

28 Pen y Pound

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?*

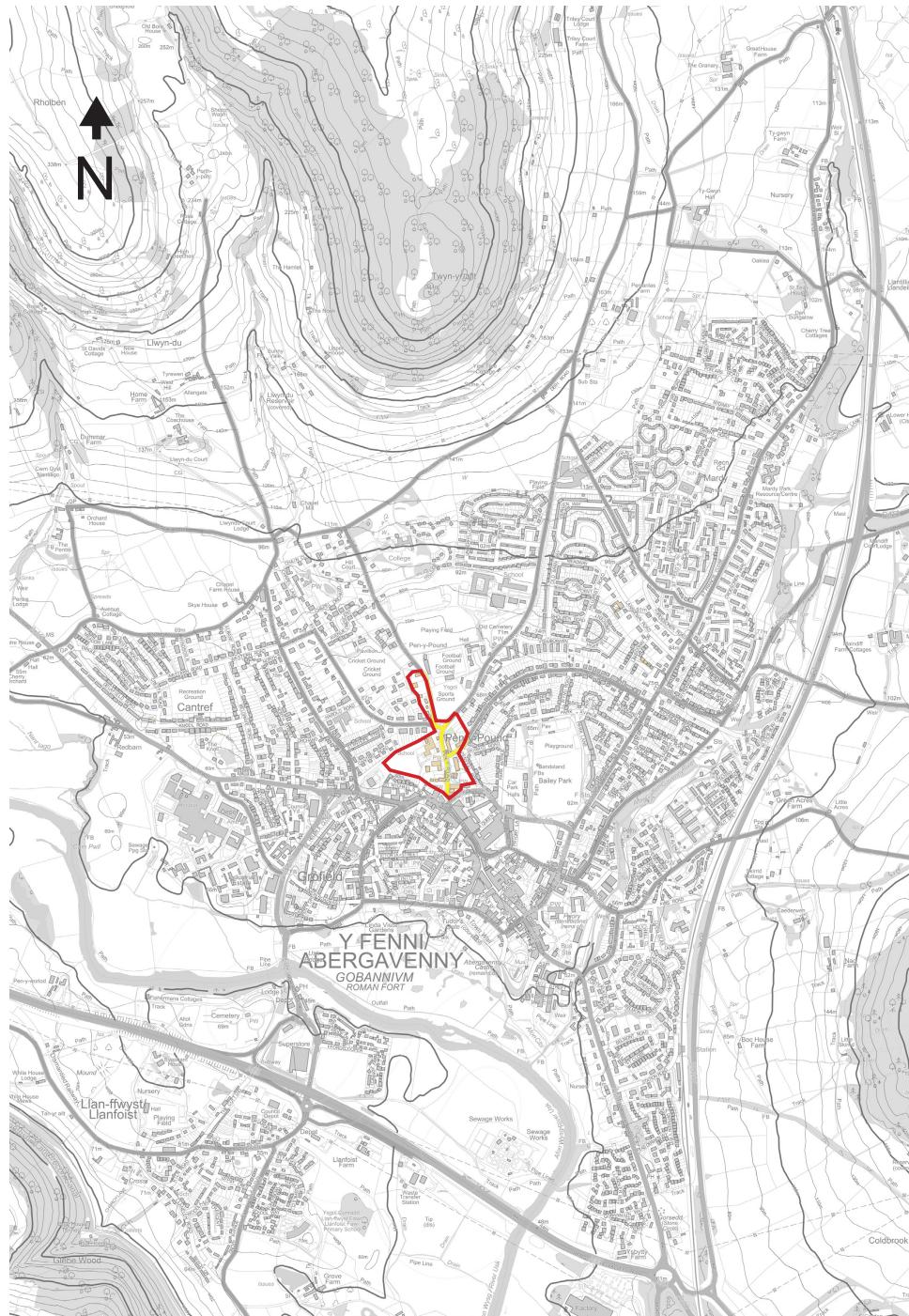
All the reports are available at <https://abercivsoc.com> and comments may be sent to abercivsoc@gmail.com or recorded when the reports are exhibited.

Acknowledgements and copyright information

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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.

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PEN Y POUND

THIS CHARACTER AREA covers the town end of Pen y Pound, extending from where it meets the A40 trunk road to the point beyond The Willows where the road becomes Hill Road.

Pen y Pound is a distinguished and distinctive part of the town where most of the buildings are large and have considerable architectural character. Trees, shrubs, some fine iron gates and railings, and, north of Avenue Road, stone walls and an old gateway add to the appeal of the area. However, the impact of traffic means that the qualities of most of the area are not easily enjoyed.





Figure 2: Looking north

Historical Background

For centuries travellers between Abergavenny and Hereford left the walled town at the North Gate, at the end of High Street, and bore right after today's Frogmore Street. This took them by way of Pen y Pound to the point where the Hereford road, via Pant y Gelli, climbed to the right, away from a lane that made for Llwyn Du and the hills. Only after the 1820s did the road to Hereford leave via Monk Street.

The earliest map of the town shows some development on Pen y Pound by 1760, probably including no 4 (dating from 1716 according to Cadw) and possibly Pen-y-Pound House, later Dyne House, Tŷ'r Morwydd or Mulberry House. Coxe's 1801 map shows little change apart from a building opposite the Hereford road turn where the tollhouse was to be built thirty years later. The Cibi (or Kibby) brook flowed closely in front of Pen-y-Pound House.

According to Barber (2011) Pen y Pound means 'the pond head' and refers to the town's small reservoir fed by the Cibi Brook in the grounds of the house

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



with that name, though we have not identified its position.

A small-scale map of 1813 shows that by then the tramroad from the canal at Govilon towards Hereford crossed Pen y Pound and ran to the left, or north, of the Hereford road for a little way before crossing that road to bend east towards the Gavenny. The 1829 Ordnance Survey map shows this more clearly and the 1844 tithe map suggests that the tramroad and highway shared the space. When the tramroad became a railway in the 1860s, with a bridge over Pen y Pound north of the tollhouse, the Hereford road was kept to the left of the rail tracks.

Cadw has dated no 7 Pen y Pound, the first house on the eastern side, and nos 6 and 8 on the opposite side as early 19th century, and at least the latter two may be shown on the 1829 map. The 1829 map also shows a building on the site of the much later Grammar School. They are all clearly shown on Wood's more detailed map of 1834 (where it is no 4 that is named Pen y Pound House). The tollhouse, just before the tramroad crossing, has been dated as 1831.

The 1813 and 1829 maps also show development extending on the western side of Pen y Pound for some way north of the tramroad. Cadw has dated The Willows as about 1820 and Aenon House, a Baptist Academy of 1807-36, is older. The Cloisters or an earlier building is shown (as two properties) on the 1844 map, which also shows a substantial building behind the tollhouse on the site of the Roman Catholic school. Cadw has dated the Cloisters as mid-Victorian; its history is unclear apart from its use as St John's School in the mid 20th century.

St Michael's Roman Catholic Church and its adjoining Presbytery were built in 1858-60. The oldest part of the Catholic school is probably a few years later; the northern extension is probably inter-war.

The entrance to Avenue Road was created opposite the Old Hereford Road in the 1890s. In 1898 the new King Henry VIII Grammar School building replaced that in the town centre; it was extended in 1904. The Presbyterian Church was built next to no 7 (which became The Manse) in 1907-10.

In 1906 Pen y Pound House was made available to the Sisters of the Holy Ghost who ran a school there, and for a time at Glancibi Grange on Chapel Road, adding the boarding house on Park Crescent in the 1920s and converting the southern part of the house to a chapel in the 1930s. In 1956 they added the large northern extension, but the school closed in 1971. From 1976 it was an environmental education centre for London local authorities until a short-lived independent trust failed in about 2010. Conversion to residential use is now anticipated.

Park Road had been driven through an opening before no 7 Pen y Pound

by 1920 and the entrance to Park Crescent was made at about this time. In the 1970s nos 1-5 Pen y Pound were cleared to allow the trunk road to be routed via Park Road.

In 1963 the new Grammar School was opened on Old Hereford Road, becoming a comprehensive school in 1971. The Victorian building on Pen y Pound became a drama centre, now known as the Melville Centre.

In about 1960 three new houses were built in the grounds of The Cloisters and the Catholic school has been extended. St Michael's Community Centre was added behind the church early in the present century.

The railway bridge was demolished in 1977, allowing the junction of Pen y Pound with Old Hereford Road and Avenue Road to be redesigned, these other roads taking priority over the northern section of Pen y Pound.

Setting, Streets and Spaces

Pen y Pound descends gradually from the north following the tightly channelled Cibi Brook, which enters the area at the rear of The Willows and passes behind other properties before disappearing under the road junction to emerge briefly in front of Mulberry House. It is close to the road through the grounds of the Melville Theatre, then turns east to pass behind the Presbyterian Church and cross to the culverted sections in the town centre. Nowhere would the casual passer-by be aware of this important feature of the town's history, though there is a risk of flooding.

Together with the Baptist Church on Frogmore Street, the lower part of Pen-y-Pound is a distinctive street of fine public buildings and large houses, many listed for their architectural and/or historic interest. Once a main route into or out of the town, this has been an elegant extension of the town centre for over 150 years. The character of the area also owes much to the fact that it is well-provided with mature trees. The tower of the Presbyterian Church is a local focal point when descending Pen y Pound.

Pen y Pound is busy with traffic as it leads to extensive upper parts of the town. The junction with the trunk road can be difficult to negotiate. The space narrows past the Presbyterian Church, with a 20mph limit, traffic-calming pillars and particularly thin footways in front the houses opposite, before opening out past the Catholic Church to views of the Deri.

Both the road junctions altered in the late 1970s have been provided with tree, shrub or grass planting; that with the trunk road has extensive guard rails



Figure 4: Formerly the Grammar School

to steer pedestrians towards a light-controlled crossing to the town centre, while that with Avenue Road has full traffic lights. There are also guard rails outside an entrance to the Catholic school.

Rather more attractive metal railings front Mulberry House (including fine gateways from both the late 19th and mid 20th centuries), the Melville Centre, the Presbyterian Church (Arts and Crafts/Art Nouveau details) and houses on the west side. In contrast a raised lawn fronts the Catholic Church and Presbytery.

The school playing field is behind the school, the church, the community centre and an area of car parking, extending to take in the former railway line and to houses on St Michael's Road. A footpath follows the old railway boundary to link Pen-y-Pound with Chapel Road. An old stone wall defines the upper boundary of Mulberry House and the wall opposite the Presbyterian Church supports a canopy, perhaps once a bus stop shelter (No 4 at one time included a surgery).

North of Avenue Road, The Cloisters is fronted by a grey stone wall with



Figure 5: Tŷ'r Morwydd – awaiting a new use

an impressive Tudor arched stone gateway with an inset carved emblem, much eroded. The wall continues past four houses until interrupted by the Listed white curved wing walls, iron railings and elaborate iron piers and gates at the entrance to The Willows. The high wall and many conifers and other trees prevent sight of the house.

Building Character

Residential properties in Pen y Pound include eight listed buildings:

- No 7, the former Manse, is early 19th century, probably altered by E.A. Johnson when the Presbyterian Church was built next door. It is white-rendered with a Classical front, two added slate-roofed bays, deep eaves and a shallow hipped slate roof; low stone forecourt wall with iron railings.
- No 4 is dated 1716 but altered since. It is roughcast rendered and painted grey/green; it has a central doorway with a simple flat canopy and 6+6 paned sash windows (the upper floor ones are flush with the wall), a south elevation

that is similar, and a hipped and belled slate roof (with a dormer facing south) and wide eaves.

- Nos 6 and 8 are early 19th century, similar to no 4. No 6 has a modest pedimented doorcase; no 8 a flat canopy or hood; both seemed vacant and neglected at the time of survey.

- No 10 is the Presbytery built in 1860 with the adjoining St Michael's RC Church (together grade II*), Gothic in local sandstone with mullioned Bath stone windows, dressings and quoins, a steep slate roof with a half dormer.

- No 16, the single storey tollhouse, is probably 1831, white roughcast with Gothic pointed windows and a five-sided slate roof to the road.

- North of Avenue Road, The Cloisters is a striking tall mid-Victorian Tudor-style house in sandstone and Bath stone dressings, with steep slate roofing and gables with decorative white bargeboards, and a massive chimney stack at the northern end. We have not explained a carved niche statue in the gable and another carving above the gateway. At the southern end of the main building, which has capped red brick chimney stacks, there is a low rendered extension. The Cloisters was St John's School for some years from 1939.

- The Willows, dated about 1820 (but possibly evident on the 1813 one-inch map), is hidden from the road by trees and shrubs but described by Cadw as stucco with a hipped roof and wide eaves and a large Doric porch, typically Regency. A hip-roofed stone outbuilding, not listed, with altered red brick dressings around openings that include a circular window, abuts the pavement and was probably once a coach house; it is now residential. Two white roughcast hip-roofed rendered cottages follow before Aenor House, no 34, equally old, is at a right angle to the road.

The Presbyterian Church (Whitefield Chapel) 1907-10 by E.A. Johnson (Listed) is in a Tudor Gothic style with several Arts and Crafts features such as the belfry, windows and the gates and railings; in a rather grey local sandstone with Bath stone details. The church has an unusual short spire topping the tower on the left hand side of the front elevation.

St Michael's Roman Catholic Church (listed grade II*) dates from 1858-60 and is in a Decorated Gothic style in local sandstone with Bath stone details; a large east window with good tracery faces the road. A sympathetic early 21st century community centre, rendered with some stone and two circular windows, has been built at the rear of the church.

Map evidence suggests that the older part of the Catholic Primary School



Figure 6: St Michael's Road, formerly Brecon Road

was remodelled and grew over the decades, retaining a Victorian character. It is mostly in the same materials as the church with three gables facing the road and a curiously positioned dormer in the steep roof. There are modern additions to the rear.

Opposite the church, behind trees, is the listed former King Henry VIII Grammar School (now the Melville Centre), 1898 by E.A. Johnson (extended by five windows to the north in 1904). It was constructed in a Tudor Gothic style in local stone with yellow Bath stone and a slate roof, and is single storey with large gables.

The older southern part of Tŷ'r Morwydd or Mulberry House is listed, was built in the late 18th century and has been extensively modernised and extended for educational and hostel uses, notably by the 1956 northern extension. It is currently vacant but conversion to apartments is planned. Elevated behind a fine 18th/19th century wrought iron gateway and railings, the original house is grey/green roughcast, two-storeyed with a pair of gabled dormers, a tiled roof and a central pedimented section with a portico doorway. A plain southern extension

includes a former chapel, and the large three-storey northern extension is partly faced with 1ft square panels of reconstituted aggregate and has a striking tall vertical window at the end.

An interesting red-brick boarding annexe of the convent school was built on Park Crescent in the 1920s, converted to residential use after the school closed in 1971. The Mulberry House car park behind this is the subject of current parking and housing proposals associated with the conversion of Mulberry House to apartments.

More recent buildings in the area include no 12, probably inter-war, single-storeyed plus a flat-roofed dormer in a slate roof between two gables; brick with concrete or stone dressings and quoins matching the stone of the adjacent school well. There are also two further dwellings obscured behind no 4; no 2 appears to be post-war. North of The Cloisters, a small bungalow with a flat-roofed front extension is followed by a large *ca* 1960 house being remodelled at the time of survey and another distinctively of the same period with an asymmetrical gabled roof, deep eaves and first floor timber cladding. Next is a much-altered Victorian house, Cibi Lodge, based on an earlier Woodbine Cottage, and once used by St John's School as a science laboratory.

Heritage Assets

Most of the older buildings are listed, though the condition of some may not be good. Mulberry House is an obvious example, and nos 6 and 8 do not appear well cared for. The County Council is currently disposing of the Melville Centre as a 'community asset' and the future of the building depends on the outcome.

Aenor House and the oldest part of the Catholic school may merit consideration for Listing and the protection of stone walls, iron railings and trees is vital.

The original conservation area has been extended to include the part of the character area north of the Avenue Road junction, but strangely not as far as The Willows and Aenor House.