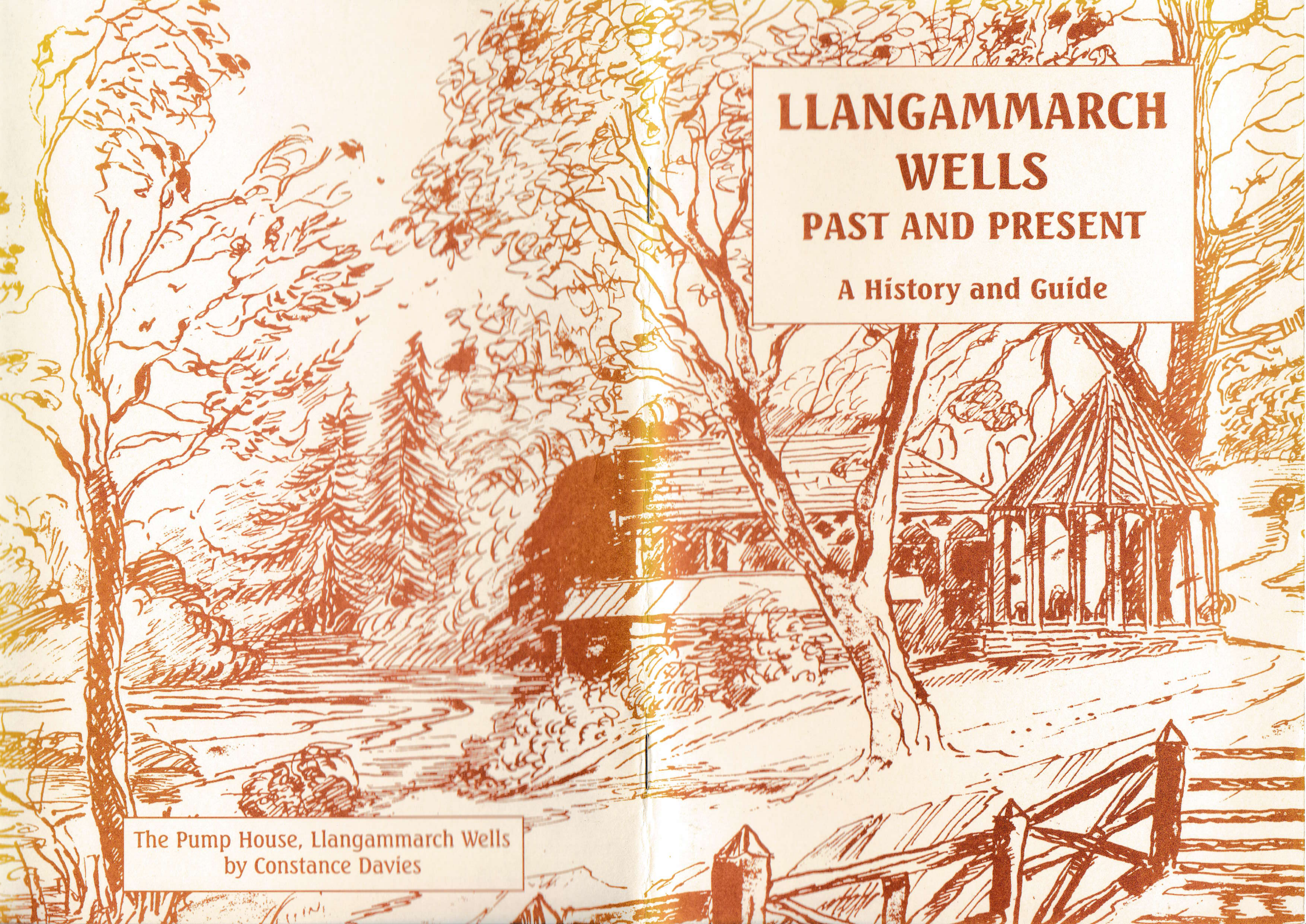
LLANGAMMARCH WELLS
PAST AND PRESENT

A History and Guide



The Pump House, Llangammarch Wells
by Constance Davies

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A History and Guide

The ancient stone fixed in the wall above the entrance to St Cadmarch's Church

1st Edition, March 2000

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INTRODUCTION

The village of Llangammarch Wells nestles in the beautiful countryside of rural Powys, approximately halfway between Builth Wells and Llanwrtyd Wells and overshadowed by the Mynydd Epynt, which means 'Mountain of Wild Ponies'. It is popular with holidaymakers seeking peace and tranquility and also with those enjoying such activities as walking, pony trekking and mountain biking. The surrounding area is noted as birdwatching country. It is above all a working village, situated as it is in the heart of sheep farming country and deeply involved with that industry.

This book is the result of much work by members of the Llangammarch Wells Local History Society and others and replaces an earlier booklet, Spa Town in Brecknock, the popularity of which inspired the writing of this new book to mark the millennium. Many thanks are due to all those who have talked of their memories of Llangammarch in times past and searched out their old photographs to put together a greatly enlarged history of the village and surrounding area.

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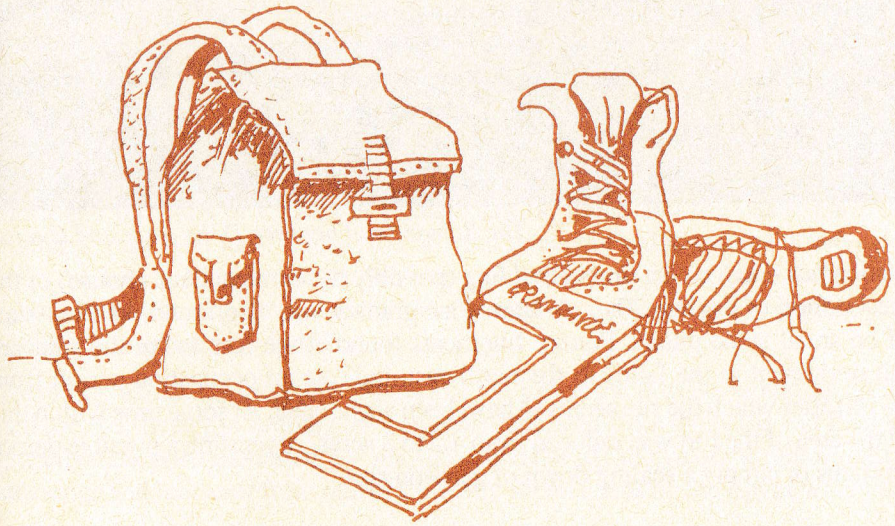
http://www.wiz.to/llangammarch/



THE ROMAN OCCUPATION

Travelling north out of the village of Llangammarch, on the Beulah road, a section of Roman road intersects at Dol-y-gaer Farmhouse and continues north. This represents part of the Sarn Helen route, built between the Roman forts at Llandovery and Castell Collen (near Llandrindod Wells). Standing on a low hill close to the road and overlooking the river plain, was the fort of Caerau, now remaining only as an earth mound within the boundaries of Caerau Farm. Caerau was an ideal 'half-way house' between Llandovery and Castell Collen. The fort itself probably housed a unit of about five hundred infantry or cavalry. It has been suggested that the defences around the fort - clay ramparts surrounded by double ditches and then a plateau surrounded by an outer ditch with no bank around the area, provided for a sinister 'killing field'. The Ordovices - local Welsh tribesmen who put up a spirited resistence to the Roman occupation - were lured across the single ditch by the possibility of an easy victory against the Romans, only to become trapped between the ditch and the implacable defences before them, and mown down in organised butchery!

The Roman road between Dol-y-gaer and Caerau

Excavation has uncovered a timber building (possibly the commandant's house) of the conquest period of the late 70s . A later stone granary was also found, its floor supported on small stone pillars. Pottery fragments found at the fort and at the adjacent civilian settlement in the fields to the north-east, indicate an occupation period from AD80-140 after which the site seems to have been abandoned. At some time within this period the area of the fort was reduced from 4.2 to 3 acres, suggesting a possible demotion of status or simply a scaling down of garrison size.

THE DROVERS

There is a tradition in Britain, going back to medieval times or earlier, of moving sheep and cattle from the upland pastures of Wales to the lowland fattening pastures of the Midlands and South-East England and then on to their inevitable fate - to be consumed by those living in London and the towns of lowland England. The men who made themselves a livelihood out of moving these animals across the country came to be known as 'the drovers' - Welsh cattle and sheep dealers who drove their animals to the fairs and markets of the English heartland. The long distance movement of such animals was an arduous task and the drovers were indeed hardy men, who, due to a few well-publicised cases of defaulting on credit notes, gained a certain reputation for their roguery and dishonesty; however, they were for the most part men of integrity, who included in their number the Welsh hymn writer Dafydd Jones of Caeo; and were among the few ordinary people in Wales having the opportunity to travel far beyond their immediate locality. As such they were able to carry back to the remote parts of Wales news of social, political, cultural and religious developments in England and also, no doubt, had many a tale to tell of their travels, entertaining those at home.

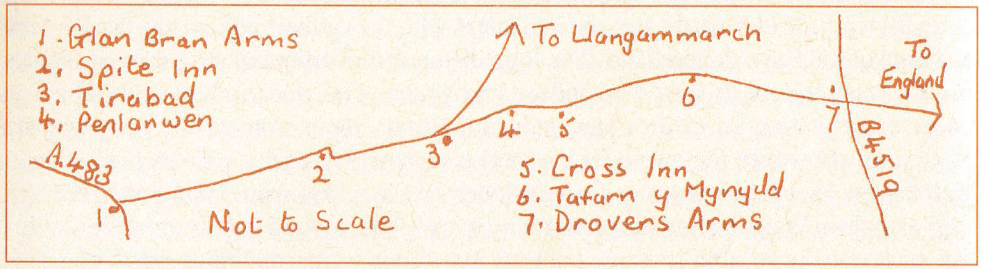
This trade in sheep and cattle reached its peak in the 18th and early 19th centuries and although most of the many hundreds of miles of tracks and by-ways in the western counties of Wales were used at some time or other by the drovers, there evolved over the years a relatively limited number of recognised long distance routes over the rugged terrain of Central Wales to the English border. These drovers' routes developed as a compromise between the quickest and least arduous way between two points and the availability of overnight accommodation and forage at farms or inns with adjoining paddocks.

One of these well known routes, and that which passed closest to Llangammarch, was that from Tafarn Talgarth to Painscastle. Tafarn Talgarth (now the Glan Brane Arms) is situated in the village of Llanfair-ar-y-bryn in the Bran valley to the north east of Llandovery. Here animals from Cilycwm in the north and from Llandovery itself were prepared for the ascent of Mynydd Epynt. The route from the Inn followed the existing road to Tirabad . Here the drovers could stop at the Spite Inn, or at the Cross Inn two miles beyond at Penlanwen. Both of these are no longer in existence; though Spite Inn Farm and the ruins of Cross Inn Cottage can be found and the oldest parts of these buildings may well have formed the original Inns. At Penlanwen the drovers deviated from the lane to Llangammarch Wells to join the Tricrugiau trail at Tafarn-y-Mynydd (now a ruin on the edge of a block of forestry and inaccessible as it is in a military training zone) and to ascend Mynydd Epynt.

Travelling across the great upland tract of the Epynt the drovers would no doubt have had some difficulty in keeping their animals separated from the herds and flocks which grazed on the open mountain, but may have had the advantage of the opportunity to buy stockings and knitwear from one of the many sheep farms on the Epynt where weaving

and knitting helped to supplement the income from the farm. All these dwellings are of course long since abandoned due to the use of the area by the military since the 2nd World War.

The Drovers Arms, now approached on the B4519 between Llangammarch Wells and Upper Chapel, was well known as a port of call on the journey to the east. The building is still in existence, but available only for the use of the army!



The route taken by the Drovers across the Epynt

It is no longer clear which exact route the drovers would have taken next, however, they travelled in some way across the open mountain to the Cwm-Owen Inn on the B4520 Builth Wells - Upper Chapel Road. From thence the drovers travelled onwards towards Erwood where there was a ford across the River Wye; thus enabling them to continue their journey towards England.

The end for the long-distance movement of livestock on the hoof was signalled by the advent of the railways in the 19th century. However, the evolution of the Welsh railway system took place over a period of almost 50 years and it was not until the late 1850s that the railways had a sufficient infrastructure to take the place of the drover as an easier and cheaper way of transporting animals to England.

Thus came the end of long distance cattle droving. Sheep droving within Wales however, continued well into the 20th century. Sheep were driven to markets and also to and from 'tack' (winter pasture). Shearing time also could often involve driving sheep a considerable distance. The late Dai Jones of Abergwesyn, one of the last of the drovers, still remembered by local people, had many stories to tell of the days before the great lorries when he walked miles to Brecon market with sheep for dealers including David Davies of Poityn, Llangammarch. Drovers within Wales often included a stop at the Garth Inn, now a private residence.

Whilst travelling on the roads around Llangammarch your progress may well be called to a halt by farmers driving sheep from one farm or field to another, perhaps for shearing or dipping; at certain times of the year sheep are still rounded up on the Epynt by men using an assortment of vehicles and sometimes on horseback, to be driven down from the mountains to the farms. These activities perhaps give a taste of the great droves of the past - however, the drover himself has long since passed into history, replaced by the lorries of the modern day.

Llangammarch Horse Fair

"Here you are, lady! Real Llangammarch Welsh" This recommendation to a prospective buyer of a riding pony was overheard at Market Drayton Horse Fair in 1939 by L.T.C. Rolt, and recorded in his book "Narrow Boat". There is no doubt that Llangammarch Fair was the biggest pony fair in Wales in those days, and famous throughout the British Isles until it was started down its rapid decline by the Army ordering all ponies off the Epynt range when it was requisitioned in 1940. Although little seems to be recorded in print it still brings back memories of Llangammarch's most exciting annual event to some local people, and it is with their help that this account has been compiled.

There is some uncertainty about the origins of the Fair, but Mr Austin Davies of Park Farm, Llangammarch, recalls that it used to be said that at one time it was held near the Old School on the Cefn Gorwydd road, where once there were a pub and some cottages. Perhaps originally it was held at Cefn Gorwydd, but in any case it must have moved into Llangammarch village by the 1880s or 1890s. No doubt Llangammarch was a natural centre for a pony fair, lying at the foot of the Epynt, a mountain whose ancient name defines it as the home of ponies.

From Mr Davies' recollections of the time between the First and Second World Wars, many farmers kept a few ponies, and some took a great interest in them and kept hundreds. Certain farmers had the right to keep ponies on the Epynt, and like the flocks of sheep still grazing on the hill, a herd belonging to one owner would stick together on their own patch. Some might be ear-marked and some branded, and farmers took a pride in their ponies, tidy stuff, which they would try to improve, perhaps by putting a bigger stallion on the mares, and where they could spare grazing for them (in those days there were only a third of the sheep being stocked today) would bring them down off the hill in the winter. Horses and ponies were vital for the work on a farm, and for many the only means of transport: in those days you travelled on horseback or you walked. Ponies were used for shepherding, and as sheep today are sent in lorries on tack for the winter, so they would drive them on horseback over to Cardiganshire to winter on farms in the better climate there.

The 15th October was the Fair Day unless it fell on a Sunday, when it would be on the Monday following. For a week or more before the Fair farmers would be gathering the ponies on the Epynt. Mr Davies would bring his herd of 20 to 30 ponies down to Park Farm to sort out what would be sold at the Fair - some foals born on the hill that spring and perhaps some ponies that had been broken in over the last year or two. He kept on the farm five or six working horses and some young ones bought or from the herd which would be broken in before being sold.

Very early on the day of the Fair ponies and horses would be driven from all over the Epynt, Upper Chapel and Llanfihangel Nant Bran, and further afield, from Abergwesyn and beyond. Mr Iorwerth Davies, when a boy at Gwybedog, remembers bunches of ponies, perhaps 25 mothers with foals from Llandeilo'r Fan, being driven through their

farm and down the fields to Penlanwen before dawn. They would have cleared the stock from the fields the day before so that the gates could be left open and horses could be driven straight through, there being no road above Tirabad then. There would probably be a couple on horseback at the front leading the herd, with two more at each side and behind to keep young foals from straying. They would be driven with their mothers to keep them fairly calm, to be parted if they were sold at the Fair, and only the mares and any unsold foals would return that night.

Horses would be streaming down by Penrhiw, Aberceiros, Troedrhiw, hundreds of them, before first light. Mrs Annabelle Thomas, too, when a young girl at Cefn farm, and not allowed to go to the Fair, recalls the excitement of seeing the mass of ponies being driven past - 'wild little things, all different colours and so pretty'.

Mr Glyn Evans of Ffinnant Isaf, Aberyscir, Brecon described in an article in *Gathered Gold* helping his Uncle Dai to drive foals over the Epynt to the Fair in 1934 - "Then down the very steep escarpment of the mountain and we were in Llangammarch. This village with its one long street was chockablock with ponies and people. Breeches and bowlers were the order of the day. From one end of Llangammarch to the other were groups of wild mountain ponies encircled by their owners. We found a suitable space and surrounded our ponies within a sizeable area of Llangammarch's main street.

"Occasionally part of the road was cleared, in order to allow a farmer to trot his horse so that a prospective buyer could see the horse put through his paces. Young foals would be neighing, hoping their dams would give a comforting reply. An old Llangammarch farmer called Jack Cefnllan used to forecast on the eve of each fair that trade would be 'either a gold chain or a wooden leg.'"

The streets would indeed be packed with ponies and horses, carthorses and cobs from the Aberceiros sometimes as far as the Station Yard and the Cammarch bridge, and even to Glasfryn and Neuaddau, as the late Mrs Ceinwen Davies remembered. Horses would be held by the halter, but the wild ponies were loose and penned by two or three men. Dealers would come from all over the country, many arriving on the mail train which reached Llangammarch Station at 6 a.m. and then making for the Cammarch Hotel for breakfast. Some travelled overnight and others perhaps stayed in Builth overnight and caught the train in the morning. They came from the South of England and Devon and Cornwall, Northamptonshire, Bedford, Stafford, Cheshire, Essex and Lincolnshire, some from Swansea and the South Wales valleys for ponies for the pits, some from Craven Arms and Knighton for big horses and some from Anglesey intending to sell them on to Irish dealers coming over to horse fairs there.

There were no auctioneers - buyers and sellers would haggle and when a deal was struck would clap hands on it. Payment would be in cash, at one time all gold sovereigns - Mr Austin Davies recalls that once some farmers who had brought ponies over from Tregaron way and sold them at Llangammarch Fair were robbed in the wood beyond the Grouse Inn (Pentwyn) at Abergwesyn on their way home. Ponies of 11 to 12 hands would be bought for the Derbyshire pits or some could take up to 13 hands and South

Wales pits might take farm horses up to 13-15 hands. They had to be four years old before they could go down the pits, so they were broken in at 2-3 years and sold as four year olds, for about £5 to £10. Horses were about £35 or perhaps £40 for a good one. Young unbroken foals or old horses unlikely to last the winter might sell for £1 or £2. Some were probably destined for butchers in Belgium.

There would be various stalls selling clothes and cheap goods, and two old blokes came in a motor van from Hereford to set up a saddlery stall under the railway bridge from which they sold halters, bridles, saddles and everything for horses, ropes, pocket knives, pitch forks and farm stuff. Often it was ex-army from the First World War, but it was good stuff and they would hang their goods up on the walls of the bridge. Eddie Jones, the village saddler at Bristol House, would also be doing good business. Some of the houses in the village would offer tea and refreshments.

The Horse Fair in about 1936

Mrs Megan Williams of Llangammarch lived at 5 Irfon Terrace as a child and her husband, Mr Garfield Williams lived at Rose Cottage. They remember that children were kept in out of the way on Fair day, but it was always exciting, a special day in the village, and to many it was like a holiday - hard work, but a day out of the routine. Mr Austin Davies remembers at one Fair a Mr Evans from Anglesey, with his three sons, buying 99 ponies. The boys penned them in the yard behind Malvern Stores (now Cammarch Books), then a bakehouse, until they were ready to drive them all down the street and over the bridge - the crowd had to get out of the way when that herd was on the move. A few years ago Mr Davies met some young boys from Anglesey at Llanybyther Horse Fair who turned out to be grandsons of Mr Evans. On one occasion

a Mr Ivor Davies from South Wales bought prior to the Fair a number of 15 hand horses for the South Wales pits from local farmers and asked them to ride them to Builth Station to be collected. On the morning of the Fair some dealers might walk out along the approach roads to the village, past Aberceiros or Neuaddau, to intercept and buy ponies before they reached the Fair.

Ponies and horses sold at the Fair were driven to Garth Station where they had enough sidings to marshall the special trains needed with different boxes for ponies and heavy horses to take them to their different destinations. Village youngsters, 'lumpers', would help to drive them along the road to Garth, which was not easy as the foals were trying to break back to find their mothers. Once, a foal jumped off the bridge and landed on his four feet in the sand below Bridgend Cottage. He was all right and was taken on to Garth. Mr Garfield Williams remembers helping as a lad and when they got to Garth a dealer might look in his pockets and give him 6d. Mr Brinley Davies might earn 2/6d to ride on his quiet little pony in front of the foals to lead them to Garth.

On the Fair Day in 1909 a flood carried away the wooden bridge over the Irfon. It was late in the day and Mr Iorwerth Davies' father was the last to cross, returning on a mare having left her foal at Garth. Cows belonging to the Cammarch Hotel, which then had a farm, had to be driven from pasture on the other side of the river down to Garth and back to the Cammarch to be milked. Will Jones from Ffynnon Bevan, emerging from the Cammarch, was determined to leap the flood, crying "It won't be a minute till I'm back with Sara!" but Mr Phillips the butcher held him back by his coat and he went home via Llanwrtyd. It seems a temporary wooden bridge was put up across to the island pending the building of the new bridge.

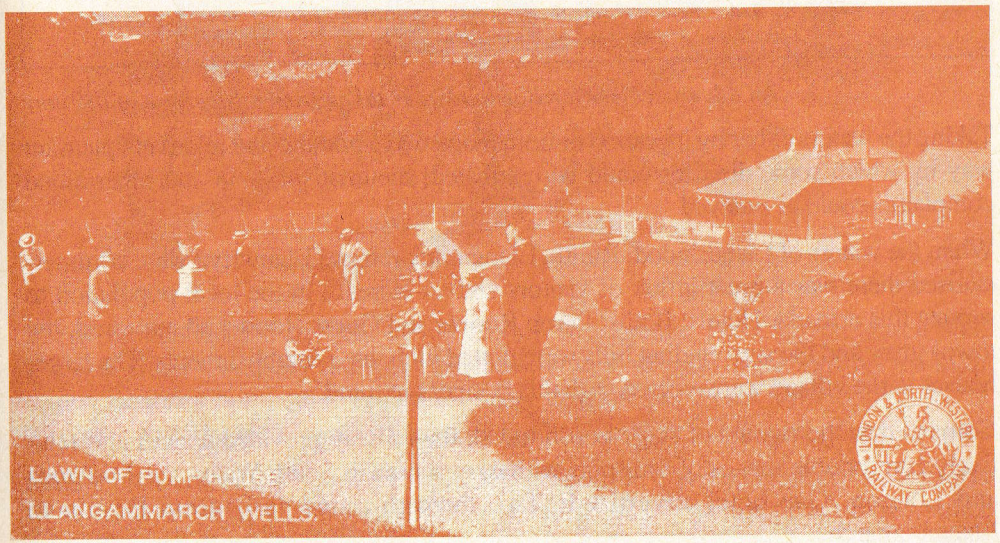
At the end of the day there would be much celebration in the pubs and a big dinner was laid on at the Cammarch. Mrs Williams remembers her mother, Mrs Elizabeth Adams, who was a waitress at the Cammarch, talking of all the turkeys being cooked. Some dealers might stay overnight but they would be on their way next morning to find more horses, perhaps at Llandovery or at Newbridge Fair which followed on the 17th October. At Gwybedog they would see some decent farmers riding back from the Fair in the afternoon, but later in the evening came others singing and wobbling somewhat in their saddles, and perhaps calling in to sober up and have a bite to eat before carrying on for home at about midnight, saying they "were going now to have tongue for supper!" The people of the village were left to clear up, each family dealing with the mess in front of their own house. Turf had been trampled, hedges and banks broken down and nibbled and to Mrs Williams it always seemed like the beginning of winter, everything such a mess and it would not revive until next spring.

It seems that the Fair survived through the last war and for three or four years after it but with the removal of the ponies from the Epynt range and the swift invasion of tractors to replace the working horses it was fading fast. By the last years of the 1940s it had disappeared to be succeeded by the auction sales of ponies at Cwm Owen and Llanafan.

THE SPA DAYS

Photographs taken at the turn of the 19th/20th century show scenes of fashionably dressed men, women and children walking in the environs of Llangammarch Wells. High-sprung perambulators, pushed, perhaps by nurse-maids, children in long skirts and knickerbockers bowling their hoops, upright gentlemen wearing high starched collars and hard hats. The ladies wear long skirts and, almost without exception, they are adorned by large decorated hats; all strolling along in the apparently never-ending sunshine. Perhaps they were taking one of the favourite walks along the river bank towards the Barium Springs and Pump Room which were in the grounds of the Lake Hotel. They would have been drawn here by the fame of the healing powers of the barium water, the beauty of the mountains and rivers and the area's reputation for bracing, pure air.

This scene was a far cry from the circumstances surrounding the discovery of the barium spring in the bed of the River Irfon, when, in a period of severe drought some years previously, a farmer in search of one of his pigs found the animal wallowing happily in a damp place at the very bed of the river, he too, took a drink from this spot and found it to have a very different taste from the usual water. Later analysis revealed that it contained among other minerals, a precious and rare mineral in the British Isles - barium, known from European spas to be "efficacious in the treatment of several chronic diseases."



The Pump House Lawns in their heyday

A leaflet published jointly by the hotels which sprang up here during the Spa's hey-day, quotes from that eminent medical publication *The Lancet*. It commended the barium

waters as a diuretic and useful in heart and kidney disease also for strengthening arterial muscles. Further praise was given in cases of Graves' disease in slowing the heart rate. Barium was not cumulative and did not irritate the stomach and kidneys. The recommended dose of barium water was one to two pints a day. Externally, one could recline in warm baths of the same water. One wonders why its use went into decline if it truly possessed all these virtues!

The Llangammarch Wells Mineral Water Co.,
LLANGAMMARCH WELLS, BRECONSHIRE.

BARIUM WATER.

Recommended in Heart Disease, Gout and Rheumatism.
(See Reports from the *Lancet*.)

PRICES.

Small 5-oz. Bottles, Aërated, including Bottles	...	4/6 per doz., carriage paid.
Large 10-oz. ,, ,, ,, ,,	...	8/- ,, ,,
Pint ,, Still ,, ,,	...	7/- ,, ,,
Quart ,, ,, ,, ,,	...	12/- ,, ,,
Gallon Jars ,, ,, Jars	...	4/6 per gallon. ,,

Cases, 3/- each dozen Bottles.

TERMS:—Cash with Order. Empties allowed for if returned, carriage paid—Jars, 2/- each; Small Aërated, 1/- per dozen; Large Aërated, 2/- per dozen; Cases as charged.

An advertisement for Barium Water taken from a brochure of the time

Taking the waters either by ingestion or immersion was a popular and relatively pleasant way by which some diseases could be combated; rheumatism, gout and other allied complaints could be relieved.

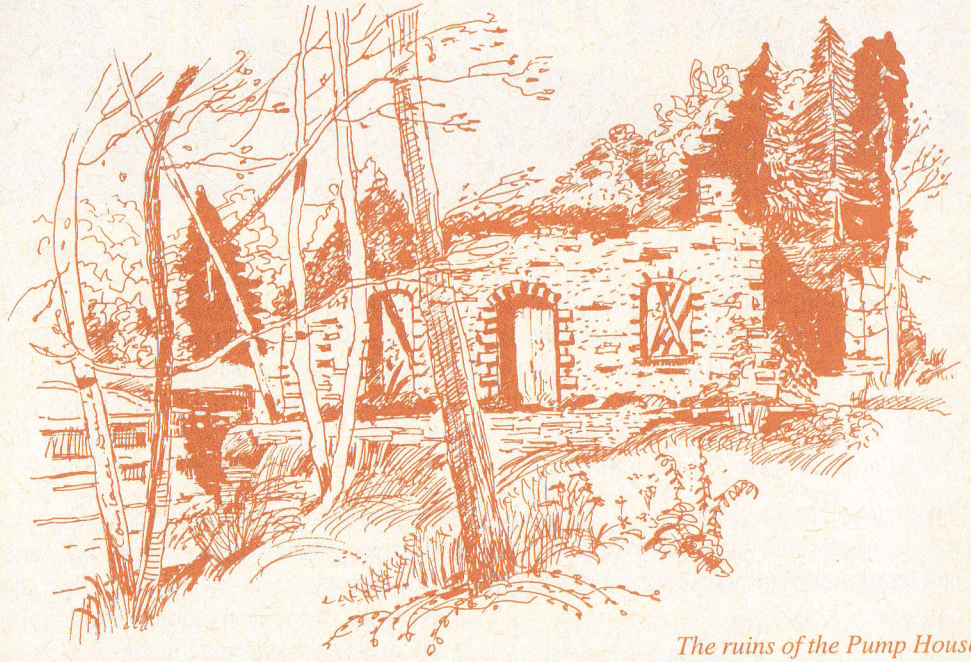
When the waters of Llandrindod, Builth, Llangammarch and Llanwrtyd were commercialised there was a great influx of visitors and an increase in the local population to service this armada. Hotels, Baths, Pump Rooms and Guest Houses all appeared, the towns grew and the surrounding hills were dotted with these establishments. The larger houses in the village were erected with this business in mind.

Compared to the rigours of stage-coach travel, the railway provided a swift and relatively comfortable means of transport with easy access to South Wales, the Midlands and London. One hotel advertised "Two through-trains daily from Euston to Llangammarch".

The Spa towns provided the means of every-day living; Llangammarch boasted two butchers shops, two grocers and two tailors. One of these tailors was housed in the present Post Office building and the Post Office was held in Mayo House and the doctor held his surgery in the house next door. Malvern House (now Cammarch Books) was a

grocery store until recently and there was also a grocery in Cwm Bryn House. The village had a lending library, a wheelwright and a cobbler.

The Pump Room was situated immediately above the Spring, close to the river and in the grounds of the Lake Hotel. A summer house, putting green and ornamental flower beds adorned the grounds. The Pump Room is now in a sadly ruined state, every gale does more damage to the fragile structure and the cultivated ground has reverted to a wild state, the stream from the hills runs through the field to the river. Primroses grow there in the spring and by mid-summer foxgloves and rose-bay willow herb are abundant, all shaded by large trees of oak, ash and beech and there is a tangle of blackberries around the ruins. A few sheep and a pony find occasional grazing in this quiet pasture.



The ruins of the Pump House

The water was bottled and sent by rail all over the country. The Llangammarch Wells Mineral Water Company did great business, crates of water were transported to the station, a dozen 5oz bottles of barium water cost the purchaser 4/6d (approx 22½p) carriage paid! The water was unaltered by bottling and like good wine it travelled well.

Until the advent of the Spa the Parish Registers show that the residents' occupations were chiefly allied to farming and its related trades, plus the rector, postman and policeman. Towards the end of the 19th Century we see that a coachman, hotel servants, a golf professional and a mineral water establishment manager have joined the list.

The Lake Hotel was established at this time and still flourishes, while the Links Hotel and Bungalow Hotel have vanished and the Cammarch Hotel has only recently become a private house.

The Golf House, Llangammarch Wells

The Golf Club was famous throughout the area, employing, as we have seen, a golf professional. Croquet, tennis, rough shooting, fishing and boating on the lake were some of the pastimes offered by the hotels. The Golf Clubhouse, now a private dwelling, is the only evidence of the existence of the club. In the woods below the Golf House is a strange concrete structure which often mystifies visitors today, this was a lift-shaft for which there are various explanations.

Where are all these glories now? Time has taken its toll. The demise of the Spa seems to have been gradual. The First World War made its impact even in these remote hills and the Depression which followed the War affected all classes of society, added to this, the advances in modern medicine made the old remedies practised in the Spa days redundant and probably scorned.

The Second World War brought about even greater changes; hotels were commandeered to house military personnel and evacuees from large cities under threat of bombing. The War Department acquired the Epynt hills as a training range, this situation exists today, changing life for ever in these hills.

ST CADMARCH AND THE CHURCH

The earliest evidence of Christian worship in Llangammarch is an ancient stone now fixed in the wall above the entrance to the present church. This depicts an infant with arms extended, a coiled serpent overlaid with a Celtic cross. It has been suggested that the carving is pre-Christian, possibly a burial stone, the Cross added when Celtic natives adopted Christianity.

The site was certainly used for burials before the Christian era. The Welsh word *Llan* often translated Church strictly refers to a burial ground. The coming of Christianity would have seen simple buildings erected for worship in this sacred space. Little is known of these until the 19th century.

The present church is built close to previous church buildings. In about 1800 the local historian Theophilus Jones wrote that the parish church of Llangammarch had only the nave remaining and by 1840 the church was described as being in a very ruinous state. It seems that in about 1890 the church saw some restoration work at a cost of around £200. In 1910 it was said that the 'present church of St Cadmarch is a building of stone in the modern Gothic style, having a chancel, nave, north aisle, south porch and a belfry with one bell'. It does not, however seem to have been a very remarkable building in any way and was demolished in 1915 to make way for the present building. The new church was built a little to the north east of the old one on land given by one Henry Thomas. It cost £4,000 to build and was consecrated on 21 July 1916 by the then Bishop of the Diocese, the Right Revd John Owen DD. The tower was added in 1927.

There appear to be two possible theories as to why the church is dedicated to St Cadmarch. One is that the church was simply named after the river, i.e. 'the church upon Cammarch'. Alternatively, it is possible that the church was dedicated to St Cammarch, who was a grandson of Brychan, Prince of the Kingdom of Brecknock at the beginning of the 5th Century. Brychan is said to have had three wives and some forty children, the eldest daughter of whom was called Gwladis. She in turn married Gwnllice (or Gunleus) ap (son of) Glewissus, ruler of the part of Gwent lying between the rivers Usk and Rhymney, then called Glewissig. Their second son was called Cammarch and it is after him that the church of Llangammarch may have been dedicated. Nothing however, is known about Cammarch himself.

The Church Today

The architect was William Douglas Caroe, a major architect of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, who headed a large Edwardian architectural practice and was architect to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners from 1895 until his death in 1938. In Wales he is particularly known as the architect responsible for the design of Cardiff University and also for the restoration of Brecon Cathedral. He was an advocate of the 'Arts and Crafts' movement in architecture, which valued the traditional skills of the artist or craftsman at a time when machinery was taking their place in a drive for speed and cheapness of production. Caroe specialised in using these traditional materials and

skills, hence the building gives the illusion of being much older than it is.

The church is built of brick clad externally with small pieces of stone known as rubblestone, finished with red sandstone detail. The results of Caroe's interest in the Arts and Crafts movement can be seen in the fine craftsmanship of the timber doors, internal stonework, elaborate oak reredos and the lectern. There is evidence that the church was not completed quite as Caroe had intended - the tower was originally planned to a more intricate design but when eventually completed in 1927 was built as a plain, square addition to the building. On the north side of the chancel an arcade with arches of moulded rubblestone marks where Caroe planned a north aisle. Despite these alterations however, the present church is a very pleasing building.

In the churchyard can be found the grave of Theophilus Evans, Rector of the parish from 1738-1763 and a great Welsh prose writer. Born in 1694, he lived in the farm house of Llwyn-Einon in Llangammarch. He was also responsible for the perpetual curacies at Llanwrtyd and Llanddewi Abergwesyn then attached to the Parish. William Williams, the famous Welsh hymn writer responsible for 'Guide Me O Thou Great Jehovah' was his curate in Llanwrtyd. William Williams, being deeply affected by the Evangelical Revival did not always see eye to eye with Evans, who maintained a more traditional stance. Theophilus Evans' grandson, Theophilus Jones, also of this parish, was born in 1759. He became Deputy Registrar of the Archdeaconry of Brecon and was the author of the *History of Brecknock and its Shires*. He is recognised as one of the Great Welsh immortals and his remains rest in the church.

As mentioned earlier, the Church was consecrated in 1916, during the period of the First World War. The East Window, the only stained glass window in the Church, is the village war memorial, and commemorates all those who lost their lives in both World Wars and subsequently in the Korean War.

On the wall to the left of the altar can be seen a plaque in memory of Thomas Howell and his brother, James Howell. Both were born at Cefn Bryn in Llangammarch. Their father, Thomas Howell, was curate of Llangammarch from 1576-1631. The two brothers both had notable histories. Thomas Howell was Bishop of Bristol from 1644 until his death in 1646 and James Howell eventually became Historiographer Royal in the reign of King Charles II following a period spent in the Fleet prison on debt charges, during which time he had discovered his ability to write. He continued to write voluminously and had completed some 50 or 60 publications before his death in 1666.

To the right of the altar a banner depicts John Penry about whom further mention is made elsewhere in this book. Also to the right of the altar, situated on the wall, is a plaque erected in 1994 by the Llangammarch Wells Local History Society, in memory of a number of RAF servicemen killed in the Second World War during training flights in the vicinity of Llangammarch Wells.

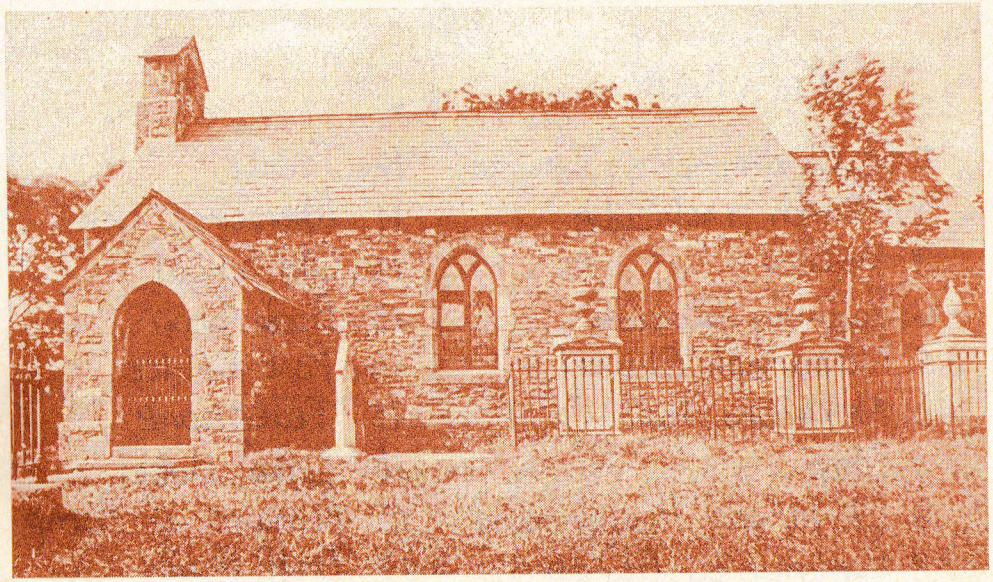
In addition to the font designed as part of the building in red sandstone is an ancient one unfortunately bearing no inscription. It is known that this font was contained in the church

prior to the present building. On the wall near the font can be found a roll of incumbents from 1410 to the present day, beginning with Thomas ap Howell in 1410. The Reredos was erected as a Thank Offering for the safe return from the Great War (1914-1918) of the men of the parish. A nominal roll is to be found by the font.

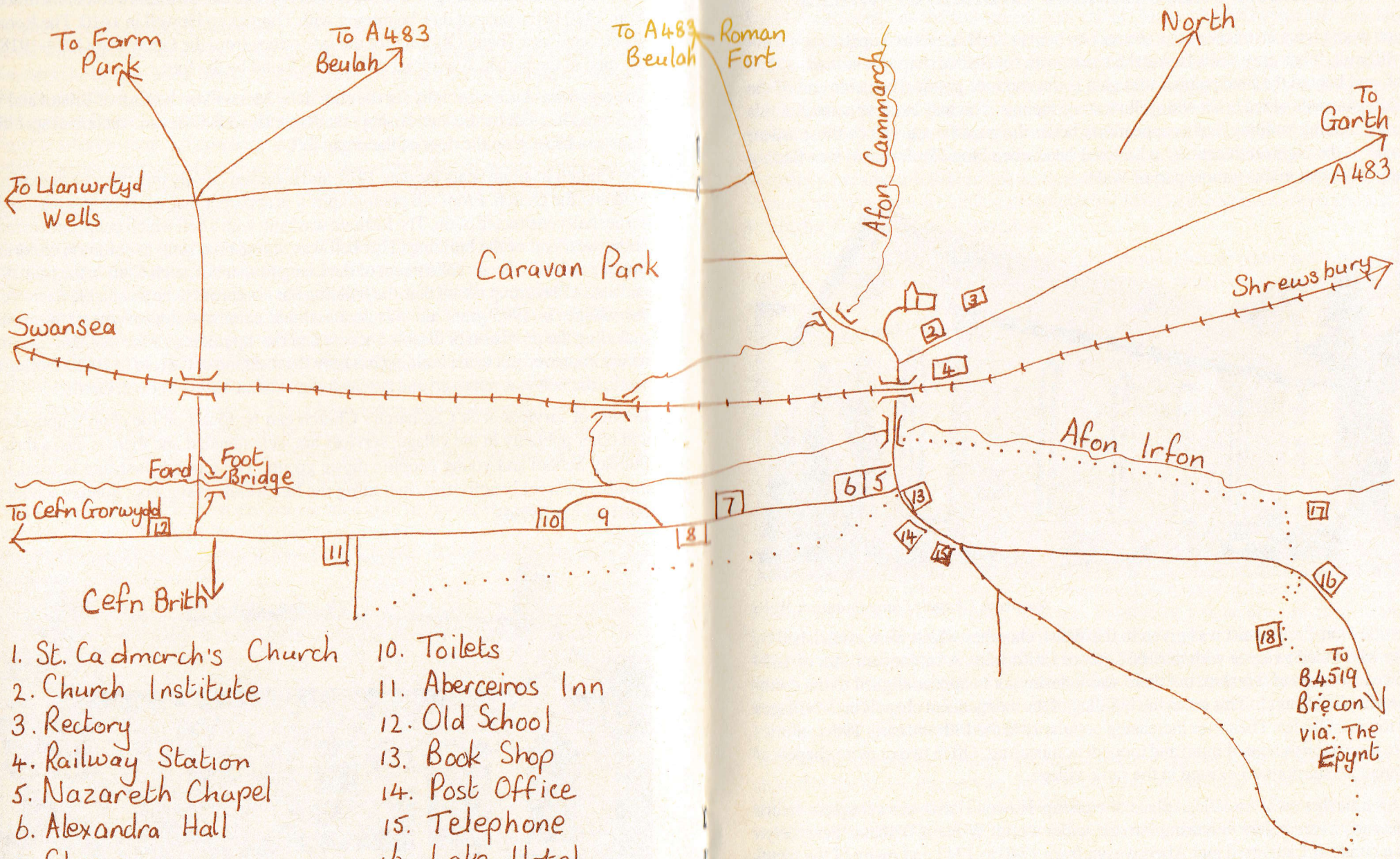
The organ was built especially for the church by Messrs Vowles Ltd, of Bristol and was dedicated in 1918 by the then Bishop, the Right Revd E L Bevan. Technical specifications can be seen on the door of the organ loft.

The Church Institute bears the date 1912 and is tucked closely into the rock between the road and the church. From old photographs it is apparent that when built it replaced an earlier hall constructed of tin. The Institute was built with a bell which hung, until recently, at the west end of the building. This bell was at one time rung to summon children to Sunday School. The establishment of the Llangammarch Lunch Club in the mid 1980s and also a Playgroup meant that the building has continued to be a valuable resource for the village. In 1995 grant aid was acquired and extensive improvements were made including the provision of disabled access and the upgrading of the kitchen. The most recent improvement to the building has been the reslating of the roof in 1999. During this work, the bell was removed and is now hung at Irfon Valley School, Garth.

Details of services at St Cadmarch's Church can be found on the church noticeboard and other publicity in the village; services are well attended and there is also a thriving Sunday School and young people's music group. The Church Institute is used for a number of weekly activities, including the lunch club, playgroup, Sunday school and other ad hoc events.



The previous St Cadmarch's Church, demolished 1915

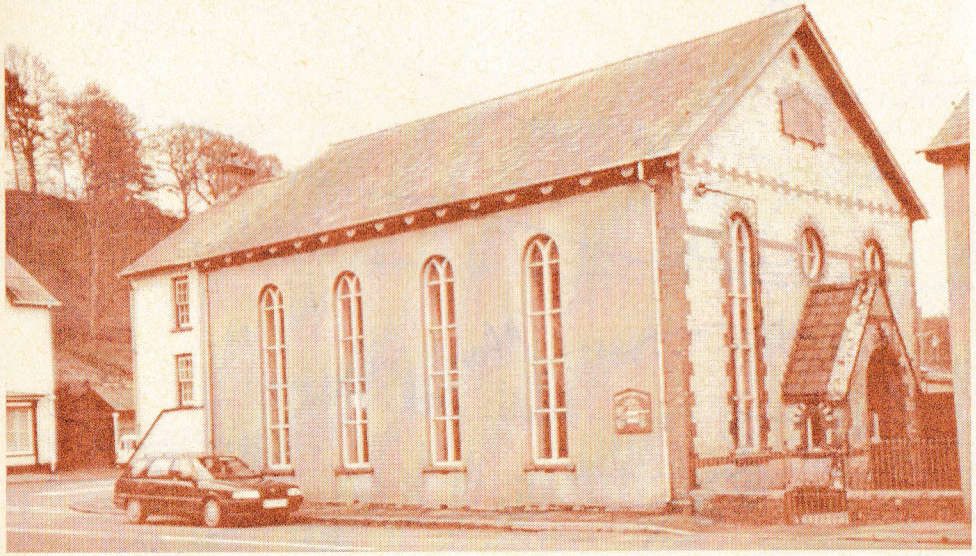


1. St. Cadmarch's Church
2. Church Institute
3. Rectory
4. Railway Station
5. Nazareth Chapel
6. Alexandra Hall
7. Shop
8. Childrens' Playground
9. Community Gardens
10. Toilets
11. Aberceiros Inn
12. Old School
13. Book Shop
14. Post Office
15. Telephone
16. Lake Hotel
17. Remains of Pump House
18. Golf House

Not to Scale

NAZARETH PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF WALES

If you were giving instructions to a stranger on how to find Nazareth Chapel, it would not be difficult. It has grey walls facing the street, with four-lance shaped windows, a slate roof, and behind the blue painted iron gate is the entrance porch. The gable end of the building is made of red brick with yellow stone facings. You may be disappointed at this modest looking building, but its appearance belies the great fervour felt by those ardent people of the eighteenth century who lived here when Non-Conformism was finding many followers in this remote part of Wales.



Nazareth Chapel, Llangammarch Wells

The title Non-Conformist was given to the Welsh churches which were established by those who failed to agree with the 1662 Act of Uniformity. A subsequent Act of 1689 allowed freedom of worship, but there was a desire not to appear aligned to the established English Church. This led to the building of the independent chapels in the villages and towns of Wales. Their ever increasing popularity in the 18th and early 19th centuries led to the establishment of more and more denominations. Often two or more chapels of different persuasions co-existed in the same village.

At this time there was no official place of worship. Howell Harris was a frequent visitor in his early years before venturing into the wider world; William Williams Pantycelyn was a curate at Llanwrtyd and Abergwesyn from 1740 to 1743 and many of the meetings these men held were in the open air. It is known that as early as 1742 a 'Society' was established at Llangammarch. In farms at Dol-y-gaer, Coryn and Llwyn-Einon services were held.

A remarkable story is told of how the Gwynnes of Garth House came to espouse "The Great Awakening" as the movement was called. Marmaduke Gwynne JP was angry about the irregular methods of the young reformer from Trevecca, Howell Harris, hearing that he was to preach at Cefnllysgwyn, he rode there on his horse. He was a just man and didn't want to condemn Harris without himself hearing him. He waited on the outskirts of the crowd and found he was compelled to listen, he was so moved by Howell's eloquence and sincerity that he was dumbfounded, so much so, we are told that "conviction entered his soul". Ever afterwards he became an avowed advocate. Mrs Gwynne ultimately became a follower and in time their daughter became the wife of Charles Wesley, marrying him in Llanlleonfel church in 1749. Garth became an open house to the Methodist Revival and its protagonists.

An interesting fact connected with this neighbourhood is that its gentry were espoused to "The Great Awakening" contrary to that in other parts of the country. In addition to the Gwynnes were the Thomases of Llwynmadoc and the Pritchards of Dol-y-gaer, all threw in their lot with the young reformers.

In 1818 a central meeting place was decided upon, this was a thatched cottage, while Sunday Schools were still held in some of the farms. During this period non-conformist baptisms were held in the home, usually the paternal grandfather's house.

The first chapel was built in 1829. Two leading lights in this project were John Morgan and David Lloyd. John Morgan was an excellent Sunday School teacher and made Nazareth a famous institution here. He was aided by Thomas Elias who worked here as a tailor before entering the ministry. His exceptional wife helped him in all his endeavours and she was held in great esteem. These were men of great character, rich in religious experience and they were also capable organisers.

One such man was John Bevan M.P. of Aberanell. A man of different type being Evan Morris, the wheelwright, from Tychwarel, incisive of tongue and smart of repartee. 'Jacko' Lewis of Neuaddau was meticulous in the smallest detail in the needs of the Chapel, another fine man was John Davies of Glancamddwr, agent to the Llwynmadoc estate, deliberate and dignified. The Reverend John Watkins of Gorwydd became the first pastor there and of Llangammarch in 1869. He was a great preacher and worked here the whole of his ministerial life.

In 1878 the Chapel was entirely reconstructed at a cost of £700 of which £600 was cleared at the re-opening service. In 1909 the Hall, named after Queen Alexandra was built, meetings and Sunday Schools were held there. The Hall is still in use today, entertainments and meetings take place there and it is used as our Polling Station on election days.

Sometime after the rebuilding of the chapel new heating apparatus was installed, together with the 'new illuminant - acetylene gas'. These improvements cost £300, well spent, we all feel that we can sing better when our feet are warm and our hands are not too cold to turn the pages of a hymn or prayer book.

The interior of the chapel is a delight and so unexpected, its grey rough-cast and brick exterior giving no indication of the elegant windows letting in the light, the curved gallery panelled in mahogany and the iron pillars supporting the gallery which bear the date 1829. The pews are arranged in a herringbone pattern, very well made of oak and entered by low doors fastened with brass plates and hasps. There are several memorial plaques on the walls in honour of the men who served in both Great Wars and also to those who also gave their lives. Two white marble tablets face the congregation, recalling the deaths of two of our Llangammarch men, Davy James Jones who was killed while serving in the famous Parachute Regiment in 1944 aged 21 and Ryan Cadwgan Powell-Jones, killed in the far off Korean War in 1953.

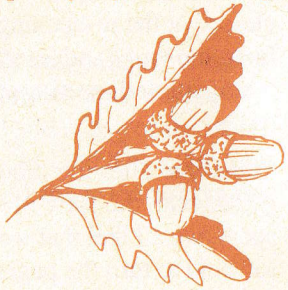
Sunday School was held in the chapel, about twenty to twenty five children attending. Among the school teachers prominent in the Sunday School in post-war years were Gareth Bevan and his wife Katie. It fell to Gareth to organise the annual trip by train to the seaside, the children were given a bag of crisps and a bar of chocolate to sustain them on the journey, but I am told that these items were invariably consumed before the train reached the first stop at Llanwrtyd!

Singing was hugely enjoyed among adults and children alike. Eisteddfodau were held every year and there would be social gatherings and meetings of Societies and Guilds. Prayer meetings were a regular event in chapel life all over Wales. There was an added excitement for the children as The Anniversary approached, for every effort would be made to provide new dresses for the girls and new shirts for the boys, this was the time too, when brand new shoes were worn.

A great coal fired heating boiler had been installed in the cellar of the adjacent chapel cottage, this great monster gave out lots of heat, the hot pipes running around the outer walls making the whole place warm and cosy, lit by those gas lights still in position on the gallery but no longer lighting the interior.

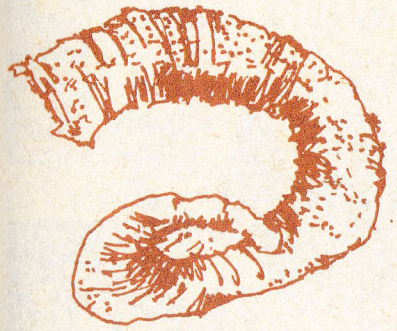
Throughout the years Nazareth Chapel has been fortunate in its elders and has had a strong leadership. In recent years the chapel has moved from the Welsh speaking North Carmarthenshire Presbytery to the English speaking Brecon, Radnor and Hereford Presbytery.

The 19th century was a time of great expansion in the membership of the chapels in Wales. In 1882 there were sixty-two places of worship in the presbytery, but a steady decline in chapel and church attendance continues everywhere in Britain. Llangammarch Wells is one of those rare villages where Church and Chapel are still active..



Today Nazareth Chapel continues with the traditional Welsh Non-Conformist services and has a membership of nearly forty people and it is now part of the joint pastorate with Ithon Road Church at Llandrindod Wells and is ably served by the Revd Brian Reardon.

JOHN PENRY - THE WELSH MARTYR

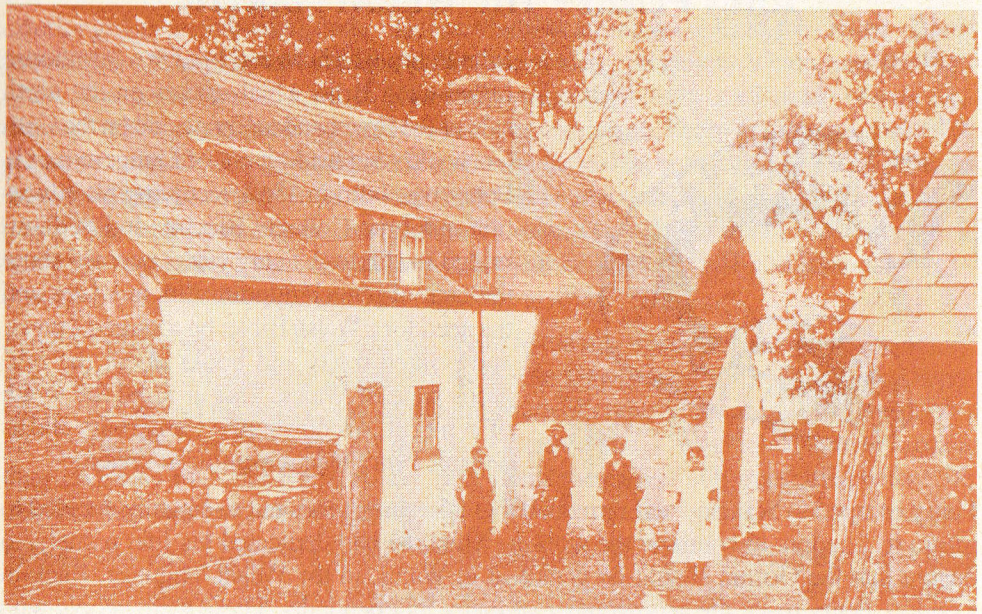


John Penry was born and bred in a farmhouse called Cefn Brith which stands on the north side of the Epynt and is signposted on the Cefn Gorwydd road leading out of Llangammarch. Penry was born in 1563, receiving his education at Christ College, Brecon, and at Cambridge and Oxford. Penry was concerned about the lack of preaching ministers in Wales and the need for a Welsh Bible; he acquired a press, and printed tracts and books about the religious state of Wales. This aroused the wrath of Whitgift, Archbishop of Canterbury and as a result Penry found himself in prison.

Penry escaped to Scotland and remained there for three years but eventually decided to return to London, to continue the work to which he had dedicated his life, namely, to ensure that the Gospel should be preached in Wales, in the Welsh language. Back in London, Penry made the acquaintance of many Independents. These were people who tried to worship in their own way and not according to the Queen's command. One Sunday morning in March 1593 while Independents were assembling together in Islington Woods, officers appeared and arrested a large number of them, including Penry who was imprisoned at Poultry Compter for two months. The end came unexpectedly when Penry was at dinner, he was informed he was to die at five o'clock that afternoon. His chains were removed and he was dragged on a hurdle through the narrow streets to St Thomas a Watering. There he was hanged in the open air. Penry was not permitted to see his wife Eleanor nor his four daughters, whose names were Deliverance, Comfort, Safety and Sure-Hope. No one knows where he was buried. To his four daughters he gave four Bibles, his sole wealth in this world.

His work for the people of Wales however, has not been forgotten to this day and a statue of John Penry by local sculptor Elizabeth Yeomans is shortly to be erected in the churchyard of St Cadmarch's Church, Llangammarch Wells to mark the Millennium.

The statue of John Penry by Elizabeth Yeomans in preparation



Cefn Brith, birthplace of John Penry

The main street, Llangammarch Wells in about 1907

THE EPYNT

Llangammarch Wells lies in the northern lee of Mynydd Epynt, about three miles as the crow, or the red kite might fly, from the hill's highest point which is over 1,500 feet.

For centuries local people have known this hill area by its Welsh name - translated as hill of the haunt of the horse. Indeed the horses from the Epynt were the reason for the annual auction in the village for many years until about the middle of the century. Since then the area has also been known to those with military connections as Sennybridge Training Area.

Be it called the Epynt or Sennybridge Ranges, the piece of land is about thirty six thousand acres, about twelve miles long by five wide, running from South East to North West. With few noticeable peaks, there are a number of deep ravines and nearly all the area lies well over a thousand feet above sea level. Annual rainfall is more than double the average of, for example, Birmingham. Naturally such high land is frequently obscured by cloud.

There is evidence of shepherds tending their flocks here three thousand years ago and bronze age cairns have been found. From the early middle ages until the nineteenth century there was a drovers road coming over from West Wales, (the old Drovers Arms Public House still exists on the Epynt, but, sadly, it is now delisenced and only available to the army) and leading to the river Wye, near Erwood, where livestock would cross the river en-route to their market place, having avoided the fees payable on turnpike roads along lower routes.

It was in the early days of World War Two, dark days for all, when the Epynt was considered by the army as very suitable for military training, to include the firing of live ammunition. Thus, within a short time, farmsteads had to be vacated and the hill cleared of its people.

This meant, for over fifty families, the loss of homes and livelihood - a traditional way of life stretching back beyond memory. Some monetary compensation was paid, but, at the time, a derisory amount. Although small farming opportunities would be found elsewhere and despite our national emergency with whatever need there might have been for training areas, it is impossible to use words to express the huge and sad loss felt by those families then. Even today memories linger on of the uprooting of a community. Further details regarding farming on the Epynt and the subsequent vacation of the farmsteads when the army took over, can be found in the book *An Uprooted Community* by Herbert Hughes and available from Cammarch Books.

With the fullest, sensitive regard to the above feelings, it has to be said that the area has proved, over half a century, to be of enormous benefit to the Army, therefore to the making of soldiers better able to fight our cause. Well over one and a half million military personnel have used the range for the fullest aspects of training - Artillery, Infantry and all their support services. The casual observer may only discern gunnery and rifle firing,

but within the area are several ranges in which are practised the many and varied activities necessary to train for war.

The terrain certainly represents much that an army has experienced in many theatres of war since 1939, or would expect to encounter. The area is very wet, the ground mostly boggy and visibility is often testing; in parts it is very wild and bleak; natural and man made cover is plentiful. It is excellent land for fieldcraft, day and night navigation, a whole range of 'dry' training (i.e. without the firing of live ammunition), and the whole gamut of military activities in which competence must be learnt if our forces are to operate to the highest standards for which our army is internationally renowned - by our (potential?) foes as well as those who, in so many cases, have looked to us to help protect and defend their territories.

Significant to the driver over the Epynt is the relative absence of troop movement. Considering that an average of two and a half thousand soldiers train here each month, their presence is pleasantly unobtrusive. It is also evident that the Ministry Of Defence has a high respect for the land and for the wider community in its conservation of wildlife and the natural landscape and by allowing farmers to graze sheep over major parts of the hill. Surprisingly few have been killed by gunfire and this is compensated for by very low grazing rentals.

For a few periods over the year, the range is opened for ramblers - access clearly being limited to paths free of unexploded shells!! And, always a popular event, the Commandant invites the public to a multi-activity Open Day once a year when one is shown many of the above features, not least of which is the Red Kite Conservation Centre which shows the military's part, depicted in graphic displays, in the restoration of this once disappearing species to the area.

At all times the Epynt remains partly accessible to the visitor via the several roads open to the public. The main one, from our village over to Brecon, past the old Drovers Arms gives a representation of the ancient and recent history of the area and it is a fine drive over and through this elemental range of hills.

Travelling towards Llangammarch on a fine evening at sunset, looking down at our scattered communities from the high hill, one is able to reflect on the beauty of nature, on past peoples and events in the area's mixed history, even on the nature of conflict and its prevention. On losses and on gains.....

FARMING

Terry Jones of Cefn-serwydd farm drives his sheep to grazing on the Epynt about 1970

Some farmers volunteered to fill in a questionnaire about farmers and their families during the twentieth century. From their answers we have been able to build a general picture of what life was like and how it has changed.

The main picture that emerges is one of really hard physical work by both men and women until the coming of the tractor for men and electricity for the women. Sheep have been the mainstay of farming with men travelling the hills either on ponies or by foot and always with dogs. Lambing took place in all weathers and in all locations and shearing was all done by hand with farmers helping their neighbours whenever possible.

During the war years of 1939-1945 it became compulsory to grow potatoes and corn in order to help feed the nation. Tractors began to appear around this time. One farmer told of having his first car in 1937 and his first tractor in 1941 and another had his first tractor in 1946. It would seem that most farmers who had teams of horses and difficult hilly land kept to them until things improved and tractors became less cumbersome. It is also a well known fact that fuel was scarce during the war. However, life on the farm does not seem to have been affected too much by rationing. Farms had their own meat supply from pigs, poultry and rabbits and there was also milk, butter, cheese and obviously potatoes. One farmer said plaintively - if only they could have grown sugar!

Land girls came and introduced the local girls to "townee" ways (pubs etc!) and there seems to have been a very popular P.O.W. called Henry who was 18.

The life of women on the farm seems to have changed dramatically. They helped outside with the lambing and milking the cows and still had all the washing, cleaning, bread making and butter and cheese making, meals to cook and children to raise; and some did not even have the aid of electricity until as late as 1962. It was even suggested that if a farmer chose his wife with care he could get as much work out of her as a man!

Nowadays things are very different. The women still help with the lambing and haymaking and, it seems, do much of the paperwork; but many now go out to work to augment the family income. Of course, they were brought up on farms and knew what to expect of life. Even so, one farmer's comment that "The girls can't wait to get away now" was just a little sad.

Since 1945 there have been many changes. Very few arable crops are grown now and there is perhaps some overstocking. The first tractors apparently frightened the stock for the first couple of years. Jobs that had taken all day could now be done in an hour or two and by one man. Although electricity was in Llangammarch in 1937 some of the outlying farms did not have it until 1962.

There are now indoor sheep sheds and scanning machines which result in more live lambs but perhaps also more infections. One farmer tells a lovely story of reviving poorly lambs in the old days. They were put into hot water with a dose of whisky. One particular lamb refused to revive and was thought to be dead until it began to snore. It seems it had had too much whisky and eventually awoke and staggered around as if drunk.

Although electricity has revolutionised farming it has also brought the computer and those of the European Union have churned out mountains of paper work to be completed by farmers, causing a great deal of pressure. Some farmers find it all too much.

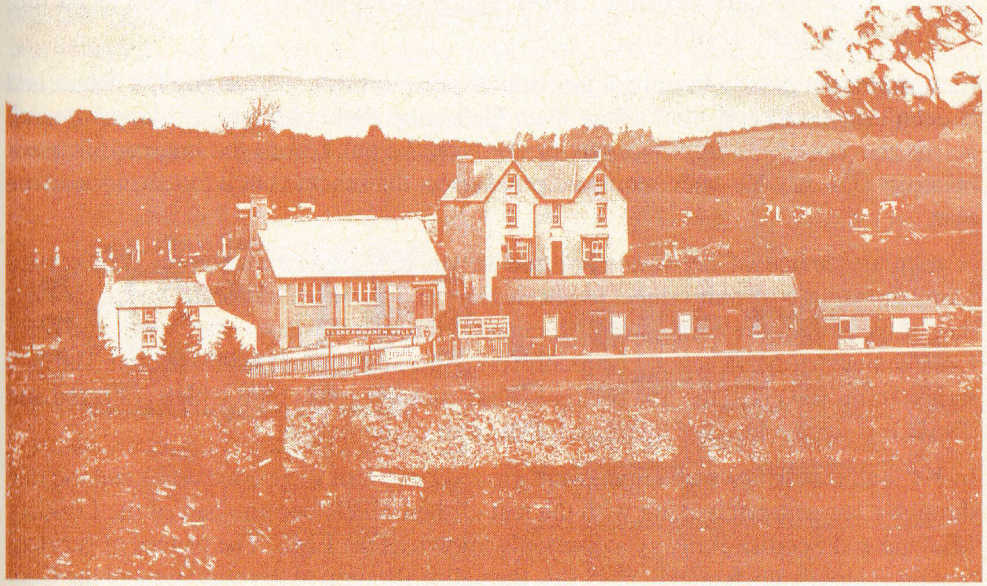
Some of the farms in Llangammarch have been in the same family for as many as seven generations dating back to the eighteenth century. Many have absorbed smaller holdings. Some have wonderful stories to hand on to future generations such as poaching salmon to feed to the pigs?! and a cow getting into a kitchen and walking around the table with the farmer behind her until she found the door and the way out.

There always seem to have been ways of supplementing the farm income: Selling butter and eggs; rabbits to the man who collected them once a week at 2s 6d a rabbit (12½p); someone did knitting for a Scottish firm. Nowadays some farms offer Bed and Breakfast and many of the wives go out to work.

When asked if things are better or worse now all agree that physically life is much better, but it is also much more stressful. One farmer summed it up by saying "the 50s to 70s were the best times, too much hardship before, too much stress now."

LLANGAMMARCH AND THE RAILWAY

Much of what we know today as Llangammarch Wells came into being as a direct result of the railway. The line reached the village in 1867 and the through route was opened from Craven Arms to Swansea a year later.



General view of the railway station and Church Institute circa 1920

In the middle part of the last century, roads were generally in a poor condition particularly in this part of Wales. Rail technology was developing rapidly and represented the easy transportation of goods and passengers. Lines were promoted the length and breadth of the country often by small companies made up of speculative businessmen. A number of such companies were responsible for the line that runs through Llangammarch. Each built sections working northwards from Llanelli and Swansea and south from Craven Arms on the Shrewsbury to Hereford Railway. The bid to complete the through route fell to the 'Central Wales Extension Railway Company'. This company built the line through the village. Although some of the line had been double track, that through Llangammarch was constructed as a single track with passing places at Garth to the north and Llanwrtyd to the south. One platform was constructed with a simple red brick station building containing a booking office, waiting room, and toilets. Behind the platform, a siding was provided into a small goods yard. A house was built for the Station Master.

By 1870, the London and North Western Railway, one of the largest railway companies of the time took over the line. The company began to promote the whole area as a place where waters with healing properties could be sampled and the fresh air would restore health and vigour. Llandrindod and Llanwrtyd quickly grew as spa towns. Llangammarch

was promoted for its unique barium water and it was the railway that added the suffix 'Wells' to these place names in the 1880s. Other evidence of the LNWR can be seen in the former railway hotel opposite the church gate near the station. Known for many years as 'The Cammarch', this is now a private dwelling. Many of the large houses of the village along with the other hotels were built to house the early tourists brought by the railway. It was the railway which carried regular consignments of the precious barium water to many parts of Britain.

Llangammarch nearly became a junction as powers were obtained by the Neath and Brecon railway to construct a line from Defynnog (Sennybridge) to Llangammarch across the Epynt. A few earth works were begun before the contractors went bankrupt. The LNWR later attempted to resurrect the scheme but it too abandoned the plan.

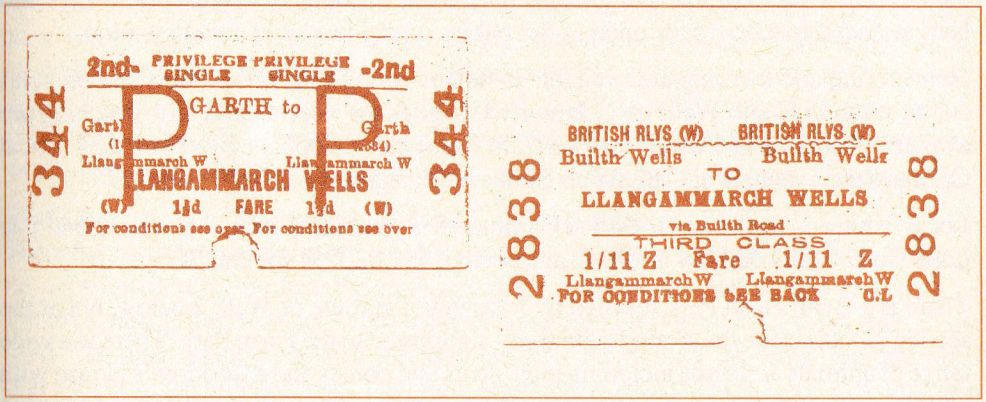
A regular service of between five and seven passenger trains each way served Llangammarch with trains direct to Shrewsbury and Swansea Victoria. During the heyday of the line in the early twentieth century, through carriages were available from Llangammarch to Manchester, Liverpool, York, Birmingham and London Euston. Through freight trains traversed the line besides a daily pick-up goods train which collected and dispatched wagon loads of merchandise at most of the stations.

In 1923, all the railways of Britain were grouped into four large companies and the line through Llangammarch along with the rest of the LNWR became part of the London, Midland and Scottish Railway commonly known as the LMS. The pattern of services remained largely unchanged. 1948 saw the nationalisation of the railways and the Central Wales Line came under the control of the Western Region. This was dominated by former Great Western management who did not take kindly to their previous rival. Although services did not change much, the railway saw little investment during this period.

The 1960s saw the most interesting part of the railway's history. A proposal was made to upgrade the signalling on the line to cope with freight flows from South Wales to the North West. The equipment for this work was stored at Llandrindod. In the event the levels of freight reduced with the increase of road transportation and a decision was made to concentrate what was left on the South Wales main line with a new yard built at Margam. This change of heart made way for an attempt to close the whole line in 1962. This was resisted but two years later, there was a dramatic change to the working of the line. All freight trains were diverted via the South Wales main line apart from a limited pick up goods service, which lingered until 1970. The line south of Pontarddulais to Swansea Victoria was closed completely and steam haulage on the railway ceased. The remaining passenger service became just four trains each way between Shrewsbury and Llanelli. These were formed of two-car diesel rail cars, although by 1970 the service was increased to five trains and extended to Swansea High Street Station by running along the main line. In 1967, again there was a threat of closure that was fought off. Wags of the day said the line survived because it ran through five marginal constituencies!

These changes directly affected Llangammarch. Goods facilities were withdrawn and the station became an unstaffed halt. This was a low point for the railway. The station began to look uncared for and run down. In 1980, the building was demolished and replaced with a crude simple wooden shelter.

1980 also saw the formation of HOWLTA, the Heart of Wales Line Travellers' Association and the fortunes of the railway began to improve. In 1985 over half a million pounds was invested in the line, which brought a modern signalling system and improvements to the track. This allowed excursion trains to run along the route enabling visitors from all over Britain to sample the scenic delights of the area. In 1993, the first of a number of steam-hauled trains returned to the line with many spectators turning out to watch.



Two tickets off the line

In 1996, with the privatisation of the railways in full swing, the track became the responsibility of Railtrack and the passenger service was taken over by Wales and the West Railway. Although service patterns changed again with fewer trains being convenient for Llangammarch passengers, the overall use of the railway increased. In 1998, Railtrack resurfaced the platform and car park at Llangammarch and rebuilt the station in an attractive brick design. It is now pleasant and inviting for passengers. Continuously updated train information available at the touch of a button was installed in 1999. Freight has also started to rumble through Llangammarch at night again when the line has been used as a diversionary route. Heavy loads of steel coil have been hauled through by the very latest high powered diesel locomotives of the English Welsh and Scottish Railway, which currently runs most freight traffic in the UK.

The railway through Llangammarch has probably never made much money! Today it survives only through government subsidy paid to the train operators. Its future is assured until 2003 when the current franchise expires. A good case will then be made for its retention and development but the pressure to close on financial grounds will remain. We cannot predict its future fortune. What we do know is that long before modern road transport, it was the railway that brought good fortune to Llangammarch.

OUT AND ABOUT

To appreciate fully the beauty of the area you need to leave the car and take to slower forms of transport. Our roads are quiet enough to make walking, cycling or horse-riding enjoyable and for the more adventurous there are miles of footpaths to be explored on foot and bridleways to be explored on foot, horseback or bicycle. Remember though that paths to the south east tend to be very steep and end abruptly at the boundary of the military training ground on the Epynt. There are routes for two round walks at the end of this section.

Crychan Forest (Grid Reference 882435 or follow signs to Tirabad and look for the picnic site on your right before you reach Tirabad) contains footpaths, bridleways and hard surfaced forestry roads open to the public. There is a large area to explore.

Horse riding and trekking are available in neighbouring Llanwrtyd Wells and bicycles can be hired in Builth Wells and Llanwrtyd. Guides for walking and bird-watching are available from Caban Cwmffynnon in Cefn Gorwydd - telephone 01591 610638. Local OS maps are available at Cammarch Books in Llangammarch 01591 620517.

Local fishing on the Rivers Irfon and Cammarch is sometimes available - telephone The Lake Hotel 01591 620474 or The Cammarch 01591 620754 for details.

There is a small Farm Park reached by following the route of Walk 2 below, but at the second junction take the second right turn - signposted to the Farm Park. There is a wide range of animals and birds including pigs, goats and ponies and a Children's House with rabbits, guinea pigs, canaries and more. There is also a tea room. For details of opening times tel 01591 620262.

Llangammarch Carnival during the 1950s

At the beginning of August the Carnival takes place. This includes a fancy dress parade, craft and produce show, dog show and children's sports followed by a dance. The event has taken place annually since 1957. In earlier years there were also pony races, car rallies, motor cycle grass track racing, drag hunts and clay pigeon shooting at various times and sometimes happening as separate events. In the 1960s and 1970s there were sheep-dog trials. In the 1980s harness races were organised and became so successful that they had to move to a bigger site at Beulah and finally became too big and expensive for a small local committee to organise - the last event was held in 1989.

Indoors the village dramatic society was formed in the 1950s. They performed three-act plays for three nights in Llangammarch and then went on tour - one night in Builth Wells and one night in Llanwrtyd Wells. For one of their earliest productions "Half a Loaf" they were helped by a visit from the author Eynon Evans. Annual performances included serious plays and farces in the earlier years. Productions became more sporadic and in recent years have included pantomimes. The first production of the new millennium was - 'Towards Tomorrow' - a play written and produced by local residents. It is worth noting that recent productions have included a live orchestra and original music.

Walk I **Footpath and road - about 2 miles**

From the main bridge over the River Irfon take the riverside footpath heading north east i.e. to your right if you face the railway bridge and church. Follow this path (can be muddy!) beside the river until after the second stream bridge where it veers right to the road. The ruins on the river bank just after the path leaves it are the remains of the wells that appear in the village name. The ruins are dangerous! At the road you can turn right for a short cut back to the village but for better views turn left, go round the corner by the Lake Hotel mentioned in Chapter Four. Take the unmetalled lane on the right opposite the hotel. You will pass on your right the Golf House. Turn right when you reach the metalled road and pause to admire the scenery. Consider how different it would look if plans to create a huge reservoir covering all the valley below had been approved. Follow the road back to the village.

Walk 2 **All road - about 3 miles**

From the main bridge over the River Irfon go under the railway bridge, keep left and ascend the hill. At the junction turn left (signposted Llanwrtyd Wells) and at the next junction turn left - farm sign Glancamddwr - along what is probably part of the Roman Road mentioned in Chapter One. Go through the farmyard, under the railway, over the river and turn left along the road to the village. If you have timed your walk well the Aberceiros Inn will be offering refreshment when you see it on your right. This is a traditional village pub, owned by the same family for 150 years offering real ale and other beverages, food, darts, quoits and pool. Otherwise the community garden you will see on your left has benches for a rest and the village shop can be found close by.

Cautions

1. Our roads are quieter than most but they are roads and there is traffic - take care!
2. This is sheep country, dogs must be kept under control!

WHERE TWO RIVERS MEET - THE SURROUNDING COUNTRYSIDE

Llangammarch Wells remains a haven for many of our treasured birds, animals and flowering plants at a time when they have dwindled in numbers and been marginalised in intensively farmed and more built-up areas of our country, and a walk at any time of the year through this relatively unspoilt tract of countryside is a rewarding experience for the nature lover.

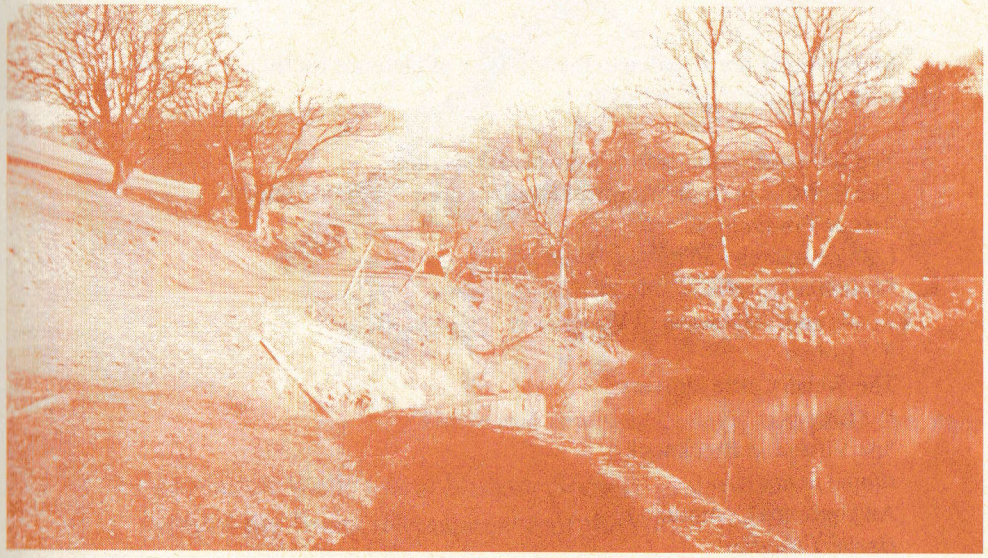
There is no more reliable indicator of the weather than the local rivers converging as they do in the centre of the village. The Irfon and the Cammarch flow in dramatic harmony with weather conditions in the adjacent hills, rising and quickening as rain enshrouds the Cambrian Mountains to the west, receding as the rain clouds disappear or move on over the bleak slopes of Mynydd Epynt to the east. Between the two mountain masses lies a gently undulating patchwork of grass, distinct fields interspersed by scattered trees and the sharp lines of hedgerows snaking into the distance.

The timeless pattern of our countryside is best reflected by our trees and hedgerows. Our so-called native trees are well represented by the oak, ash, birch and the occasional beech. These dominate in the valleys and the lower slopes where they are joined by relative newcomers to Wales such as the sycamore and horse chestnut. The old oaks are especially grand 'though many are now expiring gracefully after decades of growing and many more of resting. Patches of powdery red heartwood and ivy clad trunks often mark the path of terminal decline mirrored by dead branches up above, driftwood grey silhouettes against a leaden sky. The lichens spread over any moist woody surface and form greyish green festoons on branch and branchlet, delighted to find an environment so free of industrial pollution.

How much more attractive are these ancient trees, the custodians of our countryside than the hillside delinquents, the conifers. The larch and spruce have few admirers 'though to be fair they make a good wind break, arranged in geometric shapes awaiting the call of forester and distant sawmill. A supposedly attractive investment, the coniferous wood is dark and unwelcoming to all but a few birds such as the siskin and goldcrest and animals of the night - the fox, the rabbit and the badger. The deciduous trees are noticeably more inviting, providing shelter and a source of food for a much wider range of insects and birds. Look up into their branches and you might well detect the sharp tapping of that small busybody, the nuthatch - often heard but rarely seen, so well is it camouflaged. If you are especially lucky you might see a spotted woodpecker, while tree-creepers, warblers, thrushes, sparrows and tits are frequent fliers. Listen carefully and that loud and rather rude honking noise heralds the flight of Ronnie the Raven, a bird always in a hurry, the road hog of the air lanes.

Below the trees lie the hedgerows. Most hedges in the parish are relatively simple in that they consist of only two or three woody species and are therefore likely to have been around for 200 to 300 years. Mainly of hazel, hawthorn and bramble, they share their

burden with the occasional honeysuckle and clump of ivy. Below, an everchanging palette of colour, beginning in spring with primrose, celandine and stitchwort and continuing with the vetches, violets, forget-me-nots, ragged robins and stately foxgloves.



Looking towards the Epynt from the reservoir, Llangammarch Wells

In the rivers, declining fish numbers influenced by forestation higher upstream and changes in bankside vegetation management have made the predatory heron and kingfisher, uncommon sights. Grey and pied wagtails and dippers now rule the streams, dipping in manic activity for insect croutons in a watery soup. In the bird world however, they are but humble foragers, the raptors are kings. There is no more breathtaking sight than that of a red kite wheeling overhead on the thermals just off the edge of The Epynt. The great survivor of the 20th century, the red kite population reached its nadir in the early 1930s when the future of the species in Wales rested upon the breeding of a single female bird. The subsequent recovery of the population to over 100 breeding pairs in 60 years or so is a triumph of conservation over persecution. Equally arresting are its fellow predators, the buzzard, often statuesque as it perches on its telegraph pole and the sparrow hawk, so deadly as it swoops at high speed and unerring accuracy on its cowering prey below.

In the twilight hours of summer and early autumn one can spot darting pipistrelle bats feeding on the wing and also swifts and swallows, busy as any commuters hurrying home from work.

There is little doubt that Llangammarch Wells is surrounded by a landscape of enchanting beauty. It hosts a panorama of ancient trees, of flowers that can brighten up the dullest day and an array of birds and wild animals second to none in these islands. It provides a reassuringly slow-changing landscape so attractive to locals and visitor alike. It is to be hoped that it retains its charm well into this century.

Llangammarch Wells Local History Society is greatly indebted to the many local people who recounted their memories and provided old photographs and other memorabilia and also to Mr John Bateman of Manordeilo for the railway tickets.

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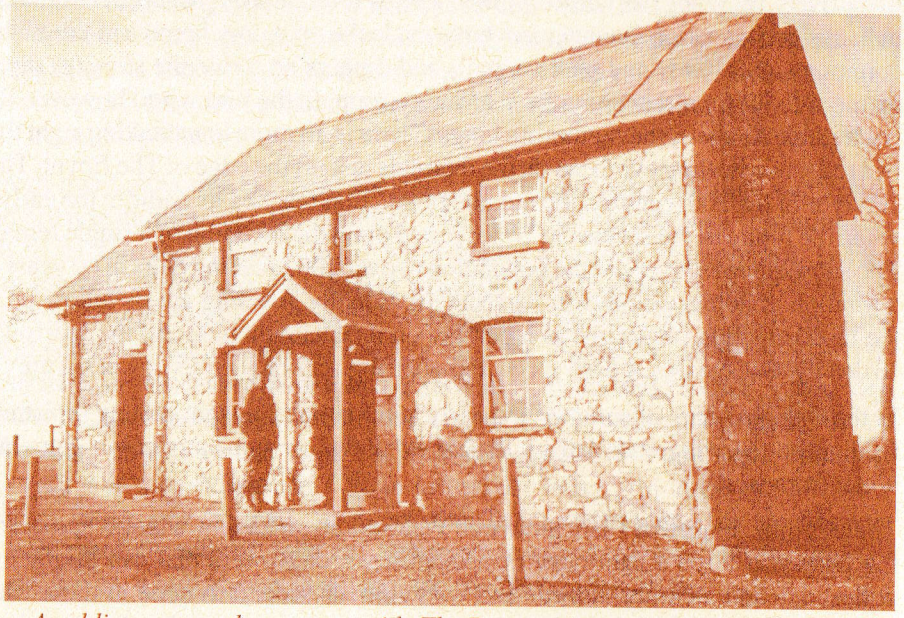
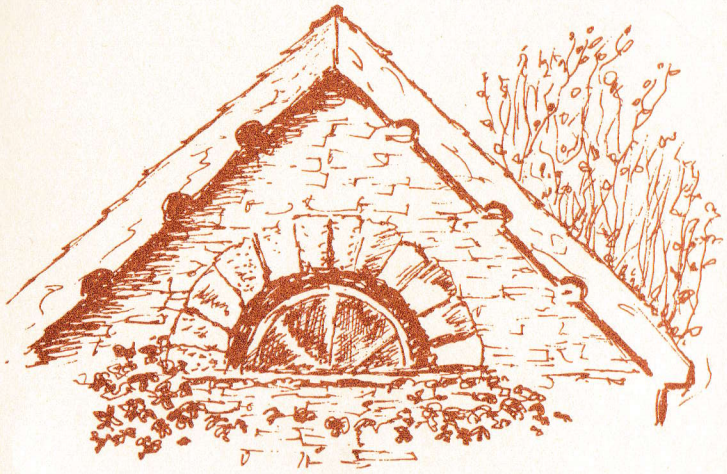
The following publications were also consulted:

The Romans in Breconshire and Radnorshire - A Field Guide
Atelier Productions
Llangammarch - an historic church
Abraham Morris
Roads and Trackways of Wales
R J Colyer
The Welsh Cattle Drovers
R J Colyer
Spa Village in Brecknock
Elaine Smith
An Uprooted Community
Herbert Hughes
Llangammarch Wells Mineral Water Co Promotional Booklet



A soldier surveys the scene outside The Drovers Arms, Mynydd Epynt; a regular stop for the drovers in times past.



Gable end, Bridgend Cottage, Llangammarch Wells

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