinz Koppel, artist; Judith Maro, writer; Bernice Rubens, novelist; Abe and Harry Sherman, businessmen and philanthropists; and Sara Sugarman, actor and director.

“Although there was a small influx of Jewish refugees fleeing Nazism in the 1930s and Holocaust survivors in the 1940s, Wales's Jewish population witnessed a gradual decline from the 1920s onward. By the end of the 1950s, there were 11 communities serving roughly 4,200 Jews, and by the 1990s this number had dropped to 5 communities serving 2,500 individuals. This reflected a general trend within UK Jewry of Jews gradually moving away from smaller communities to major centres, principally Manchester and London, as they offered a more extensive Jewish communal infrastructure and a broader range of career opportunities.

“According to the 2011 Census, 2,064 Jews live in Wales today, but the numbers who make up the active membership of the remaining communities are much smaller. Organised Jewish life in Wales today is primarily centred on Cardiff's two synagogues – the Cardiff Reform Synagogue and the Cardiff United Synagogue. Beyond the capital, Swansea's small Jewish community still uses a room in its former synagogue building in Ffynone Rd for worship, while Llandudno's synagogue has been used as a retreat centre for Hasidic Jews from Manchester since 2004. There are also small pockets of Jewish life to be found in places like Bangor and Welshpool.

“While Wales's Jewish population may have significantly diminished over the last century, a Jewish presence of over 250 years continues to make its impact within Welsh and British society today.”



## APPENDIX E SYNAGOGUE ARCHITECTURE

“The physical archtype for the Jewish House of Worship throughout the centuries of exile particularly during the Middle Ages and until modern times, was the homely Shool not the elaborate Temple, the shtiebel not the ornate Sanctuary. Of course there were valid historical and social reasons for this unadorned simplicity of style. Nor must it ever be forgotten that what the little prayer room lacked in outward beauty or design was more than adequately redeemed by the intensity of its spiritual power and the religious devotion of its crowded congregations. Unlike the Ancient Greeks, the Jews refused to worship the beautiful as though it were holy. On the contrary, it was in things holy that they found the real secret and true meaning of the beautiful.

“Nevertheless, there have been times when the Synagogue has also reflected the happier situation of Jewish Society. In lands of freedom and in periods of an expanding cultural horizon the Synagogue often became transformed from the simple little Shool to a building combining external physical beauty with spiritual force.”

This is an extract from the booklet ‘The Stained Glass Windows of Singers Hill Synagogue, Birmingham (1963) – A Birmingham Hebrew Congregation Publication’ from its Foreword written by Rev. Dr. Chaim Pearl M.A. PH.D.

The book ‘The Synagogues of Britain and Ireland – An Architectural and Social History’ by Sharman Kadish first published in 2011 has also been most informative about synagogue architecture. The book has been likened to “the Jewish Pevsner” as in 1999 Sharman Kadish began a Survey of the Jewish Built Heritage; a project to record and research the architectural heritage of the Jewish Communities of Britain and Ireland.

What we learn is that there is no set blueprint for how a synagogue should look, their architectural shapes and interior designs varying greatly, often following the architectural styles in vogue at the time and place of construction. Below is a summary of styles and influences in synagogue architecture leading up to the construction of Merthyr Tydfil Synagogue in 1876-7.

### E.1 Georgian Era (1714-1837)

For much of history, the constraints of antisemitism and the laws of host countries restricted the building of synagogues that would be visible from the street or banned their construction altogether. To overcome these restrictions, synagogues were often built within existing buildings or accessed through interior courtyards. Their exteriors would be discrete and understated, not hinting at their use within, and their interiors would be restrained.

#### **Bevis Marks Synagogue, London** – **first purpose-built synagogue in Britain (opened 1701)**

The first purpose-built synagogue in Britain was Bevis Marks Synagogue in London which opened in 1701. Built for the Spanish & Portuguese Sephardi Community, the building was discreetly tucked away in a back alley as Jews were not permitted to build on public thoroughfares at that time in Britain. The simple but dignified architecture of this synagogue is influenced by both the Portuguese Synagogue in Amsterdam, also known as the ‘Esnoga’ and the churches of Christopher Wren who was supervising the rebuilding of the City of London after the Great Fire of 1666. The architect was the Christian master builder Joseph Avis. From the Middle Ages Jews had generally been excluded from craftsmen’s guilds, impeding their training as architects or builders, so a Jewish architect would not have been available.

Bevis Marks Synagogue is regarded as a precursor of the gallery plan that became the norm in British synagogues in the 19th and 20th centuries, whereby women worshippers entered the building through the same main entrance as the men and accessed their Ladies Gallery via an internal staircase. In synagogues such as the ‘Esnoga’ in Amsterdam women originally entered the synagogue via an external staircase.

Today Bevis Marks Synagogue is still discreetly tucked away from public gaze, now approached through an enclosed inner courtyard and dwarfed by modern high-rise developments such as the nearby ‘Gherkin’. The building still operates as a synagogue and is Grade I listed as “the 2nd synagogue erected in England after the resettlement of 1656 and in its little altered state is of exceptional historic interest”.



**Bevis Marks Synagogue, 1891 (source: ‘cityoflondon.gov.uk’)**



**Bevis Marks Synagogue, Exterior (source: ‘spitafields.com’)**



**Bevis Marks Synagogue, Outside Gates (source: ‘sephardi.org.uk’)**



## E.2 Victorian Era (1837-1901)

### Jewish Emancipation and the 'Cathedral Synagogue' Style:

From the 1830s onwards, but particularly from the 1850s, a new-found Jewish confidence, underpinned by Jewish emancipation and economic advancement, expressed itself architecturally all over Europe by the building of monumental synagogues. These were built in prominent city-centre sites on public streets. This was the age of the 'Cathedral Synagogue' – a big urban synagogue in which formal services were held featuring a Hazan (cantor) and choir, also referred to as the 'Choral Synagogue'.

Jewish emancipation in the UK took place between 1833 and 1890; Parliament passed a series of laws that placed male Jews in the United Kingdom on an equal legal footing with other emancipated males. Emancipation removed previous legal restrictions on civil and political rights; Jews now had the right to vote, to enter parliament, to enter any occupation, to attend universities and to own property.

The hallmark of the Georgian synagogue had been discretion. Whereas Jewish emancipation brought about the 'Cathedral Synagogue' which were grand and prominent symbols of Jewish presence in a city. By the 1850s, the Industrial Revolution was firmly established, and Britain was the undisputed 'workshop of the world'. Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham and Glasgow became important industrial cities. And during the 1850s, it was the Midlands and north of England that led the way in building these substantial urban synagogues that expressed the economic advancement and upward social mobility of the Jewish elite. Freehold sites were purchased in good locations and architects with good reputations were engaged. Examples include Singers Hill Synagogue in Birmingham (1857), Hope Place Synagogue in Liverpool (1857), and Manchester Great Synagogue (1858).

Synagogues became larger and more complex buildings. After Singers Hill Synagogue had been built the inclusion of schoolrooms, a minister's house and caretaker's house, offices, kitchen, cloakrooms and WCs became the norm. However, a Mikveh (ritual bath) was rarely included in these large synagogues. Synagogue design in the Victorian period was also impacted by advances in heating, lighting and ventilation technology.

### a) Italian Renaissance Style:

During the 1850s, synagogues built in the Midlands and north of England reflected the Italian Renaissance style of architecture. A style associated with Renaissance Venice, Florence and Rome and popularised by the Grand Tour of Italy undertaken by many artists and architects at that time. Singers Hill Synagogue in Birmingham and Manchester Great Synagogue are both examples of this style. This trend continued throughout the 1860s and was promoted by the leading Jewish synagogue architect of the day, Hyman Henry Collins.

The 1850s also saw purpose-built synagogues being built in Wales. These Welsh synagogues also tended to be in the Italianate style. The purpose-built synagogue at Goat Street, Swansea (1859) and Francis Street, Newport (1869) being good examples.



015a Singers Hill Synagogue, Birmingham  
(source: 'birminghamconservationtrust.org')



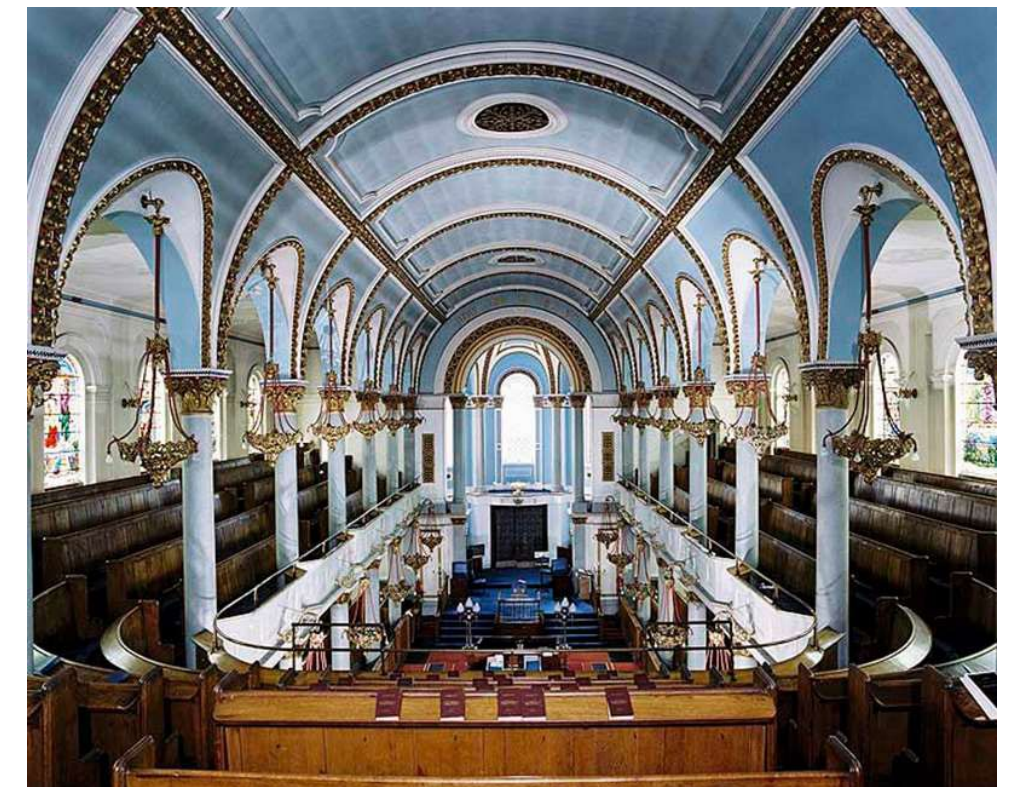
Singers Hill Synagogue, Birmingham 2023  
(source: 'patrickcomerford.com')

### Singers Hill Synagogue, Birmingham – first truly 'Cathedral Synagogue' in Britain (opened 1857)

The first truly 'Cathedral Synagogue' in Britain was Singers Hill Synagogue in Birmingham which opened in 1857. It was built on a prominent site and designed by leading municipal architect Henry R. Yeoville Thomason (1826-1901) who was responsible for many other significant buildings in Birmingham, including Birmingham's Council House and City Art Gallery.

The synagogue was built in the Italian Renaissance style of classical architecture favoured by Thomason, using red brick with stone dressings. Externally it featured a triple-arcaded portico beneath a rose window in the entrance gable, flanked by two projecting wings which formed the entrance courtyard; these wings being houses for the resident ministers. Schoolrooms were built at the rear for the 350 pupils of the Birmingham Hebrew Schools. Internally the main prayer hall was built to a basilican plan, which separated the 'nave' from the side aisles by arcades. This became a hallmark of the Victorian Cathedral Synagogue. Another characteristic being the galleries this naturally created above the side aisles.

Singers Hill Synagogue was designed to seat a thousand people making it the largest in the country at the time. It still survives today and is the oldest still-functioning example of its type. The building is Grade II\* listed.



Singers Hill Synagogue, Birmingham 2002  
(source: 'historicengland.org.uk')



**b) Romanesque Revival Style:**

Elements of the Romanesque Revival style of architecture also became popular in British synagogue design during the Victorian period. Inspired by Ancient Roman art and architecture; it is characterised by its use of simple geometrics such as round or “Roman” arches, barrel vaults, towers and turrets, thick walls, small windows and lack of ornamentation.

Chatham Memorial Synagogue, Rochester, Kent – Romanesque-inspired synagogue (opened 1870)

This is the best surviving example of a Romanesque-inspired synagogue in Britain. Chatham Memorial Synagogue opened in 1870 and was designed by the Jewish architect Hyman Henry Collins who usually favoured the Italianate style. It is built of chunky stone, with round arched windows and a 50-foot square tower. The building is now Grade II\* listed largely for its decorative interior.



**Chatham Memorial Synagogue, Rochester, Kent**  
(source: 'drawinglife.art')

**c) Gothic Revival Style:****Gothic (12th to early 17th century):**

The original Gothic style first appeared in the early 12th century in northern France and was quickly adopted throughout Europe. This architectural movement lasted from the 12th until the early 17th century. Gothic being the architecture of the pointed arch, rib vaulting, flying buttresses, window tracery, pinnacles, and vertical emphasis with towers and spires. Another key feature being the extensive use of stained glass and the revival of the medieval rose window, which brought both light and colour to interiors.

Pointed arches gave the impression of soaring height; and were used in arcades, vaults, doors, windows and niches. Rib vaults and flying buttresses helped to support the weight of these taller buildings. Innovations in tracery (the stone framework that supports the glass) meant that windows could be larger and of increasingly complex patterns.

The term Gothic was adopted by Italian writers in the Renaissance period (late 15th to early 17th century); the word being used in a derogatory way as a synonym of 'barbaric'. They denounced the style as unrefined and ugly and attributed it to the Gothic tribes which had destroyed the Roman Empire and its classical culture in the 5th century AD.

Great Gothic cathedrals were built throughout northern France such as Notre Dame in Paris (building work started in the 12th century) as well as in Soissons, Chartres, Bourges, Reims and Amiens. This new Gothic style was also used in two highly important buildings in London: Canterbury Cathedral and Westminster Abbey.



**Westminster Abbey, London** (source: 'thegeographicalcure.com')

**Gothic Revival (late 18th to 19th century):**

Gothic Revival was a movement that began in England to revive medieval Gothic forms and became popular in the second half of the 18th century and throughout the 19th century. The Gothic Revival movement was closely linked to philosophical movements associated with Catholicism and a reawakening of High Church or Anglo-Catholic belief; supporters had become concerned by the growth in religious nonconformism. Examples of High Church include the Anglican and Catholic denominations as they place a “high” emphasis on ritual, ceremony, vestments and sacraments. Whilst Low Churches such as Baptist and Pentecostal follow a freer style of worship.

18th century examples of the Gothic Revival style tended to be domestic, such as at Strawberry Hill House in Twickenham, built for the politician Horace Walpole between 1749-76 and which made the style fashionable.

However, the most prominent figure in the popularisation of the Gothic Revival style of architecture was the architect Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin (1812-1852). After helping his father to survey and record medieval buildings, he became convinced that Gothic architecture was not only superior aesthetically, but also morally to Classical architecture. Pugin had been brought up in the Presbyterian church which he had found “cold and sterile” and converted to Catholicism as soon as he could in 1834, attracted by its pomp and ceremony.

Pugin is most famous for his work on the rebuilding of the Palace of Westminster in London (more commonly known as the Houses of Parliament), together with Sir Charles Barry. Pugin designed the interiors and its renowned clock tower, now called the Elizabeth Tower, which houses Big Ben. Construction work began in 1840 after the original building had been destroyed by fire in 1834. The rebuilding of the Houses of Parliament in the Gothic Revival style cemented its popularity; many public buildings followed in this style, as well as an ambitious programme of church building, including restorations.



**Palace of Westminster, 1900s** (source: 'prints-online.com')



**Gothic Revival Synagogues:**

Gothic Revival had become the preferred architectural style of the Christian Church and especially the Church of England. As such, Jews in England and Scotland viewed the Gothic Revival style as being inherently Christian and English and avoided it when building their synagogues. They favoured the religiously 'neutral' styles of neo-classical, Greek Revival or Italianate.

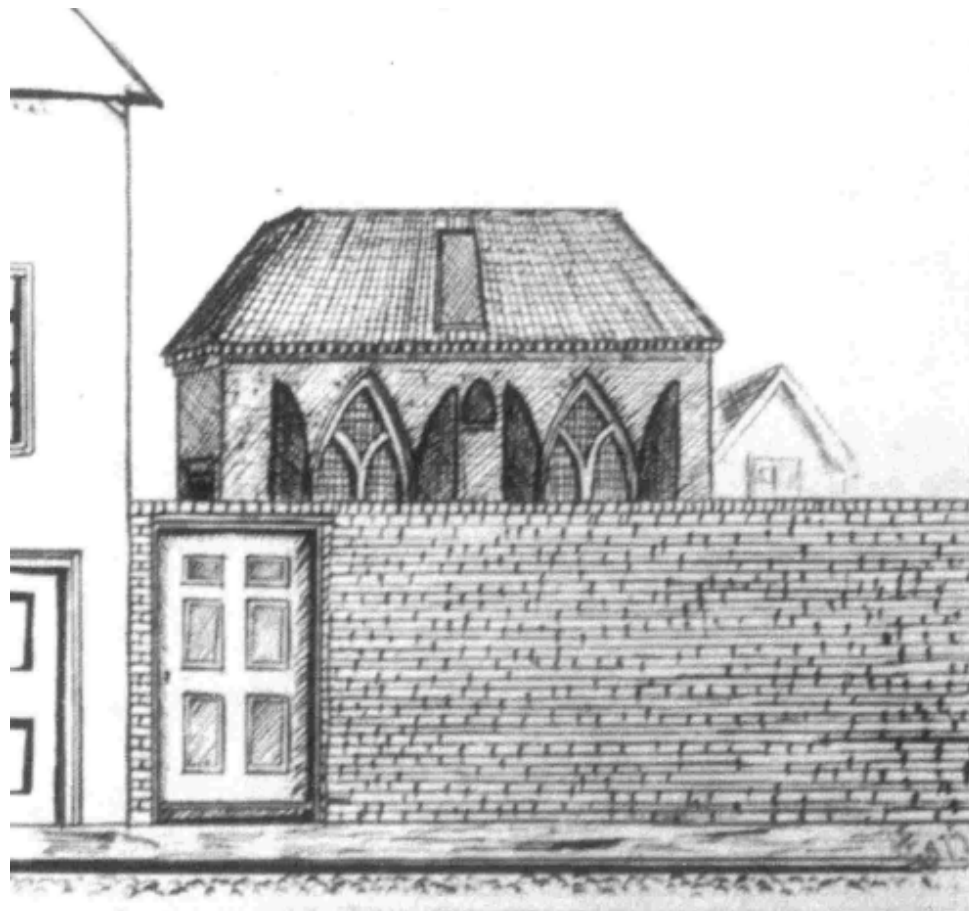
The leading synagogue architect of the 1870s, Nathan Solomon Joseph said in his 1867 report to the Building Committee of the Central Branch Synagogue "Gothic architecture is scarcely admissible, being essentially Christian in its origin, its form and its symbols".

However, there are a few notable exceptions:

**Ipswich Synagogue, Rope Walk, Ipswich, Suffolk – Regency 'Gothick' (opened 1795)**

Ipswich can lay claim to an early and rare example of a Gothic Revival synagogue in England, built before Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin had popularised the style, and when Gothic was still spelt 'Gothick'.

The synagogue was built between 1792-5, with the building described as "a brick building with pointed windows" in White's Directory of Suffolk, 1844. The windows appeared to have prominent brick surrounds and were divided into three lights each by simple Gothic glazing bars. The synagogue is believed to have been demolished in 1877.



**Synagogue at Rope Walk, Ipswich - sketch from the 1800s**  
(source: 'suffolkinstitute.pdfsrv.co.uk')

**Former North Church Street Synagogue, Sheffield (opened 1872)**

The only surviving Victorian English synagogue built in a simple Gothic style. It was designed by John Brightmore Mitchell-Withers the elder (1838-94), an Anglican native of Sheffield.

The synagogue was built in red brick with two-centred Gothic arches, an arch with a pointed crown (its form derived from the intersection of two circles); an important element of Gothic architecture. Above its main door was a tall brick pointed arch, below that a tympanum of sandstone with a chronogram and inscription in Hebrew from I Kings 8: 33: "When your people Israel, having sinned against you, are defeated before an enemy but turn again to you, confess your name, pray, and plead with you in this house". Services were held in the synagogue until 1930; and the building still stands today.



**Former North Church Street Synagogue, Sheffield**  
(source: 'flickr.com')

In Ireland and particularly in Wales, synagogues built in the Gothic Revival style were more common. Somehow this self-imposed ban didn't exist there, and people didn't think that 'Gothic equals Anglican'. In Wales, this might be explained by the popularity and tolerance of Nonconformist religions, and the widespread use of the Gothic style of architecture when building chapels from the 1870s.

**Example of a Gothic Revival Synagogue in Ireland:****Great Victoria Street Synagogue, Belfast (opened 1872)**

The synagogue was a polychrome Venetian Gothic building of red brick, with black brick and stone decoration. The use of polychrome decoration would have been inspired by the work of John Ruskin (1819-1900). The synagogue was designed by Francis Stirrat, a Scottish architect working in Belfast; with many sources suggesting it was a collaboration with London-based architect Nathan Solomon Joseph.

It was an unusual style choice for a synagogue in a predominantly Catholic country or where the Irish Jews so acclimatised that they their cultures were merging, and they were adopting Catholic preferences.

The building continued as a synagogue until 1904 when the congregation moved to a new synagogue on Annesley Street. The building became an Orange hall and was then acquired by the Apostolic Church, however, by the late 1980s it had fallen into disrepair. A new church was to be built on the site which would retain the original façade but the façade collapsed in 1993 and was never rebuilt.



**Great Victoria Street Synagogue, Belfast**  
(source: 'patrickcomerford.com')



## Examples of Gothic Revival Synagogues in Wales:

### **Former Pontypridd Synagogue, Rhondda Valley (opened 1895)**

The Pontypridd Synagogue was very modest in appearance with Gothic pointed arches. It was built of rubble stone, with ashlar quoins, contrasting brick window dressings (now painted red) and a Welsh slate pitched roof.

Its design was in keeping with typical Welsh chapel architecture of the time and the building could be mistaken for just another chapel if it wasn't for the engraving of "PONTYPRIDD SYNAGOGUE" on the front elevation; the engraving being on the tympanum of the top pointed-arched window below the finialled gable. The use of this architectural style is not surprising given that the architect was J. Lloyd and the builder James Snelling, both local chapel builders. The synagogue was built in an elevated position above the Taff Vale Railway and could be seen from some distance. The synagogue closed in 1978, and the building converted into private flats which still exist today.



**Pontypridd Synagogue, Western Mail October 17, 1895**  
(source: 'blogs.timesofisrael.com')



**Former Pontypridd Synagogue - now flats 2022**  
(source: 'rightmove.co.uk')

### **Llanelli Synagogue, corner of Queen Victoria and Erw Roads (opened 1908-9)**

An Edwardian example of a pointed arched synagogue. Built in square blocks of grey sandstone with contrasting yellow brick dressings at the window surrounds, quoins and plinth. It has a pitched slate roof. The architect was Thomas Arnold and the builder John Evans, both local men.

The synagogue still stands today. The building had become derelict but was restored in 1988-9 and brought back into use as the Llanelli Free Evangelical Church.



**Former Llanelli Synagogue - now Llanelli Free Evangelical Church**  
(source: 'peoplescollection.wales')

### **Merthyr Tydfil Synagogue, Church Street (opened 1877)**

This was the third purpose-built synagogue in Merthyr Tydfil. The architectural style is simplified Gothic Revival but quite unlike the Welsh chapel architecture seen previously. This building has a gabled and double-turreted front, with a red Welsh dragon perched on the gable. It is built of snecked rubble stone with ashlar dressings and a steeply pitched roof of Welsh slate. The architect was Charles Taylor and the builder John Williams, both local to Merthyr.

Its location at the top of hilly Church Street made it highly visible within Thomastown. Its visibility and individuality providing proof of the position the Jewish community once held within Merthyr Tydfil.

The synagogue still stands today. The building closed as a synagogue in 1983 and has subsequently been used as a gym and Christian Centre before being bought by the Foundation for Jewish Heritage in 2019.



**Merthyr Tydfil Synagogue c.1978** (source 'alangeorge.co.uk' website)



#### d) Orientalism:

From the early 19th century people became fascinated with the Orient; the Orient becoming a frequent theme in literature and art. By the second half of the 19th century architectural style in Europe was being inspired by Moorish, Islamic, Byzantine and Indian elements; with domes, turrets and minarets being adopted. At the time the term 'Orientalism' wasn't used; instead, things were called Moresque, Saracenic or Byzantine.

Advances in building technology such as the use of cast iron for column supports to galleries meant that slim rods of iron could be substituted for solid masonry pillars which enabled the use of delicate Moorish forms, slender columns and horseshoe arches.

The Berlin Temple on Oranienburger Strasse completed in 1866 became the most celebrated expression of Orientalism in synagogue architecture in the second half of the 19th century. The 'Illustrated London News' published an engraving of this synagogue in 1866 which sparked the introduction of Orientalism into British synagogue architecture. The use of this 'exotic' style aiming to ensure that synagogues were not mistaken for churches.

The tripartite façade became an enduring feature of 19th century synagogue architecture. Theorists suggesting that a tripartite front imitated the appearance of the Temple of Solomon, whilst the use of a pair of turrets was reminiscent of the portal columns at the entrance to this temple named in the Book of Kings as Yahin and Boaz, symbolising stability and strength.



**Berlin Temple on Oranienburger Strasse 2016**  
(source: 'wikipedia.org')



**Berlin Temple on Oranienburger Strasse c.1885**  
(source: 'germanhistorydocs.org')



**Temple of Solomon, Jerusalem - illustration of how it might have looked**  
(source: 'freemason.com')



Examples of High Victorian Orientalism in synagogue architecture:

### ***Manchester's Park Place Reform Synagogue (opened 1858)***

This was the first synagogue in Britain to adopt the Oriental style, especially within its interior. The building style fused Venetian, Romanesque, Gothic and Moorish influences whilst using typically Victorian materials of brick, faience and stone dressings.

The external façade with its alternate courses of red and white brickwork and decorative window-heads was derived from Mamluk architecture. Whilst Muslim Spain inspired the interior ironwork arches which spanned the aisles, their spandrels filled with fretwork stencilling and bold horseshoes arch above the Ark.

The building was completely destroyed by aerial bombing during the Blitz in 1941.

### ***Princes Road Synagogue, Liverpool (opened 1874)***

The most lavish High Victorian Oriental synagogue in England, and older sister of London's New West End Synagogue. Both designed by the same architect; Liverpool-based Scottish architect George Audsley. It opened in 1874 and is Grade I Listed despite losing its exterior turrets in the 1960s. Its gorgeous mint green, stencilled and gilded décor contrasts with the rich jewel colours of the domed and turreted Ark.

Reasons for its Grade I listing include being "one of the finest 'cathedral synagogues' in Europe" saying "The building's eclectic Orientalist design represents both the Liverpool Jewish community's eastern origins and their desire to maintain links with the Holy Land but also emphasises their prominent and influential position within western society and identity as Anglo-Jews. It possesses an extremely ornate interior of exceptional quality reflecting the status and wealth of the synagogue's congregation. The interior's design and decoration display Moorish, Classical, Egyptian, Gothic and Romanesque influences."



***Princes Road Synagogue, Liverpool - with turrets (pre-1960s)***  
(source: 'thejewishweekly.com')

### ***The New West End Synagogue, Bayswater (opened 1879)***

It has much in common, both inside and out, with its 'older sister' – Liverpool's Princes Road Synagogue, which was designed by the same architect, George Audsley. It opened in 1879 and is also Grade I Listed.

Its architectural importance is "as a largely unaltered late Victorian building. The architecture and designed elements of the Synagogue illustrate many characteristics of that era's taste for the decorative arts including: exoticism, as seen in the eclectic style of the exterior which combines neo-Grecian, Romanesque, Assyrian and Moorish elements; intricacy of detailing, in the variety of capitals of the bimah (no two are the same) and in the arcade spandrels which each have a unique design; and polychromy in materials, as evidenced in the mosaic floor, alabaster and marble wall casing, and the stained glass."



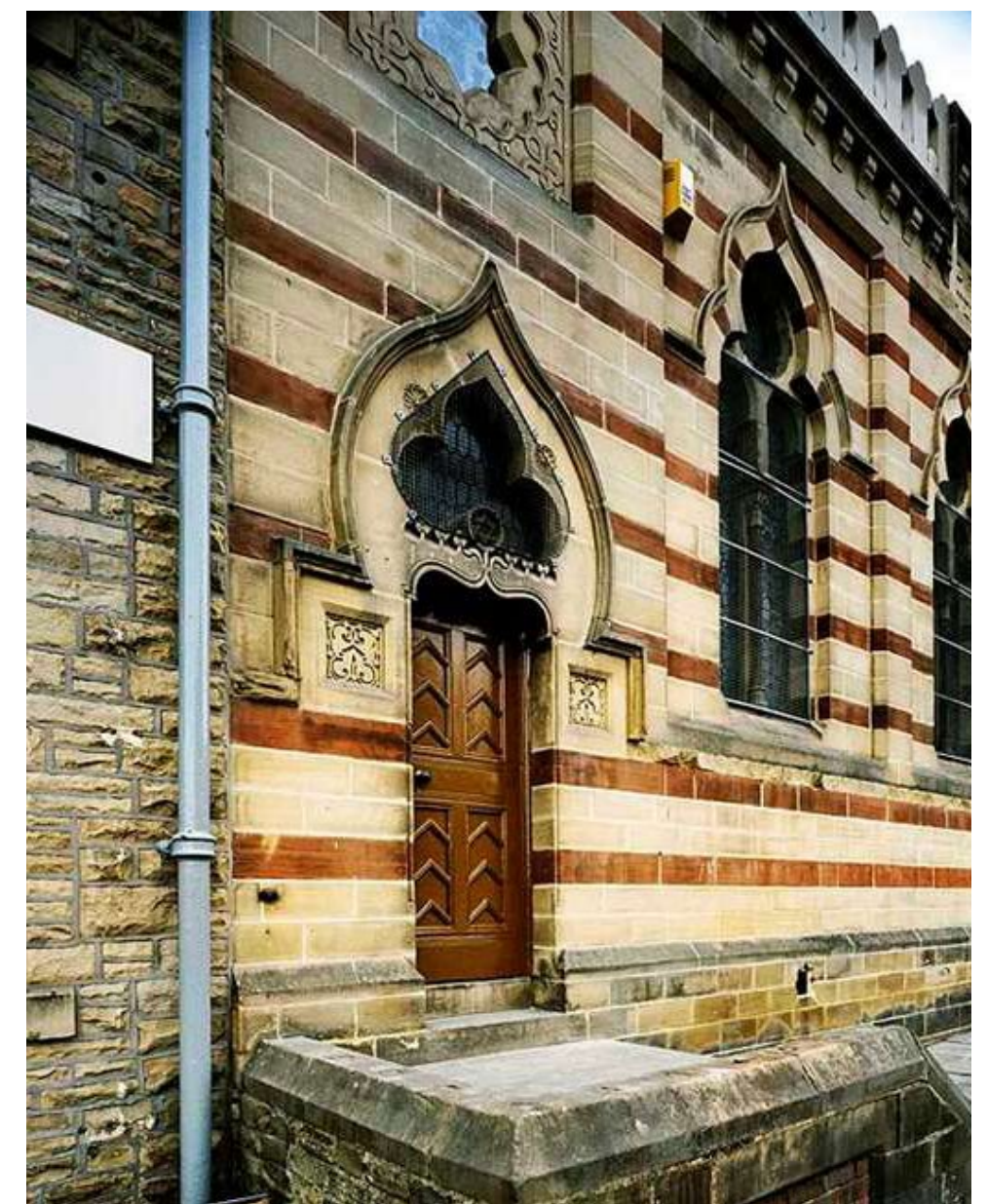
***New West End Synagogue, Bayswater - looking towards the ark***  
(source: 'shulbythesea.co.uk')

### ***Bradford Reform Synagogue, Bradford (opened 1881)***

Designed by local church architects the Healey Brothers, Francis and Thomas Healey. It featured exotic touches such as striped brickwork, horseshoe arches and a decorative cornice, inspired by a mixture of Mamluk Egypt, Moorish Spain and Mogul India. It opened in 1881 and is Grade II\* Listed.

Bradford was the first Reform synagogue in Britain to be built without an upstairs gallery, as such, women were seated on one side of the synagogue and men on the other.

Reasons for its designation include being "perhaps the most thoroughgoing example in England of a synagogue built in an eclectic Islamic Revival style, featuring Moorish, Mamluk, and Moghul styles both outside and inside, linking it with a late-C19 vogue for Orientalism in synagogue architecture across Europe" and that "the exotic design of this small provincial synagogue by Francis and Thomas Healey successfully emphasizes the religious difference of the congregation within the larger community".



***Bradford Synagogue, Moorish inspired exterior***  
(source: 'historicengland.org.uk')



## APPENDIX F STAINED-GLASS IN THE SYNAGOGUE

Historically there has been a comparative absence of stained glass, even in the greater synagogues, and where it has existed it has often been unimaginative in design. A strict interpretation of the words of the Second Commandment which condemns idolatry has been suggested as the reason for this is. Exodus 20:4-6 reads:

“Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them”

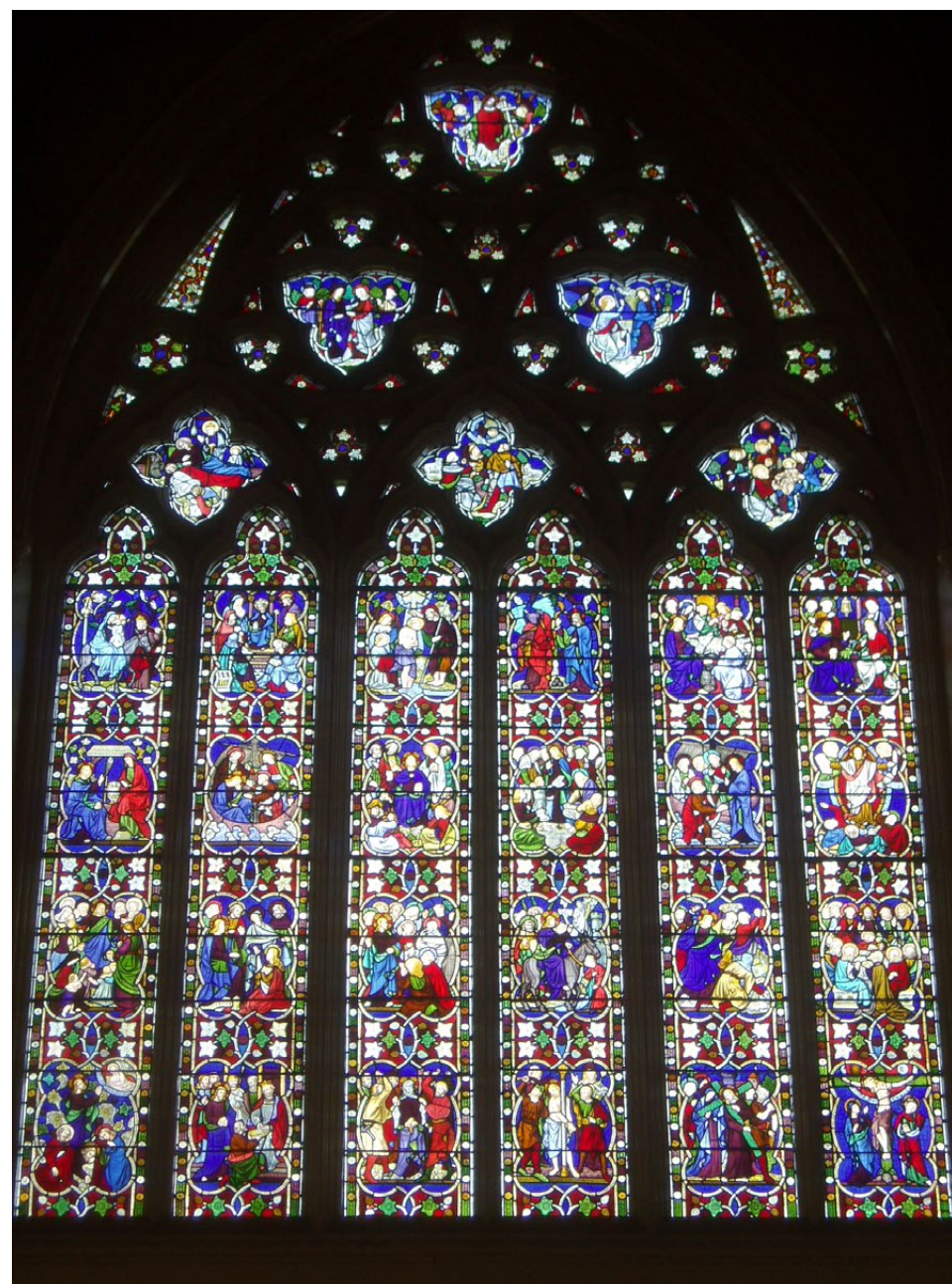
Synagogues built in England after the Resettlement of 1656 were originally lit by natural light through large round-headed windows filled with clear glass. **Bevis Marks Synagogue, London** is a good example of clear glass protected by iron bars, which looks much the same today as it would have done at the time of its construction in 1701.



*Bevis Marks Synagogue - windows (source: 'wikiwand.com')*

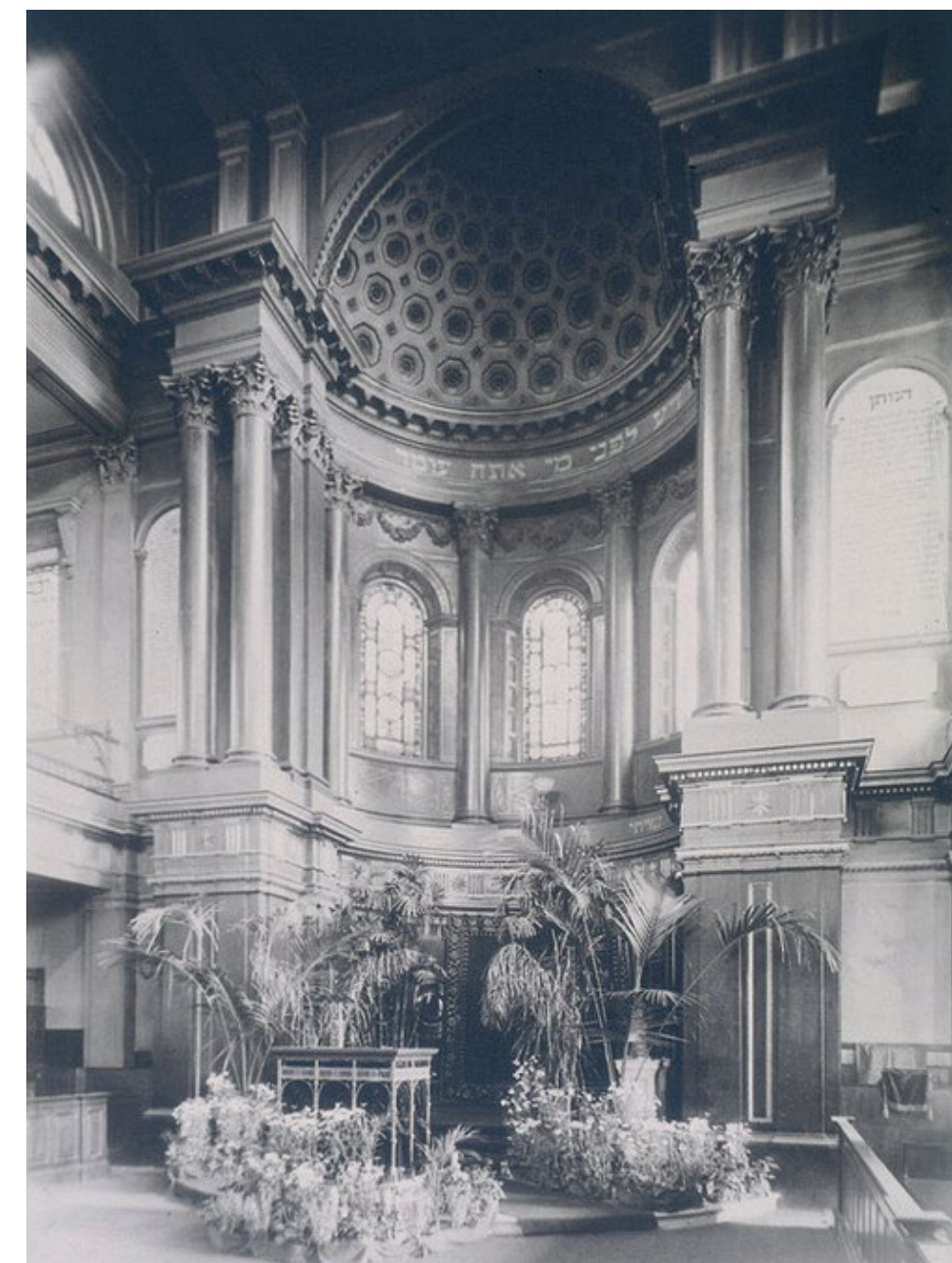
Stained glass reappeared in England in the early to mid-19th century along with Pugin (1812-52) and the Gothic Revival style. Pugin rejected enamel-painted pictorial windows and returned to the medieval styles and methods of stained glass, which employed a mosaic method of plain coloured glass given shape and form through the use of lead borders.

Pugin persuaded his friend John Hardman, a member of a Birmingham based metalworking family, to set up John Hardman & Co in 1838 to manufacture ecclesiastical metal work. Pugin then encouraged the firm's expansion into stained glass in 1845. A very successful collaboration followed. Pugin acted as its chief designer until his death in 1852, when he was succeeded by Hardman's nephew John Hardman Powell (1827-95). John Hardman Powell had trained as Pugin's apprentice and married Pugin's eldest daughter, Anne. Hardman & Co's windows can be seen in the churches, cathedrals and buildings of the 19th and 20th centuries.



*Erdington Abbey, Birmingham - west window by Pugin & Hardman 1850 (source: 'flickr.com')*

The first English synagogue to incorporate coloured glass – painted not stained – into its design was the Italianate **New Synagogue, Great St Helens, Bishopsgate Street, London** (opened 1838) designed by John Davies. Here, the Ark was in an apse (a large semicircular or polygonal recess in a church, arched or with a domed roof) backlit by 3 windows of richly painted glass.



*Interior of New Synagogue, Great St Helen's, Bishopsgate Street, London (source: 'magnoliabox.com')*

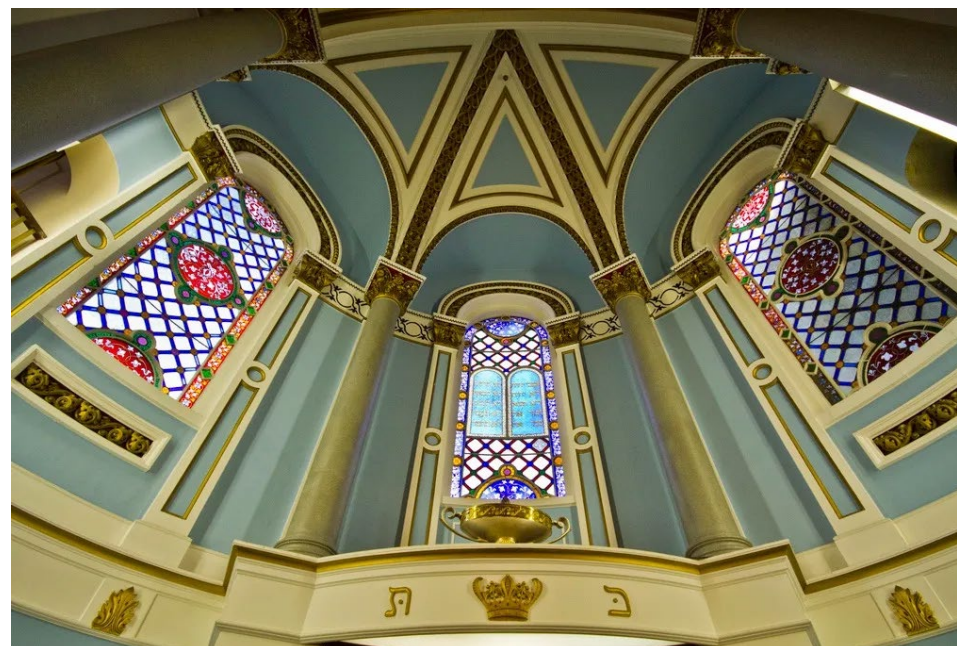


This set a trend for other synagogues to install stained glass behind their Ark in the 1850s. Examples include the following:

**a) Hull Hebrew Congregation Synagogue, 7 Robinson Row (opened 1827 & 1852 after a rebuild):**

This was Hull's first purpose-built synagogue which in 1827 had a seating capacity of 95. By 1851 the building had become unsafe and was too small for its community. During 1851-2 the synagogue was almost entirely rebuilt to accommodate the town's rapidly growing Jewish community, with seats provided for 200 men on the ground floor and 80 women in the gallery. Stained glass behind the Ark was incorporated into the 1851-2 rebuild.

The synagogue at Robinson Row was later used as a piano factory and was then demolished in 1928.



**Singers Hill Synagogue - stained glass windows above the Ark**  
(source: 'religionresources.org.uk')

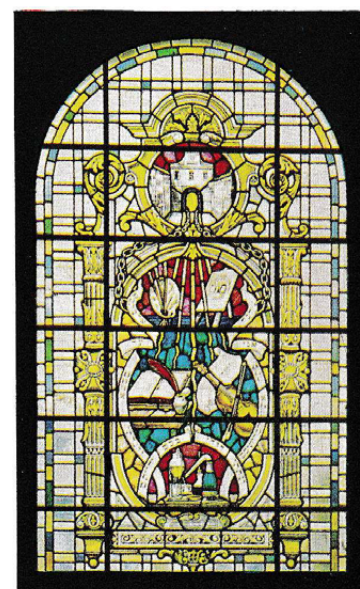
**b) Singers Hill Synagogue, Birmingham (opened 1856):**

This was the first truly 'Cathedral Synagogue' in Britain. The three stained-glass windows behind the Ark date from 1856, with the Luhot (Ten Commandments) featured in the central window. The fine red and blue glass rose window to the west of the synagogue also survives.

The historic glass was made locally by Chance Brothers & Company, whose glassworks were originally based in Spon Lane, Smethwick, West Midlands. One of their greatest achievements was to supply the glass used to glaze Joseph Paxton's Crystal Palace for the Great Exhibition of 1851, having just supplied the glass for Paxton's famous glass house at Chatsworth House.

Singers Hill Synagogue is now known for its modern stained glass installed between 1956-63, when figurative stained glass replaced simple leaded lights on the long walls. The new windows were executed by P.A. Feeny and D.B. Taunton of Hardman Studios of Birmingham, the leading stained-glass studio which had been associated with Pugin and the Gothic Revival in church architecture. These windows are unusual in their depictions of human forms. The subjects ranging from the traditional Bible stories and holidays to contemporary themes such as the 'Emancipation of the Jews,' 'World Aid to Israel' and the 'Emergence of Israel'.

**Singers Hill Synagogue, Birmingham - modern stained glass**  
(source: booklet 'The Stained Glass Windows of Singers Hill Synagogue' from 'jewishgen.org') - 2no. pages of 4no. to right



UL1. Emancipation of the Jews

**EMANCIPATION OF THE JEWS**

The emergence of Jews from subjection to freedom is graphically portrayed. The ghetto, surrounded by high walls, is seen with its gates wide open and its broken chains dangling, over a composite picture of modern Jewry's contribution to the world of medicine, art and music. A feature of the window is the canvas on the easel, on which is painted the East Window of our own Synagogue.

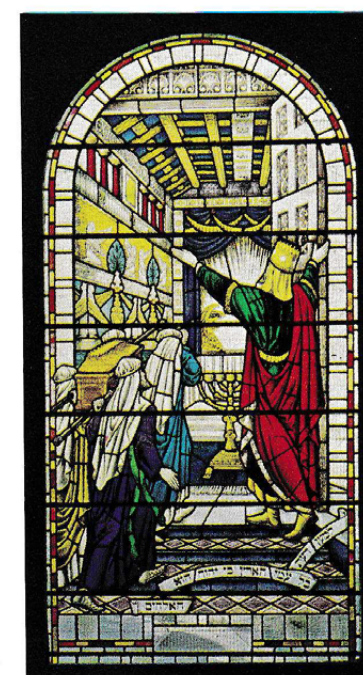
The prophetic words of the 37th Chapter of Ezekiel form the text —  
הנה אני פתח את קברותיכם ונתתי רוחי בכם והייתם והנחתו אתכם על אדמתכם  
"Behold I shall open your graves and place my spirit in you so that you may live. And I shall place you in your own land".

**SOLOMON'S TEMPLE**

The Ark of the Covenant is seen being taken into the newly completed Temple of Solomon for the service of consecration. The open doors reveal the Perpetual Light and one of the Cherubim within the Temple precincts.

King Solomon stands by the door with arms upraised in prayer to the Almighty.

The text is from the prayer Kings I. 8.60 —  
למען דעת כל עמי הארץ כי יהוה הוא האלהים  
"That all the people of the earth may know that the Lord is God, and that there is none else".



UL2. Solomon's Temple



**Singers Hill Synagogue, Birmingham - stained glass rose window**  
(source: 'religionresources.org.uk')



UL7. Emergence of Israel

**EMERGENCE OF ISRAEL**

This beautiful example of the craftsman's art has been adapted from the original design of a noted Jewish artist Mrs. Fay Pomerance, the successful contestant in a competition organised by the congregation. It vividly portrays the outstanding event of our time — the establishment of the new State of Israel.

The Menorah, symbol of the State, dominates the scene in the top medallion. The main design portrays various aspects of Eretz Israel today. The large blue and white flag of Israel flies over the buildings of the new Hebrew University and the Weizmann Institute. On one side will be seen an orange tree bearing fruit and on the other, a cactus or "Sabra", the name by which native-born Israelis are popularly known. The medallion at the foot of the window shows a typical scene of Kibbutz life — the farmer ploughs his field on a modern tractor whilst his guns are stacked by his side — a stark reminder of his preparedness against attack.

"Dedicated by the congregation to the revered memory of Ivan Shortt J.P. President 1943 - 1955".

**MARTYRDOM OF THE JEWS**

There is a stark simplicity to the design of this window which records the unparalleled tragedy of six million Jews murdered by the Nazis in Europe.

The upper medallion consists of one Yahrzeit candle, while the main theme is a replica of the Belsen Concentration Camp Memorial set against a background of fire.

Inscribed on the monument are the words —  
יזכר אל את רבבות היהודים. ארץ אל תכסי דמם  
"May God remember the myriads of Jews. Earth, hide not their blood".

The text is the opening phrase of Kaddish (the Mourners' Prayer) — יתגדל ויתקדש שמה רבא

In the lower medallion a man and woman are seen reciting memorial prayers.



UL8. Martyrdom of the Jews



**c) Hope Place Synagogue, Liverpool (opened September 1857):**

This was the home of the breakaway Liverpool New Hebrew Congregation, located next door to the Liverpool Hebrew School. The architect was Thomas Wylie of Liverpool who designed an ambitious building in Staffordshire white brick combined with coloured glazed brick and stone dressings. The synagogue had an Italianate façade, with a triple-arcaded open porch and side wings housing the reader's house and vestry. It was topped by a prominent dome covered in Belgian zinc, 24 feet in diameter, with a glazed arcaded drum. Matching small corner turrets were tucked between the front porch and side wings.

A pair of domed turrets was a feature that became fashionable for synagogues across Europe. However, it appeared at Liverpool's Hope Place Synagogue and Manchester's Orthodox Great Synagogue in the 1850s, ahead of the popularity of 'Orientalism' in the 1870s.

The interior of the synagogue was also ahead of its time, designed on a square plan under a shallow dome with an octagonal ceiling lantern. Its gallery, carried on iron columns, wrapped around the space in an elegant semi-circle. This domed 'Byzantine' plan became fashionable for synagogues later in the century.

Inside the synagogue, the Ark was flanked by two tall round-headed windows filled by a latticework design with margins. The windows stained by Mr Moss of Paradise Street, by whom they were presented to the congregation. Above in an ellipse was the 'all-seeing eye' a symbolic representation of God found in Freemasonry. Chief Rabbi Nathan Adler ordered its removal as he considered it in contravention of the Second Commandment.

Soon after the synagogue opened the dome was found to be unsafe and it was considered dangerous to hold services in the building. In 1862 Sir James Picton replaced Wylie's dome with an octagonal skylight in the form of a hipped saucer.

The synagogue closed in 1937, and the dome was removed in 1997 when the synagogue was converted into the Unity Theatre.



**Unity Theatre, Liverpool - entrance on Hope Place**  
(source: 'writebase.co.uk')

**d) Orthodox Great Synagogue, Cheetham Hill Road, Manchester (opened March 1858):**

Built following an architectural competition, which was the first to be held for the design of a synagogue outside of London. The winning architect was Thomas Bird (1811-75), a Gentile who had just designed Cheetham Town Hall which had opened in 1855 and stood opposite the future site of the synagogue.

Bird favoured the Italian Renaissance style, and the synagogue's extravagant street façade featured a Corinthian loggia with a pair of columns and entablature. Unusually, there was a pair of domed turrets which also featured at Manchester's Orthodox Great Synagogue, ahead of the popularity of 'Orientalism' in the 1870s.

The interior of the synagogue featured a single stained-glass window inserted over the Ark. An article in the 'Illustrated Times, 2 May 1857' on the laying of the foundation stone said "The hall is lighted by twenty windows, and by one of stained glass in the centre of the east end over the Ark. This is to be of an arabesque pattern, and at the top of it is written the word 'Jehovah' in Hebrew characters." The synagogue also included a clerestory lit by 8 stained glass windows, four on each side. Later pictures show the window over the Ark with a Star of David, either a later addition or the original design was never installed.

The synagogue was abandoned and sold in 1977 and demolished in 1981 after falling into disuse.



**Interior 1958 Orthodox Great Synagogue, Cheetham Hill Road, Manchester**  
(source: 'jewishmiscellanies.com')

Few synagogues started life with stained glass. This was usually added later, donated by wealthy patrons. A good example being:

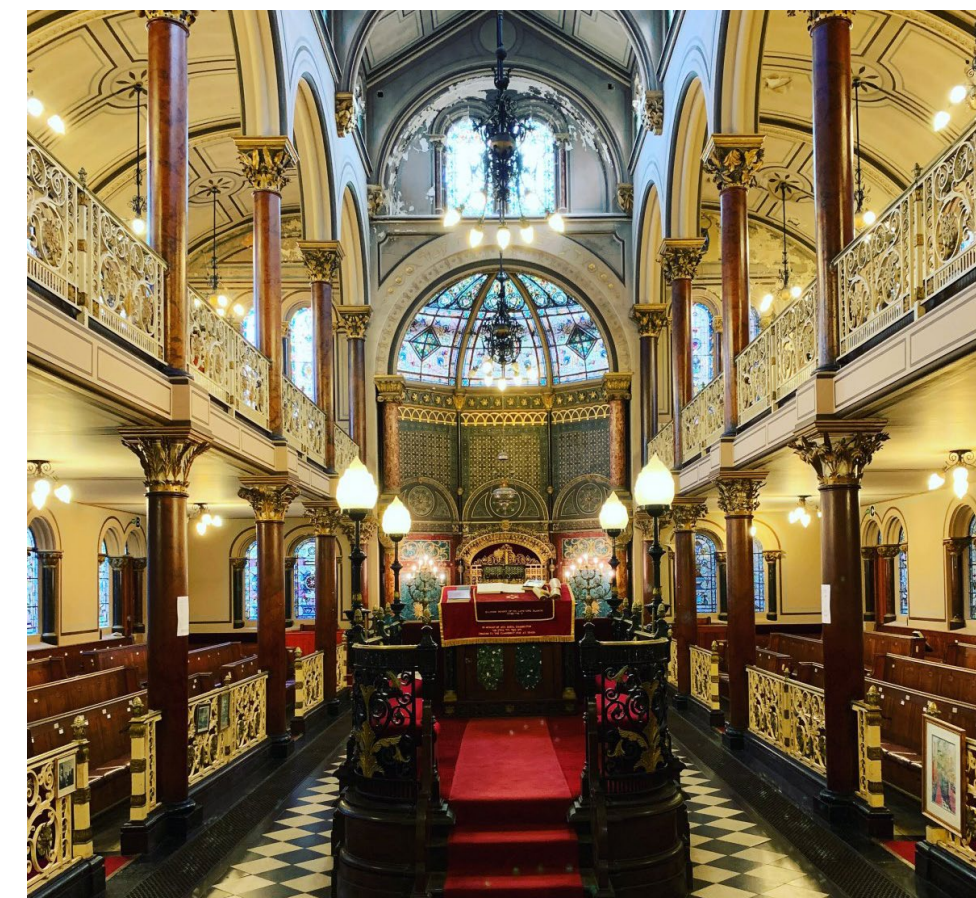
**Middle Street Synagogue in Brighton (opened in 1875)**

whose original windows were of plain cathedral glass, tinted and leaded in geometrical designs, some of which still exists on its west front.

Middle Street Synagogue was designed by Brighton architect Thomson Lainson, after winning a competition in 1874. The building had a low-key Italian Romanesque façade of yellow-white brick. Colour being introduced by polished Aberdeen granite columns either side of the front door, windows with shafts of red Mansfield stone and by red and blue-glazed brick dressings over the windows and along the cornice.

This low-key exterior does not prepare the visitor for its sumptuous interior; full of marble, brass, mosaic, stencilling, gilding and stained glass. Much of this donated by the Sassoon family, the synagogue's main patron. Following the opening of the synagogue, its magnificent interior evolved over the next four decades or so. Middle Street was unusual in that stained-glass panels were inserted into the semi-dome apse behind the Ark. It also claims to be the earliest synagogue to have installed electricity, in 1892. It was described as "after the Royal Pavilion, the most spectacular interior in Brighton" by the author, historian and conservationist Anthony Dale (1912-93). The building being designated a Grade II\* listing in 1971.

Regular services in the synagogue ceased in 2004 with the building now only open for special occasions and group visits. A Feasibility Study is to be undertaken to research and evaluate the various options that could bring the building back into regular use and provide a sustainable future.



**Middle Street Synagogue, Brighton - interior**  
(source: 'middlestreetsynagogue.co.uk')



Not everyone was a fan of bringing stained-glass into the synagogue. The Jewish architect Nathaniel Delissa Isaac Joseph (1859-1927) known as Delissa Joseph, who was a prolific designer of synagogues said “The bulk of our synagogues have been ruined by their windows. Good buildings have been darkened and made ridiculous by the introduction of ill designed, badly coloured, or over-coloured glass, and generally speaking, a synagogue is better without coloured glass – better lighted, and freer from distracting elements.”

Very few stained-glass designers and craftsmen have been Jewish, historically due to them having been excluded from craft guilds. Exceptions include:

**Ervin Bossanyi** (1891-1975) the Hungarian Jewish refugee, left Nazi Germany for England in 1934. His work includes the beautiful Rose Window above the Ark in the New West End Synagogue, Bayswater. Installed in 1937 in memory of Emma, Lady Rothschild, it illustrates numerous aspects of Jewish ritual and tradition. He created stained glass windows for Senate House Library, University of London, the Tate Gallery ('The Angel Blesses the Women Washing the Clothes'), the Victoria and Albert Museum ('Noli me tangere'), York Minster, Canterbury Cathedral, and the President Woodrow Wilson memorial chapel in Washington National Cathedral, Washington DC, among others.

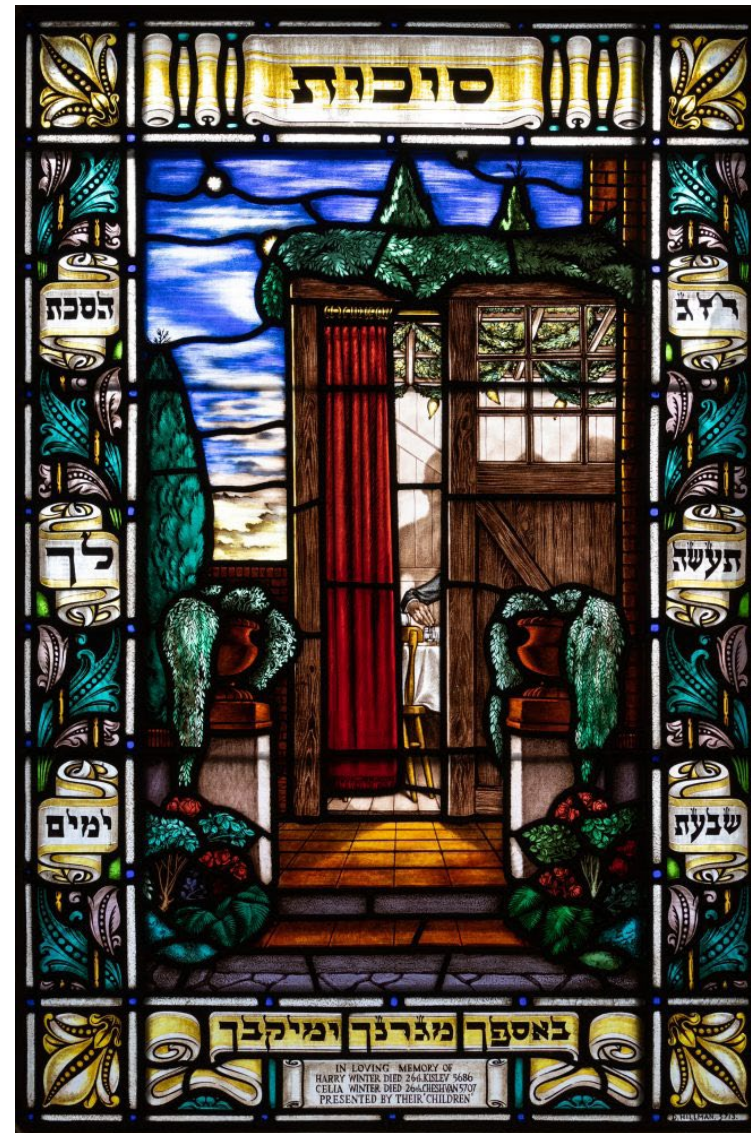


**Ervin Bossanyi stained-glass at York Minster made 1944 and installed 1975 (source: 'visitstainedglass.uk')**

The most prolific Anglo-Jewry stained-glass maker was undoubtedly David Hillman (1894-1974). He was born in Riga, Latvia and came to England when he was fourteen. He was the only son of Rabbi Samuel Isaac Hillman, minister of the South Portland Street Synagogue, Glasgow. David was among the first student intake at Glasgow School of Arts and then attended the Royal Academy Schools in London. His father tolerated his unconventional choice of career on the condition that he continued his Yeshivah education. David actually went on to qualify as a Rabbi.

He gained commissions for stained-glass at many prestigious London synagogues including the Bayswater Synagogue at Chichester Place, Central Synagogue on Great Portland Street and St John's Wood. Hillman was a member of St John's Wood Synagogue which in now the largest repository of Hillman glass in the country.

Hillman utilised traditional symbolism in an original way. His works included images of flora and fauna, landscapes, planets and musical instruments. His images were accompanied by apt biblical quotations, often from Psalms or the liturgy, reflecting his rabbinical training. However, Hillman also dared to push the boundaries of what was permitted with partial depictions of the human form.



**David Hillman panel at St Johns Wood Synagogue (source: 'visitstainedglass.uk')**

It was not until the 1950s that the taboo on representation of the human figure in British synagogue glass was finally broken. The depiction of the female face and form being even more daring.

Synagogue glass had tended to confine itself to the symbolic, employing well established symbolism, such as the Menorah (seven-branched candelabrum), Magen David (Star of David), Luhot (Tablets of the Law), or ritual connected with the Jewish calendar or insignia of the Twelve Tribes of Israel. Often considered unimaginative.

The **Brighton and Hove Reform Synagogue on Palmeira Avenue (opened 1968)** managed to depict traditional subjects in a modern stylised way within its extraordinary stained-glass windows by the artist John Petts. The 3.4m high doors of the Ark are constructed of glass in steel frames in the form of round-headed Luhot. The long stained-glass windows above fill the length of the east wall above the Ark. Images include the central Burning Bush in fiery reds and yellows, contrasting with the cool blues of the surrounding glass windows which depict symbols such as the Star of David, the Tree of Life and key Jewish festivals. It has been described as “The Guernica of Brighton” and “one of the great religious artworks of the 20th century”.



**Brighton and Hove Reform Synagogue, John Petts 1966-67 Image (source: 'architectsjournal.cco.uk')**



The more daring 1960s synagogues incorporated large expanses of stained or coloured glass. **Carmel College Synagogue, Wallingford, Oxfordshire (opened 1964)** by Tom Hancock features multi-coloured plate glass windows by Nehemia Azaz (1923-2008). His work was bold and colourful and employs a glass technique known as dalle de verre which uses pieces of coloured glass set in a matrix of concrete and epoxy resin or other supporting material. The use of thicker glass produced deeper colours than traditional leaded stained-glass and the resulting panels are durable.



**Carmel College Synagogue, 'Six Days of Creation' & Commemorative Windows 1964-5** (source: 'nehemiaazaz.com')



**Carmel College Synagogue, 'Six Days of Creation' & Commemorative Windows 1964-5** (source: 'nehemiaazaz.com')

By the end of the 20th century and into the 21st century, the fashion for stained and coloured glass gave way to a desire for natural lighting and the use of plain or frosted glazing.

An excellent example of a modern British synagogue making use of natural lighting is the **Belfast Synagogue, Somerton Road (opened in 1964)** designed by the modernist architect Eugene Rosenberg of Yorke, Rosenberg, Mardell. The synagogue design was unusual and innovative; circular, not rectangular. The roof being held up by concrete-covered beams that form the shape of a Star of David. Natural light floods in from full-height double-light strip windows in the façade and glazing in the roof above. The bronze and silver letters that adorn the Ark doors are by the Israeli sculptor Nehemia Azaz. The building was designated a Listed Historic Building in 2015.



**Belfast Synagogue, Somerton Road - interior** (source: 'yelp.co.uk')



**Belfast Synagogue, Somerton Road - interior** (source: 'k-larevue.com')

Another modern synagogue devoid of stained-glass is the rebuilt **Liberal Jewish Synagogue, St Johns Wood (opened in 1992)**. However, this synagogue is also without much natural light; the interior of the synagogue being noticeably dark and reliant on electric lighting.



**Liberal Jewish Synagogue, St Johns Wood** (source: 'msarchts.com')



**Liberal Jewish Synagogue, St Johns Wood** (source: 'liberaljudaism.org')



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