



Abbey Cwmhir Heritage Trust's project

# Demystifying the Abbey

## *Di-swyno'r Abaty*

Newsletter Issue 2

Summer 2021

Charity Number 1018536

### The Trust wins “15 minute” grant from Cadw and National Lottery

The Abbey Cwmhir Heritage Trust are delighted that they have been awarded a £5500 grant by The National Lottery Heritage Fund and Cadw.

Andrew White, director of the National Lottery Heritage Fund in Wales says:

“We’re all probably more aware of our local areas of late and local heritage – whether that’s a building, a landmark, a nature reserve or even our local shop, is important because it helps create and shape our communities. Connecting with our heritage is also good for our wellbeing and thanks to National Lottery players and our partnership with Cadw we have been able to encourage a diverse range of people right across Wales to get out and about to explore and re-discover their local area.”

Mel Walters - Demystifying the Abbey Project Lead, & Jackie Marriott - Treasurer Abbey Cwmhir Heritage Trust, led the bid application for Abbey Cwmhir Heritage Trust. “We are very excited to have received the above grant as our remote valley in mid Wales has an important place in Welsh history. Our recordings of oral memories from the village, on-line talks and community heritage trails will mean that everyone in our community will learn more about their heritage through a fuller engagement with Abbeycwmhir’s past and present.”

This grant gives a major boost to the £500 Magic Little Grant that we won from People’s Postcode Lottery earlier in the year.



### GOLGYDD / EDITORIAL

Rwy'n falch iawn i gyhoeddi'r ail gylchlythr ar gyfer 'Diswyno'r Abaty' – prosiect treftadaeth gymunedol Ymddiriodolaeth Treftadaeth Abaty Cwmhir.

Rydym yn falch o ddweud bod gennym bellach +20 o wirfoddolwyr sy'n cymryd rhan mewn llawer o weithgareddau gan gynnwys ymuno a'n Hysgol Maes Archeolegol yr hydref diwetha, helpu cynllunio teithiau cerdded cymunedol. A pharatoi pamffled i blant a'i teulu ar gyfer eu annog nhw i archwilio treftadaeth ac amgylchedd ein cwm hyfryd yng nghanol Cymru.

Gobeithiwn y byddwch yn mwynhau darllen y cylchlythr hwn ac rydym yn eich croesawu i ymuno a ni yn bersonol neu arlein.

I am very pleased to be publishing the second newsletter for 'Demystifying the Abbey' – Abbey Cwmhir Heritage Trust's community heritage project.

We are proud to say that we now have +20 volunteers who are getting involved in a range of activities including joining our Archaeological Field School last autumn, helping to devise a range of community heritage walks, and preparing a pamphlet for children and families to encourage them to explore the heritage and environment of our lovely mid-Wales valley.

We hope that you will enjoy reading this newsletter and we welcome you to join us on-line or in person.

# Community Heritage Walks

The Trust launched the first Abbeycwmhir Community Heritage Walk at Easter this year. The route description for this easy walk around the village of Abbeycwmhir describes a wealth of heritage locations. These include the abbey ruins and The Hall of course, and also a number of other locations including a Telephone Box that is listed by Cadw and the village Petrol Pump. A copy of the route description can be found at [www.abbeycwmhir.org](http://www.abbeycwmhir.org).

Longer routes are being planned and will be waymarked over the coming months. These will vary in length and duration from a short easy walk taking around an hour, to strenuous upland walks taking 3 – 5 hours. The walks are designed to showcase the range of landscapes and heritage features around the village of Abbeycwmhir – and be fun to walk. They all start at the village green in the centre of Abbeycwmhir.



## 1. Start at the notice board next to the village green.

(what3words = satin.tester.directors)

With the notice board behind you, walk down the road towards the petrol pump. The petrol pump is a Grade II listed structure. Continue past the petrol pump. Immediately to your left you will see Cross Cottage.

Cross Cottage has an interesting history and has served several very different purposes. It was built in 1858 and was the first school in Abbeycwmhir. The large windows facing the car park ensured good light in the classrooms. Children from the very youngest up to the age of 12 or 13 were all in the same class and were taught by the village schoolmaster or schoolmistress. It was built by Francis Aspinall Philips. There is a shield bearing the date and his initials on the building.

It is said that the children made too much noise for The Hall, which was close by and in 1868 the school was relocated to a new building about 200 yards along the road out of the village. The school then became a laundry for The Hall. It is still known in the village as "The Laundry". When the Estate was sold it became occupied as a private house.

Next to Cross Cottage is St Mary's Church.

The lychgate was built in 1901 by the estate craftsmen as a memorial to Mary Beatrice Philips. On each side of the churchyard you will see a large, ancient yew tree, an indicator of a sacred site that has been used for a long time. The trees are thought to be more than 1100 years old. Ancient yews often indicate the site of an early religious settlement, often just one individual living in a small cell. The first church of modern times was built around 1669 by John Fowler of Brondrefawr who occupied the post-monastic estate. It stood on the flat ground immediately south of the present church. The church we see today is modelled on a Gothic style church in Brittany and was built by the Phillips family in 1866, inside are stained glass windows by the 19th Century glass artists Heaton, Butler and Bayne who did work for Queen Victoria and Clayton and Bell. The rose window is said to be the best in Radnorshire. The church interior was designed to reflect the new style of Anglican worship which was adopted by the Victorians.

2. To get to Home Farm continue on down the road. Just before the road slopes uphill you will see an old red telephone box and the courtyard of Home Farm on your right. The telephone box is a Grade II listed structure. Walk into the courtyard. In the building on your right you will find a display and information on the history of Cwmhir Abbey.

Across the road, to your right is The Happy Union pub. The Happy Union has served as the village's public house for over 200 years. In the early days it was simply known as 'The Public'. The pub sign shows a man wearing a hat decorated with leeks riding on a goat. Such cartoons were common in the eighteenth century. Next to the Happy Union was the village shop and post office. In the days before many had a car the shop was very important. Kerosene could be bought for oil lamps before the village had electricity and accumulator batteries could be charged from the water-powered generator which supplied electricity to the Hall. At the back of the shop the dairy supplied milk. The landlord of the Union was also the village Tailor. Petrol was also sold from the pub and dispensed from the petrol pump across the road.



Through the courtyard. On your left you will see directing you to Cwmhir Abbey. Follow the path through the gate to the ruins of the abbey. Dedicated to St. Mary Magdalene was by Cadwallon ap Madog, Lord of Powys in 1176. The first monks came from a Cistercian abbey in Carmarthenshire. The abbey was with gifts of land by Maredudd ap Maelor. Land was given to the abbey by timber. These gifts were confirmed by royal charter in 1215. The nave of the church, at 73 meters was the largest in the British Isles. Today a sign that the rest of the abbey and the or the use of the monks were ever built.

As why such a large church was planned nor why this was never completed. The mason's marks are seen on some of the big blocks of building stone. Each mason had his own mark.

also the burial place of Llywelyn ap Gruffydd, the last true Prince of Wales. His memorial tablet is at the east end of the nave. His body, minus his head, was brought here for burial after the battle of Cricklade in 1282.

Abbey ruins, going back the way you came to the Farm courtyard. It was once called Abbey Farm. The rebuilt in the 1860's by the Phillips as a model farm with the latest farming to one side of the yard was the coach stables and accommodation for the The chimney pots are made of cast iron of the 19th century industrial period, one of the grave markers in the

Farm courtyard and turn right. Taking the road as this is a blind corner. Just ahead to your left are the gates of the Hall, no longer open to the public, but the be clearly seen through the gates.

Retrace your steps back to the green and notice board.



The Hall: The post-monastic estates did not have a 'big house' until the arrival of Thomas Wilson in the 1820's. He was a solicitor from London, who wanted to create a country estate. Wilson built his house on the site of the house we see today; it was much smaller but contained rooms of generous proportions. He cleared the site of the abbey ruins to create a romantic ruin, as was the fashion of the day and spare material was hauled up to make the garden around the house. Good progress was being made with the house and redeveloping the farms when trouble struck. A business deal in London, with Lord Portman, failed. Wilson went bankrupt and he emigrated to Australia to make a new life for himself and his family. Wilson's house was hidden in the core of the present house which was much enlarged by the Phillips in the 1860's.

Francis Phillips was a cotton mill owner from Stockport where he had a very large house. In 1837 he acquired 3,500 acres of land which was for sale around Abbeycwmhir. Like many businessmen who made money out of the industrial revolution, he wanted to create a country estate for himself and his family.

Care should be taken when walking in the countryside. Follow the Countryside Code: keep dogs on a lead, especially near grazing stock and respect people's privacy and privacy. Our paths are open and welcome to visitors and there can periodically take place in woodland as peace please observe notices posted by Natural Resources Wales. It is advised that appropriate footwear and clothing are worn on walks and that consideration is given to matters of safety.

Please follow the advice of the National Trust. If you have any concerns about the safety of the paths or the condition of the buildings, please contact the National Trust. This would however appreciate any information regarding material changes or any problems encountered, [comms@nt.org.uk](mailto:comms@nt.org.uk) [www.abbeycwmhir.org](http://www.abbeycwmhir.org)



All the route descriptions for these walks will be available to download from the [www.abbeycwmhir.org](http://www.abbeycwmhir.org) website. The route descriptions will be made available as soon as we are able, with waymarking to follow soon afterwards.

# Archaeological Fieldwork Research Group

We held a very successful Archaeological Field School at Cwmffwrn Farm near Abbeycwmhir in September 2020, led by Dr Jemma Bezant of University of Wales Trinity St David and attended by 16 people. Cwmffwrn Farm is an upland farm on the likely route between Cwmhir Abbey and Strata Florida Abbey (the Monk's Walk). It is largely unimproved, so still has many lumps and bumps in the landscape that may reflect medieval or even earlier occupation.

In preparation for the event Julian Ravest and Vic Pardoe flew drones over the area and they were able to reveal a number of boundary banks and potential hut platforms that had not been previously recorded. During the Autumn we continued to meet on Tuesday mornings, to clear the ground and survey some of the farmstead platforms that we discovered. Of course, progress has been limited over the Winter months by restrictions placed upon us by the Covid regulations. However, we have not been idle: investigation of the population of the study area in the upper Cwmhir valley has taken place. An analysis of population change based on 'Repopulating the Tithe Map' has proved to be revealing. By using the results of the 1841 census, which is contemporary with the Tithe Survey, it has been possible to get a precise snapshot of the population of the area. It informs us of the size of families and the number of live-in workers employed. Longer term changes have been investigated by analysing the census returns from 1841 to 1911. This reveals a substantial drop in population from 33 in 1841 to just 3 in 1911. A study of the population of the township of Cefn Pawl, in which our study farms are located, shows a general decline of about 30% and we have investigated possible explanations. As a result of the enclosure of the upland sheep walks a number of farms have been amalgamated, resulting in a loss of living for many. Agricultural depression also forced many from the land, as they moved to the newly developing industrial areas or emigrated to start new lives abroad.



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Members of the Research Group are now contributing to an academic paper to be published in Archaeology in Wales. It will show how discoveries have been made using photogrammetric methods and how these have been ground-truthed by practical fieldwork. It is also hoped to report on some hafod sites in the study area,

relating them to transhumance and the management of stock both in the medieval and monastic periods and later post medieval times.



The project is continuing to engage the team, frequently throwing up more questions than answers. The fact that the area has escaped modern intensive farming has left much of interest to be investigated further.

We have resumed our Tuesday morning surveying, so if you would like to join us, please contact:

[jlo.theabbey@gmail.com](mailto:jlo.theabbey@gmail.com).

We gratefully acknowledge the support of Angela and Ian Lewis of Cwmffwrn Farm and Prof David Austin and Dr Jemma Bezant of UWTSD through the Sacred Landscapes of Medieval Monasteries project funded by AHRC.

# Population Summary from Census 1841 to 1911

## Populating the extended Home Grange of Gollon

Part of our ongoing research is to examine a range of historic documents including charters, estate records, tithe maps and census records to try to determine the boundaries of the Home Grange of Gollon. Our studies today suggest that in addition to the area defined by David Williams "Atlas of Cistercian Lands in Wales" 1990, the Home Grange is likely to have included land to the north-east (part of parish of Llanbadarn Fynnyd) and north-west (Cennarth).

The article above, looking at the area of Cwmffwrn, described reasons why the population might have decreased significantly during 19<sup>th</sup> Century. We can see this decline in the population statistics for the whole of Home Grange.

Parish		Year							
		1841	1851	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901	1911
Abbeycwmhir	Cefn Pawl & Gollon	589	558	537	559	487	452	396	379
Llananno	Lordship of Abbey	126	139	156	151	123	122	115	95
Llanbadarn	West & North of the River								
Fynnyd	Ithon	354	297	354	419	371	305	285	285
St Harmon	Cennarth	487	446	500	534	459	438	343	241
<b>TOTALS</b>		<b>1556</b>	<b>1440</b>	<b>1547</b>	<b>1663</b>	<b>1440</b>	<b>1317</b>	<b>1139</b>	<b>1000</b>

## Collecting memories

We are collecting memories of Abbeycwmhir and posting these on our website [www.abbeycwmhir.org/oral-history/](http://www.abbeycwmhir.org/oral-history/) and with People's Collection Wales [www.peoplescopy.wales](http://www.peoplescopy.wales).



Despite COVID and social distancing we have been able to hold interviews using Zoom. Whilst not as personal as face to face we are still able to continue to capture people's memories with high quality sound.

It is always fascinating to hear people's stories. Here are a few teasers:

1. Did you know that the petrol pump in the centre of the village was owned and managed by the Happy Union? The tank sits under the garden of Cross Cottage. The petrol would go on your tab !
2. The Village Green as we know it was once divided into two gardens owned by Cross Cottage, once the village school, and Garden Cottage.
3. The lamp on the side of Cross Cottage was the first public utility light in Radnorshire as The Hall had the first electricity run by hydro powered from the pond in the Hall Gardens.
4. Cross Cottage was the original school in the village. It is said that the children made too much noise for the Hall, which was close by and so in 1868 the school was relocated to a new building about 200 yards along the road out of the village.
5. St Mary's Church's great glory are the stained glass windows. The East Window glass artists Heaton, Butler and Blayne, made stained glass windows for Queen Victoria. The West Window is a rose window by London glass artist Clayton & Bell known to be the best west window in Radnorshire.



We have collected many interesting tales and hope to collect many more. If you would like to share your memories please contact us at:

[oralhistory.cwmhirabbey@gmail.com](mailto:oralhistory.cwmhirabbey@gmail.com). We would love to hear from you.

## Placenames around Cwmhir Abbey

In the 1100s the Abbey was called Abaty Cwmhir, that is Long Valley Abbey. The original name of the valley isn't recorded but like most valleys it was probably called after its stream, Clywedog, and therefore was Clywedog Valley. Clywedog means 'One to be Heard' that is 'Noisy' because its numerous little rapids and waterfalls could be heard some way from its actual course particularly after rain or melting snow.

The group of houses round the Abbey became known as Abaty Cwmhir and so the village of Abbey Cwmhir later on. The Valley of the Clywedog also took the name of the important and wealthy Abbey and was known as the Long Valley – Cwmhir Valley but thank heavens we still have our 'Noisy' River.

The Welsh streams and hills are usually named after some physical or environmental characteristic that can't be changed like the Poeth or 'Warm' stream which never freezes. (This was perhaps why the Abbey and its buildings were situated here so that the Poeth could supply water for cooking, washing and sanitary purposes and the liquid waste would be washed away by the Clywedog.) We have few written records before the 1200s, but the names of streams and hills are very long lasting because children grew up knowing the names of places and in-comers were told the names and just accepted them. They could be medieval or even more ancient.

So we have Llywy Hill which means Horizon or Edge Hill, Cefn Pawl, the Ridge of Flaking (rock), Gelenyn from Gelynen, the Holly Bush (farm), Cwm Ysgawen which looks like Valley of Mountain Ash but is perhaps more likely to be named after the stream Ysglent - Leaping (down the hill) and there are many more.

## Photography and videos of our landscape heritage and activities



As part of our Cadw/National Lottery grant we have purchased a camcorder and supporting equipment, into order to make short video clips and take still images that show Abbeycwmhir landscape and heritage and our volunteers walking/surveying/preparing graphics etc.

There are many on-line training opportunities to teach us how to take film footage and edit it to create short video clips – and we wonder whether you would like to join us in making good use of this equipment and learning to make videos and good still images? If so, we will create a Camera and Video Club, where we can learn together and share tips and experiences. Abbey Cwmhir Heritage Trust has a Youtube channel [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com) 'Abbey Cwmhir Heritage Trust' and we would love to put video clips on it that are made by the Camera and Video Club. If you are interested in being part of this, please get in touch with Alison Finnieston: [Alison.finnieston@btinternet.com](mailto:Alison.finnieston@btinternet.com) .

## Activity pamphlet for families and school children

Our National Heritage Lottery Fund/Cadw grant is enabling us to design a fun activity pamphlet aimed at primary age children. It will contain 8 pages of activities that introduce children and their families to the heritage of Cwmhir Abbey and the village of Abbeycwmhir. They will meet Llywelyn Ap Gruffudd – the last native born Prince of Wales, our Cistercian ‘White monks’, our local miller, blacksmith and Mrs Philips from The Hall. Each page will include activities for children. The pamphlet includes a Woodland Maze and Woodland Walk where they will learn to identify our local plants, birds and animals. It will be available on-line and in the Cwmhir Abbey Exhibition Room.

If local schools wish to use this pamphlet as a resource and visit Abbeycwmhir, then we will also be preparing an indoor activity (build your own model village) which would complement using our local village hall – Philips Hall - as a base.

For more information about this resource, please contact [cwmhirabbey@gmail.com](mailto:cwmhirabbey@gmail.com).



Example of our artist Jenny Greene's work

## Future Activities for your diary

**Archaeological field surveying** at Cwmffwrn Farm – Tuesdays 10.00 – 12.30 from 4<sup>th</sup> May  
(email [jlo.theabbey@gmail.com](mailto:jlo.theabbey@gmail.com) if you intend to attend)

**Community led archaeological excavation** at Cwmffwrn Farm during Festival of Archaeology fortnight – Public Open Days 24/25<sup>th</sup> July

**Launch of Community Heritage Walks** – 18<sup>th</sup> September

**Series of on-line talks** including:

Amy Reynolds “The Role of Monasteries in mid-Wales Politics” 29<sup>th</sup> July

Prof David Austin “Monasteries in their Landscapes: archaeological approaches to studying the Cistercians in Wales” 19<sup>th</sup> September

Brian Rees “Diversity in Farming and the problem with Archaeological Digs” 31<sup>st</sup> October

Dr Jemma Bezant “A Years Abbeycwmhir Archaeology in Context” 12<sup>th</sup> December

For further information about our activities please visit our website [www.abbeycwmhir.org](http://www.abbeycwmhir.org) or contact [history.cwmhirabbey@gmail.com](mailto:history.cwmhirabbey@gmail.com)