

Abbey Cwmhir Heritage Trust

Ymddiriedolaeth Treftadaeth Abaty Cwmhir

Village Community Heritage Walk

A gentle walk exploring the village heritage



The Petrol Pump

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



(what3words = satin.foster.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 classroom. 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.

Across the road, to your right is The Happy Union pub.

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 1680 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 Philips 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.

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.

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.



The Lychgate

3. Walk through the courtyard. On your left you will see a signpost directing you to Cwmhir Abbey. Follow the signs and pass through the gate to the ruins of the abbey.

The Abbey, dedicated to St. Mary Magdalene was founded by Cadwallon ap Madog, Lord of Maelienydd in 1176. The first monks came from Whitland Abbey in Carmarthenshire. The abbey was endowed with gifts of land by Maredudd ap Maelgwyn. More land was given to the abbey by Roger Mortimer. These gifts were confirmed by royal charter in 1215. The nave of the church, at 73 meters in length, was the largest in the British Isles. Today there is no sign that the rest of the abbey and the buildings for the use of the monks were ever built.

No-one knows why such a large church was planned nor why this was never completed. The mason's marks can be seen on some of the big blocks of building stone. Each mason had his own mark.

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

4. Exit the abbey ruins, going back the way you came through Home Farm courtyard.

Home Farm was once called Abbey Farm. The farm was rebuilt in the 1860's by the Philips Estate as a model farm with the latest farming methods. To one side of the yard was the coach house with stables and accommodation for the coachman. The chimney pots are made of cast iron, typical of the 19th century industrial period, as are some of the grave markers in the churchyard.

5. Exit Home Farm courtyard and turn right. Take care crossing the road as this is a blind corner. Just on the bend and to your left are the gates of the Hall. The Hall is no longer open to the public, but the building can be clearly seen through the gates.

6. Complete the walk by retracing your steps back to the village green and notice board.



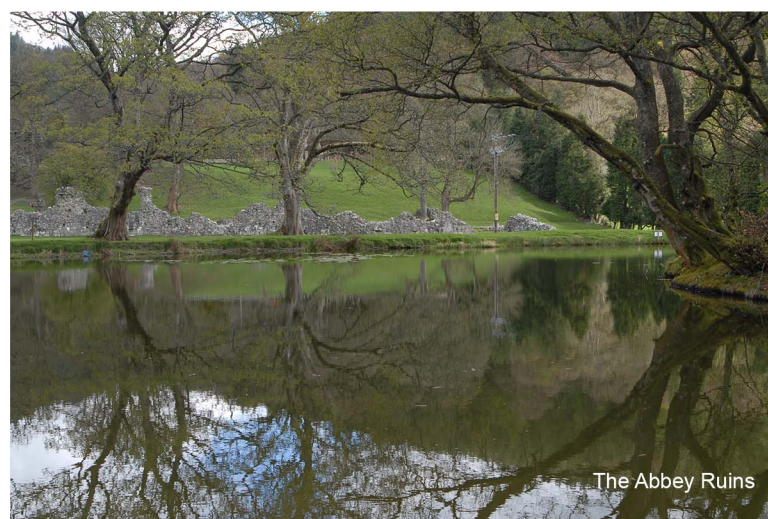
The Happy Union

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 ruin to create a romantic ruin, as was the fashion of the day and spare material was hauled up to make the flat 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 is hidden in the core of the present house which was much enlarged by the Philips in the 1860's. Francis Philips 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 property and privacy. Our walks are steep and uneven in places and these can become hazardous as a result of inclement weather. Forestry operations periodically take place in woodlands so please observe notices posted by Natural Resources Wales. It is advised that appropriate footwear and clothing are worn on our walks and that consideration is always given to matters of safety.

Whilst the Trust has researched all the routes for these guides, no responsibility can be accepted for any unforeseen circumstances encountered. We would however appreciate any information regarding material changes or any problems encountered. cwmhirabbey@gmail.com

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The Abbey Ruins