

20 Monmouth Road

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.

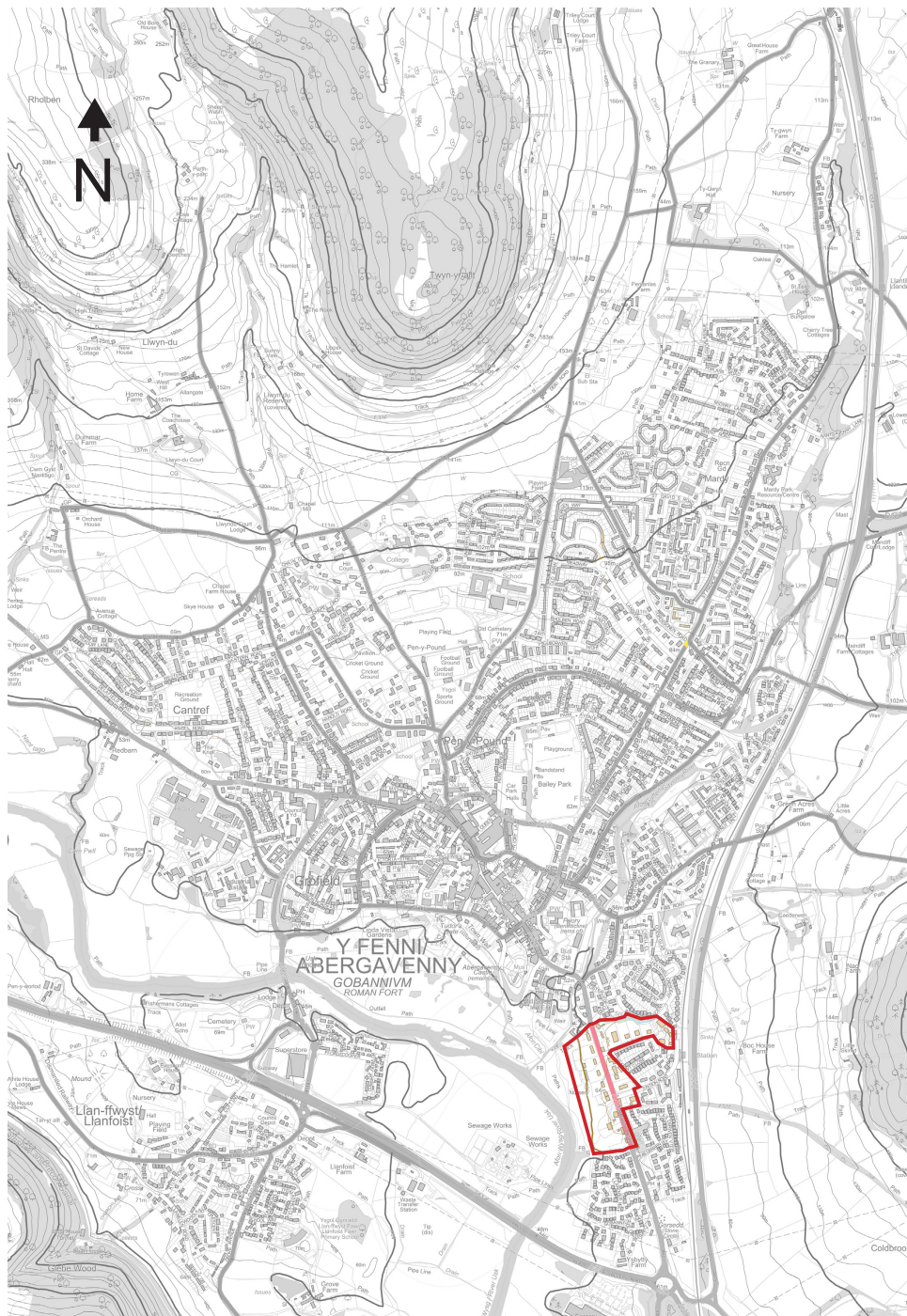
Acknowledgements and copyright information

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 Leron 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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¹ <http://www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/abergavenny-conservation-area-appraisal>



MONMOUTH ROAD

THIS CHARACTER AREA COVERS Monmouth Road between Fosterville and the Plas Derwen and Ysbytty Fields estates, together with the mostly older housing on the northern side of Belmont Road.

The Monmouth Road entry to Abergavenny is distinctive, even distinguished – the mature trees and shrubs, the tower of Cae Kenfy Lodge, impressive houses on both sides of the road, stone walls and the view of St Mary's and the Deri. Belmont Road has equally impressive houses, walls and trees. The area is also strong on historical interest.





Figure 2: Landmark at the gateway to Abergavenny

Cae Kenfy Lodge's tower is not well-maintained and vulnerable; this memorable landmark, though not particularly distinguished architecturally, must be safeguarded. Fairlea, on Belmont Road, is also a key building that must be sustained. The character of Monmouth Road could also be threatened by accesses to any backland development in the gardens on the western side.

There is a possibility that Monmouth Road could be de-trunked in future years, providing some relief from the incessant traffic. There are also plans for more railway station car parking, which would relieve Belmont Road of street parking.

Historical Background

The original main route to Monmouth was via Monk Street and what is now the B4233. The route via Mill Street was primarily that to Usk and, on a 1760 map, 'the Passages' or the Severn ferries. Today's Monmouth Road (A40) appears in its present straight alignment on an 1813 early Ordnance Survey map. The ori-

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



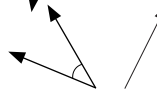
Terminated street view



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



gins of this straight section are unclear; it is possible that it was a turnpike dating from the late 18th century, but it could be part of the Roman road to Usk. The 1813 map (the accuracy of which is questionable) also appears to show an old road or track a few yards east of the present Monmouth Road and that might have been the Roman road and a predecessor to the turnpike. The increased importance of this route will owe something to the new Llanellen bridge of 1821 giving a more direct access to the commercial growth of Pontypool and Newport.

The 1813 map also shows a road or track passing in front of Brookfield (formerly Pen y Causey), explaining the orientation of the present house (*ca* 1910, replacing an earlier property), then along the line of the rear access lane to Monmouth Road properties and across the fields towards Coldbrook House and Llanddewi Rhydderch. It is still a public path east of the railway.

The 1829 Ordnance Survey map, generally more accurate than the 1813 map but also to a small scale, and the larger scale 1844 tithe map, also show the track towards Llanddewi Rhydderch, but that running just east of the present Monmouth Road is reduced to field boundaries. The straight section of Monmouth Road ended where it joined the Mill Street entry to the town, intersecting with Holywell Road (then Lane) at the bridge. Mill Street was by-passed in 1847. A curious feature beside the main road is shown in 1829 where it meets the Coldbrook track between Pen y Causey and the later Belmont public house. The 1844 map shows two small plots here, described as gardens.

The area was orchards and farmland until the GWR railway station was opened in 1854. Station Road (Great Western Road) must have been constructed in about 1850. By the late 1870s the Belmont public house, four large houses and two smaller houses fronting Monmouth Road, three large properties on Pen-y-Causey (now Belmont) Road and a pair at the western end of Station Road had been built. Fairlea was about to be built and a timber yard occupied the site of Whites Close, possibly linked to Blorengue View terrace. Cae Kenfy had also been built (Cenfi is a name for the Gavenny – ‘Gavenny field’).

Fairlea dates from 1881 and was built by William White, inventor of Hygeia Rock, a product thought to have been used for sound and damp proofing London Underground tunnels as well as cavity infill at Fairlea. The product was made in the former timber yard at the rear. Surprisingly no houses were built between no 63 Monmouth Road and Cae Kenfy between the 1880s and the interwar period. Similarly there are eighty years between the development of the north side of Belmont Road and the development of the field on the south side.



Figure 4: 1850s Classical

Setting, Streets and Spaces

Monmouth Road climbs gradually from about 55m above sea level at The Belmont to over 60m at Station Road. The slope up from the Usk is much steeper, particularly west of the road behind the houses. Except where interrupted by trees, these houses and those on the east side that are elevated above the road enjoy wide views of the Blorengue and the Usk valley. Belmont Road climbs to about 70m and some older houses here had the same westerly view, but trees have now obscured this.

Those arriving at the town via Monmouth Road initially enter through tall trees, with the tower of no 91, Cae Kenfy Lodge, a striking feature on the left hand side. After Station Road a particularly fine view emerges, flanked by large Victorian villas, of St Mary's Church tower against the green backcloth of the Deri.

Many housing plots are large, several more than a quarter hectare, especially on the west side of Monmouth Road and in Belmont Road. It is perhaps surprising that few of these plots have been subdivided. Gardens are typically lawns,



Figure 5: Italianate villa

driveways and many mature trees, including holm oak, copper beech and cedar. Trees are particularly dense at the rear of Belmont Road properties that dip down to a small stream.

The older properties, especially on Monmouth Road, have stone walls with cock and hen or rounded tops. There are red brick walls on the northern side of Belmont Road banded in yellow brick. The walls are often supplemented with clipped hedges or timber fencing. The only rather unkempt area is in front of the cottages on Belmont Road.

There are public seats at the junction of Belmont Road with Monmouth Road and a flower bed at the junction with Station Road.

There is a public footpath on the northern edge of the area that links Monmouth Road with Castle Meadows and a riverside footpath.

Monmouth Road is a busy trunk road (A40) and traffic often exceeds the 30 mph limit. The junction with Station Road can require patience from those using that road. Belmont Road experiences on-street parking associated either with the station or the town centre.

Building Character

Monmouth Road The western side has a mixture of domestic properties of varying sizes from the early nineteenth century to the late twentieth century. The tower of Cae Kenfy Lodge and its related high wall is a particularly distinctive feature of the arrival into Abergavenny. This, and the other large Victorian properties were designed to look across the meadows below with fine rear elevations. High walls make Cae Kenfy impossible to view from the road but it dates from about 1870 with many subsequent alterations and was divided into two after the last war. It and Cae Kenfy Lodge both have unusual gate pillars. Another house, recently modernised, was built in the grounds of Cae Kenfy in the 1980s.

Nos 67-71 on this side of Monmouth Road are large dwellings, probably early post-war (no 67 the most recent), well-screened by shrubs and hedges from the road. No 69 is architecturally the best, in dark red brick with a steep tiled roof and an impressive brick arched doorway. Nos 75 and 77 are modest bungalows.

Nearer the town, nos 59 (Bella Vista) and 61 (Ingleside) are both listed houses of rock-faced sandstone with limestone dressings, some timberwork, battlemented parapets and slate roofs, designed by Edwin Foster (who lived at no 59 in the early 20th century). The impressive large detached house at no 63 has some similar features and yellow brick capped walling similar to early Fosterville houses at nos 8-14.

On the eastern side, no 16 (Brookfield) is a listed and little altered Edwardian house with many characteristic period features largely hidden behind trees and a wall. Timber framing with red-brick nogging, a gabled porch and trussed gable woodwork are perhaps the most evident. No 30 is a fine listed Italianate villa with painted stucco built in about 1850, but unfortunately also difficult to see apart from the tower. Other dwellings of interest on this side of Monmouth Road are no 26/28 and Claremont Hall at no 32, both in white stucco and probably built in the 1870s. No 32 has recently lost an interesting narrow ramped driveway on Station Road and a house built in the rear garden is rather unsuccessful at blending with older houses in the area. No 34 is a more modest, but attractively prominent, double-fronted listed Italianate house of *ca* 1850 facing Station Road. Behind iron railings it has a central gabled porch and a low-pitched roof with small pediments at eaves level; a lean-to bay on the right side elevation gives views along the main road. No 36, also Listed, is similar but less interesting. No 38, an extended stone house with Gothic window frames was built as a tollhouse, but we have not dated the building.



Figure 6 :1870s Classical (modern extension)

The rendered older part of The Belmont public house on the corner of Belmont Road is probably mid 19th century but much altered; the sandstone section with high eaves and dormers is probably from the 1870s.

More recent houses on the eastern side are 1950s former police houses at nos 18/20 (no 18 is being extended at the time of writing), and a bungalow from the same period with a half-hipped roof at no 24.

Station Road Nos 1-5 are included in this character area. Old maps suggest that this building, a large steeply gabled slate-roofed sandstone structure from about the 1870s with limestone dressings, behind a good 6ft wall, was originally a pair, then a single dwelling or institutional use, and is now split into three.

Belmont Road has substantial sandstone, brick (one white-painted) and rendered Victorian buildings, mostly with restrained details compared to nearby Fosterville Crescent, but with little alteration since they were built. The exception to this is Belmont House (formerly The Elms) which is now a residential home and has a sympathetic addition. No 6 (Highfield) is a stone villa with



Figure 7: Tudor Revival at Fairlea

unusual window hoods.

The most interesting building in Belmont Road, even in suburban Abergavenny, is Fairlea, built in 1881. This strikingly tall listed house surprises when first encountered, like some survival from the Elizabethan age. It is timber-framed, infilled with cream-brick nogging or rendering, with other 'Tudor' woodwork features including a balcony, tall chimneys and a tiled roof; it has a red engineering brick boundary wall and was named Wayland between the wars.

There is also a stone 1870s terrace of six houses, originally named Bloreng View, with ground floor bays and yellow brick details. Most now have brown uPVC windows and doors and some have lost chimneystacks. This terrace could possibly have been associated with the railway or the timber yard (and later workshops associated with Fairlea) where three substantial buff-brick houses were built in the 1980s as White's Close.



Figure 8: Victorian detailing

Heritage Assets

The eastern boundary of this character area is that of the Conservation Area within which it is situated. There are seven listed buildings, including the remarkable Fairlea, and a number of other Victorian buildings that have a similar quality. The tower of Cae-Kenfy Lodge has particular landmark value. No 69 Monmouth Road is a fine house from the mid-20th century.

Period stone and brick walls and mature trees also add greatly to the character of the area.