

THE VILLAGE TRAIL

The Village Trail is designed to guide the visitor, during an easy stroll, around some of the more interesting features that have survived to help indicate the development that has taken place here over the past centuries.

Our tour appropriately commences in the centre of the community on the Twyn (the site of the old village green), outside the present day Star Inn and "Old Court", which are both numbered among the oldest buildings still standing and in use in the centre of Dinas Powys.

N.B. References marked [] relate to the map provided with the Trail.

1. The Star Inn [1] and "Old Court" [2]

(Formerly known as New House and Court House)

A document of 1639 shows the Court House and New House to have been leased by the Lord of the Manor to Edward Herbert of Cogan Fach with assurance of continued use for the holding of the Manor Courts. Dating back some 450 years the old part of what is now the Star Inn has authentic 16th century windows. The extension to the south end of the building was added in the 19th century. The Old Court has an original open fireplace with a "beehive" oven located in the chimney breast. Both buildings have pointed stone arch doorways and internal stone built spiral staircases. Many of the shops and houses around the Twyn are of considerable antiquity but, over the years, have been considerably altered and modernised.

Turning to the left, walk along the side of the Twyn, with its stone enclosed sward and War Memorial. Each year, early in December, local societies and organisations stage a lamp-lit "Dickensian Fayre" around the Twyn, in aid of the many locally supported charities. If the weather is inclement the Fayre can be held inside the spacious Parish Hall [3] that stands just around the corner, at the end of the square, in Britway Road.

Facing you, across Britway Road, is a row of cottages, overlooking the Twyn, which contribute much to the atmosphere of the village. You will note that the end house is built from granite stone which is quite unlike the stone quarried locally and used in the construction of the other cottages. This stone once served as the ballast carried by coal ships returning unladen from across the seas to Penarth Docks. Once discharged, this stone was sold for use by the builders merchants of that time.

2. The Parish and Lee Halls [3]&[4]

The Parish Hall was opened for use by members of the community in 1907 and has, since then, been in regular use for the sort of group functions usually found to be going on in a community such as Dinas Powys. Today, use of the Hall is almost continuous for activities such as dancing, keep fit, indoor bowls, badminton, Arts, Crafts and Produce shows, the presentation of plays by the local group of players, large scale meetings of all kinds and many other varied events. The nearby Lee Hall, which stands to the right of the main hall, is not so large but is equally well used for smaller gatherings and functions. This hall, which was opened in 1977, stands on land donated to the community by members of the Lee family, descendants of General Lee (for further details see Part 2 - "Local History").

Both halls are administered by the Community Council whose offices occupy a corner of the Parish Hall and who, themselves, host community functions such as the annual Village Show in both halls. Jointly, the two halls provide a true centre for the life of today's thriving community.

3. The Ebenezer Church [5] and 19th century cottages

While standing at the junction of the Twyn and Britway Road, it is worth noting that this road was once the main artery into and out of Dinas Powys with the Pen-y-Turnpike heading north and the St. Andrew's and Wenvoe road heading out towards the south and west.

Straight ahead of you, at the bottom of Highwalls Road, stands the Ebenezer Church, built in 1895 on the site once occupied by one of the earliest Calvinistic Methodist Churches in Glamorgan (circa 1785). The present building has been substantially rebuilt and renovated, although part of the original lime and ash flooring still remains.

On the right hand side of the square you will see two small rows of cottages which date back to the early 1800's. Most of the cottages have now been substantially "renovated and modernised" and their actual age has become difficult to visually determine.

Walk up the gentle slope towards the Ebenezer Church, passing Brecon House, on your left, this was the first "telegraph house" in the community (1890). On the right, up beyond the cottages, you will see the entrance to one of the oldest streets in Dinas Powys. This is Heol-y-Cawl (Broth Lane) which contains both modern dwellings and some little altered 18th century cottages built, as was the custom then, directly onto the narrow roadway.

Heol-y-Cawl is so called because once, during a "bad" winter in the 19th century, it was the site for a "Soup Kitchen", set up to help feed members of the community who had run out of supplies when the village was cut off and isolated for a considerable time by deep snow. Heol-y-Cawl is very steep and should be walked with caution.

At the bottom of the hill you come to Mill Road, connecting Britway Road to the Pen-y-Turnpike. Turn left into Mill Road and walk downhill until you see St. Peter's Church standing on your left.

4. St. Peter's Church [6]

Although the residents of Dinas Powys were able to attend service in the outlying churches of St. Andrew's and Michaelston-le-Pit, the Church in Wales did not have a fitting local presence in the centre of this growing community until as late as 1930. It was not until then that the building of the Church of St. Peter's in Mill Road was completed and consecrated for public worship.

There had been an earlier building, an "Iron Church" (built in 1881), which stood in Parish (now Highwalls) Road, opposite the cottages leading up to the Ebenezer Church, but it could only accommodate 180 worshippers.

Mostly in response to local demand and using the £10,000 raised in the Parish by donation, the Church of St. Peter was built on land presented to the community for that purpose, by the Reverend A.C. Lee who was present at the Service of Consecration conducted by the 83 year old Lord Bishop of the Diocese of Llandaff.

It is recorded that the architects were anxious to ensure that the new church should blend in with and not destroy the beauty of the little valley, lying between the Castle mound and Castlewood and known as the Lettons, in which it would stand. Accordingly, Pennant stone and white lias, ready dressed and weathered, from the recently demolished Cyfarthfa Iron and Steel Works, Merthyr, was obtained and used. This stone blended well with local hard limestone from the quarry at St. Andrew's which was used for the piers and arches and the facings around the windows.

The money raised in the Parish by donations (see above) provided for the building of the nave, chancel, baptistry and south isle, with accommodation for 320 worshippers. The architect's additional plans for a north isle and tower have never been completed.

Because of this clever use of weathered stone, the present building looks much older than its actual years; although the Diamond Jubilee was only celebrated in October 1990. The simple structure, which closely follows the Welsh tradition, has gained much in character over the few years since its consecration, and the use of Columbian pine for the roofing and oak for the furniture also contributes towards the natural charm and simplicity of St. Peter's. Crossing the church grounds from the southern entrance you come to Lettons Way, originally the Lettons Valley but now one of the "new" roads in Dinas Powys. The name Letton has its origin in the old English word for a "herb or kitchen garden". Facing west (left) along the road, Castle Wood stands behind the houses on your left hand side and Castle mound is on the right.

5. The Old Mill [7], the Millfield and Cwm George

Arrive back at Mill Road, turn left and walk along the pavement, cross the river bridge and you will come to the Public Footpath notice which directs you to turn left towards the entrance into the Millfield (referred to in earlier days as Pwllmeads).

The river Cadoxton, which you have just crossed and which you will now walk beside for a little way, was once part of the extensive mill leet which provided the power required to drive the overshot wheel of the old Manorial mill (c. 1426). Since the mill went out of use the leet has dried up, leaving the river to flow along its more natural course under the stone bridge that you will now see ahead of you.

In earlier days, when water from the river was used to provide the power to drive the mill, the river was diverted from its course and into the leet by means of a weir and sluice gate, the remains of which still stand some two fields distant up the river. Water from the leet was then directed into header ponds from where it fell, to drive the overshot mill wheel, before returning to the main stream of the river. Looking back across the river, before crossing the stile into Millfield, you will see Mill House, now mostly re-built, but which still contains part of the old mill in its structure (see also the Introduction). Look carefully and you will see the hub of the overshot wheel protruding from the side of one of the single storey buildings near to the river.

Climb the stile into Millfield and follow the path, looking up to the left as you go along the footpath; you can see the walls of the castle up through the trees at the top of the hill. Follow the footpath, past the greenhouses, through the stile/fence and onto the rough stone road at the end of the path. This is Cwm Drive. Turn left here and follow the Drive up the hill around the corner and down towards the "kissing gate" that you will see on your right. This is the entrance to Cwm George.

6. Dinas Powys Castle [8]

The remains of the stone walls of Dinas Powys Castle can be seen at the top of the wooded mound that runs along the right hand side of Lettons Way. The castle, known to be one of the earliest stone built fortresses erected by the Normans in South Wales, was the seat of the de Sumeri family (see Introduction), and can be dated back to 1190 AD.

The remains now consist of an extensive, rectangular, stone walled ward which in some sections is more than 10 metres high. Nothing now exists of the stone built tower (or keep) that once stood at the north western corner of the castle, except for the buried foundations. The remaining walls are largely overgrown with ivy which, fortunately, helps to retard the rate of the deterioration taking place within the structure. Even so, plant and tree growth on the walls, combined with the work of heavy frosts, continues to destroy the rudimentary mortar used by the builders, 800 years ago, to hold the stones together.

The site occupied by the castle and the mound upon which it stands (which is now registered as an Ancient Monument) were acquired by Dinas Powys Civic Trust in 1982 with a view to caring for the surrounding woodland and conserving the castle remains for use by the community and visitors to Dinas Powys.

For some long while prior to this, following the end of the Second World War, the castle site had been largely neglected by its previous owners and officialdom (in the form of the Welsh Office who, prior to the formation of Cadw, were responsible for the care of registered monuments in Wales). At the time of purchase the site was not registered and few people outside the community knew of the castle's presence near to the Twyn.

Once the castle and encircling site became the property of the local civic society it was registered and some level of protection was provided to prevent the site and the surrounding land from being acquired for development. Rising costs and the failure to obtain any worthwhile financial backing and support, either locally or nationally, have now reduced the Trust's objectives to those of simply caring for the site as best it can, within the obvious financial limitations of a registered charity.

Consequently, because of the undeniable dangers associated with the unstable nature of parts of the walls and in order to conform with the requirements of the Insurers under the terms of Public Liability, local inhabitants and visitors are no longer encouraged to freely visit the site. They may, however, use the footpaths at their own risk and a pleasant walk around the site can still be enjoyed, providing that common sense prevails and undue risks are not taken in the vicinity of the obviously fragile sections of wall.

If you do decide to take a look around, then you can reach the castle by climbing the steps which enter the site by the side of the small electricity sub-station opposite the first house, the Vicarage, in Lettons Way. Keep away from the walls (as far as you are able) and keep to the footpaths. You will enjoy your visit.

At the end of your tour around the castle site, because there is only one entrance available to the public, you must return to Lettons Way via the same footpath and steps. Once back on the road, turn left and return to the junction with Mill Road.

7. Cwm George [9] (Optional)

If time permits, you can now take a pleasant detour from the main route of our walk. Allow half an hour for this excursion. If you do not have the time then move on to follow the instructions in section 8 below.

Upon entering the Cwm footpath you will see that the sloping sides of the Cwm are heavily wooded with, at the eastern or right hand side, a very pleasant row of beech trees that provide good company no matter what the time of year you walk the trail. Towards the western end of the Cwm you will come to a steep limestone cliff, on the left, sometime the home of falcons, where in summertime the brambles at its base abound with a splendid variety of butterflies. Up on top of the wooded hill to the right of the footpath is the site of the Iron-Age settlement [30] which was discussed at length in the Introduction.

Walking on, up the slight incline, to the end of the Cwm, you will come to a stile and gate. Climb the stile and follow the old Estate drive-way, which is now a public right of way. After a short walk, out into the open field you will see, down in the valley to your right, a cluster of houses and a church nestling in the hollow. This is Michaelston-le-Pit.

The route you are now on leads down to the village or, alternatively, past the weirs on Wrinstone brook, which later becomes the Cadoxton River and up towards Cwrtyrala House, on the left. (See Walk No.1).

But you must turn about now, retracing your footsteps back through Cwm George, to the kissing gate, then turn right.

8. Highwalls Farm [11]

Follow the footpath which bears to the right when you leave the Cwm or, if you have not walked through the Cwm, carry straight on, up between the two post and wire fences. This was once the route of a Parish roadway. Walk up this path, through the belt of trees, until it brings you out onto the north east corner of Dinas Powys Golf Club. On leaving the trees, climb the stile and follow the way marked footpath, with Castle Wood on your left, heading towards the buildings you will see on the skyline, up ahead. The one-time Highwalls Farmhouse [11] was once occupied by the Constable of the Manor but now, no longer a farmhouse, it is used as part of the club house complex by members of Dinas Powys Golf Club.

Keep to the footpath, with the Golf Club House on your left hand side. Cross the Course, on the footpath, towards the houses that you will see ahead, where there is a gateway leading out onto Highwalls Avenue. Turn left into the Avenue to the corner where, on your right, you will find a narrow passageway between the rows of houses, known as the "Spickett" (Footpath No.38). This leads you upwards towards the Twyncyn at the point where it joins a lane which rises steeply up to a wooded promontory that provides views over the surrounding countryside and the Bristol Channel. However, to continue on the Trail you must turn left here, down the Twyncyn, which is bordered by pleasant detached houses of varying architectural design, until you reach Britway Road and Dinas Powys Common.

9. Dinas Powys Common

You are now standing at the point where Britway Road ends and St. Andrew's Road commences and runs on towards St. Andrew's Major, Wenvoe, Barry, and the main road links to the west of Wales. Across this road is Dinas Powys Common, administered by the Community Council, to whom it was sold for a token sum by the Lee family in 1948.

The Common, in its present form, provides a fine open area for team sports and general recreation and includes a play area for the younger children. There are extensive views towards Sully, the Bristol Channel, the north Somerset and Devon coastlines as well as northern Barry and eastern parts of the Vale. Across the Common, beyond the sports pavilion which is headquarters to local activities in the fields of athletics, rugby and cricket, stands a group of older, more established dwellings, where recent 'finds' date land usage back to at least the 18th century. Down in the hollow, beyond the Common, stands the housing development at Southra Park, one of the latest estates to have been built in Dinas Powys. On the Common itself, there are indications of much earlier habitation. For example, the presence of many early walled enclosures can be detected and the remains of parts of a Romano-British farmstead were excavated here by members of the Local History Society in 1978. There are also the scant remains of a burial mound and indications of a moated house platform.

Cross Britway Road and, swinging left, follow Mount Road around the top western edge, of the Common. The large white house that you are approaching behind the high wall on your left is "The Mount". Once the home of the Hurst and Lee families in Dinas Powys and the centre of influence in the village under General H.H. Lee.

10. The Mount House [12]

When the Hurst and Lee families shared manorship rights with the Tenner family of Wenvoe Castle (see Introduction), the house was much smaller than it stands today. Since then a new section in the Georgian period and style was added, forming the present frontage on the Common. Today, the Mount is a large and rambling building that has been divided up for multiple occupancy.

The Last Lord of the Manor to live in The Mount was General Henry Herbert Lee who succeeded to the Manorship in 1876 and played a leading role in village affairs until his death in 1920. Chrystal Tilney in her excellent "Glimpses of Old Dinas Powys" very aptly and neatly refers to the General as a "benevolent despot".

Carry on walking down Mount Road, back towards the village centre at the Twyn. At the lower end of the Common you will see the steeply pitched roof of the first Wesleyan Chapel, built in 1876, now known as Kynance Hall. At the bottom of the Mount hill, as you re-enter Station Road and the Twyn, you will again see the Star Inn, on your left. Straight ahead at this point, behind the high stone wall, is Mount Farm House [13], another of the older houses that still stand in Dinas Powys.

11. The Wesleyan Methodist Church [14]

Cross over Station Road, be very careful at this "blind" corner, because the traffic can be very busy here.

Turn right once across Station Road and ahead of you, on your right, you will see the face of the Wesleyan Methodist Church [14], built there in 1903. Opposite the church stands the Wesley Court Centre [15] which provides for a wide range of social activities in the community.

Walk on down Station Road, past the entrance to this hall, until you come to a footpath leading off to the left, towards a flight of steps, just as Station Road begins to swing away to the right revealing the north eastern end of the Common. If you follow down this footpath (once known as Harry's Path), you will come to a very pleasant little house on the left hand side, at the head of the footsteps. This is now the Manse [16] to the Methodist Church, but was once Murch Farm House, yet another of the original farm buildings still standing in the community.

Retrace your steps back to Station Road, turn left and follow on along the road. On your left you will come to a small, in-set, housing development known as the Malt Houses. This development stands on the site once occupied by a farm, a butchery and a brewhouse and, in 1892, by a hospital for local women [17].

Carry on past these houses and down the hill, until you arrive at another, broader, flight of steps, again on the left. These steps will take you down onto the Cardiff Road, but please do pause at the top to take in the view spread out before you. Ahead across the Cardiff-Barry railway line, you will see the more recently developed parts of the community at the Murch. Once on the pavement at the bottom of the steps, turn left and walk down the Cardiff Road towards the more central parts of the village.

Dinas Powys railway station [18], which you will pass on the right, was opened for public use in 1888. There is a regular passenger service from here to Cardiff, Barry Island and Bridgend. The once busy goods yard and Brickworks sidings have been dismantled and removed.

Walking down the Cardiff Road you will come to a large, red brick, towered building on the left. This is the site of the former St. Winifred's. It stood at the junction of Cardiff Road and Elm Grove Road. Often known locally as the "Institute", this imposing building was built in anticipation of the 'boom' that was expected to follow the opening of the railway. It was intended that the building should be used as a hotel, but the dream did not materialise and, in 1916, St. Winifred's was converted for use as a Red Cross Hospital to help deal with some of the wounded brought back from the fronts during the First Great War. It was, subsequently, converted into flats and later still became the offices of one of today's most prominent architects in Wales.

13. St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church [20]

Turn left around St. Winifred's, into Elm Grove Road and take the first turning on the right into Edith Road. This leads you to St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church and Hall, which stand on the right hand side about half way along the road. The original building was constructed in 1922 to provide for a growing Roman Catholic population and was greatly extended in 1970.

Although the church has an unexceptional exterior, the interior, in complete contrast, is attractively open and colourful and a visit is well worthwhile. After the visit, retrace your footsteps back to Elm Grove Road and turn right walking up the hill, back towards the Twyn.

14. The Cross Keys [21] and Three Horseshoes [22] Public Houses

At the top of the hill on the left hand side, before you reach the Twyn road junction, you will come to two public houses set back from the road. The Cross Keys and the Three Horseshoes. These adjacent buildings, (two of the Twyn's three inns) have been much modernised; but still retain some original features, which can be identified in the respective structures as dating back to the 17-1800s. During the 18th century the Cross Keys was kept by the Steward to the Lord of the Manor and was often used to entertain the Court Leet.

The Village Bard, Thomas David (Dewi-Wyn O'Essyllt); who was born at the Old Mill (at the bottom of Mill Road) in 1820, was married in 1842 to one Jane Matthew of the Three Horseshoes Inn. A commemorative plaque to record this event is displayed on the wall facing the Twyn. They had four children, each of whom were baptised at St. Andrew's Church, where the Bard's grave and memorial can still be seen.

Turn full left around the Three Horseshoes and back into the Twyn, walking back towards the Star Inn. You have now come full circle and to the end of the village trail.