

# ST. PAUL'S CHURCH, CWM CENTENARY YEAR 1982

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A HISTORY BY  
ROLAND C. READ



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**A History of  
St. Paul's Church, Cwm**



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St. Paul's church council acknowledges the devotion of the author in the preparation of this history, and the assistance of Mr. F. E. A. Yates of Starling Press Ltd. in its publication. We remain indebted to them both.

# Foreword

by the Lord Bishop of Monmouth

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The last quarter of the nineteenth century saw much building of churches to provide evangelistic outreach and pastoral care for the rapidly expanding population of South-east Wales, and the erection of the Church of St. Paul, Cwm, was one of the churches in that programme of development.

But the story of the first hundred years of its life, which is told in this booklet, fills in the necessary information to make that individual and particular story come alive.

Mr. Read has given us the necessary social and industrial background, the record of local events—some of them achievements, and some disasters—and brief assessments of the people involved in the developing account of the fortunes of the worshipping community, whether priests or laypeople, who contributed to that story, and made it distinct from any similar account about any other church.

He is the better able to do this because by his own long and devoted service to his Lord in the Church in that whole area he has known personally, and supported loyally over many decades, those prominent in the Church community about whom he now writes. The writing has been for him a labour of love.

He has set down for posterity, at a significant moment for thanksgiving within the St. Paul's community, a worthy record of faithful worship and obedient witness to Christ.

Because it is a warm and intimate story, well told, it will inspire pride in the past and determination for the future which will give new spirit to young and old in the congregation which maintains the witness of the Church in Cwm today.

I commend this booklet warmly, not only to the local Christian fellowship but also to a wider readership as an encouragement and a challenge to continuing faithfulness amid the difficulties of today.

✱ DERRICK MONMOUTH

July 1982.

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## Early days

The Rev. William Cox, in his "Historical Tour in Monmouthshire" (1801) has very little to say about the Ebbw Valley, but there are points that are of interest.

Coming up the valley of the little "Ebwy" he mentions Cwmtillery and the parish of "Aberystwith" and also Nanty-glo.

The valley was very fertile and so little English spoken that if it were not for the fact that he had as a guide the Vicar of Trevethin (Mr. Williams) he could not have made himself understood.

From Nanty-glo he went "round the northern extremity of a mountain sometimes called Beacon Hill" and so he enters the valley of the "Great Ebwy" which he describes as "bounded by ranges of hills feathered with trees and traversed by a mountain torrent." The scenery, here, is more wild and there are fewer inhabitants.

"Art has also introduced a striking difference, in the other vale (meaning the "Little Ebwy"). The path, continually ascending and descending, ran along the rugged sides of the beacon mountain; here the way is a railroad carried over an artificial terrace."

He mentions later this same "rail road", which runs over a bridge at Aberbeeg, and he also tells of the canal at Crumlin.

Surely this is sufficient evidence for the rail road (tram road) which once carried the products of the furnaces either at Beaufort or Ebbw Vale down to the head of the canal at Crumlin, thence to Newport.

This rail road passed near the "Crown House" (now demolished) and in front of "The Boot" which was at the top of Crosscombe Terrace and continues on much the same track as does the present railway.

selected Messrs. Coombes, Edgar Williams, Tomlinson, P. C. Jones, Walter Court, Challenger.

For St. Mary's, Victoria: Messrs. Pugh, Taylor, D. Collins, J. Price, E. Parfitt, Lewis, Jones and Daniel Jenkins. The vicar selected Messrs. W. Price, J. Jones, G. Hawkins, Prickett, R. Tullie, T. J. Parry.

Mr. T. Parry was elected hon. secretary of St. Mary's, Victoria, and Mr. J. Wilcox of St. Paul's. Mr. Wilputte was treasurer of St. Mary's and Mr. G. Pratten St. Paul's.

### Developments

During the ministry of Mr. Croft the vicarage and the Parish Hall were built and the extension to the Church was completed. The house was in use by 1907, but of the contractors or the architect, there is no record.

Over the building of the Parish Hall we are better informed.

The site (563 square yards or thereabouts) was bought from the Ebbw Vale Company for £59.11s.8d.

The contractor was James Snelling, builder, of Cwm. He contracted with the vicar and the committee to complete the building for £1,050 by December 31, 1903—"and, in default thereof, he will pay a penalty of two pounds, ten shillings per week for every week the work after that date shall remain incomplete, and that the work be done to the entire satisfaction of Mr. L. Coombes, Railway View, Cwm, Mon." This was signed by Mr. Snelling on August 1, 1903.

The Rev. Coleman Williams had put aside £200 as a nucleus for a Parish Hall fund. The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge made a grant of £145 upon certain conditions but this money was not paid until September, 1907, and the conditions are inserted in the Trust Deeds (now in the Registry at Cardiff).

Between 1900 and 1908 the parish had raised, by voluntary subscription, £1,300 towards the building fund for the Parish Hall, so that by 1908 the building had been more than paid for, £1,645 having been contributed. Some of this money would have been spent on furnishings and other fees.

The growth of the parish by the end of the first decade of the century was considerable and it was felt that it was time to enlarge the church. A faculty, dated July 27, 1909, gives us some idea of what was to take place.

The Church then consisted of a nave and chancel, with a vestry on the north side and a south porch.

It was proposed to: "thoroughly repair the church and to enlarge it by extending the nave seating over the present chancel. To erect a new chancel, north aisle, organ chamber and vestry on the north side of the new chancel with a heating chamber underneath. To construct a tower to the height of sixty feet—and to provide for an additional vestry in the tower on a level with the floor of the

new north aisle—the arcade between the nave and the aisle to be built of Bath stone”.

The estimate was £1,780 and it was contemplated carrying out the whole of the work “except the Tower which was to be deferred until funds permit.” The actual work was estimated at £1,500 of which £200 had been raised by subscriptions and grants; £200 was borrowed by the parish from the Llandaff Church Extension Society at 2½ per cent interest and a further loan of £700 had been borrowed from the London and Provincial Bank, Ebbw Vale. The balance of £400 required to complete the work was to be raised by subscriptions.

The church provided accommodation for 197 but there would be an additional seating for a further 124 people, thus making the seating capacity in all 321, which is about the number at present.

The tower was never added.

During the alterations, services were held in the Parish Hall.

The work on the church was completed and the church re-consecrated on May 24, 1910.

Mr. Croft served as Vicar from 1900 to 1914 and then was appointed to Mountain Ash.

He was able to look back over those years with great satisfaction and much joy in his first parish as a vicar.

The Rev. D. J. Sproule was instituted on June 24, 1914.

The parish of Cwm had a population of 12,000 and our Sunday Schools an attendance of 360 children.

Our Junior School met at 2 o'clock and a Senior School at 3. In order to get a seat in Church for Evensong you had to be there half an hour before the service began, and at festivals chairs were carried from the Parish Hall.

Mr. Sproule had served as Curate at St. Mark's Church, Newport, for four and a half years, and, coming to a parish as his first living, we can well imagine what a difficult task he faced.

There was a growing parish, and the outbreak of world war one brought many problems. Much was expected from him and there were many problems stemming from proposed Disestablishment and Disendowment of the Church in Wales.

Occasionally a minute book entry throws light on the trend of parish affairs. One entry is significant, for it points to a change that came about many years after it was made.

It concerns the Disestablishment: “proposed by Mr. E. D. Peters and seconded by Mr. W. J. Lewis, that we, in Vestry assembled, strongly protest against the unjust Bill for the Disestablishment and Disendowment of the Church in Wales.

“Mr. E. D. Fudge supported the proposition in a very able speech.”

The actual Disestablishment did not come into effect until 1919—the war intervened.

It is interesting to see names that have been associated with this parish in the past.

Mr. E. D. Peters was people's warden for many years and Mr. W. H. Peters, Vestry clerk.

Names that also appear quite frequently are G. G. Pratten, L. Coombes, R. E. Wickson, C. Read, W. D. Jones.

An entry dated April 22, 1919, reads: "The Vicar opened the meeting with prayer and remarked that this meeting was rather an historical one as it would probably be the last vestry meeting, owing to the passing of the Welsh Church Bill, which would come in force six months after peace was signed."

The Bill in fact did not abolish the Easter Vestry. It did, however, bring about the decline in the prestige of the office of Sidesmen, for under the constitution, drawn up for the Church in Wales, a great deal of their work was vested in the new Parochial Church Council.

It was at this meeting Mr. R. E. Wickson was elected people's warden.

On April 6, 1920, we have the election of the first Parochial Church Council. It was made up of: Mesdames Sproule, Pritchard, Roberts, Day, Read, Coombes, Peters, Saunders, Hill, Foley, Paget, Knee. Messrs. W. Walters, W. Foley, G. West, C. Saunders, C. Coombes, J. Evans, G. Pratten, C. Read and the secretary W. H. Peters. Ex-officio were Vicar and two church wardens. The wardens, Mr. L. Coombes and Mr. R. E. Wickson, were elected as the lay representatives for the parish on the Patronage Board. Thus the new constitution of the Church in Wales was brought into this parish.

But, another very important event had taken place that year. In his opening remarks at the vestry meeting the Vicar reminds the Parish that Victoria and Waunlwyd had been formed into a Conventional District, and his colleague, the Rev. E. V. Phillips, had been appointed its first curate-in-charge.

Thus the connection between Victoria and Cwm came to an end, after twenty years.

### Setbacks

The business at the meeting on May 5, 1920 was the Million Pound Fund. This was to be raised throughout the Province to replace some of the monies which had been taken from the Church in Wales when she was Disestablished and Disendowed.

It was decided to collect subscriptions and collectors were appointed.

At a meeting on June 7, 1920, the Council were forced to discuss "the havoc caused to the Church through subsidence". It was decided that to continue with the building programme was out of the question (this probably referred to the tower).



It was proposed that a temporary vestry be erected "inside the lower end of the north aisle".

On July 26, 1920, it was reported that £226.10s.3d had been collected for the Million Pound Fund and Miss Roberts (of the Mission) was thanked for her part in distributing leaflets for special services in connection with the Fund.

Miss Roberts for many years worked hard at the Mission. Her presence is still felt, her name revered and loved. Without doubt she played her part loyally in the work of the parish during her time here as a lay worker and district visitor.

There is little in the minute books concerning Miss Roberts or the Mission. It was a boot and shoe shop and was purchased by the Rev. D. J. Sproule and others, from Mr. T. J. Moore on July 14, 1915.

It must have been about this time, or a little later, that Miss Roberts came to the parish for, so we understand, the house was bought as living accommodation.

At first the premises, at Marine Street, were used solely as a house, but later a part of it was used by Miss Roberts for Sunday School work and as a weekly meeting place for women and girls.

After Miss Roberts's time, the introduction of weekly and Sunday services was made by Mr. R. C. Read.

By September, 1920 plans were being drawn up by Mr. L. Coombes for alterations at the Parish Hall, and in another minute (April 6, 1920) there is a brief reference to the organ fund. Mr. Sproule said "there was much to be thankful for and to take courage and go forward. The new organ had been erected free of debt, and general collections had increased."

In November, 1920, he asked that the magazine be reintroduced. It had been suspended, because of the cost of printing, in 1918. It was decided to publish for one year, but in fact it continued without a break from 1921 to 1933.

In 1921 the parish came of age and at the Patronal Festival on January 25 the vicar had as special preachers the Rev. J. L. Croft and Rev. L. Evans, a former curate who was in the parish for many years. He had married a Miss Pritchard from Victoria and his first son became the Archdeacon of Monmouth, the Ven. Ernest Evans, now retired.

In May, 1922, the vicar dealt with the proposed memorials to Mr. E. W. Peters, warden and Sunday school superintendent and Mr. G. Pratten the Verger and sidesman. The War Memorial for the 1914-18 war was also discussed.

The memorials to Mr. Peters and Mr. Pratten are the windows in the Sanctuary. The Unveiling and Dedication of the War Memorial windows was held on July 24, 1922. They were unveiled by Lt. Colonel J. Evans, D.S.O., T.D. and dedicated by the Archdeacon of Monmouth.

On May 29 the clearing of the church-yard and south side of the

church was talked over and it was decided to continue this work under the direction of Mr. L. Coombes, who was given the contract for the erection of a retaining wall. Unemployed members of the church were to carry out the work of clearing the site.

At a special meeting of the council on May 7, 1923, the plan drawn up by Mr. Coombes was discussed and it was agreed to follow it in detail.

A building committee was formed of Messrs. C. Read, W. Walters, W. D. Jones, E. Goddard, D. F. Jukes and the Vicar and Wardens. Later, at a meeting held on July 30, it was stated that a loan had been secured from Barclay's Bank for the work and the interest was 4 per cent. The sum borrowed is not stated.

### Changes

It is evident that a great deal of money had to be found to cover the expense incurred by the alterations. Part of this money was raised by various "efforts", a sale of work, a series of dances and socials, a Christmas forest of trees, church to hall trail of pennies, socials by the C.E.M.S., the G.F.S. and the Boys' Club.

But by far the greatest amount was collected in boxes distributed among parishioners and brought in by women collectors.

The church hall was reopened on October 24, 1923, by Mr. Croft.

The Rev. Daniel Williams was inducted on December 18, 1924, after Mr. Sproule left for Raglan.

It was not long before some of the new vicar's ideas were questioned at council meetings. He was very keen to give children a sound teaching in church doctrine and he suggested to the council that there should be a children's service in the Parish Hall on Sunday evenings and that he would train a rota of parishioners to carry out this work. There was much opposition to this idea, but it was decided to give it a trial.

He was also in favour of a budget and that the envelope system of collections for Missions be replaced by what he called "A Home Box System". The council agreed to give it a trial.

He also suggested that after general expenses had been met the vicar and church wardens be given power to allocate spare money to various societies. It is evident that the vicar was earnest in his support of missionary societies and this was one way the parish could help.

For the time being existing financial schemes remained in operation.

An annoying feature of some minutes is the way discussions arise relating to previous business which was not recorded.

A case in point is the purchase of an electric blower for the organ. In fact, it is not quite certain from the minutes (May 4, 1925) whether it had been purchased or not.

In any case, the outcome was that Mr. H. J. Lunn was to provide

further details. That, was the last we read of the subject. But, of course, a blower was ultimately installed.

Another case concerns the bell. In a minute dated August 19, 1926, Mr. B. Henry was thanked for the very good job he had made in repairing the bell.

At the same meeting the vicar stated he had received an offer of a Processional Cross in memory of Mrs. Zechbauer (at this time Mr. Zechbauer was choirmaster and organist).

Many objections were raised and it was suggested that a ballot be taken. This was not acceptable to the Vicar as he had decided to accept the Cross.

He had also selected new cassocks and surplices for the Choir. Again there were objections, raised on the grounds that the church account was already overdrawn.

The minutes from 1918 at the end of the First World War, to 1930, remind us frequently of the difficulties of raising money.

Industrial unrest at the end of the war led to the General Strike of 1926 which lasted six months. It certainly was a difficult time, yet attendance at church services was remarkable and the minutes of those days show us how, in spite of difficulties, many new ways of making money were introduced.

A dramatic society was formed and a village fayre was held with Cwm Band playing in the Vicarage grounds.

There was a Boys' Club, a Men's Club, a Girls' Friendly Society, Mothers' Union and a Sewing Guild. All assisted in keeping the church alive in difficult times.

### Tragedy

Minutes dated March 15, 1927 refer to the explosion at the Marine Colliery on March 1, when 52 men were killed. The Vicar referred to the explosion which had brought great sorrow to the Parish. Votes of condolence were passed with the bereaved. Letters of condolence were sent to the 11 church families who had been bereaved.

The remainder of the minute concerns itself with a letter from the Bishop. A crusade was to be carried out in the Deaneries and it would commence in June, 1928. A committee was formed to prepare.

The Crusade was a great success. Preachers came from all parts of the country and open-air services were held with the final speaker being the Bishop of Woolwich.

The Rev. Daniel Williams left the parish in April, 1932, having accepted the living of Llanddewi Rhydderch.

His successor the Rev. Basil Williams had served as a Curate at Chepstow for three years and then was given the living of Undy, where he stayed for four years. He was inducted in May, 1932.

The Church had now been built fifty years and as one would

expect many things needed attention. The church and the Parish Hall were redecorated and alterations made to the hall. This work was completed by September, 1935.

The Vicar suggested that a new altar and a clergy vestry be built at the west end of the Church. Plans were drawn up and by June 6, 1936, the Vicar had obtained patterns of frontals which were shown to the members of the P.C.C.

He read a letter from Mr. Coombes offering to erect an altar in memory of their parents who had played such an important part in having the church built.

An altar fund was opened to buy frontals. The white frontal was given by the Mothers' Union and the red one by the Sunday School; the remainder purchased from the Altar Fund.

The new altar was dedicated by the Bishop on October 28, 1936 and the original altar was placed in the north aisle which has been used as a Lady Chapel ever since. The clergy vestry was never built.

For many years almost every house in Cwm had two families but about this time Ebbw Vale Council began a housing programme which took many people away from Cwm and from St. Paul's. Much work had been done to the church and hall and much money had to be found—and the quota had been increased to £134.

The organisations played their part in raising money to meet rising costs and the Rev. Basil Williams, being keen on amateur dramatics, began a group known as St. Paul's Players which proved to be very successful and performed for many years.

During his Incumbency all churches in Cwm worked well together.

We are reminded of things like Religion and Life Week, open-air services, annual carol services when all came to the Parish Church.

Then there was the Coronation of King George VI when all churches held a service of thanksgiving at the Coliseum and a plea for a return to religion was made.

When the second world war began many of our young boys were called to serve in the forces, and when the possibility of an invasion came, all schoolchildren were evacuated from the South Coast to different parts of the country. We accepted a group of boys from Dover. The headmaster stayed at the Vicarage and the boys at different homes, and all attended morning service at the Church every Sunday.

Every effort was made to keep Church life active, and on Whit-Monday parents gladly parted with their Ration Books to purchase food for the annual tea.

Some of our boys never returned from the war and we have a Litany Desk in memory of them.

The Rev. Basil Williams left in 1949 for Portskewett.

The next incumbent was the Rev. D. Morgan Jones, who had served as a curate at St. Mark's, Newport and St. Mary's Aber-gavenny. While in Cwm he had to overcome many financial problems. The war had taught us our buildings were not properly

insured and many things needed attention—the heating and lighting systems for example.

Mr. Morgan Jones introduced a Gift Day which brought in a lot of money each year.

He was a much loved Priest, a good visitor and an extremely hard worker. He left for Caerleon in 1963.

The Rev. David Elias, a former curate of Aberavon and vicar of Magor was inducted in December, 1964 and many important changes took place during his ministry.

There was the question of Anglican-Methodist relations, and the revision of the Prayer Book in the Church of Wales with a revised Eucharist.

There were many problems to overcome. Many of our church people had by this time left the parish to live on the new housing estates at Ebbw Vale and Beaufort.

We were facing the difficulties of higher costs and smaller congregations. The quota was now £321.

Members of the P.C.C. made visits to people on the Electoral Roll and a follow-up was made by the vicar. Gift Day was kept and a home box system was introduced.

In June, 1972, Mr. Elias moved to Pengam.

During the short term of the last vicar of Cwm, the Rev. Roy Cale, we were discussing having to become part of the rectorial benefice of Ebbw Vale.

He left at the end of 1973, for Abersychan.

Around our church we have many memorials to many people who have taken an active part in the life of St. Paul's.

Soon after the Rev. J. L. Croft came he went down to the church one morning and found all the windows at the east end had been broken.

These were replaced by the three stained glass windows which are there now. One was given by the Croft family, one by the Church Wardens and people, and a third one by Mr. Croft with the following wording which I doubt will be seen on any other stained glass window: "For the wanton act of vandalism perpetrated by two boys, March 11, 1902."

St. Paul's became part of the Rectorial Benefice of Ebbw Vale in 1974, by Diocesan Decree. The new parish incorporated the former parishes of St. David, Beaufort (including Beaufort Hill), St. John's Parish, Christ Church, St. Mary, Victoria and St. Paul, Cwm.

So after nearly a hundred years the situation reverted to what it was in 1870.

The first Rector of the new Benefice was the Rev. Royston Clifford Wright, who appointed the Rev. John Peacock as vicar of St. David's, the Rev. John Ellis as vicar of Christ Church and the Rev. Peter Price as vicar of St. Paul's.

Canon Wright left in 1977 to become Archdeacon of Newport; John Ellis in 1976 to become vicar of Llanddewi Rhydderch; John

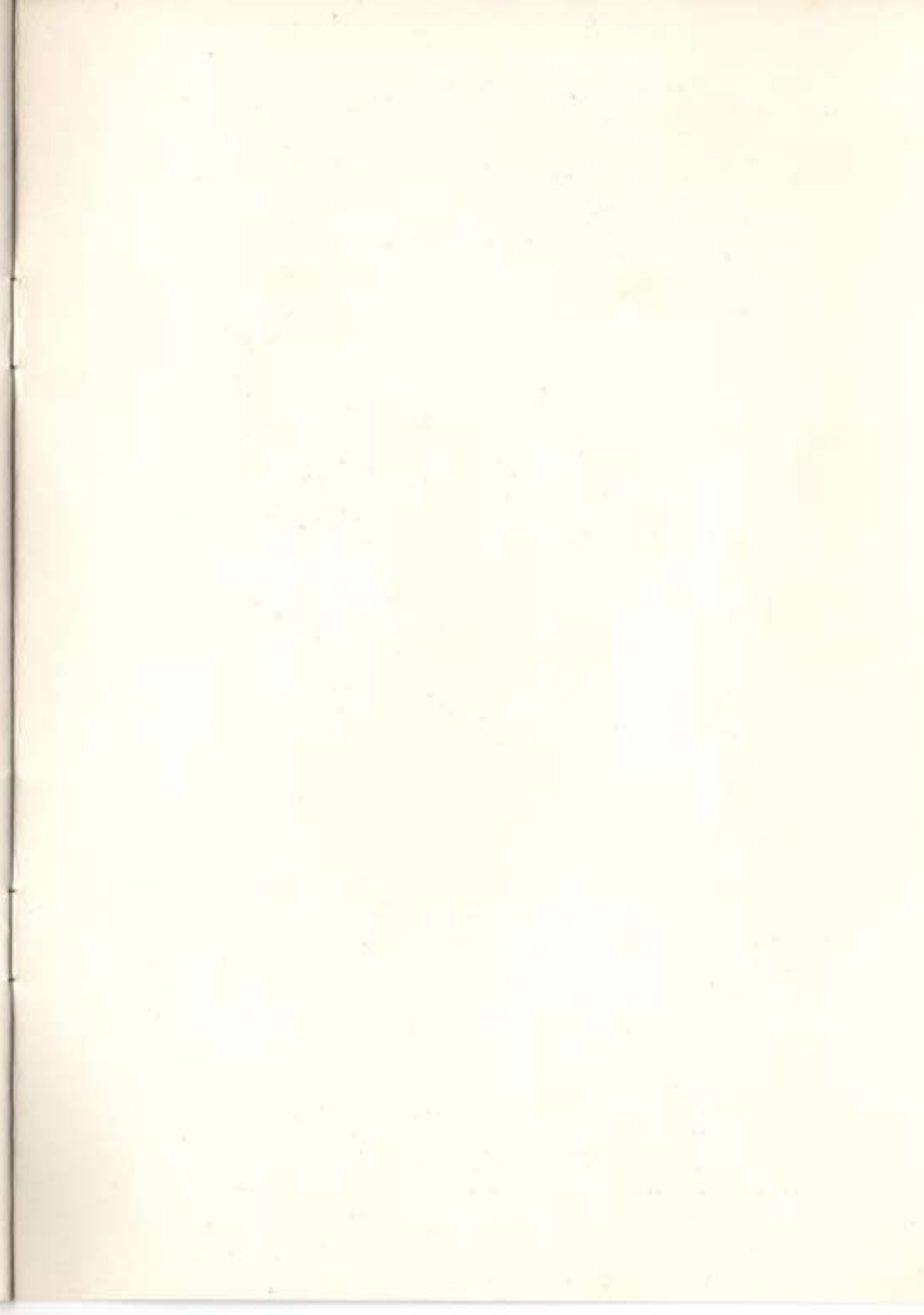
Peacock in 1978 to become vicar of Caerwent and Peter Price in 1977 to become vicar of Llanfihangel Crucorney.

In 1977 the Rev. Alfred Pryce Hawkins was appointed Rector and the Rev. Walter Jones was appointed vicar of St. Mary, Victoria. The Rev. John Humphries became benefice curate.

Because of the reduced manpower situation Vicar Jones also looked after St. Paul's and, although there has been an increase in staff since, he has continued to look after the needs of both southern parishes.

What of the future?

That is in the hands of God, but Cwm carries on much as it has in the past, and, given the continuing work and enthusiasm of the congregation, it seems set fair to last at least another hundred years.





ROLAND C. READ

The author of this history, Mr. Roland C Read was granted a parochial reader's licence in May 1920 and a Diocesan licence in May 1931.

For 25 years he has been chairman of the Monmouth Diocesan Association of Readers and he was a member of the Governing Body of the Church in Wales for thirty years. He has served on all the major committees including the electoral college of the Church in Wales and has been a representative to the Diocesan Conference for forty years.

His father, the late Mr. Charlie Read was a member of the first parochial council at St. Paul's.

**THIS BOOKLET IS OFFERED TO YOU IN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF  
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