

## Small Pilgrim Places Journal 51:

### The Pales Meeting House, near Llandrindod Wells, Powys

The county of Powys covers the hills and valleys of mid-Wales to the east of the Cambrian Mountains. Between Llandrindod Wells to the west and Kington to the east, above the village of Llandegley, is patch of land that has been used as a Quaker place of worship for many generations.

George Fox, the founder of Quakerism, visited this region (previously known as Radnorshire) in 1657, and subsequently twice more. The movement grew here despite dreadful persecution, with Friends meeting in farmhouses. Before long there was a need for land for a burial ground. A site in the hills above Llandegley was offered in 1673, and in about 1717 the building which still stands today was constructed here. It became known as The Pales because, as a deed of 1694 says, it was "fenced in round about".

Hospitaller Jeff Glyn-Jones wrote to me that the paled area was:

"...donated by someone either of the Friends or a sympathiser. The persecution of the Quakers in the early years was considerable and the CofE not tolerant of non-conformists until the great Welsh resurgence of the 1730's when the Meeting was already established.

'Beyond the pale' was an expression of the time, as now, and the Quakers were not allowed to be buried in consecrated ground, with the result, countrywide, that Friends needed a spot away from likely desecration in order to bury their dead. 'The Pales' Meeting House came afterwards as a place of worship where people would come from many miles to join in the fellowship of likeminded people."

The stone building today sits adjacent to a narrow lane that winds up the shoulder of hill heading from lowland, hedged meadows and pasture towards thin-soiled, windblown, sheep-grazed grassland. A small unlocked gate at the lower end of a blind wall leads round the side of the building, where the beauty of the meeting house and its surroundings begin to reveal themselves.



The squat single-storey building sits under a neatly-thatched roof. The door to the porch was padlocked but Jeff had given me the code so I could enter and look round the two rooms inside. The meeting room itself is very simply furnished, with chairs set in the round.



The second room contains a wood-burning stove and facilities for refreshments. A rather unlikely addition is a bier, presumably used historically for burials. I noticed a rather charming addition to the bier: a couple of tea towels neatly hung over its handles - quite a sensible extra duty for them since the bier was parked near the sink. In Victorian times there had been a school here, and one teacher was the American Yardley Warner, a prominent campaigner for the rights of slaves.



A Wardens Cottage adjoining the meeting house was built for Warner and his wife Anne. The cottage still stands, although when I visited it was unoccupied, and its little vegetable plot untended. The rest of the grounds, however, although a little overgrown from verdant spring growth, are quite delightful. A burial ground, with a few dozen graves marked by identical headstones, lies next to the warden's cottage.



Beyond it is a small copse holding a variety of fruit trees, willows and other native trees, where the sward was carpeted with Spanish bluebells. The lower ground, edging open farmland, held a beautiful garden planted with heathers, acers and geraniums centred around a peace pole and a pond where water lilies and bog bean flourished. A wooden bench by the pond became an ideal picnic spot for me and my dog, a good vantage point for admiring the far-reaching view across a wide valley and hills beyond.

The future of this idyllic meeting house, burial ground and garden has been under discussion for some years and remains uncertain, but the Management Group continue to search for a sustainable future for the Pales. Their main aim is to keep it as a venue for workshops, retreats and other purposes that would value the natural beauty of its surroundings, its abiding spiritual atmosphere, and its invitation as a place of worship where everyone is welcome. Since Ali's visit, The Pales is now under the care of Addoldai Cymru, The Welsh

Religious Building Trust, a charity set up to take into ownership a selection of Welsh chapels and meeting houses that are historically and/or architecturally significant to the story of chapel building and Nonconformity in Wales and that are valuable to their local communities. It continues to be available for use for workshops, retreats etc., and a contact email is on the entry for The Pales on the SPPN website if you wish to visit.