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TOWN GUIDE

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Cowbridge Town Guide

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These two photographs and the cover photograph feature views of the High Street, Cowbridge.



Foreword

Distinguished people in the past have descended the Downs road into Cowbridge and having done so never wandered very far from its 'Gates'. The same can be said of the present, a wide variety of people visit Cowbridge, are immediately captivated by its unique charm and settle in the area.

Cowbridge, as 'Capital of the Vale', has enjoyed a unique position for centuries as the oldest borough in Glamorgan and local Government re-organisation cannot detract one whit from its past history, neither can it obliterate its architectural heritage of buildings of all periods from Norman onwards.

Legislation in any form cannot spoil the completeness of its community spirit.

Whilst studying this booklet I hope that the reader will capture some of the feeling of uniqueness engendered by the description of buildings and places and in so doing appreciate some of the inevitable pride of the inhabitants in their town.

On behalf of the Town Council, I bid you welcome and trust that you will visit us again.

Councillor Norman E. Williams
Town Mayor of Cowbridge



Children's Play Park and 'The Poplars'

Old Hall, Cowbridge



Introducing Cowbridge

In the heart of the Vale of Glamorgan is the little town of Cowbridge, a place once familiar to all who travel the A48 trunk road from Cardiff to Bridgend. A by-pass now takes through traffic round Cowbridge and thus a measure of welcome peace and dignity has returned to the town centre.

Inhabited since Roman times (their main highway followed the route that the A48 now takes), Cowbridge was fortified by the Normans who encircled it with walls during the 11th century. Two centuries later it was of sufficient importance to be granted a charter and Cowbridge, indeed, remained a Borough right through to the present year when, in modern local government changes, it lost that status. It also, for many years, 'shared' a member of parliament with nearby Llantrisant and it was also for centuries the seat of the county Petty Sessions and possessed the county jail.

Today Cowbridge remains small (it has but 1,500 residents) but it is a centre for a large rural area and its market always presents a highly animated scene. Parts of the town walls and one of the gates survive and the town's many old buildings include the church and grammar school.

Although it has long since lost its railway, Cowbridge is easily reached by road, and regular bus services—augmented by seasonal coaches to coastal resorts—link it with nearby towns and villages. This ease of communication has led to a limited growth of Cowbridge as a residential town and to the person employed in the bustle of Cardiff it certainly offers a restful place of residence away from the mainstream. The town, however, lacks no modern amenity. It has excellent schools and its main street is flanked by shops of a high standard which cater for every need. Sport and recreation are catered for and, of course, the town stands in the centre of some of the loveliest country in South Wales.



The Old Town Hall, demolished in 1830

The Present Town Hall

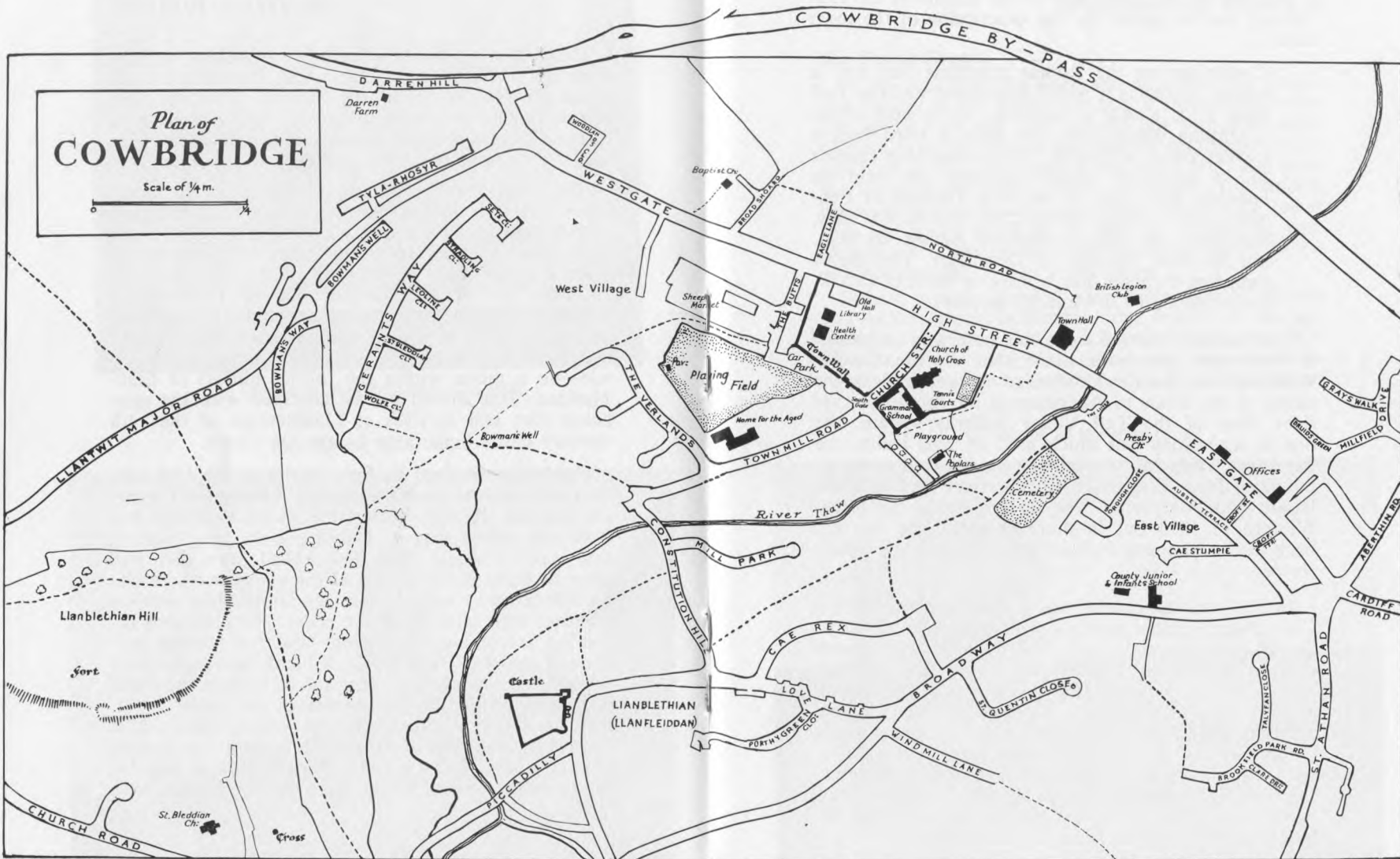


An Historic Town

Cowbridge is one of the most 'long-established' communities in Wales for it shares with Boverton a claim to be the Roman Station of Bovium, a station mentioned in the Antonine Itinerary. The discovery of Roman coins and other remains within the area of the old town's walls has given credence to this theory.

The town may have been a settled site in Saxon times but it is in the Norman period that the next records are found when it was known as Pont-Vaen. This name derived from the stone bridge over the river, a great rarity in those days of timber bridges. In 1091 Robert St. Quintin, one of Fitzherbert's knights, fortified Cowbridge and encircled it with walls and gates, parts of which remain today. Robert may also have built a castle—most likely a wooden stockade—on a motte within the former hillfort of Llanblethian. This should not be confused with the gatehouse that still survives at Llanblethian of the 14th century castle built there by the De Clares.

Cowbridge received its first charter in the 13th century and this was confirmed during the reign of Charles the Second. At this period the name Pontfaen was gradually giving way to Cubrigg which was, indeed, first used in about 1295. The walled town then had gates at three of the points of the compass (there was no North Gate) and of these the South Gate survives together with sections of the walls. The town was becoming increasingly important and the leading burgesses formed a Town Guild, a highly privileged body formed to keep law and order and to meet at the Guild Hall which stood in the centre of the main street. Here, too, stood the stocks for wrong-doers whilst Cowbridge also has a Bridewell, a gaol for county offenders. This is a reminder that Cowbridge was for centuries the seat of Great and Quarter Sessions.



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An idea of the Cowbridge of the middle of the 19th century can be gained by this description of the town then:—

'Cowbridge on the Roman maritime way and a railway connects it with Llantrissant and the Taff Vale. It is a seat of sessions, has a post office, a banking office, two chief inns, a town hall, a market place, a church, three dissenting chapels and a grammar school. Markets are held on Tuesdays and fairs on the first Tuesday of February, the Tuesday before 25th March, 4th May, 24th June, the first Tuesday of August, 29 Sept. and the first Tuesday of December. The parish comprises 96 acres, has a property value of £3,122, a population of 1,094 and 235 houses'.

The railway referred to in this note was authorised in 1862 and ran from Llantrissant on the Cardiff-Bridgend line down to Cowbridge and south along the valley of the Thaw to Aberthaw at the mouth of that river. Part of the Taff Valley Railway system, the line in its heyday was much used by coal trains and passenger trains ran several times a day (but never on Sundays) from Cowbridge to Aberthaw and to Llantrissant and Pontypridd. The line passed to the Great Western in 1923 but in more recent times was cut back at the southern end and has now long since been closed.

In 1887 the last charter was granted together with a Coat of Arms and a motto 'Awn Rhagom', both based on the old Borough Seal. The town's silver maces date from 1606 but in 1883 the Mayor was provided with a new gold chain. This status as a Borough with a Town Council of mayor, aldermen and councillors persisted until April 1974 when drastic changes made Cowbridge a part of a much larger District Authority. The town, however, retains a degree of independence as a Community and still keeps a Town Council with its leading councillor given the title of mayor. Thus the long link with tradition remains unbroken.

Features of Interest

The Parish Church

In the centre of the town and adjoining the Grammar School is the Parish Church, a substantial building dating from the 12th century but with later additions such as the guild chapel and the south aisle which was built in 1473 for Lady Anne Nevill who also built the lovely tower of St. John's at Cardiff. The church has a very massive and castellated fortress-like tower that no doubt acted as a place of refuge in past troubles. The nave roof, with its carved bosses (some of them heraldic) is well worth seeing.

Several monuments and other tablets are of interest and include mural tablets to Judge Jenkins of Hensol, the local historian, Benjamin Heath Malkin and William Carne of Nash. Most other early features of interest were swept away in the drastic restoration of

The Church of the Holy Cross



1848, the rose piscina in the chancel alone surviving. The church plate, however, survived and it includes an Elizabethan chalice and a very fine flagon of 1686.

Town Gate and Walls

Fragments survive of the former circuit of walls as does one of three gates. On the south side of town near the cattle market is a section of wall that, with two towers, appears to be 14th century masonry. There are other stretches near the Grammar School garden and a raised walkway survives within the Old Hall garden. A section of the moat is also to be seen near the stoneyard but all the rest has long been filled in.

Of the three gates the South Gate — ‘Porte Melin’ — survives although it has been greatly restored and little of the original masonry remains. It consists of a double arch, square cut at the top and with massively thick walls.

The Town Hall

The original Town Hall (which was a small and steepled building not unlike a Scottish tolbooth) stood in the centre of the main street but in about 1830 it was pulled down and the present Town Hall was built on the site of the old county jail. The building, long and low in stature but capped by a dome tower, incorporates the Council Chamber and offices of the former Borough Council and of the newly created town authority. Within these rooms are interesting records and photographs as well as constables’ staves. Below the building may still be seen the cells, passages and gratings of the old jail which survived more or less intact when the Town Hall was built as a superstructure on top of it.

The Grammar School

Extending from the South Gate to the Parish Church is the Grammar School, a building founded in 1608 and endowed, during Charles the Second’s reign, by Sir Leoline Jenkins, Secretary of State and a former scholar.



The Grammar School

The school, now jointly controlled by the local education authority and Trustees of Jesus College, Oxford, is housed in buildings mostly erected in the 19th century although, with their tall chimneys, they have more of a Tudor look about them. Known locally over the centuries as 'The Colledge' the school has a magnificent record of scholarship and many of its pupils have gone on to rise to prominent positions in the church and state.

Other Buildings

Of Cowbridge's other churches, the Ramoth Baptist Chapel dates from 1828.

In the main street are several pleasant Georgian buildings with, in certain cases, fragments of Tudor

detail. An especially dignified house with a pillared porch projecting over is Caercady House in the High Street. It is Georgian as is Cross House but far older is the Great House, a tall gabled building that dates from the 16th-17th centuries when it was the town house of a branch of the Carne family. It is now a chemist's shop. Also of interest is the Ancient Druid, a house with strangely carved heraldic beasts over the windows—it may well have been a pilgrims' hostel in medieval days. In the garden of Rhos Celyn House is to be seen a broken monolith of uncertain date and known as 'Y Garreg Wen'.

Inns and former inns are as numerous as one would expect of a town on an historic main road. Typical examples are the 'White Lion' and the 'Three Boars Head'. The former is now a baker's shop but it retains the old mounting steps used by coach passengers. The latter is a dry-cleaners. The Eagle, now an agricultural stores, has a long history to it. It was an inn—the Spread Eagle—in Elizabethan days and it possessed a rather fine ballroom with galleries and an oak staircase leading to it. It still survives although in a decrepit state. In the 18th century this room was used as a school (The Eagle Academy) and taught local children the rudiments of arithmetic and book-keeping at a time when the Grammar School taught only the classics.

Two old inns that survive are The Bear and The Duke of Wellington. The latter, with a most interesting exterior, is of the 17th century but The Bear is not so historic. It was a staging-point for coaches and the horses were changed whilst passengers were refreshed in Dickensian comfort within.

The Neighbourhood

Immediately south of Cowbridge and reached by a pleasant field path leading past St. Quintin's Castle is **Llanblethian**, a village with its parish church high on the hill above the attractive line of houses that form the village street below. The church tower dates from 1477 but the building itself and the font of Sutton Stone are older.

Quiet roads lead on to **Llanmihangel**, a village beautifully situated and with a small medieval church seemingly overcrowded with elaborate tombs and effigies. Llanmihangel Plas is a fine Tudor house, rebuilt by James Thomas whose arms appear over the fireplace in the panelled hall. Behind the Plas is an avenue of 110 yew trees and on a bank close to both house and church is the rather sadly neglected St. Ann's Well.

East of Cowbridge the breezy Stalling Down, the highest point in the district, leads one down to **St. Hilary**, a pretty village with a rather over-restored church. Nearby is Beaupre Castle, a building started in the 12th century but greatly altered and extended over the years. The main features are the two main entrances, the outer of which is a splendid example of Tudor Renaissance carving. Tradition has it that the draft of the Great Charter was first prepared at Beaupre and read to assembled barons prior to its presentation to King John at Runnymede.

On the Bridgend road is Pentre Meyrick and the beautifully sited castle of **Penllyn** in whose grounds, each August, the Cowbridge Agricultural Show is held. The castle's Norman keep stands on the edge of a ravine but most of the occupied part of the castle is less spectacular and was built in 1790. Craig Penllyn is a very beautifully wooded valley.

COWBRIDGE

REFERENCE:

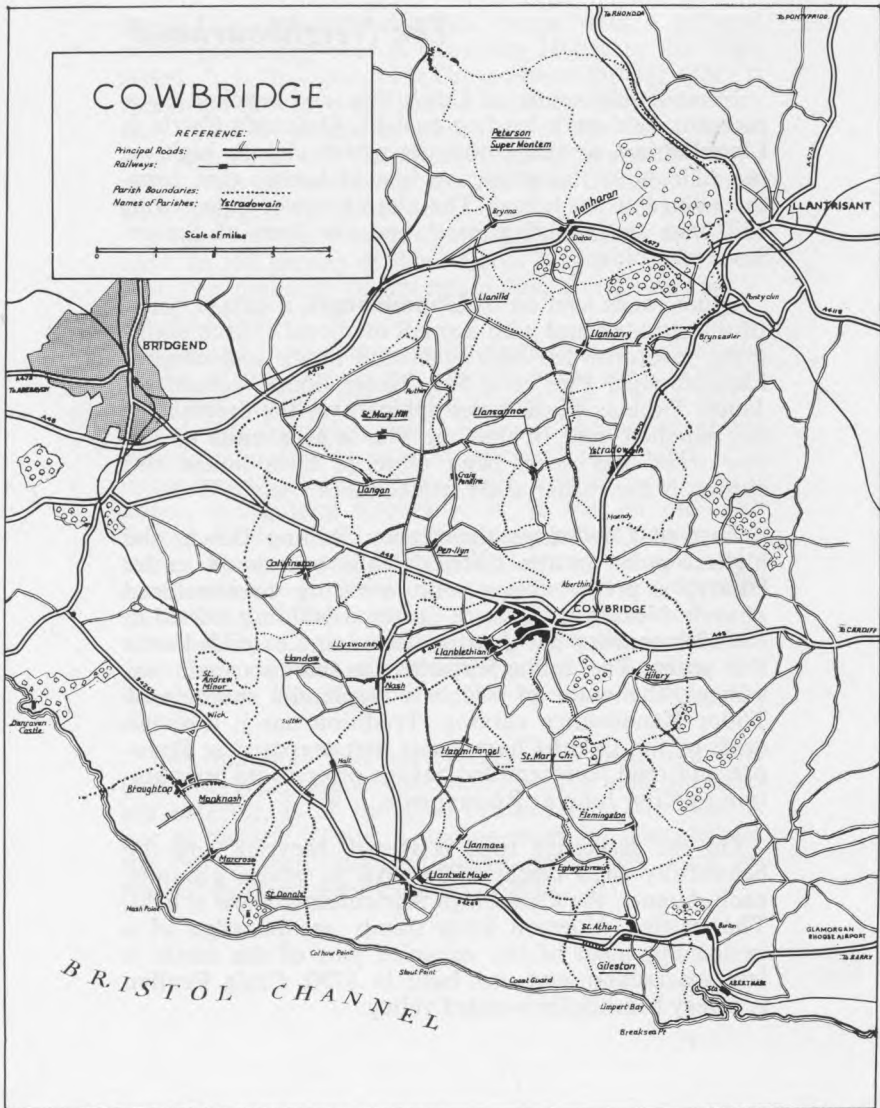
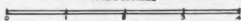
Principal Roads: 

Railways: 

Parish Boundaries: 

Names of Parishes:  Tetradowain

Scale of miles



BRISTOL CHANNEL

South and the coast may be reached near **Llantwit Major**, a village with a town-like appearance and ancient buildings that include a Town Hall of the Tudor period and a 12th century parish church. There is a quite good beach at Llantwit reached by road or field path and other attractive beaches include that at Southerndown towards Bridgend. Barry is within easy reach by way of Llantwit Major or St. Athan.

Not far from Barry and reached off the A48 Cardiff road is **Duffryn**, a house used as an educational centre and set in magnificent formal gardens that are open daily to the public from April to October. Also open daily (throughout the year) is the Welsh Folk Museum at nearby **St. Fagans**. This museum includes the castle, beautiful floral gardens, cottages, farm-houses, a chapel and many examples of Welsh crafts and industries.

General Information

AREA

— 84 acres.

BANKS

— Barclays, Lloyds and Midland all have branches in the High Street and the National Westminster has a branch at Westgate.

CAR PARKS

— Free park behind the Town Hall and adjacent to the Cattle Market.

CHURCHES AND CHAPELS

— Holy Cross Parish Church
Roman Catholic Church of St. Cadoc.
Ramoith Baptist Church.

EARLY CLOSING DAY

— Wednesday.

EDUCATION

— Schools are provided by the South Glamorgan Education Authority. These schools are y-Bont-faen Junior School; The Girls' High School (opened in 1889 but since extended and now being greatly improved) and the Boys' Grammar School which is jointly controlled by the local education authority and Jesus College, Oxford.

The nearest facilities for further education are at the Glamorgan College of Education at Barry or at the various establishments at Cardiff.

ELECTRICITY

— Supplied by the South Wales Electricity Board whose office and service centre is at 44a High Street. Tel. 2286.

ENTERTAINMENT

— Cowbridge has no cinema but the cinemas of Bridgend are within easy reach as are Cardiff's cinemas and theatre. Dances, concerts and other events are held in local halls and Cowbridge has numerous clubs and organisations.

GAS

— Supplied by the Wales Gas Board. Tel. Cardiff 42601.

HEALTH SERVICES

— The nearest hospitals are at Bridgend and Cardiff.

HOUSING

— Pre-war council houses exist along lower Broadway and the post-war estate is at The Limes to the south of the town centre. In all there are nearly 100 council houses in Cowbridge.

INDUSTRIES

— Cowbridge is the centre of a mixed farming area with milk being produced on a large scale. Light industries have been established on the Llandow Industrial Estate (west of Cowbridge) and these include general engineering, steel fabricating and metal working.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

— Cowbridge is a town within the Vale of Glamorgan District in the County of South Glamorgan. The administrative offices of the District Council are at the Town Hall, Barry. Tel. Barry 3342. The Clerk and Chief Executive is J. Colley.

Purely local matters are controlled by the Cowbridge Town Council. The offices of the Town Clerk and Town Agent are situated at 56 Eastgate. Tel. 2960.

MARKET DAY

— Monday.

NEWSPAPERS

— 'South Wales Echo' (Daily) — Thomson House, Cardiff. Tel. Cardiff 33022.

'Glamorgan Gazette' (Fris.) — 37 Caroline Street, Bridgend. Tel. Bridgend 2119.

POLICE

— Police Station. Tel. 2268 (or 999 in emergency).

POPULATION

— 1,500 (1973 estimate).

POST OFFICE

— The Head Post Office is in the main street.

RESTAURANT

— Guy's Restaurant, 6, High Street.

SPORT

— Cowbridge has facilities for both cricket and football, the cricket ground being especially attractive.

Angling is possible in local rivers and canals.

There are golf courses at Southerndown, Royal Porthcawl and Wenvoe.

Swimming is possible at Barry or at the Cardiff Pool.

The locality is hunted by the Glamorgan Foxhounds whose kennels are at Llandough, near Cowbridge. Meets take place on Monday and Thursday.

The town has several sports and social clubs.

TRANSPORT

— Bus and coach services are provided by the Western Welsh Bus Company. Bus services operate to Llantwit Major (Not Suns.); to St. Athan (Not Suns.); to Cardiff (daily); to Bridgend, Port Talbot, Neath, Ammanford and Carmarthen (daily); to Bridgend, Port Talbot, Swansea and Llanelli (daily); to Bridgend and Porthcawl (daily) and to Talbot Green (Mon.-Fris. only).

Saturday coach services (in summer only) operate to Barry, Tenby and Minehead.

The nearest railway stations are at Cardiff and Bridgend on the main line from Fishguard and Swansea to Newport, Swindon and London (Paddington). Express services are hourly.

TOURIST ACCOMMODATION

— The Bear, High Street; The Duke of Wellington, High Street.

WATER

— Supplied by the Mid Glamorgan Water Board. Office — "Sunnyside", Bridgend. Tel. Bridgend 56555.

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