

Little Newcastle Church 150

On 8 September, 1870, plans for the rebuilding of St Peter's Church, Little Newcastle, were approved. This was to be the third re-building the church was to witness in seventy years, but it differed from the first two in a number of respects, as Richard Davies reports



Firstly, the incumbent, Revd Arthur Richardson, employed an architect, E H Lingen Barker, to oversee the work. Barker had a wide practice and his handiwork can be seen in a number of the churches of this diocese and beyond.

Secondly, Barker's plans were not curtailed by the dimensions of the medieval church: the north aisle had been lost at a much earlier date but had been partially regained during the restoration at the start of the 19th century and totally recovered during the work carried out in the 1840s. But Barker swept away the north aisle, widened the nave, broadened and lengthened the chancel and added a porch and vestry.

Barker was also fully aware of the latest ecclesiological trends and sought to implement them. Whereas the church of the 1840s was essentially backward-looking in its layout, its successor, though architecturally undistinguished, was to incorporate features which would have pleased the adherents of the Oxford Movement: the font in the 'correct' position by the door, the high ceilings, the pulpit and organ flanking the broad chancel arch, the raised chancel and the additional two steps leading up to the sanctuary.

It was rustic Tractarianism, as much as a small Welsh parish could afford, and such desirable features as a reredos and stained glass windows were probably not even contemplated.

Raising funds, even for this modest structure, was probably a struggle. Work did not commence until 1872 and proceeded in sections. The re-opening service did not take place until July 1875, and the morning service was graced by the presence of the Bishop, Rt Revd Basil Jones, who preached. For the afternoon service, there were two Welsh sermons, delivered by Revd W Evans (Rhymney) and Revd D Evans (Llanrhystud) and yet another two Welsh sermons, for the now pew-hardened parishioners, in the evening service, given by Revd Rees Evans (Llandybie) and Revd Henry Jones (St Dogmaels).

In 1970, the church celebrated the centenary of the granting of the permission for the rebuilding to proceed and we had hoped to mark the 150th anniversary in September. Covid-19 will probably prevent this, so 2022 or 2025 will have to be considered instead. Whenever we celebrate, we are grateful for the efforts of our forefathers; we have entered into their labour.