

## William Owen and Fabian's Bay Church

It was during the 1860's that the family's connection with Fabian's Bay Church first began. This was a time of great religious fervour - a time when most families attended church or chapel during the week and up to three times on a Sunday. It was a time when attendance at churches outstripped the capacity of the buildings to cope and when almost all children would receive Sunday school lessons. William and Sophia Owen allowed their home to be used for Sunday school teachings and so started a family link with Fabian's Bay Church that persisted into the 1940's. William and Sophia's son, George Owen, was a lay preacher there and George's granddaughter Mary Owen was married at the Church. There will be more about George and Mary later as they are both direct line family members.

The history of Fabian's Bay Congregational Church is another stirring story of men's zeal and determination for their faith. The 1860's was a time of great activity in church building; a period too, when large numbers of English-speaking people came to live in this area. Their presence prompted the deacons of Canaan, Foxhole, to raise the question of building a new English church for these newcomers.

At the time, however, the Congregationalists were more than fully extended with their activities in the district: Canaan had only recently been rebuilt, and members were busily engaged in upholding and furthering the cause in Danygraig and Port Tennant. However, during the decade before Fabian's Bay finally came into existence, a kindly old blacksmith, William Owen, offered his house in Miers Street for a Sunday School.<sup>27</sup>

This move was more than fruitful and the blacksmith and his family soon discovered that their home was too small to accommodate the numbers of children attending. William Owen then persuaded the minister and members of Canaan to erect a schoolroom which was built in Balaclava Street where Mr. Owen, his family and others settled there to carry on the work.

By about 1870 it was found that this schoolroom had become too small to allow work to be accomplished efficiently, and once again, members appealed to the parent church for help. This time, the request was for a full-size church. Canaan's minister, the Rev. B. Williams, who then resided at Kilvey Terrace, St. Thomas, enlisted the help of his friends, Dr. Rees of Ebenezer and the Rev. W. Jones, Castle Street. With their support, financial and otherwise, the small debt on the school was paid off and plans laid for the construction of the present Fabian's Bay Church.

W. H. Jones supplies us with the origin of the name Fabian, used for Fabian Street as well as for the Congregational Church, when he writes :

"The name 'Fabian' frequently appears as that of a family holding premises in the lordship of Kilvey from the 17th century onwards, and Fabian's house stood, until the 19th century, in the neighbourhood of the Red Lion tavern, which was the ferry-house on the east side of the river."<sup>28</sup>

There is a sketch of Fabian's house in the R.I.S.W. The building is shown as being half thatched, half tiled, and a footnote adds that it was removed in 1859.

**The involvement of William Owen in the establishment of Fabian's Bay Church is detailed above. The passage is taken from the book " The Story of Swansea's Districts and Villages" by Norman Lewis Thomas, and is itself taken from the history of Canaan Church, Foxhole.**