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GLAMORGAN



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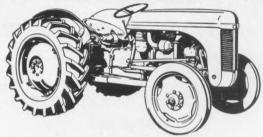
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## COWBRIDGE

#### OFFICIAL GUIDE

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#### COWBRIDGE

#### GLAMORGAN

COWBRIDGE is a friendly little market town of 1,030 inhabitants just twelve miles West of Cardiff and in the heart of that beautiful southern portion of Glamorgan known as 'The Vale'. It consists mainly of a mile-long street along the main road (A.48) leading to West Wales, astride the small River Thaw that flows south to the Bristol Channel.

In spite of the incessant tide of through traffic it retains its rural atmosphere; from the street, green hills are visible to east and west, and a minute's walk from various points brings one into a quiet countryside. On market-day (traditionally Tuesday, but recently held on Mondays) its importance as an agricultural centre becomes very obvious. Farmers, butchers and cattle-dealers come from far and near.

The River Thaw, though small, has always provided an obstacle to movement between East and West, for from its source just four miles north of Cowbridge to its mouth at Aberthaw, the river is bordered by a ribbon of marsh and swamp, extremely difficult to cross. There were always numerous wooden bridges but only at some half-dozen places could stone bridges be built and the first of these was at Cowbridge where the stream cuts through solid rock. This is the significance of its ancient Welsh name of 'Pontfaen'—the Stone Bridge.

Probably there was a ford before the first bridge was built, for a line of burial mounds marks the movement of prehistoric peoples from the inlets at Nash, Monkmash and Llantwit Major to the river-crossing.

Whether there was a settlement near the bridge in pre-Norman days is difficult to tell but certainly the Normans, with their usual acumen, saw that the crossing was a focal point in the economic life of the surrounding district and as early as 1091 walled in a space immediately west of the bridge, dominating its activities. Settlers were encouraged but in its early years these seem to have been almost exclusively English or Norman, judging from the signatories on the oldest documents and, like similar Norman-founded towns in South Wales, it was subject to attacks by the Welsh, who resented the preferential treatment of the townsfolk. In this



UPPER HIGH STREET

#### HIGH STREET



connection the castellated form of the tower of the Parish Church is most significent. In the chronicles of neighbouring Llancarfan and Margam there are records of hostile attacks

on such towns in South Glamorgan.

In most cases a Norman town clustered about its castle but Cowbridge is unusual in that the castle is nearly half a mile away, in Llanblethian, and, indeed, it is possible that in the first instance, there was a temporary motte on the site of a prehistoric hill-fort on the summit of Llanblethian Hill. If so, it was built by the first Norman lord of the town, Robert St. Quentin, whereas the so-called St. Quentin's Castle of which only the gate-house survives, was not built until the fourteenth century, long after the St. Quentin family had either left the area or had died out.

It is interesting to note that, while the Welsh still spoke of Pontfaen, all its documents adopted the name Cowbridge which originally applied only to the small bridge over a drainage ditch at the foot of the Darren Hill at the western

edge of the town.

The walled town extended only from an East Gate (near the present Town Hall) to a West Gate near the present cattlemarket. On the road leading past the church to Llanblethian is the only surviving gate, the South Gate. There is a difference of opinion as to whether there was a North Gate; there seems to have been no point in building one, seeing that no road led North from the enclosed area. The walls and their watchtowers survive on the east side of the cattle-market, to the south of the Old Hall Garden and again, beyond the South Gate around the garden of the Grammar School. Originally it had a raised walk on the inside and this survives within the Old Hall garden. Outside this was a moat, of which one section remains, to the west of Mr. Hill's stoneyard; the rest was filled in only in the middle of the nineteenth century. One of the last sections of the moat formed the 'Butts Pool' on the south-west corner of the cattle-market, and this existed until almost within living memory. Apparently it was used to duck female 'scolds' in unregenerate days! One can walk along the site of the moat by following the lane at the back of the Town Hall, the Eagle Lane, the Butts road, the road thence to the South Gate and the field path outside the Grammar School and churchyard back to the main street.

The portion of the town east of the walled area was known as the East Village until the postal authorities coined 'Eastgate Street' some forty years ago.

Even if the town were boycotted for some time by the Welsh the economic pull of the bridge won in the end, for it was the meeting-point of roads from North, South, East and West—as it still is—and here they must have come to buy and sell. Special privileges were accorded to dwellers within the walls, embodied in a series of charters, the earliest granted by lords of the manor and later confirmed by the Crown, from the thirteenth century on. (Cowbridge is one of the smallest

chartered boroughs in the kingdom).

The charters not only granted privileges to the burgesses but delegated to them the responsibility for maintaining law and order. Their leading men formed the highly privileged Town Guild, meeting at the Guild Hall which stood in the middle of the main street where Church Street branches off. (When the road was reconstructed in 1951 the foundations of the hall were uncovered). At its entrance stood a cross and Church Street was originally 'Rood Street'. It is an interesting fact that up to about forty years ago, funerals approaching the church from the East always followed the right-hand side of the road until they wheeled at right angles just where the cross must have stood. Here, too, the stocks would have probably stood—the original Cowbridge stocks are now in the Welsh National Museum at Cardiff.

Near the East Gate was the Bridewell, a gaol for the use of the county, for Cowbridge was for centuries the seat of both Great Sessions and Quarter Sessions. (It was the privilege of the guildsmen that they should not be imprisoned there if found guilty of any offence, but under their own Guild Hall). By the early nineteenth century the Guild Hall had proved such an obstruction to traffic that it was demolished and a new Town Hall built as a superstructure over the old gaol. It is an eerie experience to go down the pitch-dark passages below to the old cells; some of the gratings are visible in the present Fire Station.

On important occasions the Mayor, Aldermen and Councillors still march in procession, preceded by the maces, the symbols of their authority, that are dated 1606. The Council Chamber has interesting records and photographs as well as



THE OLD TOWN HALL, DEMOLISHED 1830
THE PRESENT TOWN HALL



the constables' staves and javelin staves borne before the judges in the older days. Here, too, is the 1886 Grant of Arms to the borough soon after its latest charter had been secured.

#### COPY OF GRANT OF ARMS

ARMS OF THE THE ROYAL ARMS OF THE EARL MARSHAL ARMS COLLEGE OF ARMS

TO ALL AND SINGULAR to whom the Presents shall come, Sir Albert William Woods, Knight, Garter Principal King of Arms, Walter Aston Blount, Esq., Clarenceux King of Arms, and George Edward Cokayne, Esq., Norroy King of Arms send Greeting.

Whereas Thomas Rees, Major of the Borough of Cowbridge in the County of Glamorgan hath represented unto the Most Noble Henry, Duke of Norfolk, Earl Marshal and Hereditary Marshal of England, Knight of the Most Noble Order of the Garter, that the Queen had been graciously pleased by Letters Patent under the Great Seal bearing date the twenty-eighth day of September, one thousand, eight hundred and eighty-six to grant and declare that the inhabitants of the Parish of Cowbridge and their successors shall be one Body Politic and Corporate by the name of 'The Mayor, Aldermen and Burgesses of the said Incorporated Borough of Cowbridge' with perpetual succession and a Common Seal, and may assume Armorial Bearings which shall be duly entolled in the Heralds' College with other Powers, Authorities, Immunities and Privileges as in the said Letters Patent is fully recited, That the Mayor, Aldermen and Burgesses of the said Incorporated Borough of Cowbridge being desirous that the Common Seal to be used by them in their corporate capacity should contain fit and proper Armorial Bearings and be assigned under legal authority. He therefore requests on behalf of the said Mayor, Aldermen and Burgesses the favour of His Grace's warrant for Our granting and assigning such Armorial Bearings as may be proper to be borne by them and their successors on Seals, Shields, Banners or otherwise according to the Laws of Arms.

AND FORASMUCH as the said Earl Marshal did by warrant under his hand and seal bearing date the thirty-first March

#### COWBRIDGE OFFICIAL GUIDE

last authorize and direct Us to grant and assign such Armorial Ensigns accordingly. KNOW YE THEREFORE that we, the said Garter, Clarenceux and Norroy in pursuance of his Grace's Warrant and in virtue of the Letters Patent of Our several Offices to each of Us respectively granted do by these Presents grant and assign unto the said Mayor, Aldermen and Burgesses of the Incorporated Borough of Cowbridge the Arms following, that is to say Per Chevron Gules and Argent in chief seme of Cross Crosslets and two Lions rampant of the last, and in base over water a Bridge of Three Arches thereon a Cow passant all proper. And for a crest on a wreath of the colours a Cow proper holding in the mouth an Ear of Wheat leaved and slipped Gold and supporting with the dexter foreleg an escutcheon Or charged with three cheveronets invected Gules as the same are in the margin hereof more plainly depicted to be borne and used for ever hereafter by the said Mayor, Aldermen and Burgesses and by their successors on Seals, Shields, Banners or otherwise according to the Law of Arms.

IN WITNESS whereof We the said Garter, Clarenceux and Norroy Kings of Arms' have to these Presents subscribed Our names and affixed the Seals of Our several Offices this seventh April in the fifty-first year of the reign of Our Sovereign Lady Victoria by the Grace of God of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland Oueen. Defender of the Faith and in the year of Our Lord One thousand eight hundred and eightyeight.

ALBERT WOODS GARTER

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#### SOME INTERESTING HOUSES



COWBRIDGE GRAMMAR SCHOOL



CAERCADY HOUSE, HIGH STREET

# SOME INTERESTING HOUSES IN THE MAIN STREET

'The Eagle', now an agricultural stores, was an Elizabethan inn, the 'Spread Eagle' just outside the West Gate. Its fine ballroom, with a gallery at either end, is now a corn-store with an opening for loading on to Eagle Lane, well worth seeing even in its ruinous state. There is, too, an oak staircase leading up to it.

In the eighteenth and early nineteenth century the 'Eagle Academy' in this old room provided a sound education, especially in fine penmanship, arithmetic and book-keeping, at a time when the Grammar School's curriculum was almost confined to the classics. Surviving exercise books show what a high standard was achieved.

Cross House opposite Church Street and Caercady House opposite the Bear Hotel have fine Georgian exteriors of excellent proportions and good mouldings.

The **Bear Hotel**, the starting-point for some stage coaches and the changing-point for others, has a Dickensian interior and outbuildings.

The 'Duke of Wellington', formerly the 'Coach and Horses', retains its interesting exterior, suggesting the seventeenth century. Adjoining it up to some thirty-five years ago, were the 'Cowbridge Arms' and 'Davies the Currier's House' in the same style of architecture, making a delightful group.

Just below, on either side of the street, is a series of tall gabled houses, including **Great House**, now in part a chemist's shop. It was in the sixteenth and seventeenth century the residence of a branch of the Carne family, just as Woodstock House, near the site of the West Gate, was the town house of the Wyndhams.

The former 'White Lion' and 'Three Boars' Head' in the lower High Street, now a greengrocer's shop and saddlery respectively, give a good idea of the old-time inns that catered for farmers on market and fair days. The former retains its mounting-steps and wide paved passage that led to stables behind. Sixty years ago it was usual to see empty carts and traps at the kerb outside.

An interesting exterior is that of the **Ancient Druid** opposite the Post Office, with its strange wooden carvings of heraldic beasts over the windows. There is a tradition that it was a pilgrims' hostel in mediaeval times.

In the grounds of **Rhoscelyn** just above this are the remains of an ancient monolith of uncertain period and character; possibly it was a primitive cross.



THE ANCIENT DRUID



THE GIRLS' HIGH SCHOOL

#### GENERAL VIEW OF THE TOWN



#### SCHOOLS

#### THE GRAMMAR SCHOOL

Known to earlier generations as 'The College', the school is a Tudor foundation of 1608, though its present main buildings are mid-Victorian. It has a fine record of scholarship and its pupils have included scholars, Churchmen and statesmen of no mean order. It has a close connection with Jesus College, Oxford. Today it is a grant-earning school with approximately 50 boarders and 280 day boys.

The Girls' High School, though not actually within the borough, has been closely connected with it from its inception, for it was partly endowed by a Cowbridge gentleman. It was one of the schools opened under the 1889 Welsh Education Act. It is no longer residential but has approximately 120 day girls, drawn, in the main, from a six-mile radius.

The Pontfaen Junior School is in Broadway.

The Church of the Holy Cross was founded in the twelfth century. Cowbridge parish seems to have been carved out of the very large parish of Llanblethian, by which it is surrounded on all sides. Only in 1484 does it seem to have had a separate chaplain, by agreement with the Vicar of Llanblethian, and even in 1535 Leland gathered that Llanblethian was the true Parish Church and Cowbridge was one of its chapels.

There are a nave, a choir under the tower, a chancel and a side-chapel (now a vestry) which was possibly the 'Llanquian Chapel' mentioned in old documents. These all belong to the Early English period but the spacious South Aisle beyond the arches was added in 1483 by Anne Neville, Queen of Edward V (and later of Richard III) who also built the beautiful tower of St. John's, Cardiff. It has a fine timbered roof which originally had carved bosses, some heraldic, which are now in the vestry and worth examining.

The church seems to have suffered from the 1848 restoration which effectively obliterated most of the mediaeval features; the rose piscina survives in the chancel and that is about all. Not only were old tombstones used for paving but near the lectern is a large stone that bore a fine incised foliated cross of a very early period but much of this has now been worn away.



**BROADWAY** 

Two mural tablets are worth examination—that of Judge Jenkins, a Loyalist of the Civil War, to the right of the entrance, and that of William Carne of Nash against the South wall.

The Vicar is always pleased to show to anybody who is genuinely interested the Church plate consisting of an Elizabethan chalice, a paten given by Judge Jenkins' daughter and a particularly fine flagon of 1686.

#### **ADMINISTRATION**

The main interests of the borough are still in the care of the Mayor, Alderman and Councillors but certain functions, e.g. sanitation, are now administered in conjunction with the Cowbridge Rural District Council.

#### HOUSING

There are two groups of Council houses, the pre-war row along lower Broadway, and the new, larger group' on thed Limes Estate, to the South of the main street and approached by a road leading from the East end of the bridge.

#### **SERVICES**

Water is supplied by the Mid-Glamorgan Water Board; it is rather hard.

**Electricity** is supplied by the South Wales Electricity Board. **Gas** is produced by the works on the Limes for the borough only.

**Sanitation.** A new water-borne sewerage system has recently been completed.

In 1954 the half-yearly rate was 10/9d. in the pound.

#### COMMUNICATIONS

The Western Welsh Company and the Neath Luxury Coaches run to Cardiff and to Porthcawl, or Ammanford, at approximately half-hour intervals. The Black and White Company's coaches run to Cheltenham (with connections to all parts) twice in the morning and once in the evening. The Rhondda 'Bus Company connects at Talbot Green with Pontypridd 'buses hourly. Western Welsh 'buses run to Llantwit Major at

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two-hourly intervals and to St. Athan at roughly two-hour intervals, both connecting with 'buses to Barry.

There is no longer a passenger service on the **railway** but heavy goods are brought into the goods yard twice a day; smaller packages are delivered by van from Llantrisant station.

The Post Office is open from 9 a.m. to 6.30 p.m. There are seven collections daily, the last at 7 p.m., and two morning deliveries.

#### HEALTH

The Medical Officer of Health comments on the freedom from atmospheric pollution and on the fact that all milk sold in the borough is now tuberculin-tested, some of it pasteurized. Serious epidemics are non-existent.

The nearest general hospitals are at Bridgend (7 miles) and at Cardiff (12 miles). An ambulance is available at the Fire Station. Crossways (2 miles) is a branch of the Prince of Wales Orthopaedic Hospital.

#### SOCIAL

The Cowbridge Athletic Club has a fine playing field at the western end of the town with tennis courts and cricket pitch. The football (Rugby) pitch is at the lower end of the field. There is a children's recreation ground near the South Gate. A Badminton Club meets at the Grammar School Gymnasium on Tuesdays and Thursdays, September to April.

The Cowbridge Amateur Dramatic Society normally produces two plays annually and its productions are of an excellent standard.

The Men's Forum, being a popular discussion group, meets at the Town Hall on alternate Thursdays.

The Women's Institute meets above the Electricity Show-rooms on the first Tuesday afternoon in the month.

The Y.M.C.A. Youth Club meets in an attractive building behind the Town Hall, known as the Cowbridge Institute in which the County Library uses one room as a lending library on Monday evenings from 7 p.m.—7.30 p.m. for the general public.

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PARISH CHURCH TOWER

#### FREE CHURCHES

Ramoth Baptist Church is at the west end of the town, approached by an archway on the right as one walks up the main street.

Sion Presbyterian Chapel is in The Limes.

The Wesleyan Methodist Chapel is in Eastgate, almost opposite the Post Office.

The Roman Catholics meet on Sunday mornings at 9.30 a.m. at the Y.M.C.A. building behind the Town Hall.

#### A FEW SUGGESTED WALKS

There is a great variety of walks in the district but only a few can be suggested here.

A short walk begins at the South Gate, follows the road to the ruins of the ancient Town Mill and crosses the river to the foot of the steep Constitution Hill. A wicket gate on the right leads to a delightful field path between St. Quentin's Castle on the left slope and Llanblethian Hill to the right. The path leads to Llanblethian village and from the last wicket gate there is a choice of roads. The shortest way back is up the steep hill immediately to the left to St. Quentin's Castle gatehouse, and a fine view of the town and its hilly surroundings. Or the road immediately ahead at the wicket gate brings you to the main road through the village, turning left back to Cowbridge or right towards the old woollen factory at the extreme south-western end. Yet a third choice is the road immediately to the right through the quaintly named Piccadilly and up a steep slope winding right to the Parish Church. That leads to Cross Inn and the main Llantwit Major road and an easy descent to the town.

A six-and-a-half miles walk (but the first two-and-a-half miles can be covered by the Llantwit Major 'bus if desired) leads from the western extremity of the town along the Llanwit Major road. About two miles out the road turns sharply left at Nash Manor to a delightful avenue. At the end of this, another sharp left turn leads towards Sigginston (a'bus

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stop). Just below Victoria Inn a left-hand road leads to Llanmihangel Place, a fine old Tudor house, and the little church. The road leads back to Llanblethian and, at its highest point, gives a very fine view.

The main Cardiff road is not very peaceful but after a bare half-mile one can go straight up the old coach-road to Stalling Down, the highest point of the district. A short drop brings one to the charming village of St. Hilary. Between the church and the Bush Inn a lane continues under New Beaupré woods, a very lovely walk. At the lower end a wicket gate gives on to a corner of the wood and a path to the left that brings one to open fields and a drive that leads to the St. Athan road and back to the town.

From Stalling Down paths also lead down over the main modern road to the northern section of Aberthin, just a mile from Cowbridge, with an interesting Tudor house.

No visitor should miss the fine Tudor gateway of Beaupré Castle. This was originally a fortified site commanding one of the fords over the Thaw but the Tudor owners made it a gentleman's residence. Permission to view is obtainable at the farm-house that incorporates part of the castle buildings. It may be reached by the St. Athan road, keeping straight on at the first fork. Opposite How Mill, and on the nearer side of a river bridge, stone stiles lead to a field path to the castle. Just above, a road to the left takes you to a railway bridge near which is the opening of a long grass-grown drive. This is a much longer route.

'Buses make accessible a number of attractive quiet beaches as well as the popular resorts of Barry (via St. Athan or Llantwit Major) and Porthcawl.

Llantwit Major itself is full of interest and its beach is a mile and a half away. 'Buses rarely run down to it but there is a good road or an attractive meadow-path.

Fontgary Cove is reached by Barry 'buses from Llantwit or St. Athan.

Southerndown, with fine sands, has a service from Bridgend, along a beautiful coast-road. Marcross and Monknash are best reached by car, as the 'bus connections are not good.



THE OLD TOWN WALLS

There is a large parking area near the Nash lighthouse at Marcross, giving magnificent views of the Bristol Channel.

Every August the highly popular Cowbridge Agricultural Show is now held on a beautiful site near Penllyn Castle. 'Buses run to Pentre Meyrick on the Bridgend route, a short walk from the show-ground.

Penllyne can also be reached on foot, leaving the mainroad about a mile and a half for Keeper's Hill to the left. On reaching the castle entrance turn to the right for a winding hill leading down to Moorlands Farm. Just above the farm a stile on the opposite side leads to a footpath under the castle woods which brings you back to the western end of the town.

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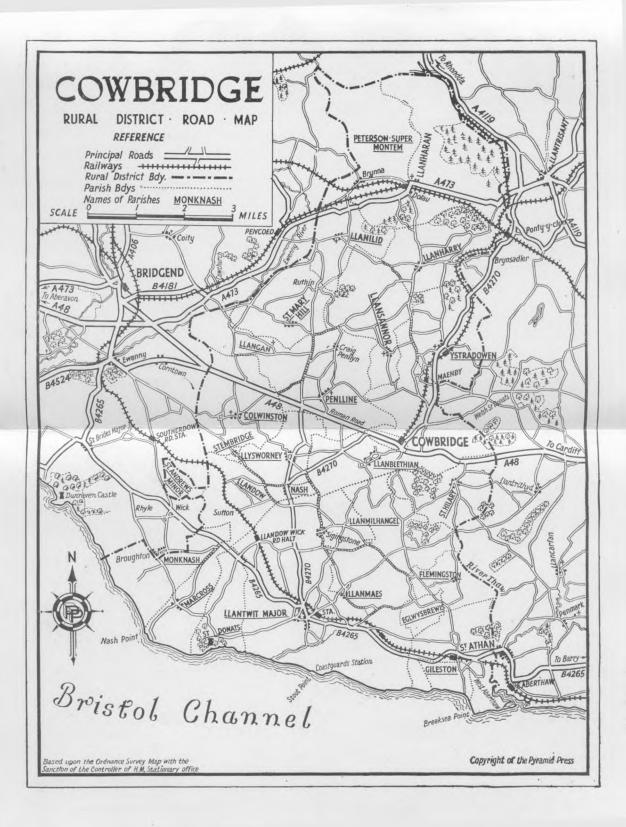
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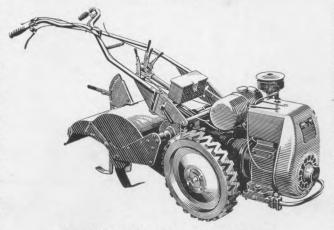
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