



Exploring Abergavenny

4 Cantref

8 PROSPECT
HOUSE

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 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.

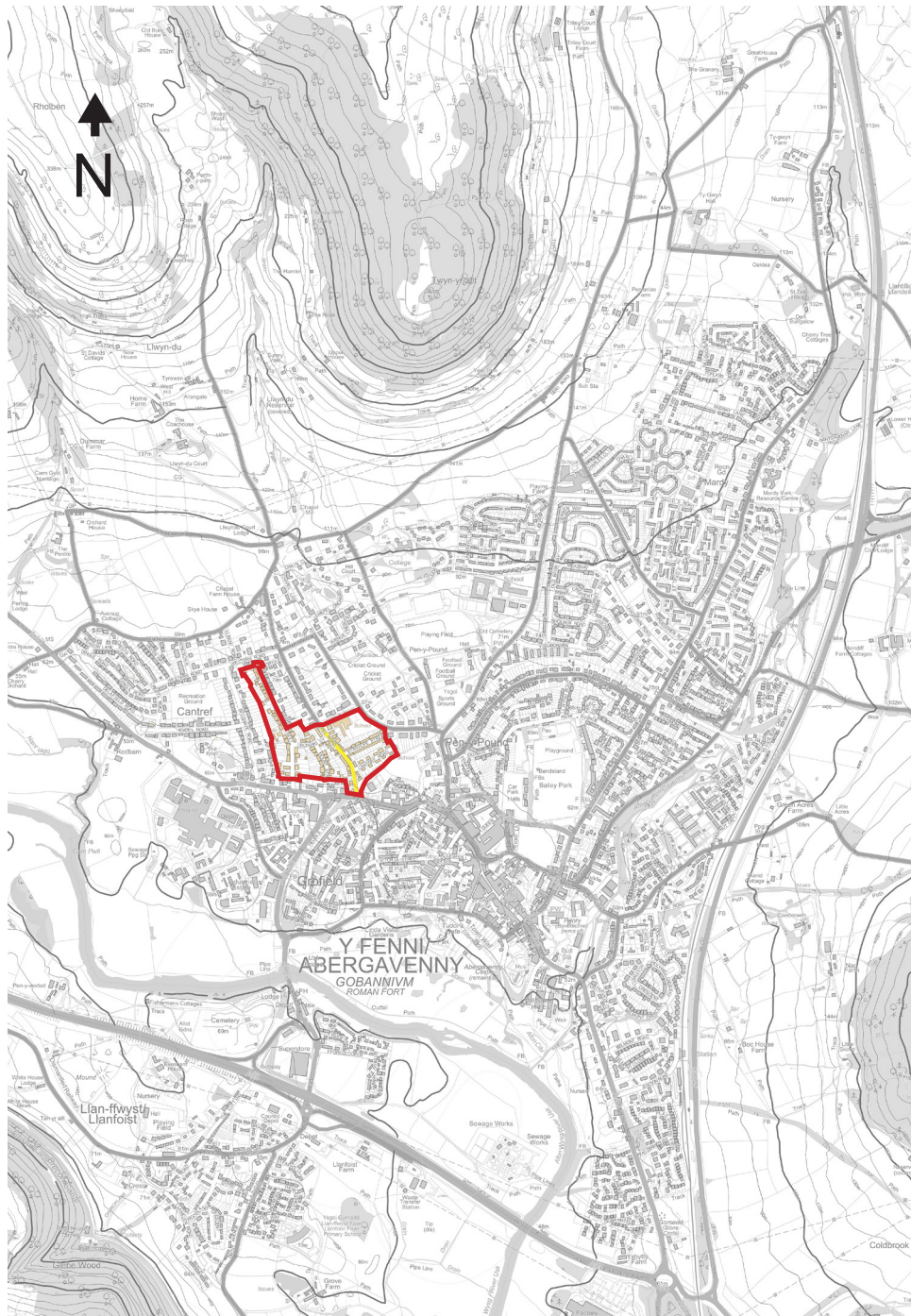
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Figure 1: Cantref location plan and aerial

Cover: North Street, bending to the left

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



CANTREF

WE HAVE NAMED THIS densely built Victorian suburb, somewhat detached from the town when it was started, Cantref as it appears on the 1880 Ordnance Survey map, the earliest detailed map of this part of the town. Today's Cantref ward covers a much wider area of the west of the town. The Welsh word 'cantref' refers to a medieval administrative or legal unit.

Cantref followed the eastern part of Grofield in the expansion of Abergavenny and has comparable charm and interest. Though the character is rather that of a densely built urban village, the arrangement of streets does not converge on a single nodal point. The intersection of Chapel Road and Stanhope Street at least had the shop and post office until quite recently, as well as some of the earliest and most distinguished houses. Unfortunately the attractive church is only a break in the North Street frontage. Most streets have the variety of age,



style and spacing that typifies the town's Victorian suburbs, but the terraces of Stanhope Street appear long and closely spaced, rather plain though not without their own variations.

As few houses have off-street parking, but the narrow streets are congested with parked cars, particularly in the evenings and at weekends and often on pavements meant for pedestrians. The problem is compounded by the use of Chapel Road, Stanhope Street and others as roads giving access to housing to the north, avoiding trunk road congestion.

Historical Background

The lack of pre-1880 detailed mapping makes the dating of the early development of the area difficult. The 1844 tithe map does not show any roads north of Brecon Road other than Chapel Road. The Duke of Beaufort owned the fields, and that which includes most of Orchard Street and Mount Street was recorded as a nursery. However, Cantref Inn on Brecon Road has been dated as 1843, and Cadw have dated no 31 North Street as probably about 1840, no 65 North Street as probably 1840-50, and nos 23/25 Chapel Road similarly. The map was probably surveyed some years before its publication date. As neighbouring houses appear to be rather later, these houses may have been quite isolated for some years, the roads having been prepared for development that took many decades to be completed, a common occurrence in the town. Victorian development seems to have started in earnest in about 1860 on Chapel Road, which is part of an old lane from Tudor Street discussed in our description of the Chapel Road area. The railway to Brynmawr opened in 1862 and its construction and operation could have been a spur to development in the area.

By 1880 about 125 houses had been built in the area. The western side of Chapel Road had been developed as far as Stanhope Street, where the housing on the north side was complete and that on the south side was more than half complete. Stanhope Street was specifically built for railway workers. Mount Street also had substantial development and North Street had a scatter of development throughout its length, including the newly built Christ Church.

About a further forty houses were built by 1900, including the completion of Stanhope Street, with another ten or so by 1920. A few years later thirty council houses were built on Cantref Road, previously allotments, and three similar pairs were added to North Street. Probably about 1950 16 council flats were built in the grounds of Tŷ Rholben on Orchard Street. This left scope for only about

Key to map

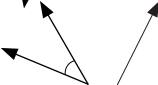
Conservation area boundary	
Listed Building	
Building of special local interest	
Building of local interest	
Metal railings	
Local landmark building	
Good sense of place	
Terminated street view	
Deflected street view	
Vista, long view	
Visual pinch point	
Building rhythm	
Important walling	
Important trees or shrubs	
Important hedges	
Footpath	
Improvement opportunity	

Figure 2: character analysis



half a dozen infillings and North Street's Orchard Close of about 1970. Most recently part of the former shop on the corner of Chapel and Stanhope Streets has been redeveloped to provide two cottages.

The school in Harold Road opened in 1898 as the Intermediate (later High) School for Girls, the same year as the new boys' King Henry VIII Grammar School opened in Pen-y-Pound. After the Grammar School became comprehensive and co-educational the Harold Road school became a junior school, now called Cantref Primary School.

Setting, Streets and Spaces

The area generally rises gently from about 60m at Brecon Road towards the Rholben and Deri to the north. Mount Street climbs rather more steeply to a high point on Orchard Street, though hardly enough to support its name.

The southern part of Chapel Road, the only road that pre-existed Victorian development, is quite wide at the Brecon Road entry but narrows to 9m between buildings, with a carriageway of about 4m, and bends to the left from Brecon Road. The bend, together with the varied arrangement and style of building, gives the street an urban village-like character. Some homes directly front the footway but most have 1-2m of space behind iron railings or low stone walls topped with railings. At the Brecon Road end the railings and walls are less impressive, and the building line is notably erratic with pairs of older and recent properties, some set back about 15m, and pre-war council development opposite provided with front gardens (some paved, others with flowers or shrubs) behind low brick walls with white railings. The space between facing buildings widens again beyond Stanhope Street. Back gardens, where they exist, vary greatly in length and width.

Stanhope Street contrasts markedly with Chapel Road, consisting largely of uninterrupted terraces of similar houses fronting directly on to the narrow footway and facing each other about 9m apart. These closely packed homes give the street a rather constricted feeling though they have a better aspect at the rear over the school playing field or between Cantref Road houses to the Bloreng.

Cantref Road, built for a similar social group nearly sixty years later, contrasts markedly with Stanhope Street, having a particularly open feeling. Ten pairs of well-spaced houses occupy the amount of space used by nearly fifty Stanhope Street properties. The building line is at only 3-4m behind the pavement and back gardens are short, but 15m was left between the pairs, now sometimes



Figure 3: Stanhope Street closed by Chapel Road and Gilwern Hill

taken for extensions and garages. It is no longer clear what type of front enclosure was provided – possibly low white rendered walls or net fencing and hedges – as there is now a wide variety (or, for car use, none at all). At the end there is a connection to the footpath that connects Pen y Pound and Chapel Road.

Mount Street has a similar character to Chapel Road; the houses are similarly close to a road that kinks interestingly in parallel with Chapel Road, the building line is not consistent, and railings are a strong feature of the street scene. Small front gardens are used in much the same variety of ways. Back gardens also vary in length and width, dictated by the property frontage and shape of the land available. Both Chapel Road and Mount Street have one or two buildings providing interest by being built end-on to the road.

Orchard Street's Tŷ Rholben provides a commanding closure to the view up Mount Street. No 31 North Street neatly terminates the westward view along Orchard Street. A block of stone garages, perhaps originally an outbuilding to Tŷ Rholben, adds interest. The flats behind the house and on Chapel Road add little to the character of the area except a grassed area with mature cherry trees,



Figure 4: Ty Rholben closes Mount Street view

but the survival of stone walls is fortunate.

The southern part of North Street repeats the kink of Chapel Road and Mount Street. At the narrowest point facing houses are less than 10m apart. The oldest houses have only a metre or so of private front space; later houses have a little more. The earlier houses tend to have simple iron railings set in a single course of stone with matching gates, while the later houses have a low wall with good gate piers, often yellow brick, and iron railings, often quite complex in detail. A number of the earlier examples have been replaced in other materials.

North of Christ Church the street is still narrow but straight. Only the western side falls within this character area; the eastern side lies in the Chapel Road character area, but its stone walls contribute to the streetscape. The older houses generally have iron railings on a low brick base, behind which there is little room for gardening, though no 61 has a large palm tree. Several more modern houses have done away with fencing to enable cars to be parked off the highway. Nos 119-123 at the turn of the street have been squeezed into little space and front directly on to the footway.



Figure 5: Former shop, and post office Chapel Road

The back gardens of North Street are mostly at least 20m long with mature trees particularly evident on the end boundary, possibly remnants of the old field boundary. As elsewhere in the area, the width of plots varies greatly; some are only 3-4m where the house is narrow or the space limited by the road layout, which also results in several tapering plots.

The short spire of Christ Church is sometimes visible as a local landmark. The grass forecourt of the church is the only break in the density of North Street housing.

A small group of 1970s bungalows on North Street is tightly grouped with little private space, though allowing a view of the Bloreng beyond.

Mature trees make a major impact on Harold Road. Cantref Primary School has a wide well maintained playing field with a variety of playing areas and a 'wild' part, fringed with mature chestnut trees on Avenue Road and easily visible through iron railings, which gives a spacious feel to the locality.

Where buildings and trees allow, the area has views and glimpses of the nearby hills. The view north from the North Street/Orchard Street junction focuses

on Rholben, while to the south the ridge takes the eye. More distant Gilwern Hill closes the view along Stanhope Street and Orchard Street, and of course the Bloreng is often visible.

A public footpath follows the boundary of the former railway line between Pen-y-Pound and Chapel Road, linking into Cantref Road. A spear-headed iron fence survives from railway days on the school side, but the variety of fencing on the housing side includes much corrugated iron and some graffiti, and hedges meet overhead.

Despite some traffic management measures (a 20mph zone, speed humps and Harold Road/Stanhope Street one-way working), the area suffers badly from the conflict between densely parked cars and moving traffic, much of which in Chapel Road and Stanhope Street is 'rat running' to avoid the town centre or generated by areas to the north. School traffic is also substantial at certain times of the day.

Roads and pavements are tarmac throughout and reasonably maintained, with yellow lines at the lower end of Chapel Road. Lamp standards on the Harold Road perimeter of Cantref School are of a decorative Victorian style.

Building Character

Chapel Road

Nos 1/2 could only be built after the demolition of the railway bridges that crossed Chapel Road and Brecon Road; nos 3-11 and 13/15 (set back) are much altered stone or pebble-dashed cottages, probably *ca* 1860; no 17 is tucked behind nos 13/15. No 19 has unusual white-painted twin and triple Italianate window openings and a narrow 'Gothick' arch giving access to the rear; no 21 is well-proportioned but with a modern porch and windows; the listed nos 23/25 are similarly classical in style but rendered and little altered. Until the 1930s, these mid 19th century houses faced allotments and the railway embankment; then two foursomes of roughcast rendered council houses were built with the entry to Cantref Road between. With slate roofs, front-facing gabled 'book-ends', simple door canopies and washed in cream, these houses harmonise quite satisfactorily and still appear to be social housing. There is a modern infill beside the railway embankment.

Beyond the bend and at the junction with Stanhope Street, Chapel Road briefly has a tightly knit appearance, focusing on the former shop and post office (closed in the early 21st century) at no 1 Stanhope Street where the old corner



Figure 6: North Street variety - stone and stucco

shopfront needs attention. This eastern side has three white-painted wide mid 19th century houses, one with a pedimented doorcase and original windows. These houses had private front spaces at least as late as a 1929 aerial photo shows. Beyond the shop and its house the out-buildings were redeveloped a few years ago in stone (still rather red) and yellow brick with half gables and an archway for rear access to parking – a development that is quite sympathetic with local character. On the western side nos 27/29 probably date from the mid 19th century but are much altered, nos 31/33 are later in stone with white painted details and roof gables (one possibly original), but nos 35-41 are also from the earlier period though now variously faced. Note that all nos 21-41 have similar eaves brackets. Creeper-clad no 43 pleasantly breaks the line by being at a right angle to the road, and no 45 completes the early phase of development.

Three undistinguished bungalows (one dormer), typical of the 1960s with sections of reconstituted stone and timber cladding, fill the space to Orchard Street, with two pairs of late Victorian houses (one dated 1890) opposite in stone with yellow or white-painted brick detailing and no 38, mid Victorian



Figure 7: recent building on Chapel Street

with scooped bargeboard details and now wholly in white.

Stanhope Street

All but the last house on each side open directly on to the pavement. On the south side nos 2-10 are white-rendered cottages similar to those in Chapel Road; nos 2/4 have doorcases surmounted by a curious shared pediment but the others are plain. Thereafter this side of the street is initially a succession of small sandstone houses, with plain rendered detailing including a stringcourse, until there are two wider houses, nos 24/26, one now pebble-dashed, both with a second door for rear access (as have some others in the street). Nos 28-38 are a little more recent (the 1881 map suggests building was then in progress beyond No 32) with arched openings to recessed doorways, wider ground floor windows and some cream brick detailing appearing. These are followed by the simpler nos 40-44 (a street nameplate on No 44 suggests this was the last house when it was placed there). No 46 is double fronted with the central doorway and window over both arched, and no stringcourse; a garage is now to the right of the door-

way. Nos 48/50 are more grand, taller with roof dormers with finials, and with red and yellow brick courses above and below the first floor windows. Finally, with a paved forecourt, there is a late 19th century red brick house with some black brick decoration and a slate canopy over the doorway and two windows.

After the former shop the north side starts with wide No 3, with an arched upper floor window, and no 5, before nos 7/9 use a paler shade of sandstone. Rendered nos 11/13 are hip-roofed and look a little earlier (note the moulding detail above door to no 11). Nos 15-21 and 23-27 resemble houses opposite, but between these terraces a curious single storey infill has long been inserted, perhaps part of No 21 which was occupied by a carpenter in 1901. Nos 29-43 mostly have wider ground floor windows. No 45 is an Edwardian double-fronted stone house with yellow brick details and a slate roof over two bays and the doorway.

Cantref Road

These well-spaced pairs of former council houses were built in the 1930s. As in the Bailey Park area, they were red brick, now (except for one) colour-washed and/or rendered, and hip-roofed in slate with a central chimney, but with small gabled porches (as in St Michael's Road). All or many are now in private ownership and several have been sympathetically extended at the side, some quite grandly. However the original spacious simplicity has been lost.

Harold Road

The southern side of the road is fully occupied by the Cantref Primary School, a listed building. The older parts are dated 1897 and 1910. The architect was probably E A Johnson. The structure is mainly in a Tudor style, particularly the earlier section, and the principle materials are yellow brick, Bath stone dressings, and a red-tiled roof. A sympathetic extension at the western end was added nearly a hundred years later.

Mount Street

This is more modest in style than Chapel Road and was completed over a longer period; a house is currently under construction next to no 26. Little altered no 31 could be the earliest, along with no 33, but nos 19-33 all appear early, as do nos 8-20, especially the last. No 26 has the same eaves detail as that referred to in Chapel Road, and nos 2, 3 and 32 (part only – also early 20th century) may also have early origins but have been considerably altered. Some are finished in stone, what is maybe the oldest in more random rubble; others have been



Figure 8: Early houses, Chapel Road

rendered and colour-washed; few have original details. Map evidence shows that No 18 was a late Victorian infill. No 6 is a more substantial white 1870s house facing south, with decorative bargeboards and window gables directly above the eaves; no 9 opposite has the same bargeboards, possibly in origin an outbuilding to no 6.

Late Victorian houses include nos 11-17 and 39-45, typical Abergavenny terraces and pairs in squared sandstone with yellow brick stringcourses and other details and simple angled ground floor bays. Nos 22/24 are red brick with yellow details in the style of the early 20th century, built in the garden of No 45 Chapel Road. Nos 5/7 are a pair of red brick and reconstituted limestone houses, c1960s with projecting integral garages.

North Street

The oldest houses in the southern part of North Street are near the junction with Orchard Street rather than towards Brecon Road as might have been expected. Apart from listed no 31, not shown on the 1844 Tithe Map

but dated by Cadw as about 1840 (double-fronted in an unusual Pennant-like grey/cream mottled stone), other early houses appear to be no 6 (stone, at a right angle to the road); no 14 (pebble-dashed and much altered); nos 21-25 (almost ashlar stone, slightly below pavement level); and nos 20-30 (rendered and colour-washed, most with added porches, doors not paired). Nos 32-36 and 42-46 (plain stone – no 36 similar colouring to no 31; no 34 with good sash windows) are probably a little later. Nos 38/40 are from the same period but larger, white-rendered, with front gables and ground floor bays and a somewhat Italianate appearance to which climbing greenery adds style. No 15/15a is an oddly mismatched pair, one possibly an afterthought.

Nos 10/12 are present by 1880 and the double fronted pair marks the change to the fashion of decorating the stonework with buff brick. Nos 16/18 are probably from a few years later. Nos 27/29 were also probably built in the 1880s, three-storeyed of unrelieved stone with angled bays to the ground and first floors and small gables above. The brick terrace of nos 33-43 (two are colour-washed) is early 20th century with decorative brickwork below the eaves similar to LNWR buildings elsewhere in the town. A group of *ca* 1970 low-pitched brick bungalows near the bottom of the street, including Orchard Close, is unobtrusive but distinctly different in character.

Christ Church, a characterful listed building, was built in 1879 as a chapel-of-ease to the parish church of St Mary. The building was originally clad in corrugated iron sheeting but this was replaced or covered with timber in 1958 for cosmetic reasons. The broach spire is a local landmark.

North of the church the houses on the west side of the street are of mixed age and not large, in character with the rest of the street. No 65 (Norman Place) is the earliest (Cadw suggests 1840-50), detached and listed, with a limewashed stone front and 6-plus-6 paned sash windows. The rendered nos 53-57 are pre-1880 but nos 53/55 are much altered and appear now to be a single dwelling whereas no 55 still has a pedimented doorcase. There are several small terraced blocks from the late 19th century or early 20th, fronted in sandstone with frequent additions of Ebbw Vale yellow brick used for decorative purposes. Many have inset arched doorways. Nos 45-51 are good examples, also early 20th century are nos 59-65 and nos 119-123. No 67 is double-fronted and red brick with yellow brick detailing. Nos 79/81 are set at a right angle to the road; they date from pre-1880 but are much altered. Nos 83 and 85 have plain stonework with interesting doorways; they appear early but map evidence suggests that they were built in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. At the end of the street, nos



Figure 9: Christ Church

103-113 are also plain pre-1880 stone cottages, some with added lean-to porches; no 115 is wider, altered and rendered. Squeezed-in no 117 appears to date back to the late 19th century but has been greatly altered.

Orchard Street

Nos 1-3 Orchard Street are dated 1897 (no 1 has a markedly curtailed side gable because of the plot shape). Thereafter the north side is dominated by Tŷ Rholben, a slightly elevated substantial 2½-storey mid Victorian house of sandstone with Bath stone dressings (note the gable eaves). The central doorway is flanked by two-storey bays, one angled and one squared. The property probably originally included the stone outbuilding to the left and gardens extending to Chapel Road. Pebble-dashed two-storey hipped roof council flats were built in the grounds in about the 1950s, facing both roads. Tŷ Rholben itself appears to be social housing. The unusual yellow-brick side wall of no 45 Mount Street and its red brick boundary wall are notable on the south side of the street.

Heritage Assets

Christ Church, Cantref School and four little-changed early houses are listed; a few others in Chapel Road may be worthy of consideration. Much of this part of Chapel Road and Stanhope Street has a particularly strong character. The unusual infill between nos 21 and 23 Stanhope Street is a feature that should be protected. Tŷ Rholben on Orchard Street has a special presence and many houses in Mount Street and North Street contribute to the character of the area, notably the Italianate nos 38/40 North Street.

The Conservation Area has recently been extended to include Mount Street and North Street. Article 4 directions that could protect the area from further loss of characteristic features have also been suggested.