



24 Park Crescent

Exploring Abergavenny

EXPLORING ABERGAVENNY

For several years the Abergavenny and District Civic Society has been studying the streets, spaces and buildings of Abergavenny and Mardy outside the town centre. This process is known as 'characterisation', defined by the Welsh Government as 'capturing the local distinctiveness by identifying how places have been shaped over time.'

This record of what makes each part of the town distinctive, and often rather special, increases our awareness of the qualities that need to be considered and respected when new development is proposed. We hope that the planning authority will share our impressions and take account of our views. We also hope that our studies will increase residents' understanding and appreciation of their town, encouraging them to take an active interest in how change is managed in the future, or to conduct more research into aspects of the town's development.

The survey started in partnership with the Civic Trust for Wales as a pilot project to test whether community groups could carry out urban characterisation. The outcome was the Trust's *Exploring your town* manual and toolkit (2013). A County Council conservation area appraisal adopted in 2016 has also been taken into account, and this also covers the town's commercial centre¹.

We have divided the town into thirty-six character areas. This report presents the history and character of one of those areas.

Now we would like *your* contribution:

- *Have we made any mistakes?*
- *Can you add to the history of the area?*

- *Do you agree with our impressions of the area?*
- *What have we missed that should have been recorded?*

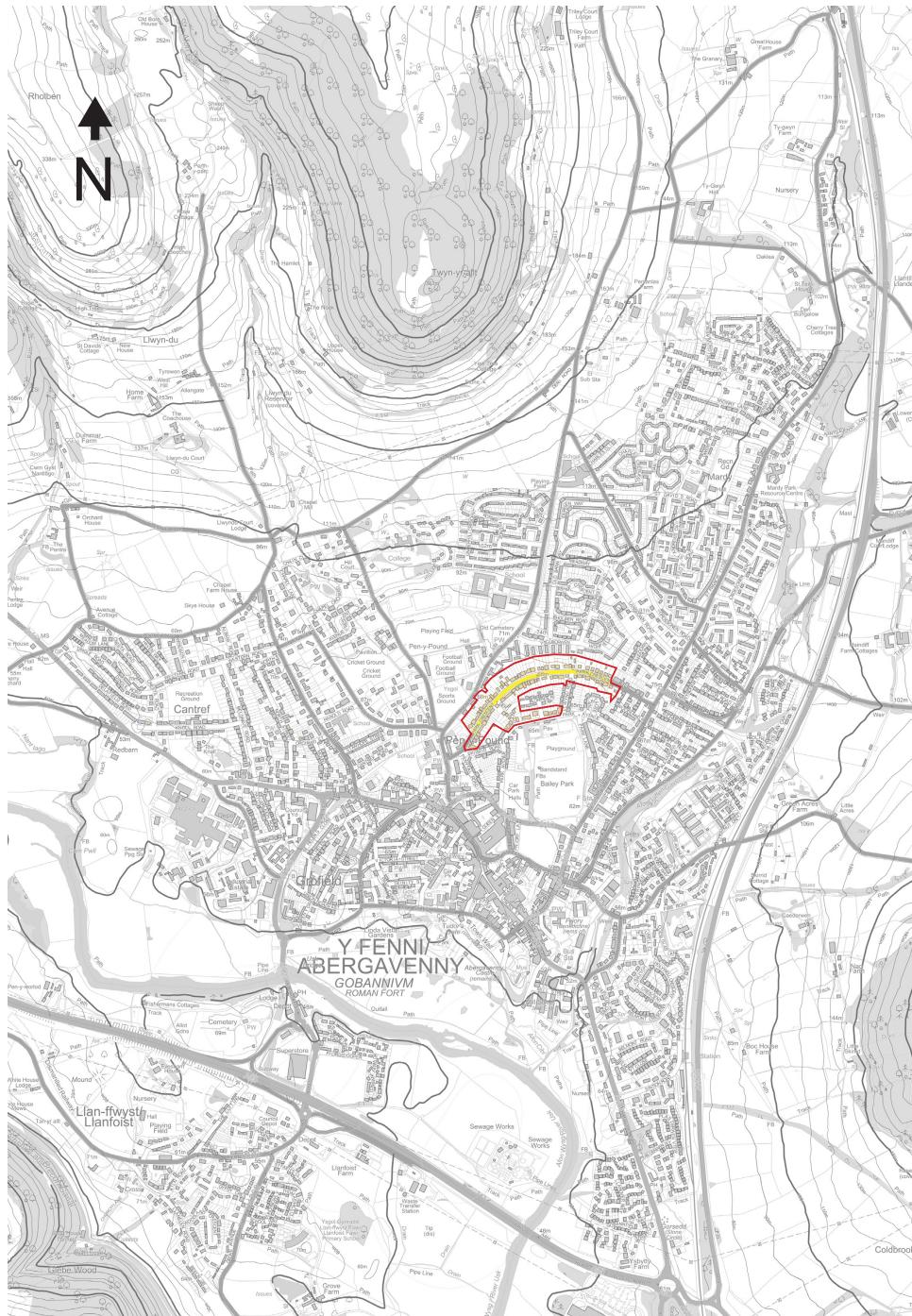
All the reports are available at <https://abercivsoc.com> and comments may be sent to abercivsoc@gmail.com or recorded when the reports are exhibited.

Acknowledgements and copyright information

The Society is especially grateful for the survey contributions of Clive Bransom, Dick Cole, Tony Konieczny, Nigel Patterson, Anna Petts, Duncan Rogers and Jay Shipley. Dick Cole has carried out much of the research and final report writing, and accepts responsibility for any errors. None of the team had prior experience of heritage studies; all have learned much from the project.

We also thank Anna Lerman and Dr Matthew Griffiths of the Civic Trust for Wales for their early support. Matthew Griffiths, now of the Open University, has also helped to present the project for the education and participation of residents, including the design of these character area reports.

This publication © 2017 Abergavenny and District Civic Society. Mapping based on Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database 2017 Ordnance Survey (Digimap Licence via the Open University). For educational use only. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. Aerial image (figure 1) © Google 2016.



PARK CRESCENT

THIS AREA CONSISTS MAINLY of development along the road that gives it its name. It is almost entirely residential and characterised by a wide variety of 20th-century individually-built detached or semi-detached houses, mixed with some housing originally built by the Borough Council for rent.

The area has no distinct overall character apart from its almost entirely residential function, the gentle curve of the Crescent and an interesting and very varied mixture of domestic architectural styles that blend happily together. The building density is modest and the area feels quite spacious.

Park Crescent is the dominant road of the area, busy with traffic and parked cars, but a wide enough corridor for this to be relatively unobtrusive apart from the occasional excessively noisy or speeding vehicle.

The area is not particularly well endowed with trees; more would soften the townscape. The space dominated by the Labour Hall and its car park would benefit from landscaping with some tree planting.





Figure 2: 8 Deri Road -- former shop with Art Deco detail

Historical Background

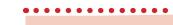
Park Crescent was created in the 1920s when Oakland Road, off Hereford Road and now part of the Crescent, was extended in a curve parallel with the London and North Western Railway's Merthyr branch to join Pen y Pound north of the then Grammar School (now the Melville Centre). The area had previously been fields apart from one at the western end that had been a sports field for some years. The council housing estate to the west of Bailey Park (Park West character area) was begun at about the same time. Deri Road was opened in about 1930 making a connection with Park Avenue.

The area was mostly subdivided into plots for private housing, but some semi-detached and terraced council housing was also built. By 1930 the Crescent was substantially built up except at the eastern end and some infilling opportunities that were not fully exploited until after the Second World War.

The railway line closed to passengers in 1958 and to freight in the 1970s. Most properties on the north side of the Crescent were subsequently able to extend

Key to map

Conservation area boundary



Listed Building



Building of special local interest



Building of local interest



Metal railings



Local landmark building



Good sense of place



Terminated street view



Deflected street view



Vista, long view



Visual pinch point



Building rhythm



Important walling



Important trees or shrubs



Important hedges



Footpath



Improvement opportunity



Figure 3: character analysis





Figure 4: Labour Hall – an unusual design

their gardens, and a few building plots have been allowed in these extensions, accessed via driveways. Many council homes have passed into private hands during the past twenty-five years.

Setting, Streets and Spaces

The Park Crescent area lies north of the town centre and Bailey Park at about 65m above sea level. The post war housing estates north of the railway rise more steeply towards the Deri.

The area has fine views of the Blorenge to the south-west and glimpses of Ysgyryd Fach to the south-east. To the north, the Deri can be seen between the houses and the Town Hall clock tower can sometimes be seen to the south.

Park Crescent, a well-used distributor road, is a wide space, with up to 25m between facing windows. The road itself is not wide enough to accommodate the considerable amount of on-street parking (many houses have little or no private parking space), but wide footways enable two wheels to be off the car-



Figure 5: 39-43 Park Avenue – note the classical pillars (behind the hedge!)

riageway without obstructing pedestrians, an unusual feature that seems to have been allowed for in a recent redesign. The curve of the Crescent and the variety of housing, broken by only a few trees, is pleasant.

Short Deri Road links Park Crescent with that part of Park Avenue where the private housing shares a similar character. The Avenue, less wide than the Crescent, is quite different in that Bailey Park is immediately to the south, though mature trees and a pavilion interrupt views of the Park and distant hills. However, the trees add much to the character of the road.

Modest front gardens are fronted by a wide variety of brick walls, some with railings, fences and hedges, the last being particularly noticeable on Park Avenue. Some front gardens have been converted to parking areas. Rear gardens are of a reasonable size, especially where former railway land has been absorbed. A few mature trees in back gardens add to the quality of the area; a copper beech and other garden trees on Deri Road are a valuable feature.

On the western edge of the area, there are also important mature trees in the grounds at the back of Tŷ'r Morwydd, a former convent and educational centre



Figure 6: Some of the earliest to be built

on Pen-y-Pound.

The one significant open space with some sense of enclosure is nearby at the junction of Park Crescent with Pen y Fal and Skirrid Roads. The Labour Hall and its rather unkempt car park, a pair of houses with large hedged front gardens, the bushes at the rear of the Melville Centre with St Michael's Church beyond, and red brick homes on the north side, define the space.

At the eastern extremity of the area there is a small dedicated public garden area east of no 12 Park Crescent, the curved boundary of which is determined by an old field boundary.

There are footpath links to housing areas north of Park Crescent near the western and eastern ends of the area, and the town centre can be reached via the Park Avenue entrance to Bailey Park.

Building Character

This is an area mainly of individual homes, some bungalows, or semi-detached



Figure 7: Pre-war 'Moderne', 59 Park Avenue

pairs built since the First World War, mostly well before the Second World War. The architectural variety is therefore considerable but generally conservative and therefore blends together harmoniously. The style contrast between housing built for the middle class market elsewhere in the town before 1914 and that in the Crescent in the 1920s is particularly striking. Brick and rendering predominate, with tiled roofs succeeding slate from about 1930.

The earlier western half of Park Crescent has several pairs of homes and two short terraces built in the 1920s as council houses, outliers of the estate to the south. They have slate roofs with red ridge tiles and the original red brick has been colour washed (except no 121). Many are now privately owned and they differ little from the overall character of the area.

The following houses deserve a short description:

- A stone-fronted, hip-roofed pair with roofed bays and porches (nos 97/99), transitional in design between the pre-1914 terraces at the eastern end of the Crescent (in the Hereford Road character area) and typical inter-war housing such as:

- Nos 65/67 or the classic rounded bay nos 85/87; Abergavenny seems to have relatively few of these 1930s pairs, so common in many towns and probably reflecting local economic depression at the time;

- An unusual terrace of three in Park Avenue (nos 39-43) in dark red brick with much stone or concrete detailing including plain square pillared doorways and mul lioned upper windows reminiscent of weavers' cottages;

- Somewhat similar, but plainer, houses on each corner of the junction of Deri Road with Park Avenue

- A handsome pair with Arts and Crafts influences including very tall chimney stacks at nos 45/47 Park Avenue and another similarly influenced house at no 73 Park Crescent;

- A former shop at no 8 Deri Road with an art deco detail;

- No 59 Park Avenue, an unusual flat-roofed pre-war Modernist house with a staggered elevation to fit the site, and wrap-around windows;

- A group of red brick homes opposite the Labour Hall, once associated with the former convent and school on Pen y Pound, are included in the Pen y Pound character area.

Many houses have been extended since built, often in the spaces between them. On occasions the considerable development of one half of a pair has resulted in a lop-sided appearance that can be discordant (e.g. nos 69/71 Park Crescent). The bungalow at no 61 is being extended to form a matching pair.

The Labour Hall is fronted by a bizarre stepped façade in grey render. A pair of classical pillars stands either side of the front door adding to this unique piece of architectural fantasy. Behind this frontage there is an older red brick building extending to Skirrid Road with an elaborate chimney. To this has been added, in not quite matching red brick, a somewhat grand stepped side entrance and a further small extension at the rear.

Heritage Assets

The most interesting buildings have been described above. None have notable heritage value except nos 39-43 Park Avenue, about which further information would be interesting. No 59 Park Avenue is probably unique in Abergavenny if not of particular merit nationally, and more information about this would also be welcome.