

Its rural peace draws the city folk—but is that peace too much?

# Cowbridge: has that local spirit of hope in the tearaway '70s

GOOD FACILITIES APPEAR today to be the all-important characteristic of a residential area, but isn't it rather paradoxical that in a small market town like Cowbridge, some people who have gladly abandoned the dusty cities, nevertheless continue to crave for city amenities?

The only honest answer to their plea can be—why live in Cowbridge if you are crying out for the amenities of Cardiff? While Cowbridge caters well for many needs, is there a case for some serious development as far as social facilities are concerned? I asked local people what they thought Cowbridge had to offer.

Retired school mistress and local historian, Miss Maud Gunter has seen Cowbridge plough through nearly 82 years of life, and she is convinced that today as in the past, Cowbridge is equipped with a rich culture. "In comparison with towns of its size, Cowbridge provides for a big range of interests" she said.

### SOCIETIES

"There has always been a culture here," said Miss Gunter. "History shows that there was an eighteenth century coffee tavern in Cowbridge, that was used as a literary club and library. Cowbridge really used to have a reputation for being a snooty, little place, mainly because of its culture."

Apart from cultural meetings in coffee taverns, pubs were the principal instigators of social spirit. "In my childhood, there was a pub for every lamp-post in Cowbridge, and one over," said Miss Gunter.

Though Miss Gunter feels that Cowbridge has lost some of its personal intimacy, local societies are doing well to bridge the gap, she said.

While the Borough of Cowbridge has a limited expansion potential, the periphery is expanding and Cowbridge says Miss Gunter is catering well for its new inhabitants. "A number of new shops have started and the old ones have been given a new lease of life."

"There is very strong social spirit, and we should like to acquire the Old Hall for a social centre, since space in the Town Hall is limited," she said.

"We could do with a community centre," said Miss Gunter "and at the moment we are depending on a library van for our books. It has five stands in Cowbridge, so there is obvious scope for a permanent library."

Cowbridge as a shopping centre caters extremely well for its inhabitants, and

there are two more supermarkets in the pipe-line.

Chairman of the Borough Council Planning Committee, Ald K. A. George, who owns a men's outfitters in the main street, told me that a lot of his customers came from Cardiff and its outskirts. "It amazes me where the customers come from," he said.

### SEARCH

Ald. George felt that most people living in Cowbridge were here for its rural aspect, and he agreed that people were often in search of city amenities. However he felt that shopping facilities were very adequate. "Shopping facilities are better than anywhere could expect for a town of this size," he said, "but there is a lack of amenities for young people."

Another shop owner in Cowbridge felt too, that young people in Cowbridge were not well catered for. "Generally facilities are good, but as far as young people are concerned, I personally feel local organisations are not catering for the majority."

"But a community centre will never be a success here," he said. "because Cowbridge is not that sort

## Adrienne Leijerstam talks to Cowbridge people about Cowbridge:

'If we become over-developed, local spirit will suffer'

'It used to be a sleepy old town, but now we have a lot of new people'



MISS MAUD GUNTER: "Cowbridge really used to have a reputation for being a snooty little place".

of community. When the time comes for people to take turns, they don't want to know. People are more satisfied with their own buildings. I think it would be a unique set up to erect a series of small interconnected buildings, for use by societies."

Chairman of Cowbridge's Entertainment Committee, Mr. W. J. James, feels that social facilities in Cowbridge leaves very much to be desired. Commenting on a community centre, he said that there was a need for some such centre in Cowbridge.

### PROBLEMS

"It's the perennial problem of dual use of facilities," he said. "The grammar school have good facilities, which we ought to be able to use, the Boys' Brigade do this occasionally, but it should be a standard facility."

"If I take my son swimming I have to go to Llantrisant, it's alright as I am prepared to travel, but there must be others who miss out," he said.

Deputy head of Cowbridge Grammar, Mr. Arthur Codling, who also chairs the Cowbridge Oper-

atic Society, feels as everyone must, that his society is unfortunate as far as the Town Hall is concerned. "We feel we are a bit hamstrung, as it is important for us to make a profit from our shows, but of course there is unlimited space for the audience."

"Cowbridge used to be a rather sleepy old town, but now we have a lot of new people in the area, and there are of course problems of space."

However, Mr. Codling felt that a community centre was not necessary the answer. "If we have a number of different organisations using one place, there can be difficulties," he said.

The strongest words on the facilities came from Coun. (Mrs.) M. J. Weston. "I think the amenities stink," she said.

"We have no health centre, no library, last year I headed a campaign to try and get these things in the town here, we made

the County sit up, but we are still waiting for final results to come through." A community centre and a youth centre were among Mrs. Weston's other suggestions.

The Deputy Clerk of Glamorgan County Council said recently that a library and health centre were on the cards for Cowbridge and should be completed around 1973-1974.

"The Old Hall is to be adapted into County Council Offices, and there will be some demolition behind it," he said. "In the grounds will be the new library and health centre."

"There is no possibility as plans now stand, for a

community centre in the Old Hall itself," he added. "The office conversion is proceeding at the moment."

"Though many of the suggested improvements are needed, it is important to pause for a moment and think of future development in Cowbridge."

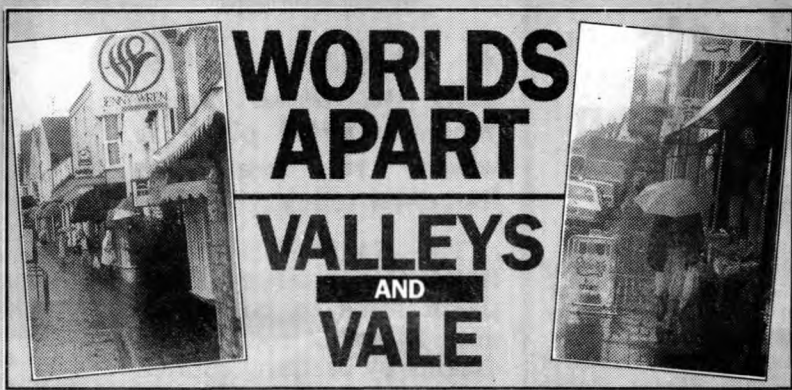
Are people of Cowbridge quelling its rural spirit, which they so much admire, by demanding all the 'mod cons' on their doorsteps? As Miss Gunter points out: "Up to now development has been manageable and local spirit has contained it, but if we become over-developed, local spirit will suffer."



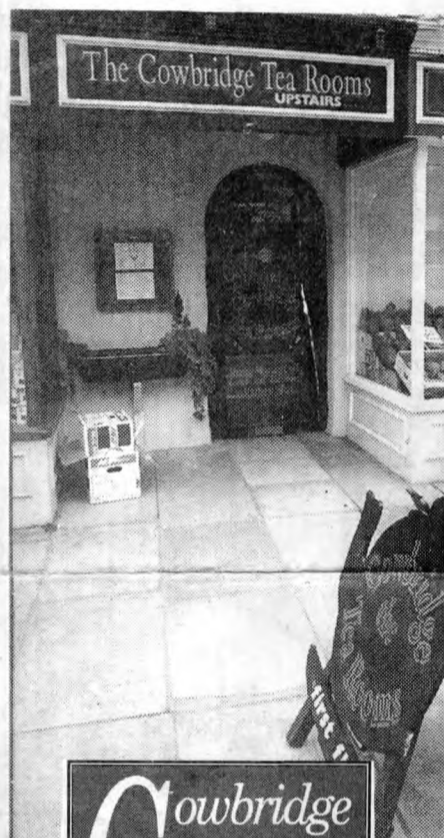
THREE OF THE SCENES in the centre of Cowbridge — the rural hub of the Vale of Glamorgan.



They're only 20 miles apart - yet the market town of Cowbridge and its gingham-covered jam jars is worlds away from the boarded-up shops and fish and chip caffs in Cynon Valley, consistently high in the statistics for the most depressed areas of Britain. DAN O'NEILL spent a couple of days comparing the two...



# Ambridge in the Vale



O WHERE are they, you wonder as you amble along this street chopped from the top of a chocolate box. The film crews, the stars, the lights and cameras? Oh, come on — this can't be real, can it?

Not in South Wales, not when the Cynon Valley's round the corner. It's just a big film set, it has to be. Where they're maybe making Mrs Miniver Returns and there IS honey still for tea.

Yes, it uncannily resembles early Hollywood's idea of Ye Olde Englishe Village, right down to the ancient stone and gently sighing yews. Cowbridge or Ambridge?

But this is for real — proof, if you ever doubted, that if this affluent town shares the same slice of the map as Penrhiwceiber and Mountain Ash, we are indeed two nations.

To step into the High Street is to trip back in time. Hold your breath. Unless you ignore the Electricity showroom, part of an organisation not noticeably short of cash, there is not one empty shop or boarded-up window along the tranquil length of this street.

There is no evidence on the pavements, clearly scoured at dawn by battalions of serfs, that such beasts as dogs exist. In fact you do not see a single wandering dog on this lumin-

**'To step into the High Street is to trip back in time'**

ous spring day, nor is there the tiniest hint of the graffiti so universal everywhere else.

Bill might love Blodwen here — but they don't tell the world by scrawling the news all over the bus shelter or the Town Hall wall. And here's another miracle — there's not a single *flag-end* on the pavement.

Malcolm Davies propels his broom along the gutter. Been in Cowbridge since last summer. Not bad, he muses. "You get a lot more mess in Barry." Malcolm, you should see Mountain Ash!

If you can tell the tweeness of a town by the titles of its shops, well... take a flower shop rejoicing in the name *Oops-a-Daisy*, a restaurant announcing that it's *Off The Beeton Track* — Beeton, as in *First Catch Your Hare*, geddit? — and the place where you get your curtain material called the *Fabric Library*. With other shops masquerading as... studios.

When the sun shines at the back of Beeton, basking among the spring blooms, the matrons of Cowbridge take their morning coffee. Wait a couple of months or so and it might be the Med, so overflowing the flora in season.

Across the road in the Cowbridge Tearooms you don't just order a pot of tea. You speak of Assam or Darjeeling, Earl Grey or Lapsang Souchong.

Coffee? Every country from Colombia to Costa Rica contributes. And in Cowbridge, apparently, they don't sell icecream. It's *iced creams*.

In the grocer's you'll find snails at £6.25 the



**LIFESTYLE:** If you can tell the tweeness of a town by the titles of its shops... ABOVE, bistro chic; LEFT, Shoppers reflect on the fashions in these windows

jar. To go with the French cheese, maybe. Half the shops, in fact, remind you of Anne Hathaway's cottage.

Speaking of cottages... you too, can live in Cowbridge if you've got two hundred grand to spare. That's about the average cost of the better class of cottage. One was actually reduced from £248,000 to a mere £195,000.

There are humbler hovels. A town house, which in valley terms means something in the middle of the terrace, is only £66,500. You can go up to another at £300,000, but that one had no photograph to show you what it looks like.

Photograph? At these prices you suspect they're waiting for some latterday Leonardo to finish his painting of the pad.

You miss the familiar old steel grilles slamming down over windows. The wood instead

of glass. Behind that glass kids' clothes, a baby's dress reduced to £32 with £25 for a romper suit.

Want a deal? Go to Mountain Ash. You find sports coats there for a lot less than the £128 for the bargain in Cowbridge.

How many weeks' dole is that? Who worries when there are only 159 out of work in the Cowbridge area compared to 3,833 in Cynon?

The Cynon Valley — where you don't find filet and avacado pears as you do in Miniverland. Where you don't find pubs like Ye Olde Mason's Arms, stuffed with brass and polished mahogany, a calendar illustration come to life.

Cowbridge — where there is not even a job centre or a chippie, only a very discreet Chinese takeaway. Which more or less says it all...



**'Cowbridge shimmered in the sunshine. Cynon Valley glowers in the gloom' — READ PART TWO ON MONDAY**

early 1970s

# The ancient town of Cowbridge



The earliest recorded auctioneer operating in Cowbridge was a Mr. John Thomas who had a sale in Llanblethian in 1885. He had working with him a Mr. John David, who thereafter gave his name to the present day Cowbridge firm of John David, Watts and Morgan. Mr. T. J. Yorwerth started a rival firm, joined by Mr. Herbert Thomas, who formed the firm today known as Herbert R. Thomas, Son and Edwards. Both firms have since shared the cattle market which is now held weekly on Mondays.

## THE DUKE

Many of the inns were the market dealers sought rest have romantic legends attached to them. The Duke of Wellington is said to have been named after the famous Duke who stopped there overnight on his way to meet General Picton in Carmarthen.

Tradition also has it that when a highwayman, having a quiet drink, was disturbed by the entrance of Customs and Excise officers he threw his

tant part in the early life of the town, serving both as a watch tower in times of trouble and containing the bells which sounded the alarm and curfew. Special seats were reserved in the Church for the officials of the borough from earliest times and at one time the Corporation also decided who was to be buried where in the churchyard.

The church has been restored a number of times, but only recently, with the re-roofing of both the chancel and the choir vestry, has the task of restoration been completed.

The Rector of Holy Cross Church, the Rev. S. H. Mogford, who has been in Cowbridge for nine years is also the Vicar of Llanblethian, Llandough, and St. Mary Church and Rural Dean of Llantwit Major and Cowbridge. He serves the large parish with the help of a curate, the Rev. Graham Francis, and lay readers like Dr. Graham Loveluck and Mr. John Prosser.

in the reign of King Charles II. Pupils at the school brought to the borough an annual income by way of boarding out fees and school uniform. The charge for boarders taken in by the townspeople in 1730 was £10 year, or £13 if they lived at the School House. It was not a "Free" school in the true sense of the word, as only a few Cowbridge boys, who passed a standard examination, were admitted at reduced fees. The school, which was known as the College, was famous for its classical tuition.

At present the Old Boys of the school are trying to retain the traditions by fighting to save the school from the comprehensive system.

The Cowbridge High School for Girls dates back to the 19th Century. The Intermediate School for Girls was opened as a result of the exertions of the prominent townsmen, John Bevan and Alderman Edward John, who were advocates of equal opportunities for girls and boys. At the moment it has about 400 pupils and is faced with the prospect of turning comprehensive in the future.

swag into a well in the middle of the floor and escaped through a window. The present landlord recently found such a well and has engaged a frogman to search for any hidden loot.

The Bear Hotel is known to be an old coaching Inn, a convenient stopping place for travellers en route to London and Bristol and west to Swansea and Milford Haven.

#### HOLY CROSS

Another ancient building of interest still standing is Holy Cross Church, Cowbridge. The most striking feature of the Church is the castellated tower which played an impor-

Cowbridge has not lagged behind in the educational field. The famous Cowbridge Grammar School dates back to the 17th Century.

There is tradition that the old Cowbridge Free School was originally an offshoot of the monastic seat of learning at Llantwit Major but there is no definite proof of this. The most widely held theory is that it was founded as a Municipal Grammar School in 1608, and had for its patron Sir John Stradling.

In 1685 the school was permanently endowed by Sir Leoline Jenkins, an old boy of the school, and Secretary of State

#### CONSERVATION

The unique character of the old borough is preserved today, for Cowbridge is situated within a conservation area and development that would not be in keeping with the town is refused.

Under the Government reorganisation plan, Cowbridge will become part of the new County of South Glamorgan, but because it is a municipal borough it is entitled to a "Community Council" which will no doubt do its best to see the tradition of the Cowbridge story is retained.



# £1m 'Better homes' Plan for Cowbridge

**A HOME improvement project to cost over £1 million — the largest of its kind in South Wales and one of the biggest of its type in the U.K. — has been designed by the National Coal Board for Cowbridge Rural Council for modernising about 700 council houses in the Vale of Glamorgan.**

Work will start in May and should take just over 12 months to complete. Under the programme all the council's older properties, built between the wars, will be renewed to 21st Century standards of comfort, with central heating, modernised kitchens and remodelled bathrooms.

It is the largest single scheme of its type to be taken on by a local authority in South Wales and will be up to 75 per cent financed under a Welsh Office grants scheme made available to all local authorities through the 1969 Housing Act.

Building works will be under direct contract to Cowbridge Rural Council and central heating installations will be undertaken by the National Coal Board.

The entire programme planning — including project scheduling — will be co-ordinated and directed by the South Wales Technical Services Branch of the National Coal Board's Marketing Department under a system devised by its Operational Research Group.

The Board's South Wales Area Architectural Services Branch has surveyed the properties, prepared drawings, designed the modernisations and applied for the grants from the Welsh Office on behalf of the local authority. It is also responsible for preparing tenders, bills of quantity and supervision of the contracts.

## BIG PROJECT

It is envisaged that simultaneous works will be carried out on housing estates throughout the rural district and it is planned that the entire scheme will be completed in about 12 months.

The project is one of the largest of its type ever handled by the National Coal Board and is second only to a similar programme now drawing to conclusion at Watford, Herts., where 840 homes have been re-styled.

Since 1969 the Board's South Wales Technical Services Branch has drafted improvement schemes for several local authorities in South Wales and the West of England, including Yeovil and Westbury (Wilts). Under this type of contract service for solid fuel it has completed works on 1,600 houses and has another 3,000 at an advanced planning stage.

Showhouses are to be placed on view in the Cowbridge Rural District so that tenants can see in advance the benefits to accrue from the project.

Central heating installations will form the first phase of the operation and each house will be completed in one day or one and a half days at the maximum. Building operations will begin shortly afterwards.

Each home will be equipped with a room heater which will burn either naturally smokeless Welsh fuel or locally manufactured smokeless fuel. It will operate up to four radiators and provide domestic hot water.

## PROBLEMS

Tenant liaison officers will be provided by the National Coal Board to assist householders with advice about routine domestic problems that may occur as a result of the operation.

They will pay at least three visits to each home before work starts and make regular checks thereafter to see that

the programme is up to schedule.

Self-help committees will be formed by Cowbridge Rural Council and the National Coal Board to help with welfare problems that may arise where properties require major surgery.

Home economists from the Solid Fuel Advisory Service — the organisation operated jointly by the Coal Merchants' Federation and the National Coal Board — will make follow-up visits to tenants later on with advice about operating appliances and information about suitable types of available fuel.

National Coal Board South Wales Area Marketing Director, Mr. Walter Lewis said: "This is a major task, calling for efficient operational planning at all levels. I consider it a partnership between the local authority and the Board which will lead ultimately to greatly improved living standards for all the tenants concerned. In the long-term I feel sure they will congratulate their council on its enterprise."

from the 'GLAMORGAN  
GAZETTE'  
23rd. March 1973

# The romantic tale of Pontfaen

BY  
ELIZABETH  
MORGAN

ONE MORNING, a sharp-eyed Norman tax collector visited a place called by the Welsh, Pontfaen, and discovered a cow hidden under the arch of the stone bridge. It was naturally the practice of the Welsh to hide their beasts when the collector was expected, and this discovery was regarded as a triumph for the administration, who thereupon named the place Cubrigg, which became in time, Cowbridge.

There is another popular legend that the town received its name from a cow which became so wedged under the bridge that it had to be slaughtered on the spot.

These stories must have been passed down for generations because eventually the cow and bridge motif was incorporated into the first arms of the borough. A corporation seal in use in 1703 shows a cow with a forefoot raised, crossing a bridge over water, and the present arms also bears the image of a cow, both on the badge and on the crest above.

Although the Normans built the first stone bridge over the River Thaw at Cowbridge, some time between the conquest and the 13th Century, it is thought the Romans may have erected the first bridge, made of wood, over the narrow ford, in order to accommodate a nearby camp which was constructed in order to guard the Great Sea Road which crossed the Thaw at this point.

A small town was developed at Cowbridge about the middle of the thirteenth century. The town claimed borough rights by ancient prescription and by charters, the first prescription being granted by Richard de Clare, Lord of Glamorgan, in 1254.

Upon his death, Richard de Clare was succeeded by his son, Gilbert, who seeing that truces between the Welsh and English were of no avail, caused the borough of Cowbridge to be walled for its own protection. The wall, built in the late 13th Century, enclosed the whole town of some ten acres. Reported to have been 25 feet high, 8 feet wide, the wall was surrounded by a ditch filled with water. Inside it there was a raised walk about 14 feet that enabled the defenders of the town, when under attack, to take up defensive positions.

### LAW COURTS

The present archway in the town, known as the South Gate, is part of the old wall.

Four gates apparently existed, as these are referred to in the Laws of the Borough (1610).

In Mediaeval Cowbridge, the Guildhall stood roughly in the middle of the High Street, and it was here that the courts were held. Some boroughs held only one court, but Cowbridge held four.

In time the Guildhall was not only a centre of legal activities, but also came to accommodate first one and later two "town shops," which were owned by the borough and let to tenants. There were no butchers' shops in the town until the 19th Century, and fresh meat and poultry were sold from the stalls in the Guildhall. The old Guildhall was removed when the new Town Hall was built in 1830.

Iolo Morganwg, the famous bard, is numbered among Cowbridge's shopkeepers. A native of Penon, near Flemingston, he moved to Cowbridge in 1797 and opened a shop somewhere opposite the present Town Hall, where he sold books, stationery and groceries. He was probably the first shopkeeper to sell East Indian sugar, for it was the product of free labour and he was in favour of promoting any measure to discourage the slave trade. He was renowned for his theory that grass would be suitable for human food, and accom-

panied by an eccentric friend, he devoted a whole day to grazing in the country.

### MARKET CENTRE

As well as the development of trading shops, dealing in livestock soon became a regular practice in Cowbridge. A record of 1630 states that there were two annual fairs in the town, and market days were Tuesdays and Saturdays. Traders were charged one penny per day for pitching stalls at the market, payable to the Sergeants at Mace.

Later, in the 19th Century, four well patronised stock fairs were held annually, at which large numbers of horses and other animals changed hands. These fairs were well attended by dealers from England and various parts of Wales, and this would account for the large number of inns in the borough, many of which were built to accommodate the travellers.

On fair evenings, in as such as the Mason's Arms and Three Boar's Head were packed to capacity by singing and dancing crowds, who were entertained by local harpists.

Tuesday was the only market day, but Cowbridge soon gained the reputation of being the Glamorgan centre for farm stock sales, and animals were



**COWBRIDGE CHURCH**

The most striking external feature of Cowbridge Church is the castle like tower which has the appearance of an embattled fortress, especially from a distance. The tower and part of the present church were probably built in the early fourteenth century on the site of an earlier chapel.

(Contd. on Page 11)



### THE TOWN HALL

The Town Hall, Cowbridge, was built in 1830 under the direction of Isaiah Verity the elder, who was later made a freeman of the borough as a reward for his skill and care in the task. The old Guild Hall and Cross were removed on completion of the new building. The Town Hall is on the site of the old prison or house of correction as it was called. A large part of the prison was used in the building and some of the cells of the old prison can be seen to this day.

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Season's Greetings to All!



PRESENT day Cowbridge (above), is very much a commercial centre and although alterations and renovations have taken place the character of the town remains.

terations and renovations have taken place the character of the town remains.

Cowbridge Grammar School (below), was founded in 1608 and at about 1617 was moved to its present site. In

1685 the school was permanently endowed by Sir Leoline Jenkins, an old boy of the school.



COWBRIDGE is the main shopping area for Llanblethian, Llysorwney, Llandow and other small villages round the district. And many of these villages come into the old boundary called the Hundred of Cowbridge. This boundary was a sub-division of the County and the Petty Sessional Division of Cowbridge. With the exception of minor extensions to the west and east borders the Petty Sessional Division of Cowbridge remains the same. The Hundred was bordered on the east by the Hundreds of Dinas Powis and Miskin, and on the west by the Hundred of Ogmor. The court today is generally known as the Police or Magistrates Court, but it is still officially the Court of Petty Sessions.

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