

# THE WELSH BIBLE

There are 3 stages whereby the Welsh Bible came to hold so central a place in the lives of Welsh speaking people:

1. The 16<sup>th</sup> & 17<sup>th</sup> C Reformation **made available** the Bible for the Welsh.
2. The 17<sup>th</sup> C **enabled** the Welsh **to read** their Welsh Bible.
3. The 18<sup>th</sup> C awakenings **aroused a hunger** for the Welsh Bible.

## 1. A Welsh Bible made available

The Reformation, begun in 1517 when Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the church door in Wittenburg, led to the emergence of the Protestant churches of North Europe. The Bible was soon translated into German and English. But the 'dawn' was slow to break in Wales.

There were, however, some who felt the need for Welsh Scriptures. In 1547 Wm Salesbury advised the Welsh:

*Go barefoot like pilgrims to his Grace the King and his Council, to get permission to have the Holy Scriptures in your language, for the sake of those among you that cannot or are unlikely to learn English ... **get the Scriptures in your own language.***

But the path to King and Council before 1547 was thorny indeed.

### ***Welsh proscribed in churches***

Henry VIII cut ties with Rome primarily so he could divorce and remarry. In 1533 the pope excommunicated him for marrying Anne Boleyn. This led to the Act of Supremacy of 1534, which declared Henry the head of the Church of England.

This did not mean, however, he was committed to reform. Though the monasteries were disbanded, church practice remained largely unaffected. Those desiring genuine Scripture-based reform were still at odds with the State.

In 1542, for example, Thomas Capper, a Cardiff man, fell foul of the authorities for his pursuit of what continued to be regarded as heretical ideas. Having taught the need for reform, he was arrested, imprisoned for 130 days, and burned at the stake in the town centre, Wales's first Protestant martyr. It is thought he died for his views on transubstantiation.

But Capper was not part of a popular movement in Wales. It preferred, on the whole, the old Catholic ways in religious matters.

In addition to this conservatism, other factors worked against a Bible in Welsh. Henry was strengthening his hold over the kingdom by binding the regions more closely to the centre. In 1536 and 1542/3 two laws reformed the administration of Wales. The 1536 Act of Union brought Wales fully into submission to England. Another change forbade the use of Welsh in public life. Though almost all the population continued to speak Welsh, its official status was lowered to that of a dialect. And only English was allowed in churches.

### ***Hope of a Welsh Bible quickened***

In 1547, Henry died and was succeeded by Edward VI, who enabled Archbishop Cranmer to reform the Church of England. Clerical celibacy and the mass were abolished, and services conducted in English rather than Latin.

The new atmosphere encouraged inspired Salesbury, a Welsh patriot and zealous Protestant burning with desire to save the souls of the Welsh through a Welsh Bible. To men of the Reformation, the task of saving Welsh souls and securing Wales for Protestantism was important. Now the only means of salvation was to be converted, and this could only happen if the gospel were heard in one's own language. Salesbury believed Welsh souls could only be saved through Welsh. As the great majority knew little or no English, with little hope of change for another century, three generations would very likely be lost.

Whilst waiting for royal authority to produce a Welsh Bible, he published in 1549, the first Welsh version of the Prayer Book and in 1551, a translation of the main texts of the new Prayer Book.

But he wanted more. He wrote:

*If you do not wish utterly to depart from the faith of Christ. . . **obtain the Holy Scripture in your own tongue**, as your happy ancestors, the ancient British, had it.*

### **Hope of a Welsh Bible quenched**

Then in 1553, the Protestant Edward VI died. The new monarch, the convinced and unyielding Catholic Mary, began reversing the reforms of Cranmer. Overnight, life became dangerous for those committed to the Reformation: justification by faith and freedom of conscience founded on the Word of God rather than papal authority and tradition. Some of Salesbury's friends went into hiding on the continent.

In England and Wales, Latin was once again the language of worship. The hope of a Welsh Bible was deferred.

Five years of burning Protestants at the stake followed. One Welsh martyr was Rawlins White, a fisherman living near the present Cardiff Millennium Stadium. Foxe's Book of Martyrs is the primary source. Foxe calls him 'a good man ... altogether unlearned and very simple'. He sent his son to school to learn to read so he could read the Word to him. He was 'a notable and open professor of the truth' with a small group of fellow believers who sought to worship simply and sincerely in their homes, probably one of the first genuine 'gathered' churches in Wales.

But in the atmosphere of fear of Mary's reign, when church authorities were anxious to be seen to tow the party line, White was vulnerable. Though now meeting in secret rather than openly, they were either found out or betrayed. White was seized on suspicion of heresy and imprisoned for over a year, resisting all the Bishop's attempts to change his mind. He reluctantly ordered White to be condemned as a heretic. While awaiting execution, he passed the time praying and singing Psalms.

On the day of his execution, 30 March 1555, when armed soldiers came to take him. White was shocked and said: "What meaneth this? Soldiers are not needed. By God's grace I will not run away. With all my heart I give Him thanks that I am considered worthy to bear all this for His name's sake." On his way White saw his wife and children weeping. The sight was more than he could bear, and wept himself. Recovering, he struck his breast, saying, "Ah, flesh, movest thou me so! Wouldst thou prevail? Well, I tell thee, do what thou canst, thou shalt not have the victory!"

Arriving at the execution place, he fell to his knees and kissed the ground. When a blacksmith put a chain around him, White said, "I pray you, good friend, nail the chain fast; for it may be that the flesh will strive mightily, but may God in His great mercy give me strength and patience to bear the fire."

Seeing a friend, White said: "I feel a great fighting between the flesh and the spirit and the flesh would very fain have his way; therefore I pray you, if you see me tempted to save myself from

the fire, hold your finger up to me, and I trust I shall remember myself." The wood and hay were placed around him. White reached out to help them arrange the materials to try to ensure the flames would be more effective and quick. He seemed very calm and relaxed. Then a priest began to speak the words of the liturgy. White called out to the people not to listen to them, at which voices were raised against him from the large crowd, shouting for the flames to be lit. As Foxe puts it:

*Then some that stood by cried out, put fire! set on fire! which being done, the straw and reeds cast up a great and sudden flame. In which flame this good man bathed his hands so long, until such time as the sinews shrank, and the fat dropped away, saving that once he did, as it were, wipe his face with one of them. All this while, which was somewhat long, he cried with a loud voice, O Lord, receive my spirit! until he could not open his mouth. At last the extremity of the fire was so vehement against his legs, that they were consumed almost before the rest of his body was hurt, which made the whole body fall over the chain into the fire sooner than it would have done. Thus died this good old man for his testimony of God's truth, and is now rewarded, no doubt, with the crown of eternal life.*

At the time of his death, White was about 60.

Mary died in 1558 and Elizabeth came to the throne. She re-established a moderate regime in the Church of England. The emphasis was on unity and uniformity. People must conform, go to church regularly and follow the services of the parish church. And services would be in English.

What hope was there, then, of a Welsh Bible?

### **1563, a Welsh Bible prescribed**

Then came a great surprise. In 1563 Parliament passed an act compelling the Welsh bishops to translate the Bible into Welsh. When completed, it would be compulsory to use the new versions wherever Welsh was the commonly used language.

How did this ever get past an English parliament?

Salesbury's friend Richard Davies, a figure of considerable standing among the Reformers, had returned from exile in 1558. He was made Bishop of St Asaph then of St David's. Most likely Davies piloted this through Parliament. He was a friend of Parker, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and of Cecil, chief adviser of Elizabeth I (a man conscious of his Welsh ancestry).

How did he win them over? Perhaps by arguing that all must hear the Gospel in their own language. Or perhaps that unity in religion was more important than unity in language. For, at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> C, some feared if the Welsh did not have their own Bible, they would turn to Catholicism. If the Spaniards invaded, what was to stop the Welsh siding with them? If Wales *had* turned Catholic, there were plans for colonies of Protestant Englishmen to be planted to ensure Welsh loyalty, in the same way that Scottish landowners were planted in Ireland.

So, even if a Welsh Bible ensured the survival of the Welsh language and the Welsh remained Welsh-speaking, it was a small price to pay for the loyalty of the Welsh to the Tudors and the Church of England.

### **1567, the first Welsh New Testament**

Davies gathered scholars and a start was made. By 1567 the NT in Welsh was published. Salesbury did the bulk of the work. Davies was busy as a bishop and also a member of the committee preparing the English 'Bishops' Bible' published in 1568.

Davies' preface is most interesting. As well as the usual Protestant arguments justifying a Welsh Bible, Davies said God had chosen the Welsh for a special mission, a special contribution to the Church in Britain. He said Christianity had first come to Britain soon after the Crucifixion via Joseph of Arimathea who was believed to have founded a Church, independent of Rome, for the Britons, ancestors of the modern Welsh. The pagan Saxons then arrived and were later converted by Augustine, the envoy of the Pope. The Norman Conquest had greatly strengthened the Pope's hold. But after centuries of blindness and enslavement, the son of a Welshman, Henry VIII, had led the Church out of Rome and restored its independence. The Welsh were a living link with the origins of the British Church, descendants of the ancient Britons who still spoke their ancient language. Did the Welsh, then, not deserve respect?

Davies' use of the schism between the old Celtic church and the "impostor," brought in by Augustine and promulgated by the Saxons, helped make Protestantism acceptable in Wales, if not immediately popular.

### ***1588, the first complete Welsh Bible***

Davies said the OT would soon follow. But the wait was long. The Welsh gave a cold reception to the NT as unreadable and incomprehensible. Although much of the OT had been done, the work petered out.

After a long gap the work was handed over to Bishop William Morgan. As well as his work as Bishop of Llandaff, from 1579 he translated the Bible. Unlike other translations, done by committees, this was Morgan's own work, though based in part on earlier half-finished foundations. He found it a great struggle and nearly gave up several times, but was encouraged by the Archbishop of Canterbury. His great motivation was to present the Welsh with the means to discern what was of the Bible and what was of man.

He finally finished in autumn 1588. The first edition of nearly 1,000 Bibles reached Wales late that year. But though received warmly, Morgan was unhappy because they were expensive, at £2 each, and inconveniently large (to chain to the lecterns of churches and shelves of libraries).

What was its effect?

It was so good it changed the relationship of Wales to England. 1588 was the year of the Spanish Armada. What if the Welsh had embraced Catholicism? Morgan's Bible played a decisive role in Welsh history. It:

- greatly encouraged loyalty to the Church of England in Wales;
- led to the firm establishment of Protestantism; and
- fostered the later growth of Nonconformity as the gospel was preached leading to many chapels and congregations springing up.

The influence of Morgan's Bible spread to every corner of Wales. There were very few other books available in the language, so, it has truly been said that the Welsh were a 'nation of one book'. And that book was the Bible of William Morgan.

### ***1630, the first popular Welsh Bible, smaller & cheaper***

Morgan soon began a revision of his 1588 work. After his death, one of his successors at St Asaph, Richard Parry, continued the work and the revision was produced in 1620. By then, most copies of the first edition had been lost or worn out. This revised edition is the one in which generations of Welsh people have been thoroughly immersed ever since. It was the basis for all later revisions up to the 20<sup>th</sup> C and became as much a part of their lives as the KJV of 1611 to the English-speaking peoples.

Then in 1630, the first popular edition was produced, the "Little Bible", "Y Beibl Bach," a smaller version costing a (still expensive) five shillings. Many other editions followed. By the late 17<sup>th</sup> C, societies such as the Welsh Trust and SPCK were being founded to distribute religious texts to the common people.

## **2. But, how shall they read the new Welsh Bible?**

Unfortunately, however, as most could not yet read or write, the Bible was still off limits to all but the highly educated.

But things were changing.

By the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> C the Church of England encouraged home Bible reading. This became more widespread in the following century. In the early 18<sup>th</sup> C, Griffith Jones of Llanddowror in Carmarthenshire, a parish priest, wrote to SPCK to ask for larger editions of the Welsh Bible. Then, around 1737, he set up a network of popular Welsh Circulating Schools to teach common people to read the Bible. He said that though the Welsh Trust had distributed many Welsh Bibles, it had not taught people to read them, so that many had been locked away unread.

His schools made the Welsh one of the most literate peoples in mid 18<sup>th</sup> C Europe. By the end of the century the great success of the movements for popular education in Welsh had made large numbers familiar with the Bible. Morgan's Bible spread to almost every corner of Wales. As the only book affordable to many, it became the book from which the majority could learn to read and write. Later, generations of children would be taught its contents in Sunday School.

By the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> C, a number of printers appeared in Wales. Though printing Bibles was a monopoly restricted to the King's printers and the presses of the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, Peter Williams got around it by printing a Welsh Bible with extensive marginal notes, sold as a commentary rather than the text of the Bible. It was the first Bible printed in Wales. The first edition sold out in 1770. It was tremendously popular for several generations and thousands of copies were issued in many more editions.

## **3. The growing thirst for the Welsh Bible**

The Bible was now available in the language of the people, and the common people taught to read. The foundation was laid to nurture the fruits of the successive Spiritual awakenings that washed over Wales in the 18<sup>th</sup> C.

It is not surprising there was such a desire for Bibles amongst the converts of the 18<sup>th</sup> C evangelical revivals. The Spirit and the Word are one. Methodist societies and Baptists encouraged people to read the Bible. It was central to their lives, the final authority in all things pertaining to faith and life. Poorer families, unable to afford the Bible, shared its contents in house meetings or in churches or chapels.

But where would the supply come from to meet the greatly increased demand aroused by these evangelical revivals?

One of the key vessels used to meet this need was Thomas Charles of Bala.

## **4. Thomas Charles**

The 1<sup>st</sup> great awakening, the Methodist (or Evangelical) Revival, began in South Wales in the 1730s, but progress in North Wales was fairly slow. Indeed it was not until the 1780s that Methodism began to gather significant strength there, especially after an evangelical Anglican

clergyman from South Wales, Thomas Charles (1755–1814), moved to Bala in 1784, and joined the Methodists. 'The Lord's gift to the North,' is how the pioneer Methodist, Daniel Rowland, described Charles in 1785.

### **The Word...**

One of Charles' most important contributions was his educational work. On moving north, he was struck by the ignorance of the Scriptures. To resolve this, in 1785 he began organising circulating schools in North Wales on the pattern of those of Griffith Jones. (Charles was a native of his area.)

Jones's schools had never been as strong in North Wales as in the South, and by the time Charles moved to Bala they had all but disappeared.

Charles gathered the poor children of Bala into his house for instruction, and soon there were so many he had to use the chapel. Charles then developed circulating schools. Charles himself trained group after group of travelling teachers, then sent them to a district for 6 or 9 months, where they taught children to read the Bible and instructed them in the basic tenets of the Christian faith. These peripatetic teachers proved to be exceptionally effective missionaries, and their influence far-reaching. Expenses were met by the Calvinistic Methodist Societies, and as funds increased masters multiplied, until in 1786 Charles had 7 masters and by 1794, 20.

Later, Charles decided that such schools should meet weekly, on Sundays. He was not the founder of the Sunday School, but by his organising ability, diligent visiting, and energy in providing reading matter for the schools, he placed the Welsh Sunday schools on a solid foundation.

These circulating schools and Sunday schools were very successful in enabling a large part of the population to read the Word.

### **... & the Spirit**

Charles was influenced not only by Griffith Jones, but also by the contemporary widespread Spirit of revival in Wales. At the time of his educational campaigns, North Wales experienced a series of powerful spiritual awakenings. One authority on Welsh revivals has claimed the period 1785 - 1815 was the most successful ever for religion in Wales.

There is no better example of the striking spiritual change than Bala itself. When the pioneer Methodist evangelist, Hywel Harris, visited the town in 1741, he was almost killed by a fierce mob. Although accustomed to confrontation, Harris was so frightened by the ferocity of the assault he was unable to face going anywhere near that town for many years.

But 50 years later, one Sunday night in October 1791, an extremely powerful revival broke out in Bala. Quite suddenly, during a normal evening service, many became gripped by the realisation of their sin, with no hope except through Christ. They remained in their seats for a long time after the service, under deep conviction. As Charles walked home later, he heard the sound of hymns from many homes. The work of God lasted for months and spread to the surrounding area and through North Wales.

Charles wrote:

*Towards the close of the evening service, the Spirit of God seemed to work in a very powerful manner on the minds of great numbers present, who never appeared before to seek the Lord's face [ . . . ] About nine or ten o'clock at night, there was nothing to be heard from one end of the town to the other, but the cries and groans of people in distress of soul.*

From about 1785, many in North Wales embraced this fervent evangelical Christianity, and a good number joined the Calvinistic Methodists. By the early 19<sup>th</sup> C, North Wales was a stronghold of Methodism, and Bala a veritable Jerusalem for North Wales Methodists. This was partly due to its central location; but above all it was the presence of Thomas Charles that made it the Methodist hub in North Wales.

A key factor was the communion services at Bala on the last Sunday of every month. Although the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists had, to all intents and purposes, by then become a separate denomination, they did not formally secede until 1811. Prior to that only ordained Anglican priests could administer the sacraments among the Welsh Methodists, and from 1784 to 1803, Charles was the only ordained priest ministering regularly among the Methodists of North Wales. So, Methodists from far and wide regularly attended the monthly services, not to mention the great summer preaching festival linked to the Association meetings at Bala.

### ***Thirst for the Bible***

As a result of Charles' schools and the powerful spiritual awakenings, much of the population were now not only able to read the Bible but, more importantly, earnestly desired to do so.

The following extract from John Elias' description of a journey with a large group of young people who walked from the Llŷn Peninsula to the Association meetings in Bala in 1792 clearly demonstrates the importance of the Bible in the lives of these young Methodists:

*We started on the journey, talking about the Bible and sermons. Occasionally we sang psalms and hymns, and sometimes we rested, and one or two would engage in prayer. Then we would proceed again on our journey, singing on the way. Very few words were uttered by any one among us all the way, except respecting the Bible, sermons, and religious subjects.*

The Bible was central to Charles' life and work. Enabling others to read the Bible, encouraging them to read the Bible, expounding and applying the Bible and supplying Bibles was the very essence of his work. To quote Prof R Tudur Jones:

*When we turn to Thomas Charles' public work, it becomes immediately obvious that his various projects all centre on the Bible. He belonged to a generation of religious leaders who shared the same ideals, and between them they were responsible for weaving the Bible in a new way into the pattern of the life and culture of the common people of Wales [ . . . ] He was intent on building in Wales a civilisation rooted in Scripture.*

With their leader holding the Scriptures in such high regard, it is no surprise that the Bible held a central place in the lives of that generation of Welsh Methodists that grew up under Charles' influence.

## **5. The thirst satisfied**

This increasing thirst for Welsh Bibles created an enormous challenge for Charles. They were scarce, and they were expensive. Generally only the rich had books. His paramount need was a plentiful and cheap supply of Welsh Bibles. How to meet this need?

Friends greatly helped him secure Bibles from SPCK from 1787 to 1789, when stocks were all but exhausted. Then in 1799 he managed to secure 700 of a new SPCK edition of 10,000. In 1801 the Sunday School Society printed 3,000 testaments, which mostly went to him.

There were still not enough, however.

But things would soon change in a big way. The efforts of Charles and others to ensure a regular supply of cheap Welsh Bibles for the common people would soon bear fruit.

A catalyst was a poor, young 15-year-old Welsh village girl, Mary Jones, who walked a round trip of 50 miles barefoot to Charles in Bala to buy a Bible.

Charles was deeply moved. As a member of the Religious Tract Society, at a meeting of the Society in London in 1802, he strongly pleaded with them to address the lack of Bibles she highlighted and to provide a regular supply of affordable Bibles in Welsh for Welsh-speaking Christians. As the members discussed the request, Rev Joseph Hughes said,

*a society might be formed for the purpose--and if for Wales, why not for the Kingdom; and if for the kingdom, why not for the whole world?*

This meeting laid the foundation for the formation of the British and Foreign Bible Society. It was launched on 7 March 1804, the first of many similar organisations throughout the world.

As one of its first tasks, it undertook an edition of the Bible in Welsh, under Charles' supervision.

In a letter in March 1804 to a founder of the BFBS, Charles gives some idea of the thirst for Bibles in Wales at that time:

*The Sunday Schools have occasioned more calls for Bibles within these 5 years in our poor country, than perhaps ever was known before among our poor people [ . . . ] The possession of a Bible produces a feeling among them which the possession of no one thing in the world besides could produce [ . . . ] I have seen some of them overcome with joy & burst into tears of thankfulness on their obtaining possession of a Bible as their own property & for their free use. Young females in service have walked 30 miles to me with only the bare hopes of obtaining a Bible each; & returned with more joy & thanksgiving than if they had obtained great spoils. We who have half a doz Bibles by us, & are in circumstances to obtain as many more, know but little of the value those put upon one, who before were hardly permitted to look into a Bible once a week.*

For Charles, the establishment of the BFBS was a matter of great joy. As he said in July 1810:

*I was continually applied to for Bibles, & much distressed I was (more than I can express) to be forever obliged to say, I could not relieve them. The institution of the British & Foreign B[ible] S[ociety] will be to me, & thousand others cause of unspeakable comfort & joy as long as I live. The beneficial effects already produced in our poor country, of the abundant supply of Bibles by the means of it, are incalculable.*

The BFBS extended its work to India, Europe and beyond. Wherever Christian missions spread, the Society could be found. Within 100 years it had distributed over 200m pieces of literature. Auxiliaries quickly sprang up all over the world, which later became Societies in their own right. In just ten years, 69 other organisations formed.

But who was this young girl, Mary Jones, cited as the inspiration of the founding of the BFBS and the resultant world-wide 19<sup>th</sup> C Bible Society movement? (The BFBS first printed the account in 1882.)

## 6. Mary Jones

### **Early Life**

Mary (1784 –1864) was the daughter of poor weavers, who lived in a cottage in the parish of Llanfihangel-y-Pennant at the foot of Cadair Idris.



Her father died when she was 4. Mary and her mother faced much hardship in the years that followed. These years saw a significant increase in poverty in rural Wales due to the wars between Britain and France following the French Revolution, and other economic factors.

Mary's parents were devout Calvinistic Methodists, among the pioneer Methodists in her area. From birth she was part of that community, receiving a Methodist upbringing very different from the majority of her contemporaries. She became very familiar with the Bible early in life, unlike most children in her area at that time. It held a prominent place in her life throughout her days.

She professed the faith at 8, and was received into membership of the local Methodist society meeting. It was unusual to become a member at such an early age, but since she accompanied her widowed mother to the evening meetings to carry the lamp for her, Mary was allowed to attend. That Mary had a living spiritual experience was clearly evidenced by her subsequent good grasp of the truths of the faith and her faithful adherence to Thomas Charles and the Methodist movement. That is nowhere to be seen more clearly than in the predominant role the Bible would play in her life.

About two years later, in 1795, Mary witnessed a period of significant persecution of the Nonconformist Methodists of her area by a prominent local landowner.

She also witnessed the great revival that swept North Wales in her youth, and was carried along by its Spirit and into its epicentre at Bala. Going to Bala on Communion Sunday and to the Association meetings was not unknown to Mary. She would reminisce of how she would walk all Saturday night to reach Bala in time for communion on Sunday morning, of the group prayer meetings on the way, and of the powerful preaching and rejoicing she witnessed in the open-air meetings on the Green.

### ***Learning to read the Bible***

The Bible was central to the Welsh Methodist faith of Mary's parents. And it was from the Bible that she learned to read in one of Charles' circulating schools.

When about 10, one of Charles' circulating schoolmasters came to Abergynolwyn, 2 miles from Mary's home, and soon after came a Sunday school. One of the most regular attendees at both was Mary. She earnestly sought scriptural knowledge, and it is obvious from the evidence that she was a capable pupil, with a very good memory. Her biographer says:

*She distinguished herself especially in the Sunday school by reciting aloud, entire chapters of the Word of God, and in her "good understanding" of it.*

Having learned to read, it then became her burning desire to possess a Bible of her own.

Apart from the parish church, the nearest Bible she knew of in the vicinity was at a farmhouse about 2 miles from her little cottage. Mary was given permission to go and read it, on condition she removed her clogs before venturing in. It is said she would walk there every week, whatever the weather, over 6 years, committing portions to memory.

### ***Saving for a Bible***

However, her great desire was to have a Bible of her own.

But there were two major problems, scarcity and cost:

- There was no copy on sale nearer than Bala, 25 miles away; and even there it was not certain a copy could be obtained. Welsh Bibles were scarce in those days.

- And for someone as poor as Mary, Bibles were very expensive. Saving enough to buy a Bible was a great sacrifice. She would have to persevere in saving every penny for years to accumulate the huge (for a poor girl like Mary) sum needed.

But sacrifice she did. Over 6 years she saved up until she had enough to pay for a copy.

### ***To Bala to buy a Bible***

She heard Welsh-language Bibles were available from Thomas Charles, the only one with Bibles for sale in the area. So, in 1800, when 15, Mary walked, barefoot as was usual among the common people at that time, over 25 miles of mountain paths, to Charles in Bala to buy a Bible.

According to one version of the story, Charles told her all the copies he had were sold or already spoken for. He had just sold his last copy. Mary was distraught. Charles was so impressed with her hunger he gave her one of the copies already promised, telling her the other would just have to wait. In another version, she had to wait 2 days for a supply of Bibles to arrive, and was able to purchase a copy for herself and 2 others for members of her family.

Mary's Bible was of the 1799 SPCK edition. In addition to the OT and NT and Apocrypha, it contained the Book of Common Prayer (in Welsh) and Edmwnd Prys's Welsh metrical Psalms.

### ***Later Years***

Mary had a long life. She married in 1813. Around 1820, she and her husband moved a few miles nearer the coast, to Bryn-crug near Tywyn, where she spent the remainder of her days, dying in 1864, an aged widow.

Despite her hardships and troubles, her Christian faith held to the end, and she was noted for her faithfulness to the Calvinistic Methodist cause in Bryn-crug.

Despite her poverty, she contributed regularly to the work of the Bible Society, donating half a sovereign to a special collection in 1854 to send 1m NTs to China, to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the BFBS.

Part of Mary's income came from keeping bees. She kept the income from the honey for herself, but divided that from the beeswax – which could be considerable – between the Bible Society and her denomination's Missionary Society. The section of her denominational magazine to which she would always turn first was the 'Missionary Chronicle'.

She made good use of her Bible. She read it from cover to cover four times in her lifetime, memorising substantial sections.

When she died, the Bible she had bought in Bala over 60 years before was on the table by her side.

## Postscript

### Mary Jones and the Bible Society

It is said that:

- Mary's visit made such an impression upon Charles he had no peace of mind until he had found a way to ensure a regular supply of cheap Bibles for the common people of Wales, impelling him to propose to the Council of the Religious Tract Society the formation of a Society to supply Wales with Bibles.
- Charles' account of Mary's visit had such an electrifying effect on the members of committee of the Society at their meeting at the end of 1802, that they began to seek in earnest the possibility of founding a society to publish and distribute Bibles, not only for Wales, but also for the whole world.

It is true there is no contemporary evidence that Charles told the story of Mary's walk to Bala at the 1802 meeting; and one should certainly not over-emphasise Mary's part. Charles would certainly have known of many other examples of the great thirst for the Bible of so many of the common people of Wales in his day.

And yet, there is regular mention that one girl had made a particular impression on Charles; and all the evidence suggests Mary was that person, and that a special rapport had developed between her and Charles following her visit to Bala.

For example,

- When special meetings began to be held for Charles' Sunday schools, where pupils from a number of schools would come together to be publicly examined, Mary would attend such meetings in her area as faithfully as possible; and would excel in them. In a manuscript lodged at the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth, Robert Griffith, Bryn-crug (a minister who knew Mary well towards the end of her life), said that her answers 'would descend in showers like balls of fire', with great effect on the gathered crowd.
- Griffith adds that Charles would be certain to ask every time he came to a meeting of schools in the vicinity of her home, 'Where is the weaver [i.e. Mary Jones] today, I wonder?'
- Griffith also tells how Mary would often meet Charles at Methodist Association meetings and converse with him on such occasions.