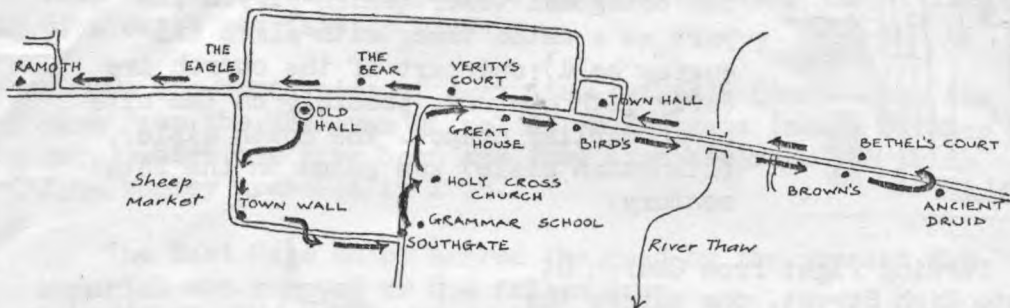


A WALK ABOUT COWBRIDGE

with the Cowbridge Local History Society



The town had its beginning in the bridging of the river Thaw on the natural east-west route, the Roman road from Caerleon to Carmarthen. Borough rights were granted by Richard de Clare, Lord of Glamorgan, in 1254.

We start at Old Hall, formerly the home of the Edmondes family - 18th century lawyers who had risen from being stewards to the Aubreys of Llantrithyd. It was converted into a Community Centre in October 1974. From the town wall surrounding its gardens (in 1266 Gilbert, Earl of Gloucester directed that protective walls be built around the borough of Cowbridge) can be seen the site of Caer Dynnaf, an Iron Age fort on Llanblethian Hill.



SOUTH GATE &
GRAMMAR SCHOOL

The town walls lead to the South Gate, the only surviving town gate of the four originally built. The adjacent Grammar School was a free school founded in 1608 by the Stradlings of St Donats and endowed in 1685 by Sir Leoline Jenkins (Secretary of State to Charles II). The greater part of the present building dates from 1847.



The Church of the Holy Cross dates from the late 12th or early 13th century. The octagonal tower (which played its part as a watch tower with alarm and curfew bell) and part of the church are early 14th century, possibly on the site of an earlier chapel. The south aisle (Llanquian aisle) was added in the 15th century.

Turning right from Church St into High Street, one passes the site, in the middle of the road, of the Guildhall, in use from medieval times until its demolition in 1830.



Great House, on the south side of the High Street, was the town house of the Carne family of Nash Manor, with 18th century facade and 17th century roof line and inserted shop front; it was Franklen House, boarding house of Cowbridge Grammar School in the 1920's under Eric Reid.

In the building which houses Bird's garden shop, Iolo Morgannwg (Edward Williams, 1747-1826), stonemason, poet, manuscript collector and literary forger, lived and sold books.

The bridge over the Thaw is at the crossing which was the reason for the birth of Cowbridge. The bridge was reconstructed in 1911 and 1954-5. Before 1954 the river ran 180 feet at an angle under the road, a contributory cause of the annual spring flood.

D. Brown and Sons, Printers, Eastgate, reminds us that Cowbridge in 1770 had the first printing press in Glamorgan, established by Rhys Thomas. Brown's office building was the Tennis Court Inn, later the Wheelwright's Arms (the sawpit was behind the inn).

The Ancient Druid, said to be the oldest house in the

town, is reputed to have been a pilgrims' hostel in medieval times. The blank space above the door is a recess for a sign; when the wall was stripped during redecoration, the outline of a cross was faintly visible.

On the north side of Eastgate, Bethel's Court takes its name from the Wesleyan chapel at 75 Eastgate (now a Butcher's shop) which may have been the 'new assembly room' in which John Wesley preached in 1758.

The East Gate which barred the road by the present War Memorial was removed or had fallen down by 1770-75. The Town Hall, built in 1830 by Isaac Verity the Elder, incorporates some cells of the old House of Correction. The new clock and cupola were the gift of Dr Coplestone, Bishop of Llandaff, in 1836. The mobile stocks were last used c. 1852.



TOWN HALL

Verity's Court was named after the Verity family, and straddles the route to the North Gate. The North Gate had gone by about 1630 and the road south from it was shut by about 1620. The moat outside the North Gate was filled in in the mid-nineteenth century.

The old Post Office stood on the site of the present Midland Bank. The Bear Hotel was a coaching inn for many years, and was used by the main coaching lines which used Cowbridge as a stopping point on the main road through South Wales. In the eighteenth century its Long Room (now the dining room) was licensed by Quakers for meetings of Protestant dissenters.



BEAR HOTEL
COURTYARD

Woodstock House, on the corner of Eagle Lane, was in the 18th century the town house of the Wyndham family of Dunraven.

The West Gate stood across the Highway just west of Woodstock House, and was removed in 1754 by the owner of Old Hall. The Eagle agricultural store was in 1767 the Spread Eagle Hotel and in 1805 the Eagle Academy. The inn ballroom with gallery, now in poor condition, was later used as the schoolroom. The school catered for the sons of local farmers and tradesmen, while the Grammar School in the nineteenth century had pupils 'of mature age and members of wealthy families'. The Eagle Academy declined rapidly when the Board School opened on Broadway in 1876.

Opposite, the car park outside the Mason's Arms is on the site of the old sheep market, a reminder of Cowbridge's traditional importance as a market town. In the 17th century, there were two annual fairs, and two market days a week.

Ramoth Chapel was founded in 1828; Thomas Morris (a former carpenter, ordained in 1810) saved it from disrepair in 1840, and during his two-year stay restored it and raised funds to clear the debt of £400. (From this and other endeavours with chapels in many parts of the country he became known as 'Ten-chapel Tom'). Baptism was performed in the river Thaw. Some of the tombstones bear inscriptions in Welsh.



Cowbridge Local History Society meets on the first Friday of the month, Sept-April,
at 8pm. in the Library, Old Hall.