

THE RADNORSHIRE SOCIETY TRANSACTIONS 2022
 A WALK AROUND ABBEY CWMHIR
 Heritage and Hidden History

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It is easy to suppose in earlier centuries that the village of Abbey Cwmhir had little contact with the wider world and was therefore very inward looking. However remote, few communities were isolated from what was going on in the wider world. Being close to the Welsh/English border, Radnorshire had many links which influenced events throughout the county. The big estates of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were largely, but not exclusively, English owned and they frequently brought personnel with them whose job it was to manage the estates. The new squires were often from the upper or aspiring levels of English society, with their own history of contact with a much wider world. They have given us a new level of ‘hidden history’, that which is not immediately obvious. As part of the recovery from the Covid outbreak and a general well-being initiative, communities have been encouraged to investigate their hidden history, also known as ‘fifteen minute history’, and in this Abbey Cwmhir is well placed.

The history of Abbey Cwmhir is one of a small remote community situated in the Cambrian hills of Radnorshire. The lands around Abbey Cwmhir were part of the very extensive home grange of the abbey, the Manor of Gollon and the Township of Cefn Pawl. This consisted of some ten thousand, hectares (22,000 acres) of valley farmland and upland grazing. Since the departure of the Cistercian monks in 1536 it has served as the centre of a series of post-monastic estates. The Manor of Gollon was purchased from the Crown by William Fowler of Shrewsbury in 1565. He was Provost of the town, effectively chief officer, responsible for administration and the dispensation of the rough justice which typified the times. When as a young boy he and his siblings were orphaned, he was brought up by his uncle, Rowland Lee, the powerful Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield, who was thought to have officiated at Henry VIII’s secret marriage to Ann Boleyn. Lee served as President of the Council of Wales and the Marches from 1534 to 1543. Fowler went on to live at Harnage Grange in Shropshire, formerly of Buildwas Abbey and acquired in a deal with Sir John Throckmorton in 1555. Throckmorton was Vice-President of the Council of Wales and the Marches at the time when Fowler bought the Manor of Gollon. His mother was a half-sister of Thomas Parr, making him a cousin of Queen Catherine Parr. The Fowlers were nothing except well-connected. Such connections were used ruthlessly in the sixteenth century, an age of massive corruption. Already the hidden history is beginning to show itself.

In essence, Abbey Cwmhir was an ‘estate village’ dominated at any given time by one particular landowner or familial squirearchy. This was frequently an absentee landlord who entrusted the running of the estates to a bailiff or reeve which was not necessarily conducive to the best interests of the tenants. All the post-monastic owners of the Cwmhir estates were English and ran them along the lines of English estates, eventually, in the time of Thomas Wilson initiating the benefits, and perils, of the English Agricultural Revolution. This brought a philosophy of substantial improvement in farming which had the potential to better the lot of the tenants. The most extensive of the post-monastic estates was that of the Fowlers, one which went into serious decline after 1760 with land being sold off in relatively small tranches.

Some of this land was reunited to form the later, generally smaller, estates.

The Church and Churchyard

A good place to start is the church where there is parking available. Alternative parking is to be found near the Cwmhir Abbey Exhibition Room in the Home Farm yard. The churchyard is entered by the Lych Gate which was built by the tradesmen of the estate to commemorate the life Mary Beatrice Philips who died in 1898. The original purpose of the Lych Gate was to provide shelter for the coffin and the bearers whilst they awaited mourners to proceed into the church for the funeral.

There are two large ancient native yew trees in the churchyard. They are both over five hundred years old, with some assessments putting them as old as one thousand years, which pre-dates the founding of the abbey in 1176. Yew trees are a feature of ancient sites of religious significance. The first church in modern times was built here by the Fowler estate around 1680, making it later than the yew trees, it was situated on the flat ground in front of the present church. Yew trees were often planted by hermits who practised their religion in remote and lonely locations. This might have influenced the Cistercians in the choice of their site for the abbey. There could also be a link with the ancient 'clas' church at St Harmon. The clas was an early form of monastery from which clerics were sent out to minister to the population in the surrounding area and establish new churches.

A picture of the early church, built by John Fowler, has survived. It was painted by Mary Leighton in 1858 showing a small single cell church with a belfry, very similar to St David's, Rhulen. Her brother, the Rev John Parker, who was a friend of the Philips family, took the service while Mary painted outside! She appears to have produced quite a collection of paintings.

When Thomas Wilson arrived in the 1820s he noted that the church was in a very poor condition. He records that he cleared the interior, repaired the roof and ceilings and provided an organ. He also gave the painting entitled '*The Agony in the Garden*' for use as an altar piece. It was possibly painted by John James Hall, one of Wilson's associates in the art world. It is thought to be a copy of an original by Coreggio.

The Victorians are often thought of as kindly souls who went around restoring churches which might or might not have been falling down. They frequently had an ulterior motive which reflects a wider situation in the established Anglican church, the Church of England which at that time was also the established church in Wales. Here a much wider controversy impacts directly on the church in Abbey Cwmhir. The 1860s was a time of great upheaval in the Church of England as a result of academic debate around what constituted the true form of Christian worship. Known as the Oxford Movement, also the Tractarians or the Anglo-Catholic Revival, the argument came down to continuing the form of worship as used by the Church of England within fairly plain churches since the time of Elizabeth I or return to a more elaborate pre-reformation form of worship, more akin to that of the Roman Catholics, in churches which were more symbolic and elaborately decorated. The row came close to destroying the Church of England.

In the 1860s the wife of the squire was Anna Theophila Philips, daughter of the vicar of Stockport and a keen supporter of the Tractarian movement. It seems that for the Philips a simple country church in mid-Wales was not sufficient, so they

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replaced it with the present edifice which was designed by John Wilkes Poundley of Kerry (and Liverpool). It is modelled on a church in Brittany and reflects the ecclesiology of the Anglo-Catholic Revival.

Inside the font is close to the door, a symbol of welcome to the new church member. Proceeding towards the east (altar) end of the church the decoration becomes more opulent. The chancel arch contains some marble supports and along the wall carved stone reflects the stiff-leaf decoration for which the old abbey was famous. A few steps lead into the choir where the floor tiles are more elaborate and marble columns are seen. Finally, more steps reach the sanctuary, the inner sanctum of biblical times. The floor tiles are even more decorative and the wall is dressed with glazed tiles. Behind the communion table is a carved reredos, all this redolent of the classic Tractarian church.

The stained glass is the great glory of the church. The colourful windows around the apse are by Heaton, Butler and Bayne, the foremost stained glass artists of Victorian times, said to have manufactured over eighty thousand windows between 1862 and 1953, including ones for Queen Victoria and the Brunel memorial window in Westminster Abbey. The rose window at the west end is by another London company, Clayton and Bell. It is generally regarded as one of the best of its kind in Radnorshire. The centre of the rose window depicts the gospel writers and the apostles.

In reality the church was effectively a chapel for the Philips family and the Hall, although tenants were expected to turn out on a Sunday and might face questioning from Mrs Philips if they failed to appear. Here the tenants faced a dilemma. By inclination many of them preferred to worship in one of the local chapels or maintain the long-established tradition of those of a non-conformist persuasion to meet for worship in local farmhouses. Again, national tensions were reaching a remote village.

Cross Cottage

Returning to the parking area, the building to the left has an interesting history. Towards the top of the gable there is a small shield which bears the letters F.A.P. and the year 1857. These are the initials of Francis Aspinall Philips, the first of the Philips family to arrive in Abbey Cwmhir, having purchased much of the failed estate of Thomas Wilson in 1837. The building was originally constructed as the first school in the village and the present parking area was the playground. At the rear of the school was a small attached house to accommodate the schoolmaster/mistress. At this time there was no compulsory education. That had to wait until the Education Act of 1870 and so in this the estate was ahead of the times. Literacy rates were very low, as witnessed in the church registers of the time where many were unable to sign their own name.

The noise of the children playing in the yard was said to have disturbed the squire's wife, so in 1868 the school was transferred to a new building three hundred yards along the road. The redundant school became the laundry for the newly enlarged Hall which entertained many visitors and shooting parties.

The wealth of the Philips family was founded on cotton mills in the industrial town of Stockport, now part of Greater Manchester. A mark of the success of an up and coming industrialist was the creation of sufficient wealth to own a large country estate. There is little evidence to show long-term residence at Abbey Cwmhir until the 1860s.

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To maintain their production raw cotton was imported from the southern part of the United States where slavery was yet to be abolished. The conditions of workers in the cotton mills were very poor and dangerous. Serious accidents were commonplace. There was widespread use of child labour, subjected to long hours of work.

The father of Francis Aspinall Philips, also Francis, was present in the House of Commons in 1812 where he witnessed the assassination of Spencer Perceval, the only British Prime Minister to meet with such a fate. He helped to administer first aid but to no avail. Francis was also present in Manchester on 19 August 1819 with his wife's cousin, Robert Hyde Greg who was the owner of Styal Mill. They witnessed the Peterloo Riots, the occasion when a workers' protest turned into one of the darkest events in British social history. The military guard was deployed resulting in eighteen deaths, one a boy of only two and over seven hundred injuries. As a mill owner, Philips was very alarmed about any demonstration of worker power and demands for rights. He wrote a very hard-hitting treatise against the demonstrators who were demanding reform and a defence of the military which was responsible for the deaths and injuries. Contemporary with the purchase of the Abbey Cwmhir Estate was the 1839 Chartist demonstration in Newport which also resulted many deaths and injuries when the military was called in to stop prevent a protest. Hidden histories and not so hidden histories.

The Happy Union

There is documentary evidence for the presence of a public house on this site for well over two hundred years. In earlier times it was simply known as the 'Public'. When it became the Happy Union is not clear. This happened in Victorian times and possibly commemorated a marriage in the Philips family. The sign of the Union is interesting. The original sign was said to have been painted by the artist George Morland (1763-1804) who was well-known for painting animals but there is no evidence to support this. Thomas Wilson was a great collector of art and moved in such circles. It is possible he acquired a copy of this famous cartoon and brought it to Abbey Cwmhir. The caricature is of a figure with leeks in his hat riding on a goat. It could be interpreted as Taffi Morgan riding to London on his goat but we ought not to be too sensitive about it. The same lampoon occurs commonly in other countries as well, in paintings, print and ceramics.

The Hall

Throughout the two hundred and sixty years of the Fowler ownership of the Abbey Cwmhir estate there was no obvious 'big house' which served as the residence for the squire. Quite early in his ownership of the Manor of Gollon, whilst on a personal visit to his estate, William Fowler wrote a letter to his wife and family back in Shropshire in which he laments the poor state of his house in Cwmhir. The letter survived and can be seen in the National Library of Wales. Perhaps the absence of a specific house did not matter for they were largely absentee landlords with only the occasional visit for the manorial court, a task commonly carried out by the estate reeve. It is quite likely that a surviving building of the monastery served the purpose, possibly the Abbot's residence.

An interesting report from the Civil War records an attack by the parliamentarians on the royalist garrison of the Fowlers at Abbey Cwmhir.

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They quickly overwhelmed the garrison and the military report of the event details a quantity of armaments and supplies which were captured. The story poses some interesting questions, not least why the Royalists billeted themselves in the bottom of a steep-sided valley which was extremely vulnerable to attack from above. The report informs us that Mr Fowler's house, which was built of 'large blocks of stone', was destroyed and rendered uninhabitable. The description of the stone suggests a surviving building of the abbey and the characteristic abbey stone.

After the Civil War the Fowlers built Devannor (Ty Faenor) as a hunting lodge to serve the deer park and a junior member of the family, John Fowler appears to have lived at the newly built Brondrefawr to the north of Bwlch-y-sarnau village. It was he who was responsible for building the church and he also served as High Sheriff of Radnorshire for 1690. His daughters married into relatively local families, Jane to George Robinson of Brithdir near Welshpool and Rachel to Jenkyn Lloyd of Clochfaen, Llangurig. Rachel was buried at Llangurig after her death in 1749. John and his wife were buried in the old church at Abbey Cwmhir. His son Edward, who succeeded his father at Brondrefawr, is buried at Llanbister. This is the only example so far discovered of marriages into local families and supports the view that at least this junior part of the family was probably resident at Abbey Cwmhir in the last quarter of the seventeenth century.

In 1706 Richard Fowler married Sarah Sloane, the daughter of William Sloane, a wealthy commodities merchant. His shipping business was based in Belfast and it was said that he would trade any commodity which would turn a profit. The wedding took place in the grand surroundings of St Paul's Cathedral. This underlines both the status and wealth of the Fowler and Sloane families. The Abbey Cwmhir Estate was settled on Sarah Sloane as part of the marriage agreement and decades later family arguments, feuding and court cases over this were to become one of the prime reasons for the eventual collapse of the Fowler dynasty. Sarah was also well connected. William had acquired land in Chelsea, her uncle, Sir Hans Sloane, owned the Manor of Chelsea, founded the Chelsea Physic Garden and gave his name to the London street names of Sloane Square and Sloane Street. Perhaps his greatest claim to fame was his position as Physician to the monarchs Queen Anne, George I and George II. This was status indeed.

Sir Hans was a great collector and pursued his interest in the natural world throughout his life, eventually amassing a collection of over seventy thousand specimens and artefacts which became one of the founding collections of the British Museum. He is also credited with having introduced chocolate to Britain and Europe as a result of time spent in Jamaica. It was insufficiently refined at the time and had to wait for the activities of the Cadbury brothers in the nineteenth century to provide the treat we recognise today. However, there was a dark side to Sir Hans Sloane. Much of his wealth came from extensive operations in slave trading between Africa and the new colonies in the Caribbean and the Americas. His wife's father owned plantations and slaves in Jamaica. Sir Hans had also invested heavily in the South Sea Company, which was certainly involved in the slave trade. His elaborate statue by the sculptor Rysbrack, on display in London, has now been removed from public showing. The South Sea Company collapsed in 1720, the 'bubble' had burst but after restructuring the company continued to function into the nineteenth century.

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It is no coincident that the will of Sarah Sloane Fowler contained a considerable bequest of South Sea shares. Is this a hidden history too far?

The first house to be built as a country seat 'big house' was constructed by Thomas Wilson in 1830 on the site of the present hall. Sales brochures of that time described it as of Elizabethan style, consisting of four large reception rooms, four bedrooms and ancillary accommodation. This does not tally with a surviving picture which might be better described as late Jacobean in style, if rather nondescript. Wilson was keen to include the abbey ruin as part of his landscaped garden. He recorded that he '*cleared the abbey ruin*', using surplus material to build up the ground in front of the house, raise the road and probably create the mound or mound close to the west end of the ruin. The purpose of the mound was to provide visitors with an elevated position to view their hosts' parkland which must have been very much a work in progress when Wilson was forced to sell his estate around 1833. The lake to the south of the abbey ruin was also created at this time. The Mound was really more popular in eighteenth century parkland and generally out of favour by the time Wilson was establishing his garden.

It is possible that the Mound, also known as a Mount, was from an earlier period, providing an elevated position from which the estate Bailiff could conduct meetings of the Manorial Court Leet, events which were generally held in the open-air since there was unlikely to be a room big enough available to accommodate all the tenants, all of whom were compelled to attend under pain of a fine. This provided him with a romantic ruin, popular in landscaping because wars in Europe had brought an end, at least temporarily, to the Grand Tour. It can only be speculated how much archaeologically significant material now lies under the road or in the Mount! A small number of carved stones have survived in the Hall gardens. Wilson also created a walk through the Little Park which reached the monks' fish pool, away to the north in the direction of Bwlch-y-sarnau. The level of the dam was raised to create a bigger lake, a walk was made around the perimeter and planting carried out.

All this development came to a sudden halt when a business venture with Lord Portman in London ran into financial trouble. Wilson faced with bankruptcy, sold all his assets and emigrated to Australia. He settled in Adelaide where he built a house which he called Cwmhir and engaged in public affairs, going on to become mayor of Adelaide. The art gallery in Adelaide has a large picture of three of Wilson's sons with Sugar Loaf at Abbey Cwmhir prominent in the background.

In 1812 Thomas Wilson married Martha Greenell at St George's Church, Bloomsbury in London. Martha's nephew became very well known in the developing world of science. His name was Alfred Russell Wallace. As a boy Alfred was fascinated by the world of plants and animals. When he became of age he started to travel to many different parts of the world, looking at the history and geography which surrounded him. He became aware of the patterns of development in the plants and animals which he encountered and began to put together a theory of how these evolved, one from another and their links with a much earlier period in the earth's history. He had hit on a theory of evolution. Alfred's researches had paralleled the work of Charles Darwin. They met in London to discuss their discoveries and eventually presented a joint paper to the Linnaean Society in 1858, revealing to the scientific world their then revolutionary ideas.

Thomas Wilson was a keen collector of artworks and through this he became

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friends with the Woodburn brothers who had started life as guilders and framers and eventually dealers in fine art and the old masters.

Through this they, like Wilson, built a fine art collection. Wilson met with many of the artists of the day. When his other business ventures failed and he emigrated to Australia his art collection passed to the National Collections. The Woodburn collection was one of the founding collections of the National Gallery. More links with the wider world. Mysteriously, at the time of the tithe survey in 1840 one of the Woodburn brothers owned Bwlch-cefn-llian, a farmstead at the very head of the Cwmhir valley. Possibly it was built up given to Woodburn by Wilson to settle a debt when trouble struck.

Tradesman's Row

The major aim of Thomas Wilson was to improve the Cwmhir estate and in this he was following the advice of Layton Cooke, set down in his survey of 1822. There was much work to do because the Fowler estate had been in terminal decline for decades. He wanted to bring all the trades that supported the estate together on one site and created what today is known as Tradesman's Row. The result was the long, low building which we see today, constructed about 1828 adjacent to the ancient abbey mill.

It was divided into a number of workshops, the largest of which was the blacksmith's shop, important for making iron products to use around the estate. As well as shoeing the many horses which were required to provide motive power for agriculture the blacksmith made screws, nuts and bolts, nails, hinges, metalwork for windows, in fact a myriad artefacts needed for a remote and self-sufficient estate. The Row also housed the cordwainer who made and maintained the harnesses and saddlery and footwear as required. The wheelright was also based here, making the wooden spoked wheels to be fitted with an iron rim by the blacksmith. It is likely that the sawyers were nearby but they were moved to Home Farm by the Philips. The accommodation provided was very small and spartan. Long before the days of social security, the row also contained the 'poor house' to accommodate a destitute family. The Poor Law was the responsibility of the parish, operated by the church wardens who had to work hard to stop new arrivals becoming a drain on the rate payers of the parish.

The mill stood at the far end of the site. There was almost certainly a mill on this site in monastic times, a very important part of the farming economy of the Cistercians, it was in use well into the twentieth century and finally demolished in 1996. The present Mill Bridge dates from the 1930s. The original stone bridge was swept away when the Fishpool dam, situated about two miles up the Clywedog valley burst in 1931, causing a great rush of water down the valley. Devannor Bridge and the Cuckoo Bridge further downstream were also destroyed.

The Home Farm

Up until the 1850s the Home Farm had been known as the Abbey Farm, a well established unit which, according to Layton Cooke covered over one thousand acres, making it by far the largest farm in the area. This figure might be taken with a pinch of salt as we do not know exactly what land comprised the holding. It was rebuilt by the Philips Estate as the model farm which served to demonstrate best

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practice in farming methods and to inspire the other tenants to improve their production. In fact, the Home Farm was a peculiarly English phenomenon, being adopted by the great estates, particularly in East Anglia, from the first half of the nineteenth century. The idea was brought to Radnorshire by English squires but it was also adopted to some extent by Welsh-owned estates.

The 1850s was a time of renewal on the Abbey Cwmhir Estate. Farm amalgamations were put in hand and a number of the smaller units were combined to make more economic farms. New houses were built at Cwm Cynnydd, Fishpool, Esgairwy, Bronrhydneydd and Cefn Pawl and a new farm at Llywn Onn. These changes pre-dated the enclosures which were to follow in short order. In the mid-nineteenth century farming was still buoyant from the revival which followed the Napoleonic wars in the early years of the century and seen as a good investment. The refurbished farms were expected to copy the new techniques and the new science which was also boosting outputs. In his report Layton Cooke had commented on the slack attitude of many of the tenants!

It was in the interest of the estate to have a number of substantial tenants who were making a good profit from their farm. Whilst the estate was prepared to invest in new infrastructure, the tenant had to do his bit as well, contributing to improvements such as drainage and dressing the fields. He would also be expected to invest in machinery and stock the farm well. From the landlord's point of view a successful tenant would be able to pay a higher rent. At this time the estate moved from tenant leases which were very long, with no chance of review to much shorter leases which gave the opportunity to increase rents regularly.

Where possible power was provided, particularly for threshing, by the installation of water driven machinery or horse-wheels. The Home Farm was one of the first to install a Pelton wheel which efficiently used water to generate the motive power for the saw mill and other machinery.

The farming was of a mixed economy, rearing both stock and growing crops as fodder for the winter and grains for wider use. The layout of the model farm was very carefully planned to make the most efficient use of space. Careful consideration was given to the most economic movement of cattle within the farm yard and pens and the transfer of manure to the fields. Winter fodder was efficiently stored and threshing floors and granaries installed.

The Abbey Ruin

The focal point of a walk around the village is the remains of the abbey, the *raison d'être* for the village and the settlement which followed down the ensuing centuries but it is also the most enigmatic. As we see it today we find just the remains of the walls of the nave, which still stand as a reminder of the considerable endeavour of building which went on here in the early part of the thirteenth century. Great mystery surrounds Cwmhir Abbey. Why was the building so large? Who financed it and was it ever completed?

Set against the religious fervour created by the Crusades the abbey was founded by Cadwallon ap Madog in 1176, at which time a quite small, simple temporary church would have been built to begin with. The claustral buildings such as the refectory, kitchens and dormitories were also temporary and quite possibly made of timber. The object was to establish a daily order and to create the facilities

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to establish a regular order of services and prayer. The long term aim ect permanent buildings and attract enough monks and lay-brothers to the new religious house. The ideal complement to aim at was sixty monks, something not even remotely achieved at Cwmhir.

Today we see the remains of a later construction which dates from the early thirteenth century. It is difficult to be precise, especially as the abbey was situated close to the turbulent Marcher border with England and regular exchanges between the Welsh Princes and the invading Marcher Lords. A best guess would suggest the period of relative calm between 1210 and 1230. The construction of a masonry building of this size was a slow business. Abbey churches of this size could easily take thirty years to complete.

The work of building was carried out by teams of craftsmen, itinerant workers who moved from one project to another. Masons' marks can be found on some of the stones which both signify the individual craftsman who was proud of his work and serve as a tally from which to calculate payment due. Whilst the masons might be considered the most important workers on site, the carpenters were of equal standing with responsibility for the elaborate timber scaffolding required in the build. They also completed many tasks in the build, elaborate roof and ceiling structures, panelling, screens and furnishings within the abbey complex. Tile makers also produced their wares on site. Similar craftsmen marks can be found at other abbey sites in Wales. They were always kept busy.

The expansion of the abbey at this time was probably financed by the Mortimer family. They were powerful and wealthy Marcher Lords who were courtiers with influence in high places. They financed the building of Wigmore Abbey and their wealth is also reflected in the construction of the sizeable Ludlow Castle and numerous other Marcher fortifications. To build Cwmhir Abbey was very expensive. Large quantities of stone had to be transported over difficult terrain and it would be necessary to arrange safe-passage for such movements. It is most unlikely that any other than the Mortimers could secure this. The expulsion of the Mortimers from Maelienydd about 1228 probably brought building to a halt and may explain the apparent incomplete nature of the structure.

Today only an outline of the nave remains. The largest nave of any church built within the British Isles, it was of cathedral proportions, bigger than both Durham and Winchester and not beaten in the wider Western European context. The lively debate about whether or not it was completed goes on. There are other incomplete abbey churches such as Talley Abbey near Llandeilo. Unlike Cwmhir, building started at the east end. Architectural evidence from Llanthony Priory shows a Romanesque Chancel but an Early English Nave. The building started at the most sacred point of the church. Parch mark evidence from the dry summer of 2018 appears to confirm the siting of the claustral building and the cloister to the south of the nave, as was the custom with Cistercian churches unless the geography of the site prevented it. The same sequence of photographs indicates the possibility of building to the east of the surviving building. This would fit with a reconstruction of the church using the proportionality found in many Cistercian churches at three to one. Other photography from 2018 indicated a series of rectangles to the north west of the abbey church. These have been confirmed by a CPAT led archaeological excavation as a burial ground, probably for the local population. Monastic burial

grounds generally lie to the east of the church. Valuable evidence comes from John Leland who was Henry VIII's inspector of buildings. He made a tour of the country around 1540 and recorded his observations. He states that Cwmhir had a huge and sumptuous Nave but he could only see the foundations and lower part of the Chancel walls which appeared to be incomplete. A statement of fact or could the removal of stone already have begun? After all, five bays of arcading and other stonework were purchased by Llanidloes parish church in 1540 for use in their rebuilding project.

The scant remains can be easily explained. Following the closure of the monasteries, agents of the government of Henry VIII were ordered to raise as much money as possible from the sale of land and materials from the redundant institutions. This part of Radnorshire is short of good building stone and in the years which followed the dissolution the abbey was an attractive source of stone to be re-used in other constructions, even into quite recent times. Abbey stone is found in buildings some miles from the site, both decorative stone and dressed stone for building walls. Some of this is legitimate.

Another controversy at Cwmhir is the burial of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd who died in mysterious circumstances after the battle of Cilmeri in 1282, the last action in Edward I's suppression of Wales. Letters concerning the event from the Archbishop of Canterbury, John Peckham, have survived. Addressed to the Archdeacon of Brecon, in the first he demands to know why the Archdeacon had allowed Llywelyn to be buried at Cwmhir where he could become the focus of further trouble. The second asks why the Archdeacon had not had the courtesy to reply promptly to his first letter! These letters seem a *de facto* confirmation of burial at Cwmhir but some scholars have suggested that Llywelyn was buried at Llantarnam Abbey or even as far away as Bristol, well away from further potential trouble in Wales. It is well established that the Cistercians were very sympathetic towards the Welsh cause and so an interment in a Cistercian abbey would not be unlikely. Contemporary writings record the presence of a white monk when Llywelyn received the last rites on the morning of the battle, possibly at Aberedw or Llanynys church near Builth. Other writings are less helpful.

In Conclusion

An historical walk around the village of Abbey Cwmhir reveals a microcosm of development and the occupation of the landscape spanning almost a thousand years. It should be remembered that there was always someone in the landscape before you and as landscape historians that journey is to explore and discover what was going on, explain what remains in the landscape today and interpret it in a modern context. In this brief perambulation the history of some of the notable buildings of the village has been described, the characters who created them revealed and most importantly their links to the influences of the more distant world. Cwmhir has been witness to national events within Wales as is reflected in the burial of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd in 1282, events which impacted both England and Wales connected with the dissolution of the monasteries, the working conditions in the nineteenth century cotton mills and the involvement of some of the players on the stage in distant lands where human beings were traded as slaves.

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This account touches on only a small number of the characters who have played a part in the history of Abbey Cwmhir. There are many more. Other links to the past and their hidden histories. To discover these is to go some way to explain the community as it appears today. As the seventeenth poet John Donne writes

*'No man is an island, entire of itself;
Every man is a piece of the continent
A part of the main.'*

Meditation XVII: Devotion on Emergent Occasions

This remains true of every individual and community in the land. There are many pieces to the jigsaw but it is the purpose of the Landscape Historian to attempt to reassemble the picture and provide an explanation of the present through the events of the past.



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