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COWBRIDGE

Glamorgan

THE OFFICIAL GUIDE

published by authority
of the

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TOP : High Street (photo: Ernest Carver & Son Ltd.)

BOTTOM : Upper High Street (photo: Ernest Carver & Son Ltd.)

The Borough of COWBRIDGE

COWBRIDGE lies just twelve miles west of Cardiff in that attractive part of southern Glamorgan called "The Vale", a region very different from the industrial valleys. It consists mainly of a mile-long street, which for centuries has borne all the traffic from West Wales to England—from droves of black cattle and wool-laden pack ponies to lorries loaded with tinplate—but which will soon be very much more peaceful. A by-pass is to be constructed, beginning this summer (1963), north of the town, to syphon off the never-ending stream of heavy transport.

The High Street crosses the small River Thaw which flows south of the Bristol Channel, and contains several pleasing and interesting old buildings besides some useful shops, and inns of respectable antiquity. Cowbridge, itself, is small; indeed with its present population of 1,000 inhabitants it is one of the smallest chartered boroughs in the Kingdom, but like many small people and places, it is full of character and well worth knowing.

From its source just four miles north of Cowbridge to its mouth at Aberthaw the River Thaw is bordered by a ribbon of marshland and has thus been an obstacle since early times. 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, Monk-nash and Llantwit Major to the river-crossing. On the summit of Llanblethian Hill nearby, there was a hill-fort. Roman relics have been found within the borough area.

Whether there was any Saxon occupation of the area is not certain but the Normans certainly settled in force and they regarded the crossing as a strategic point. Instead of building a castle, they walled in a space immediately west of the crossing. Perhaps they built the bridge; or perhaps they found there a bridge after the clapper style, suitable for pedestrians and packhorses. At any rate, the bridge was of stone, a rarity in those days, and the Welsh therefore (the "vulgar Welsh", said the condescending Dineley, the Duke of Beaufort's chronicler in 1684) called the place Pontfaen or Bontvaen, "the stone bridge" and continued to do so for centuries.

It is possible that a castle also was built, by the first Norman lord of the town, Robert St. Quentin, on a motte raised within the Llanblethian hillfort. This would have been most likely a wooden keep and stockade. Folk-memory has confused events so that today the 14th century castle of the De Clares (of which the gatehouse

still survives) at Llanblethian has been attributed to the St. Quentins.

The little Norman fortified borough near the river-crossing was, to judge by signatures on early documents, inhabited by Normans and their Saxon, or English subordinates. In the case of most Norman boroughs in Wales, the Welsh were not allowed to come within the walls or, if they did, they had no burgess privileges; and, not unnaturally, they resented this and occasionally attacked such places. Hence, perhaps, the castellated tower of the Parish Church, of a type frequently found on the Marches. Although "the natives" continued to call the town Pontfaen, the name "Cubrigg" goes back at least to 1295; but this applied to the small bridge over a drainage ditch at the foot of the Darren Hill west of the town—perhaps where the burgesses' cattle were driven out to pasture and taken in at nightfall.

This walled town has an East Gate (near the present Town Hall) and a West Gate near the cattle market. On the road to Llanblethian is the only surviving gate, the South Gate (Porte Melin, the Mill Gate). Probably there was no North Gate. The walls and their watchtowers survive east of the cattle market, south of the Old Hall Garden and beyond the South Gate around the garden of the Grammar School. Within the Old Hall Garden, the raised walk, which the sentinels patrolled, survives. There is also a section of the moat, west of the stoneyard; the rest was filled in only during the last century. The

The Old Town' Hall, demolished 1830





The Town Hall (photo: Ernest Carver & Son Ltd.)

line of the moat is : the lane at the back of the Town Hall, 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 earliest of the Cowbridge charters was granted by the Lord of the Manor, and later confirmed by the Crown, from the thirteenth century on. These 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". 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 county, for Cowbridge was for centuries the seat of the Great Sessions and Quarter Sessions. It was, however, a privilege of the Town Guildsmen that they should be imprisoned under their own Guild Hall ! Early in the 19th century this was demolished and a new Town Hall built as a superstructure over the old gaol, whose eerie cells and passages still exist and whose gratings may be seen in the Lesser Hall.

On important occasions the Mayor, Aldermen and Councillors still walk 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 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
EARL MARSHAL

THE ROYAL
ARMS

ARMS OF THE
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, Mayor 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

The Grammar School
(photo: Ernest Carver
& Son Ltd.)



Cricket at Cowbridge
(photo: Ernest Carver
& Son Ltd.)






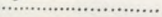
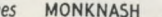
*Cowbridge's lively
Market*
(photo: Ernest Carver
& Son Ltd.)

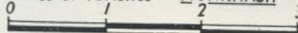


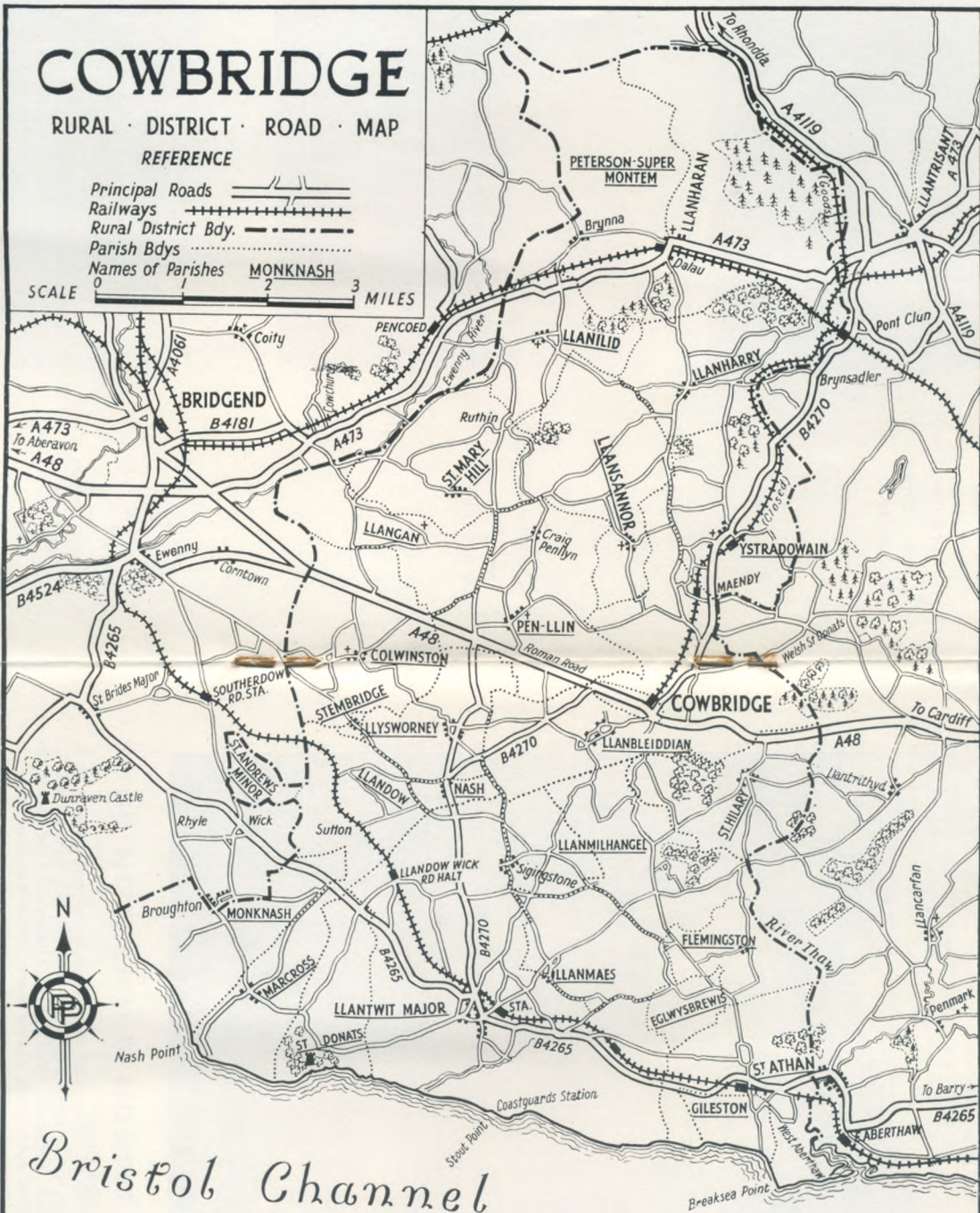
COWBRIDGE

RURAL · DISTRICT · ROAD · MAP

REFERENCE

- Principal Roads 
- Railways 
- Rural District Bdy. 
- Parish Bdy. 
- Names of Parishes 

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Bristol Channel



one Body Politic and Corporate by the name of 'The Mayor, Aldermen and Burgesses of the said Incorporate 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 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 Officers to each of Us respectively granted do by these Presents grant and assign unto the said Mayor, Aldermen and Burgesses of the Incorporate 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 Queen, Defender of the Faith and in the year of Our Lord One thousand eight hundred and eighty-eight.

ALBERT WOODS
GARTER

WALTER ASTON BLOUNT
CLARENCEUX

G. E. COKAYNE
NORROY

SOME INTERESTING HOUSES

A surprising number of old houses have survived the traffic-vibration of the last few decades and the vicissitudes of the centuries. Many of them are Georgian; some have Georgian facades on older constructions, and some retain details going back to Tudor times.



'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.

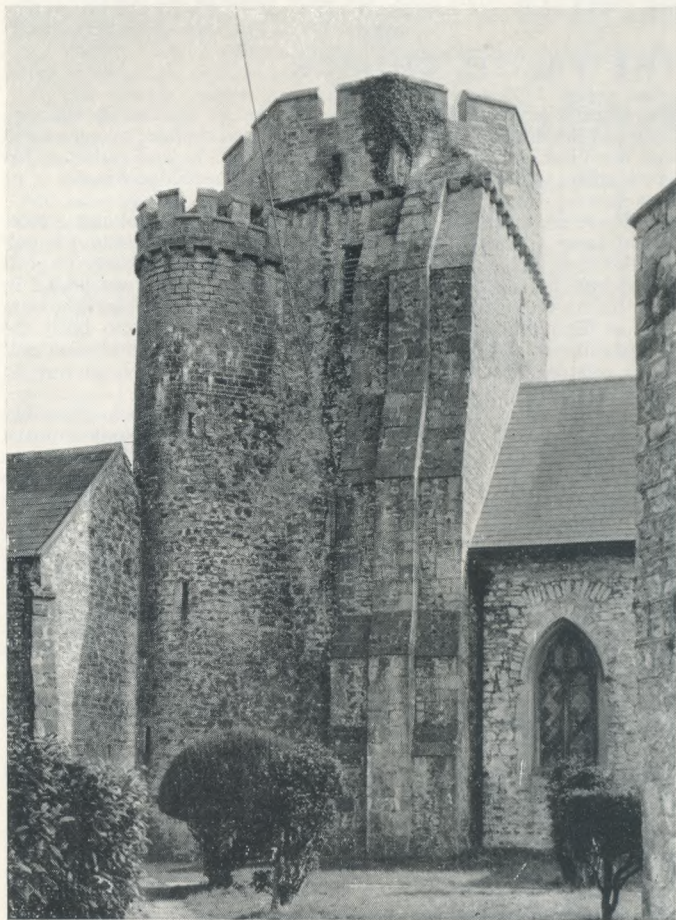
The 'Duke of Wellington', formerly the 'Coach and Horses', retains its interesting exterior, suggesting the seventeenth century.

Just below, on either side of the street, is a series of tall gabled houses, including the 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 dry cleaners 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.

OPPOSITE PAGE : *A general view of the town*

BELOW : *The Parish Church tower*



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; it has been called "Y Garreg Wen" but since this only means "The White Rock" the name indicates nothing historical.

THE PARISH CHURCH

The Church of the Holy Cross was founded in the twelfth century. Only in 1484 did the parish acquire 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, wife of the young Prince of Wales who was slain at Tewkesbury 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 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.

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.

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

Roman Catholics meet at St. Cadoc's Church which is situated close to the ancient Town Mill on Sundays at 9 a.m., Weekdays, Thursday 7 p.m.

ADMINISTRATION

The main interests of the borough are still in the care of the Mayor, Aldermen 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 the Limes Estate, to the South of the main street and approached by a road leading from the East end of the bridge.

Health. The Medical Officer of Health comments on the freedom from atmospheric pollution and from serious epidemics.

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.

Education. Known to earlier generations as 'The College', the Grammar School is a 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 341 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 375 day girls, drawn, in the main, from a six-mile radius.

The Pontfaen Junior School is in Broadway.

PUBLIC 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 now piped into the town.

Sanitation. A water-borne sewerage system was completed some years ago.

In 1963/64 the half-yearly rate was 10/8d. in the pound.

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

Municipal Car Parks (free) adjoining Cattle Market and at rear of Town Hall.

Banks. Barclays, Lloyds, Midland, National Provincial.

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SOME WALKS IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

A short walk begins at the South Gate, follows the road to the *ruins of the ancient Town Mill* now being converted into an attractive dwelling 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 of 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 Llantwit 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 stop). Just below Victoria Inn a left-hand road leads to Llanmihangel Plas, a fine Tudor house, and the little church. The road leads back to Llanblethian and, at its highest point, gives a very fine view.

Take the bus along the Cardiff road for approximately half a mile and 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 Beaupre 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 a Tudor house, Ty Mawr (The Great House), having a Bridge Gate House.

The fine Tudor gateway of Beaupre Castle, near St. Hilary, is interesting. Beaupre was originally a fortified site commanding one of the fords over the Thaw but the Tudor owners made it a gentleman's residence. 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 the river bridge, stone stiles lead to a field path to the castle. An alternative, much longer route is by way of a drive entered from the St. Athan road near the railway bridge.

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.

Penllyn can also be reached on foot, leaving the main road 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.

Llantwit Major 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.

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

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



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