

# A WALK AROUND COWBRIDGE

There was a small town here in Roman times - the High Street runs along the line of the main Roman road in South Wales, the Via Julia, and archaeological digs have exposed a wealth of military and civilian remains. Cowbridge as we know it today, however, developed from the 'new town' established in 1254 by Richard de Clare, the Lord of Glamorgan. The town walls, the South Gate, the church and the burgage plots date from this time. Its growth since then has been as a market town for the Vale of Glamorgan, with the wealthy families of the Vale having town houses built along the High Street, and also as an educational centre, the Grammar School being founded in 1608.

This short walk is restricted to the central area; there are of course buildings of interest outside the area covered.

*Start in the gardens of Old Hall.*

Old Hall, now Cowbridge's Adult Education Centre, was built as a town house, probably in the seventeenth century, and was associated with the Edmondson family until the 1920s. A Classical extension with Venetian windows was added in the eighteenth century - but now only the ground floor of the facade remains.



Old Hall gardens are bordered to the south and west by the Town Walls, which were built to enclose the new town of Cowbridge in the thirteenth century.

*Proceed between the modern Health Centre and the Library, designed by the Welsh School of Architecture, to the steps leading to the 'battlements' - the short stretch of walkway on top of the wall.*

The bastion in the south-west corner was originally higher, but still gives a good view over to Llanblethian Hill with its Iron Age fort - and also overlooks the site of the Butts Pool, where scolds (over-talkative women!) were ducked in the eighteenth century. The pool was filled in when the cattle market was constructed.

*Go through the gateway in the wall and walk to the Southgate.*



In the mediaeval walls, there were originally four gates, which controlled access to the town, particularly to collect tolls from those going in to market. Only the Southgate remains.

The walls continue to another bastion in the Grammar School garden.

*Go through the Southgate to inspect Cowbridge Grammar School.*

The school was founded in 1608 by the Stradlings of St Donats, and was owned by Jesus College, Oxford, from 1685 to 1918. Jesus College paid for the present buildings - now in a sorry state - to be put up in 1847 - 52. They were designed by the ecclesiastical architect, John Prichard, to harmonise with the church and cottages in Church Street.



*Walk past the Tally Court, where handball used to be played, and opposite the two cottages (formerly one house, built in the late sixteenth century) is the entrance to the churchyard of Holy Cross Church.*

Like the town walls and the Southgate, Holy Cross Church was first built in the second half of the thirteenth century. Its solid and perhaps fortified tower may have been capped with a small spire; the bells date from the eighteenth century. Inside the church, the tower arches are massive; the south aisle with its more delicate arcading was a gift to the church of Lady Ann Neville (wife of Richard III) in 1473. Many memorials and monuments are of interest, especially the Carne memorial and those to the Edmondes family and to various headmasters of the Grammar School.

*On leaving the churchyard, turn right towards the High Street.*

The Duke of Wellington was a mediaeval house: the two front rooms and passage remain in their original location. The space in the High Street opposite the 'Duke' - earlier the Black Horse - was occupied by the Town Hall, market and town cross; these caused such an obstacle to traffic on the main road that in 1830 the Town Hall and cross were demolished and the market moved. A small brass plate on the road marks the site of the cross where, among others, John Wesley once preached.

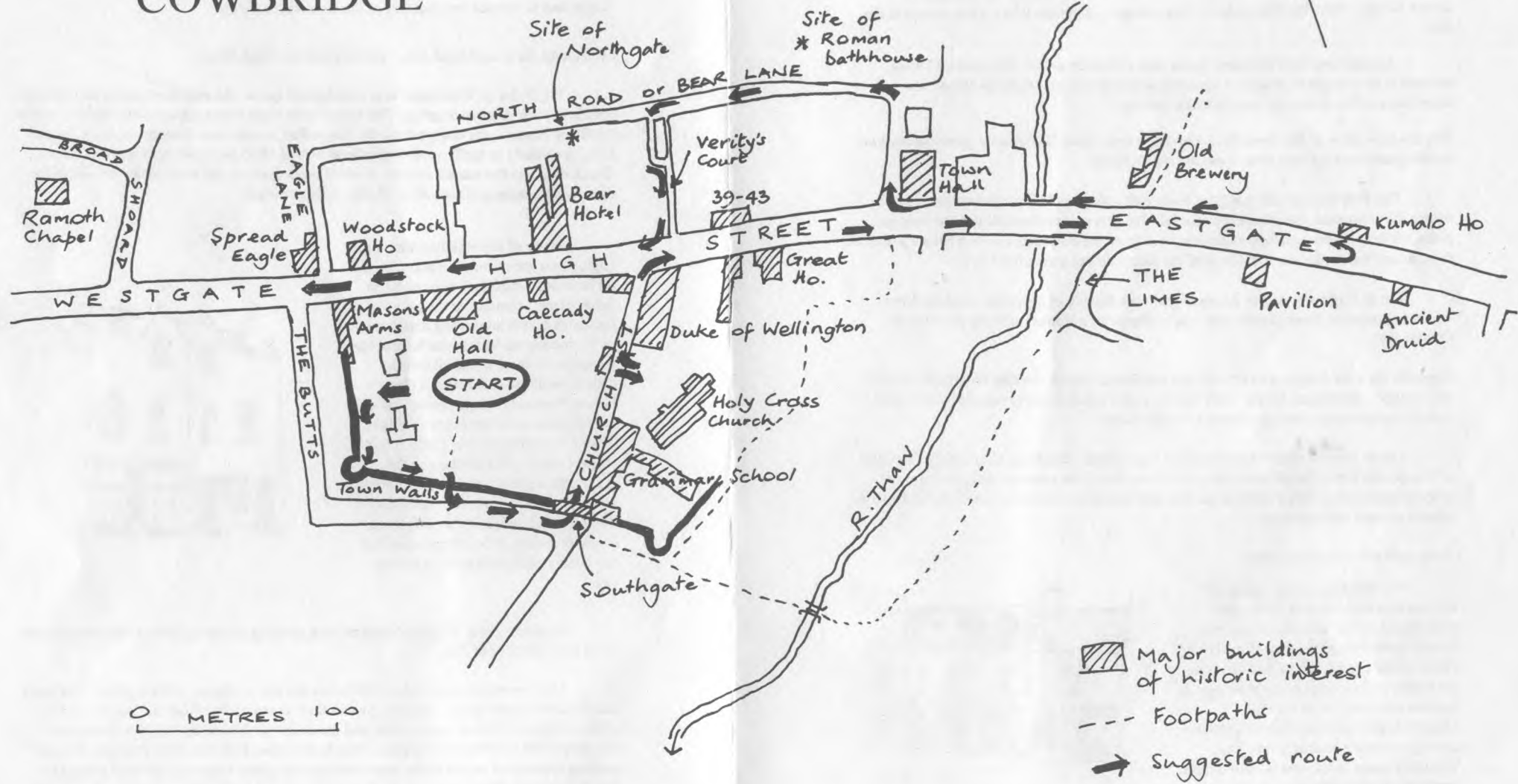
Many of the buildings along the High Street are of mediaeval origin, but all have been modified to a greater or lesser extent; sometimes the backs of the buildings reveal interesting details such as the mediaeval warehouse behind the newsagent's shop, or the sixteenth century window at the rear of Great House Pharmacy. Great House was once the town house of the Carne family of Nash Manor; built in the 1500s it had a major change of its frontage in the eighteenth century, giving the Georgian windows and doorways we see today. The left hand side of the building was Franklen House, a boarding house for the Grammar School in the interwar years.



Opposite, 39 to 43 High Street make a pleasing grouping, with a fine carved ogee hood over the door of No 41.

The Town Hall was built in 1830 over the former House of Correction. The main hall is on the upper floor, while the ground floor contains the Council Chamber and offices, Mayor's Parlour, Lesser Hall and the cells - which are now used to house the exhibits of the Cowbridge Museum. Outside the Town Hall stood the Eastgate, though nothing remains of this or of the town walls at this point. Opposite, the wall plaque to Iolo Morganwg, the talented but eccentric historian and folklorist, contains a line in the script he invented.

# COWBRIDGE



Eastwards over the river, the Old Brewery (now a residence) was one of Cowbridge's nineteenth century breweries - others being at the Vale of Glamorgan Inn, and in Cooper's Yard - which reminds us that at that time there were about two dozen inns and public houses in Cowbridge! The river Thaw used to flow past the east side of the Old Brewery - a plaque showing the position of the former bridge can be seen on the wall of the garden of Glanthaw Cottage.

The buildings along Eastgate are also of some antiquity: the Pavilion however, recently reconstructed and preserving the facade and turret of the former cinema and ballroom (where Lloyd George was presented with the freedom of Cowbridge) now shows no sign of the handball court or wheelwright's premises which once occupied the site.

At least two other buildings to the east should be noted - the Ancient Druid, reputed to be a pilgrims' hostel on the route to St David's, and Kumalo House nearly opposite, a coffee house in the eighteenth century.

*Retrace your steps to the Town Hall, turn right into Town Hall Square, pass the Institute building and turn left into Bear Lane (or North Road).*

The wall on your left is not the town wall - that would have been a few metres nearer the main road, but glancing to the left one gets an excellent idea of the burgage plots, the long narrow gardens extending back from the buildings on High Street. Many of the gardens follow the exact outlines of the plots laid out soon after 1254.

On the right, the Arthur John car park was the site of a significant excavation which unearthed a Roman bathhouse, and evidence of a Roman military presence in Cowbridge.

*Opposite the Vale Forge, turn left into the courtyard outside the Old Woolbarn, which was earlier a malthouse for the 'Vale' brewery (for which stabling was provided in the Vale Forge buildings) and go through Verity's Court.*

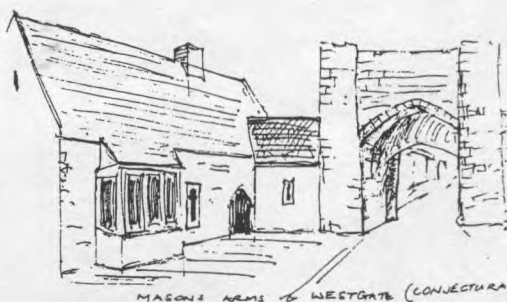
Isaiah Verity - after whom the court was named - had been awarded the freedom of Cowbridge for his work in building the Town Hall. The entrance still preserves its original appearance with a cobbled surface and triangular stones to protect the walls from wheels of carts and carriages.

*Turn right into the High Street.*

The buildings at the corner of the junction with Church Street were constructed in the seventeenth century. On the north side of the road is the Bear Hotel, of mediaeval origin. Inside, some doorways and carvings attest to its age. It became the town house for Plas Llanmihangel, and then in the eighteenth century a reputed coaching inn. The 'assembly room' at the rear is built over a mediaeval undercroft, now used as a restaurant.



Opposite the Bear, Caecady House with a fine portico and Georgian facade was another town house, as was the nearby Old Hall whose frontage to the main road is a nineteenth century construction. Woodstock House, another solid Georgian building, was the town house of the Wyndham family of Dunraven. Opposite, the Mason's Arms shows interesting examples of change - a mediaeval trefoil headed window next to a seventeenth century bay and a nineteenth century extension at right angles to it. This was probably the gatehouse for the Westgate (removed in 1753 because of the increasing road traffic).



Outside the Westgate, the street named 'The Butts' is probably associated with archery; opposite, Eagle Lane is named after the Spread Eagle Inn, now occupied by a shop and restaurant. The front part dates from the seventeenth century, but the extension running along Eagle Lane is more important in the history of Cowbridge. This housed the ballroom or assembly room which became the social centre of the town in the eighteenth century; it subsequently became used as a school, the Eagle Academy. It has a curved ceiling and two fine balconies above the fireplace, but sadly needs attention

*Our short walk around Cowbridge ends here; we hope it has whetted your appetite to find out more about this historic town.*

A good source of information is Cowbridge and District Museum in the Town Hall. It is open on the first Saturday of every month, from 11am to 4pm; as well as the interesting displays in the cells, there is a good reference section.

Cowbridge and District Local History Society meets in the Lesser Hall on the first Friday of every month, from September to May, at 8pm. Visitors are welcome!



