

GUIDE TO RURAL WALES

CARDIFF & MONMOUTHSHIRE

PLACES OF INTEREST

ACCOMMODATION

FOOD & DRINK

SHOPPING

LOCATOR MAP



ADVERTISERS AND PLACES OF INTEREST

Places of Interest

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Cardiff and Monmouthshire

Several very distinct regions characterise this part of South Wales. To the north run the valleys that were once an economic powerhouse based on coal mining and the iron industry. Much of the land that was once an industrial wasteland has been reclaimed by nature, with the help of sensitive human intervention, but there are still some monuments to the great industrial age remaining, chiefly at the Big Pit Mine and Blaenavon Ironworks. The regeneration has been aided by the fact that, even when industrial activity was at its most rampant, it was all concentrated on the valley floors, leaving the uplands always wild and beautiful.

To the south, the valleys of the Wye and Usk offer some truly glorious scenery, as well as the equally breathtaking sight of Tintern Abbey. An inspiration equally for poets and artists, this abbey was at one time one of the richest in the country and the magnificent ruins beside the River Wye are still a stirring

sight. This area, too, is one that saw much contest between the Welsh and the English, so not surprisingly there are numerous fortifications to be seen and explored. The Three Castles - White, Skenfrith and Grosmont - provided a valuable defence from their strong yet isolated positions, while most towns of note also had their own fortress.

Monmouthshire itself, for many years, was fought over politically. Was it an English county or a Welsh one? Henry VIII, in 1535, divided Wales into 12 counties and placed Monmouthshire in England. The waters were muddied even further when people began referring to the Principality of Wales and Monmouthshire. In 1974, when local government was reorganised, the matter was settled when Monmouthshire was legally placed in Wales.

The largest city in the area is Cardiff, the capital city of Wales and a place that is successfully blending the ancient with the modern. The Romans occupied various sites in this area, but it was heavy industry and the influence of the Bute family that made Cardiff such a powerful port. The home of Welsh rugby, the superb Millennium Stadium, and a recently rejuvenated waterfront, Cardiff is a city that vibrates with life, energy and enthusiasm.



Cardiff Castle

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Cardiff

 Cardiff Castle	 Pierhead Building
 Llandaff Cathedral	 National Museum
 Metropolitan Cathedral of St David	
 Welsh Regiment Museum	 Dr Who Exhibition
 Cardiff Bay Visitor Centre	 Techniquest
 Cardiff Bay	 National Assembly
 Cathays Park	 Norwegian Church Arts Centre
 Wales Millennium Centre	 Roath Park
 Cardiff Bay Church Tour	
 Cardiff Centenary Walk	 Millennium Stadium

The capital city of Wales boasts a lively city centre that was recently voted the 6th best shopping destination in the UK and, in Cardiff Bay, one of Europe's most stylish waterfronts. A £220 million barrage across the mouth of the River Taff and a kilometre long, has transformed tidal mudflats into a 200 hectare freshwater lake, and elsewhere in the

city a £2 billion programme of regeneration is under way.











The area once known as Tiger Bay is one of the country's most exciting and imaginative regeneration developments. Now called **Cardiff Bay**, this revived waterfront is home to the new **National Assembly** (known as Y-Senedd in Welsh), the impressive **Pierhead Building**, which was built in 1896 for the Bute Docks Company, and the **Cardiff Bay Visitor Centre** (known locally as The Tube). At this award-winning tubular building, visitors can see a futuristic exhibition that lays out the full vision of the complete development, which, among other aims, is reuniting the city with its dockland. The **Wales Millennium Centre** is an arts and cultural centre of world importance. It is also home to the world class Welsh National Opera. Of particular interest to children at Cardiff Bay is **Techniquest**, the country's leading science discovery centre, where visitors can explore many aspects of science and technology through a range of interactive exhibits. On certain days, Wallace and Grommit Invention Sessions take place.

The former church for Norwegian sailors, which is where the author Roald Dahl was baptised, is now the **Norwegian Church Arts Centre**, which maintains the links that have grown up over the years between the two nations.

Cardiff was given city status in 1905, but was not declared to be the official capital of Wales (Caernarfon was the other contender) until 50 years later. It now has a population of about 320,000. The city is very much a product of the Industrial Revolution and its story is intertwined with that of John Crichton-Stuart, 2nd Marquess of Bute (1793–1848), who began developing the town. The



Pierhead Building, Cardiff

 historic building  museum and heritage  historic site  scenic attraction  flora and fauna
 stories and anecdotes  famous people  art and craft  entertainment and sport  walks

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Cardiff Castle

*Cardiff Castle Grounds, Cardiff,
South Glamorgan CF10 3RB
Tel: 02920 878100
website: nationaltrust.org.uk*

Cardiff Castle is an unusual blend of Roman fort, medieval castle and fanciful Victorian gothic mansion.

The Romans established a fort on the site in the 1st century AD, but the square 8 acre fort that remains today was built in the 4th century. When the Normans built their castle in the late 11th century what remained of the Roman walls was buried under earth ramparts. The walls were revealed during excavations in 1889, and were rebuilt on the original foundations - clearly visible in places - between 1922 and 1925.

The Norman motte had a stone shell keep added in the 12th century. Further reinforcements were added by the De Clare family in the 13th and early 14th centuries. The keep gained a gatehouse and fore-buildings linked by a massive ward wall to a new tower in the south - the Black Tower. The wall and the keep's fore-buildings were demolished by 'Capability' Brown in the 1770's during re-development of the site. The moat that surrounded the motte was also filled in, but has since been restored and modern stone now marks the position of the old wall and fore-buildings.

In 1423, Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, built a new tower and hall block on the western wall of the site. This was improved in the late 16th century by the Herbert family who converted it into a luxurious and well appointed house. For most of the 17th and 18th centuries the house was left empty and fell into disrepair. In 1766 the house came into the possession of Lord Mountstuart, the future 1st Marquess of Bute. He began a programme of demolition and re-building that was continued by his grandson, the 2nd Marquess.

The 2nd Marquess of Bute gained immense wealth through the exploitation of mineral resources on his Glamorgan estates and his development of Cardiff as a centre for industrial trade. When he died suddenly in 1848 he left an infant son, John Patrick Crichton Stuart, as "the richest baby in Britain". The 3rd Marquess was to become one of the richest men in the world, and he lavished money on building projects at many of his properties. In 1869 work began to remodel Cardiff Castle to the designs of the Gothic Revival architect William Burges. The great wealth of Lord Bute provided Burges with the freedom to design and build his most fanciful schemes. A visit to Cardiff Castle without viewing the interiors would mean missing out on some of the most remarkable rooms ever created during the Victorian era. To fully appreciate the work of William Burges it is worth visiting nearby **Castell Cacho** which was rebuilt as a summer retreat for Lord Bute and features more of Burges' gothic fantasy creations.



family controlled the docklands and, as the town began to thrive as a coal-exporting port, they made a vast fortune. Cardiff became the biggest coal-exporting port in the world, and

at its peak in 1913, more than 13 million tons of coal were exported from the docks.

Some of this wealth was poured back into the rebuilding of **Cardiff Castle**. A no-

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expense-spared project initiated by the 3rd Marquess (who was reputed to be the richest man in the world) resulted in an extravagant and opulent Victorian version of a castle of the Middle Ages, designed by the eccentric architect William Burges. With his flamboyant imagination allowed to run riot, Burges created magnificent rooms rich in murals, stained glass and marble, which have to be seen to be believed. However, while the building is very much a flight of wealthy Victorian fancy, outside in the grounds there is the well-preserved medieval castle keep and stonework dating from Roman times. The **Welsh Regiment Museum** is housed within the Black and Barbican Towers, and visitors can gaze out over Cardiff from the top of the Norman keep.

As might be expected in a capital city, Cardiff is home to many of the national treasures of Wales. At the superb **National Museum** there is a vast collection of archaeology, natural history (including 55,000 live leaf-cutter ants!) and ceramics, as well as permanent exhibitions on the Evolution of Wales and Man and the Environment. The art gallery is home to a fine collection that includes the largest body of Impressionist paintings outside Paris and the best Welsh art. It has an important collection of 20th century art, featuring work by Augustus and Gwen John, Stanley Spencer, Eric Gill and Barbara Hepworth. The museum and gallery, along with the City Hall, are located in **Cathays Park**, where there are other civic buildings and various departments of the University of Wales. The city is proud of

its parks and claims to have more green space per person than any other UK city core with vast green swathes reaching into the heart of the city.

Although Cardiff's famous Arms Park, the home of rugby football for so many years, has gone, its replacement, the **Millennium Stadium** is becoming an equally revered shrine to the Welsh national game. The stadium was christened by hosting the last great sporting event of the 20th century, the Rugby World Cup Final in November 1999. Visitors to the stadium can see the hallowed turf and learn how the pitch was laid, find out how the 8000-ton roof opens and closes, and walk from the Welsh players' dressing room, through the tunnel and on to the pitch.

Cardiff has achieved new fame as the place where the BBC television series *Dr Who* is made and filmed, and at the Red Dragon Centre on Hemingway Road is the **Dr Who Exhibition**. It has props and costumes from the latest series, as well as from previous ones. It's the place to hang out with Daleks and Cybermen.

A mile or so from the city centre stands **Llandaff Cathedral**, a beautiful building set



Llandaff Cathedral, Cardiff

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in a grassy hollow beside the River Taff. The cathedral suffered severe bomb damage during World War II, and part of its restoration programme included a controversial Epstein sculpture, *Christ in Majesty*, which dominates the interior. Inside, visitors will also find some delightful medieval masonry, a marvellous modern timber roof, and some works of art by members of the Pre-Raphaelite movement. In Charles Street in the city is Cardiff's 'other cathedral' - the

Metropolitan Cathedral of St David. It was built as a Roman Catholic church in 1887, and became a cathedral in 1916. Two miles north of the city centre, **Roath Park** is a 19th-century urban park with handsome trees, formal flower beds, a wild area and a memorial to Scott of the Antarctic.

A great way to explore the city centre is to follow the **Cardiff Centenary Walk**, which takes in most of the sites and historic landmarks. It's about 2¼ miles long, and has numbered waymarkers on the pavements. A free guidebook and map are available. The **Cardiff Bay Church Tour** is a guided walk round the many churches around Cardiff Bay. It takes in the Norwegian Church, a Mosque and a Greek Orthodox church. The city's long history is also on show at the recently opened **The Cardiff Story**, housed in the former old library in the city centre.

Many famous people were born in, or lived in, Cardiff. The actor and composer of musical comedies, Ivor Novello, was born at 95 Cowbridge Road in 1893. A blue plaque on the house and a 7ft bronze statue near the Millennium Centre commemorate his life and work. Perhaps the most famous is the singer



Roath Park, Cardiff

Shirley Bassey. She was born in the former Tiger Bay area, which has now been completely redeveloped. Shakin' Stevens, the rock star was born Michael Barrett in 1948 in the Ely district. The children's writer Roald Dahl (1916-1990) was born within the large Norwegian community that flourished in the city, and was baptised in the Norwegian Church. He stayed in the Llandaff area and attended the cathedral school.

Around Cardiff

ST FAGANS

3 miles W of Cardiff off the A48

Museum of Welsh Life Battle of St Fagans

On the outskirts of Cardiff, this picturesque village is home to the open air **Museum of Welsh Life** in the extensive grounds of St Fagans Castle, a splendid late-16th century mansion. Founded in 1948 and now Wales' most popular heritage attraction, this is a museum unlike any other, as it contains an assortment of buildings, collected from all over Wales, which have been re-erected in these glorious surroundings. Within the 50-

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acre site you'll find a Celtic village, a 17th-century farmhouse from Gower, a tiny white-washed chapel of 1777 from Dyfed, a Victorian schoolroom from Lampeter, a pre-war grocery, a farmyard complete with animals, a terrace of iron-workers cottages, a toll keeper's cottage and a House for the Future. Each of the 40 or so buildings has been furnished to reflect a period in its history.

As well as this superb collection, there's also a pottery, tannery, bakery, smithy and three mills, most of them with workers demonstrating the original methods employed. The museum holds demonstrations on traditional craft skills, and visitors can enjoy a delightful stroll round the formal gardens, the Italian Garden, the modern knot garden and the terraces that descend to a series of fishponds. There are also galleries with exhibitions of costume, daily life and farming implements. The complex includes a traditional bakehouse selling organic bread, a restaurant and coffee shop, a play area for under-12s and a gift shop with products relating to the museum's collections.

The **Battle of St Fagans** took place in 1648, when a detachment from the New Model army defeated Parliamentary troops who had defected. At the time there was dissention among some of the Parliamentary troops, as they had not been given food or money for a long time, and they feared that they might eventually be sent home without remuneration. For that reason some of them fought under the Royal Standard under the command of the governor of Pembroke Castle.

TONGWYNLAIS






3 miles NW of Cardiff on the A470

 Castell Coch











Situated in the Taff Valley and hidden by trees,

Castell Coch appears to be a fairytale castle of the Middle Ages, yet it dates from the 19th century. Built on the site of a 13th-century castle, Castell Coch was designed by the eccentric architect William Burges for the 3rd Marquess of Bute, as a companion piece to Cardiff Castle. As the Marquess was reputed to be the wealthiest man in the world - the family owned the thriving Cardiff docks - money was no object, and so this elaborate castle was constructed. While the medieval illusion of the place is maintained by the working portcullis and drawbridge, the interior decoration is perhaps even more astonishing. All perfectly preserved, each room is a masterpiece, with eye-catching details such as paintings of butterflies on the domed ceiling of the drawing room, scenes from *Aesop's Fables* and Greek mythology on the walls, and bird and animal mouldings around the doors. The Marquess planted a vineyard in the castle grounds, which it is said, produced the only commercially made wine in Britain between 1875 and 1914. There are now more than a dozen commercial vineyards in Wales alone.

Newport

 St Woolos Cathedral	 Transporter Bridge
 W H Davies	 Newport Museum and Art Gallery
 Public Art Trail	

The city grew up around the docks at the mouth of the River Usk. In 1801 it had a population of just 1000; that had rocketed to 70,000 by the early 1900s, and has now reached 120,000. Newport is the third largest city in Wales and achieved city status in 2002 to mark the Queen's Golden Jubilee. The Romans settled in the area in the 1st century and the town's **St Woolos Cathedral**, splendidly situated on the hilltop, is just the

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St Woolos Cathedral, Newport

Victorian houses, something of a rarity in Newport.

Hemmed in by modern buildings on three sides and by the river on the fourth, the substantial remains of Newport Castle are best seen from the middle of the nearby bridge. In any case, entry to the site has been suspended for safety reasons. The castle was built in the 14th century by the d'Audele family, and replaced an earlier timber structure near what is now the cathedral. In the

latest building on a site that has been a place of worship since the 6th century. The church was founded by St Gwynllw (Woolos is the English version of his name), who was, before his conversion, a cruel and wicked man. He is said to have had a dream one night that he would go to a hill and find there a white ox with a black spot. He went the next day and, finding the ox, saw it as a sign from God and became a devout Christian. It is said that he died in AD500.

The church started off life as a wooden structure not long after the saint died. It was then replaced by a Saxon stone building, and some of the stonework in the present Galilee Chapel may be from this church. The rest of the building is Norman and later. It did not become a pro-cathedral until 1929, when the diocese of Monmouth was created. Finally, in 1949, it achieved full cathedral status. In the graveyard of the church are the graves of some of the soldiers of the Welsh Regiment who were killed in the Battle of Rorke's Drift during the Zulu Wars of South Africa.

Just down the road from the cathedral, Snow Hill is remarkable for its Georgian and

16th century the castle was lived in by Henry VIII's uncle, Jasper Tudor.

In the **Newport Museum and Art Gallery** there is a range of displays on the town's origins, including a Roman mosaic floor that was excavated close by. Not to be missed here are the John Wait teapot display and the Fox collection of decorative art. Just to the north of the museum, on the river bank, is another striking work of art, Peter Fink's enormous red sculpture, *Steel Wave*. Erected in 1991, it represents the steel and sea trades, which played such important roles in Newport's development. The sculpture is part of the city's **Public Art Trail**, which also features an extraordinary Kinetic Clock, which delivers a repertoire of shudders, spits and shakes on the hour; and a massive Chartist Mural depicting the Chartist uprising of 1839 when 22 protestors were killed by soldiers as they hid in the Westgate Hotel. Both these works can be found in the pedestrianized John Frost Square. Westgate Hotel itself is a wonderfully ornate Victorian structure fronted by pillars from its predecessor, which still bear the bullet pocks from the shooting.

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An impressive reminder of Newport's more recent past is the massive **Transporter Bridge** across the River Usk. It was specially designed in 1906 by Frenchman Ferdinand Arnodin to allow traffic to cross the river without disrupting the movement of shipping. Basically, a cradle is suspended on wires from a gantry that spans the river, and this carries vehicles back and forth. The bridge is one of very few of its kind, one being in Middlesbrough, while two others are in France.

Among the city's famous sons of Newport were the TV personality Johnny Morris and the poet **W H Davies**, born in his grandfather's house in 1871. Much admired by Shaw, Davies is perhaps best known for his *Autobiography of a Supertramp*; in a poem called *Leisure* he penned the famous lines:

*What is this life if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare.*

An allegorical sculpture of Davies, inscribed with this couplet stands in the town's shopping centre.

To the west of the town stands **Tredegar House and Park**, one of the finest examples of Restoration architecture in Wales, and the home of the influential Morgan family for more than 500 years. Visitors can tour the rooms and discover just what life was like here, both above and below stairs, as well as finding out something of this great Welsh family. Its more colourful and famous members include Sir Henry Morgan, the notorious pirate, Godfrey, the 2nd Lord Tredegar, who survived the Charge of the Light Brigade and whose horse is buried in the



Lake at Tredegar House and Park, Newport

grounds, and Viscount Evan, whose menagerie included a boxing kangaroo. The park that surrounds the house is equally impressive, with early 18th-century walled formal gardens, an orangery with restored parterres, and craft workshops. Visitors can take a carriage drive through the parkland and children have their own adventure playground. There's a tea room and gift shop, and a suite of rooms available for corporate events.

Around Newport

CAERLEON

2½ miles NE of Newport on the B4236

- Caerleon Castle Parish Church of St Cadoc
- National Roman Legion Museum
- Arthur Machen Ffwrrwm Art & Craft Gallery
- Caerleon Roman Fortress and Baths

Despite its close proximity to Newport, Caerleon has managed to maintain the air of a rural town, but its chief attraction is the remarkable Roman remains. Caerleon is one of the largest and most significant surviving

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Roman military sites in Europe. It was set up in AD75 by the 2nd Augustinian Legion and originally called Isca. A substantial Roman town grew up around the military base and among the remains to be seen at **Caerleon Roman Fortress and Baths** are a large amphitheatre where thousands watched the gladiators, the only surviving barracks to be seen in Europe, and a complex system of Roman baths that were the equivalent of today's sports and leisure centres. Finds excavated from the remains are on show at the **National Roman Legion Museum** where, along with the weapons, mosaics and models, visitors can see one of the largest collections of engraved gem stones.

Caerleon Castle was originally built of timber in 1085 by Norman invaders, though the uninspiring ruins you see today date from the 12th century and later. Many people believe that Caerleon had links with King Arthur, asserting that the Roman amphitheatre was the site of King Arthur's Round Table. Alfred, Lord Tennyson appears to have given this story some credence since he visited Caerleon while seeking inspiration for his *Idylls of the King*. Interestingly, he stayed at the riverside Hanbury Arms where the ruin of Roman watchtower sits beside the inn. Caerleon has more to offer than Roman remains – impressive though they are. The town has some fine examples of timbered buildings and also worth a visit is the seemingly unpronounceable **Ffwrwm Art & Craft Gallery**, which is set inside an 18th century walled garden. The courtyard here contains several craft shops, a tea room, an art gallery and a sculpture garden. Sculpture is something of a Caerleon speciality. In midsummer, the town hosts a two-week Arts Festival and International Sculpture Symposium, which attracts sculptors from all over the world. The sculptors work in public so that visitors can see

the works of art emerging from the raw materials, mostly wood.


The **Parish Church of St Cadoc** is largely 15th century, though a church had stood here long before this. The lower parts of the tower are thought to be 12th century. The church contains some impressive stained glass.


However, Caerleon has more to offer than Roman and Norman remains - impressive though they are - as the town has some fine examples of timbered buildings. Caerleon's most famous son was the writer of dark, brooding ghost and fantasy books, **Arthur Machen**. He wrote this fond tribute to his birthplace:

*I shall always esteem it as the
greatest piece of fortune that has fallen to me,
that I was born in that noble,
fallen Caerleon-on-Usk, in the heart of Gwent.*

PENHOW

7 miles E of Newport off the A48


 Parish Church of St John the Baptist

 Penhow Castle

This hamlet is home to Wales' oldest lived-in fortress, the 850-year-old **Penhow Castle**, which still has its stout Norman keep and an impressive 15th-century Great Hall complete with minstrels' gallery. It is no longer open to the public. Adjacent to the castle is the **Parish Church of St John the Baptist**, which is very picturesque, and well worth a visit. Its tower is 12th century, and it was built by the St Maurs family, who also built the castle.











CWMFELINFACH

9 miles NW of Newport on the A4048

 Ynys Hywel Centre

 Sirhowy Valley Country Park

Covering some 1000 acres of both woodland


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and farmland, the **Sirhowy Valley Country Park** provides the opportunity to walk, cycle or ride along the park's numerous trails. The Full Moon Visitor Centre has all the details of the park's natural history and of other activities here. In the heart of the country park is **Ynys Hywel Centre**, a converted 17th-century farmhouse, which now organises outdoor pursuits.

DERI


14 miles NW of Newport off the A469


 **Parc Cwm Darran**

To the north of Deri, in beautiful Darran Valley, lies **Parc Cwm Darran**, a glorious country park that, along with the adventure playground and informative Visitor Centre, also has a six-acre coarse fishery.

CWMCARN

7 miles NW of Newport on the B4591

 **Cwmcarn Forest Drive**

 **Mabinogion Sculpture Trail**

Just to the west of the town is **Cwmcarn Forest Drive**, a seven-mile stretch of high forest road that provides some of the most magnificent panoramic views of the South Wales countryside and the Bristol Channel beyond. Another attraction is the **Mabinogion Sculpture Trail**, which depicts characters from the Celtic folklore tales of the *Mabinogion*. The drive's visitor centre has details of the route and what can be seen at various points as well as a coffee shop and a gift shop selling local handicrafts. There is also a campsite and a mountain bike trail.

RISCA

5 miles NW of Newport on the B4591

 **Fourteen Locks Canal Centre**

To the south of Risca, at High Cross on the

Monmouthshire Canal, is the **Fourteen Locks Canal Centre**, where this complicated systems of locks was constructed to raise and lower barges some 168 feet in just half a mile, with only the minimal wastage of water. There are several walks from the centre, which take in the locks, ponds, channels, tunnels and weirs, as well as the countryside in which the centre is sited. Open from Easter to September, the visitor centre has a display that follows the opening (in 1796), the growth and the heyday of the Monmouthshire Canal, and the decline that started when the railways began to take over from water transport.

NELSON

14 miles NW of Newport on the A472


 **Llancaiach Fawr Manor**

 **Nelson Handball Court**











As well as boasting the open-air **Nelson Handball Court**, dating from the 1860s (and still in use), this village is home to **Llancaiach Fawr Manor**, a handsome Elizabethan manor house that has been lovingly restored to reflect the year 1645 and the Civil War. During this turbulent time the Prichard family lived here, and visitors can meet members of the family and their servants, all in authentic costumes, as they carry on with their daily lives. As well as preparing meals, gardening and exchanging gossip of the day, a number of activities from that time, such as archery and falconry, are staged. This is a wonderfully entertaining and informative living history museum where visitors also get the chance to meet some of the eight resident ghosts on the special ghost tours.

CAERPHILLY

 **Caerphilly Castle**  **Visit Caerphilly Centre**

 **Tommy Cooper**

Caerphilly Castle (CADW) completely

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dominates this town, which in medieval times was far more important than Cardiff, a few miles to the south. A 'sleeping giant' of a castle, the fortress sprawls over some 30 acres making it the largest castle in Wales. In the whole of Britain it is only exceeded in size by Windsor.

It is also one of the finest surviving examples of medieval military architecture in Europe. This great fortress was built largely in the late 13th century by the Norman Lord Gilbert de Clare. Along with the 'wall within walls' defence system, he also employed a mighty water defensive arrangement that included lakes and three artificial islands. The castle was restored in the 19th century by the Marquess of Bute, but nothing seems to be able to restore the castle's famous leaning tower, 10 degrees out of true, which manages to out-lean even the Leaning Tower of Pisa. Perhaps the most impressive feature of the castle is its mightily impressive Great Hall; its most unusual is an intriguing display of full-size working replica siege engines. The **Visit Caerphilly Centre**, as well as

providing tourist information, has a shop selling quality locally-made Welsh crafts and a selection of Welsh food. The town is famous for its distinctive white crumbly cheese, which was first made in 1831, and originated in the farms surrounding the town. During World War II, and for a few years after, the making of the cheese was prohibited in favour of making Cheddar, which keeps much longer. Today, grocery departments and delicatessens all around the country stock this salty, pleasantly buttery cheese with a hint of citrus.

Caerphilly was the birthplace of the much-loved comedian **Tommy Cooper** (1921-1984), though he moved to Devon when he was a few months old. Recently, a bronze statue of Tommy Cooper was unveiled by Welsh actor Sir Anthony Hopkins; it occupies a beautiful spot overlooking the castle.

PONTLLANFRAITH











8 miles NE of Caerphilly on the A4048

Gelligroes Mill

Close to this town is **Gelligroes Mill**, a 17th-century water mill restored to full working order. In the early 20th century, the mill was owned by Arthur Moore, a radio enthusiast, who on the night of 11 April 1912 claimed to have heard distress signals from the sinking *Titanic*. No one believed Arthur until two days later when the news reached England of the disaster.





Gelligroes Mill, Pontllanfraith

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Pontypool

 Pontypool Museum  Junction Cottage

 Pontypool Park  Llandegfedd Reservoir

Pontypool is credited with being the home of the Welsh iron industry. The first forge here is believed to have been in operation as early as 1425, and the first ironworks opened in 1577. It is said that the first iron working forge in America was started by emigrants from Pontypool in the mid-17th century. The Torfaen valley in which the town lies also prides itself on being the earliest place in Britain to have successfully produced tin plate, which it did in 1720. Today, the town's industrial heritage can be explored at the **Pontypool Museum** where both the industrial and social history of the town and surrounding Torfaen valley is detailed. The museum is located in the late-Georgian stables of Pontypool Park, once the home of the Hanbury family who were, appropriately, owners of a local ironworks.

Pontypool Park is a 19th-century landscaped park whose main attractions include a shell grotto and a unique double-chambered ice house. The formal Italian gardens have recently been restored with the

help of Heritage Lottery funding.

Canals, too, have played an important part in the development of Pontypool and this particular legacy is recalled at **Junction Cottage**, a toll keeper's cottage of 1814 lying at the junction of the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal and the River Lwyd.

However, industry seems worlds away at **Llandegfedd Reservoir**, to the east of Pontypool, where the lake and surrounding countryside provide numerous opportunities for fishing, sailing, walking and bird watching.


Around Pontypool

CWMBRAN

3 miles SW of Pontypool on the A4051

 Llanyrafon Mill and Farm Museum

 Llantarnam Grange Arts Centre











 Greenmeadow Community Farm

This new town in the old industrial valleys of South Wales was founded in 1949 and was once itself dominated by heavy industry. Today, the mines and large works have gone and major environmental improvement schemes, including planting forests, have taken away many of the old eyesores. Not far from

the town are some interesting and historic places including the **Llanyrafon Mill and Farm Museum** and the **Llantarnam Grange Arts Centre**, which is the leading visual arts and crafts exhibition venue in south-east Wales. It stages seven exhibitions each year and also provides an extensive programme of educational activity to the local community starting from the age of five.



Llandegfedd Reservoir, Pontypool

 historic building  museum and heritage  historic site  scenic attraction  flora and fauna
 stories and anecdotes  famous people  art and craft  entertainment and sport  walks

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Greenmeadow Community Farm, a 150-acre working farm set within the town's green belt, is home to all manner of farm animals, including many pedigree and rare species. Farm trails, a children's adventure playground, and an unusual dragon sculpture are among the other attractions that go to provide a popular and entertaining day out.

ABERTILLERY


6 miles NW of Pontypool off the A467

 Abertillery & District Museum

The **Abertillery and District Museum**, on the ground floor of the Metropole Conference and Cultural Centre, tells the story of this former mining town and the surrounding area from the Bronze Age up until the present time. There is a re-creation of a miner's kitchen and many artefacts and displays about the mining industry.

BEDWELTY

7 miles W of Pontypool on the A4048


 Parish Church of St Sannon


The **Parish Church of St Sannon** is medieval in origin. Inside, on the south wall, is the famous iron gravestone of Mary Rowlands, who died in the 1770s. For over 200 years it lay in the churchyard, yet it shows little sign of rusting, a testimony to the quality of the iron made around here at the time.

BLAENAVON

6 miles NW of Pontypool on the B4246

 Cordell Museum  Blaenavon Ironworks

 Big Pit: National Coal Museum

 Pontypool and Blaenavon Railway

Despite once having been associated with the heavy industries of coal mining and iron working, Blaenavon is set in surprisingly

pleasant countryside, which can be further explored by taking the **Pontypool and Blaenavon Railway**, the highest standard gauge track to have survived in Wales. Half the site lies within the Brecon Beacons National Park. The northern terminus, Whistle Halt, stands at 1300 feet and is the highest station in England and Wales. Adjoining the station is the Whistle Inn, which is famous for its extensive collection of miners' lamps.

The oldest colliery in Wales, Big Pit Mine, closed in 1980, but has been reopened as the **Big Pit: National Coal Museum**, with former miners and engineers from the site giving guided tours accompanied by plenty of anecdotes. Visitors (children must be at least five years old and a metre tall), armed with helmet, lamp and battery pack, can travel down a 90-metre shaft in a pit cage and walk through the underground roadways, air doors, stables and engine houses that were built by past generations of mineworkers and where thousands of miners, some of them children, laboured in arduous conditions. On the surface at this site, designated Britain's 18th World Heritage Site by UNESCO, there are more buildings to explore, including the winding engine-house, the blacksmith's workshop and the pithead baths.

The other side of the town's industry, iron working, can be discovered at the **Blaenavon Ironworks**, a marvellous site that not only represents an important aspect of the Industrial Revolution, but is also one of Europe's best preserved 18th-century ironworks. Built against a cliff-face in the 1780s, and then at the cutting edge of technology, the ironworks, whose power came from a steam engine, became the second largest in Wales. Visitors to the ironworks and the **Cordell Museum** can see the whole

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process of production, including the row of blast furnaces and the ingenious water balance tower by which the material was transported. Here, too, the human element of the vast ironworks is covered, as a small terrace of workers' cottages, built between 1789 and 1792, has been preserved.

The **Parish Church of St Peter**, built in 1804 and looking like an engine house, is the oldest building in Blaenavon and has many features made of iron, including tomb covers, a font and pillars. It was built by the ironmasters of the ironworks, Samuel Hopkins and Thomas Hill, and given to the parish.

Blaenavon is renowned as a book town, and now has many second-hand bookshops on its main street.

EBBW VALE

10 miles NW of Pontypool on the A4048


 Festival Park

Ebbw Vale is a former steelmaking town, whose member of Parliament was once the formidable orator, social reformer and driving force behind the National Health Service, Aneurin Bevan. The town was transformed by the 1992 Garden Festival. Following the event, the garden site was developed into **Festival Park** with houses, shops and a range of leisure activities. Within the 70 acres of parkland and woodland are ornamental gardens, a lake, owl sanctuary, woodland craft centre and, in summer, a Japanese pavilion selling teas.

A monument to Aneurin Bevan stands on the outskirts of the town, which still has a number of fine houses that were built by the wealthy steel and coal magnates of the area. The town itself lies in a crowded valley but, just to the north, stretch the moorlands of the lower Brecon Beacons.

TREDEGAR

12 miles NW of Pontypool on the B4256

 Elliot Colliery Winding House











 Bryn Bach Country Park  Aneurin Bevan

 A J Cronin  Neil Kinnock

This pretty town was the birthplace of **Aneurin Bevan**, founder of the National Health Service and Member of Parliament for Ebbw Vale. The ashes of Bevan, in 1960, and of his wife Jennie Lee, in 1988, were scattered in the hills above Tredegar. It was in the town that the novelist **AJ Cronin** worked as a doctor and where he collected information for his book, *The Citadel*, which was later made into a film starring Robert Donat and a television series with Ben Cross. Brown tourist signs lead to the **Elliot Colliery Winding House**, now a museum of a colliery that once employed more than 2000 people.



Statue of Aneurin Bevan, Tredegar

 historic building  museum and heritage  historic site  scenic attraction  flora and fauna
 stories and anecdotes  famous people  art and craft  entertainment and sport  walks

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Close by lies **Bryn Bach Country Park**, a 600-acre area of grass and woodland, with a 16-acre man-made lake, an abundance of wildlife, a visitor centre and opportunities for walking, fishing, canoeing, climbing and abseiling. **Neil Kinnock**, the former Labour leader, was born in Tredegar.


RHYMNEY


12½ miles NW of Pontypool off the A469



Rhymney was once a coal mining town, and is nowadays famous because of the poem written by coal miner, and later school teacher, Idris Davis called the *Bells of Rhymney*, about a coal mining accident. The poem was later set to music by the folk singer Pete Seeger. The words mention many towns in southeast Wales, but the bells of Rhymney are called the “sad” ones.

ABERGAVENNY

8½ miles N of Pontypool on the A40

 Parish Church of St Mary & Tithe Barn

 Abergavenny Castle

 Abergavenny Museum  Blorenge

Abergavenny has sometimes been called the gateway to South Wales, and is a particularly pleasant and thriving market town. It sits within the Usk Valley, with the Brecon Beacons National Park to the north. The town can trace its history back to the Roman fort of Gobbanium established here in either AD57 or AD58. In the early 12th century, the Norman knight Hameline de Balun built a castle here, and founded a priory. The **Parish Church of St Mary**, once the priory church, dates from the 14th century and later. Inside there are fine choir stalls and medieval altar

Abergavenny Museum

Castle Street, Abergavenny, Gwent NP7 5EE

Tel: 01873 854282











e-mail: abergavennymuseum@monmouthshire.gov.uk

Abergavenny Museum is set in the grounds of the ruins of a Norman castle, where you can enjoy a picnic during the summer and a brisk walk on colder days. The museum building was formerly a hunting lodge built by the Earl of Abergavenny. The displays tell the story of this historic market town from prehistory through to the present day - they are on several levels and with some help most areas are accessible to wheelchair users.

Features include the recreation of a Victorian Welsh farmhouse kitchen and a saddler's workshop. There is a regular programme of temporary exhibitions, reconstruction of Basil Jones' Grocery Shop, a well known local store, and an activity room for children. The castle was the seat of the medieval Lords of Abergavenny and was the focus point of Border warfare for over 300 years. The castle and grounds have been open to the public since 1881.

During the warmer months, guests are encouraged to make use of the courtyard and lawn area, complete with BBQ and outdoor furniture set.



 historic building  museum and heritage  historic site  scenic attraction  flora and fauna
 stories and anecdotes  famous people  art and craft  entertainment and sport  walks

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tombs. The **Tithe Barn** of the church was started in the 12th century, extended in the 14th, enlarged again in the 17th, and refurbished in the 21st. It was officially opened by HRH Prince Charles in October 2008. It contains a Learning Space and Interpretation centre where visitors can learn about the Church and the town down through the centuries. Pride of place in the Tapestry Exhibition Area is the famed Abergavenny Tapestry, created over five years by 50 people. Also in the Tithe Barn is a well-stocked Food Hall.

In 1175, in the Norman **Abergavenny Castle**, the fearsome Norman lord, William de Braose, invited the Welsh lords to dine and then murdered the lot while they were disarmed at his table. Not very much remains, as King Charles I ordered it to be destroyed. Today, the rebuilt keep and hunting lodge of the castle are home to the **Abergavenny Museum** where exhibits from prehistoric times to the present day detail the history of the town and surrounding area. Displays include re-creations of a Victorian kitchen and a saddler's workshop. The castle and its grounds have been open to the public since 1881.

Abergavenny is a popular place during the summer. Surrounded by glorious countryside, it is a place from where all manner of activities, including walking, pony trekking and canal cruising, can be enjoyed. Bailey Park, close to the town center not only serves the community as a recreation ground but also hosts annual events including a steam rally, Custom Car show and the It's a Knockout competition. A little way south of town, the 1834-foot **Blorengae** is a popular tourist spot. One of the car parks at its base is called Foxhunter. It was presented by Colonel Sir Harry Llewelyn in

memory of his wonderful show jumper, which died in 1959 and is buried nearby.

LLANTHONY

19 miles N of Pontypool off the B4423

Llanthony Priory

In the beautiful Vale of Ewyas, also known as Llanthony Valley, is set deep within the Black Mountains. **Llanthony Priory** was built on a spot that has links with the beginnings of Christianity in Wales. In the 6th century it was chosen by St David for a cell. The priory grew out of a hermitage founded by the Norman William de Lacy in the 11th century. Located next to the Priory, Llanthony Trekking and Riding offers a choice of riding experiences, from simple trekking for novices to hacking for the more assured rider.

The beauty and tranquillity of the location have inspired many people. Eric Gill and Walter Savage Landor are among those who made their homes here. Landor actually bought the ruins in 1807 and lived in part of them. He had intended to restore them and create a gentleman's estate. He was refused permission and for many years the site continued to decay. Eventually the Welsh Office graded it as an Ancient Monument and so ensured its survival.

Monmouth

 Monnow Bridge	 Monmouth Castle
 Round House	 Great Castle House
 Parish Church of St Mary	 Castle Museum
 Nelson Museum and Local History Centre	
 Regimental Museum	 Naval Temple
 The Kymin	 King's Garden
 Geoffrey of Monmouth	 Charles Stuart Rolls

This prosperous and charming old market town



Monmouth Castle

grew up at the confluence of three rivers - the Wye, Monnow and Trothy - all noted for their fishing. The River Wye is crossed by a five-arched bridge built in 1617, but the Monnow boasts the most impressive of the town's bridges. **Monnow Bridge** is one of Monmouth's real gems, and its sturdy fortified gatehouse, dating from the 13th century, is the only one left of its kind in Britain. When work was undertaken some time ago on the bridge to strengthen it, the foundations of the previous wooden bridge, dating from about 1180, were discovered, directly under the present one. The gatehouse was not part of this new bridge, however; it was added in the early 14th century as part of the town's defences.

Long before the bridge was constructed, the Normans built **Monmouth Castle** here in around 1068. Later rebuilt by John of Gaunt in the late 1300s, the castle was the birthplace of his grandson, later Henry V, in 1387. Today, only the Great Tower and Hall of the castle still stand. In the 17th century, **Great Castle House** was built by the 3rd Marquess of Worcester from the ruins of the castle, and he lived here while his other homes, Badminton and Troy House, were being rebuilt. Today, the

castle houses both the **Castle Museum** and the **Regimental Museum** where the histories of the castle and the Royal Monmouthshire Royal Engineers are explored. The **King's Garden** is a re-creation of a small medieval courtyard garden planted with herbs that would have been common around the time of Henry V.

Another interesting building in the town is the 14th-century **Parish Church of St Mary**, formerly a priory church, whose eight bells are said to have been recast from a peal that Henry V brought back from France after his victory at Agincourt. The story goes that as Henry was leaving Calais, the ringing of bells was heard and he was told that the French were celebrating his departure. He immediately turned back and took the bells to give as a present to his native town.

One of the graves in the churchyard is that of an obscure house-painter called John Renie, who died in 1832 at the age of 33. His headstone is an acrostic of 285 letters that reads, "Here lies John Renie". This epitaph can be read over and over again, upwards, downwards, backwards and forwards, and if doglegs and zigzags are also included, it is apparently possible to read "Here lies John Renie" in 45,760 different ways. The memorial also records the deaths of his two sons, one at the age of one year and nine months, the other at the age of 83.

An earlier Monmouth man, **Geoffrey of Monmouth**, was the Prior at St Mary's before becoming Bishop of St Asaph in North Wales. It was probably in Monmouth

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that Geoffrey wrote his massive work, *A History of the Kings of Britain*, with its legends of King Arthur and Merlin.

Also in the town is the **Nelson Museum and Local History Centre**, where a fascinating collection of material and artefacts about the great Admiral can be seen. This interesting collection of memorabilia was accumulated by Lady Llangattock, the mother of **Charles Stuart Rolls** of Rolls-Royce fame, who, while born in London, had his ancestral home nearby. The history of the town is illustrated in displays in the same building. The exploits of the Hon Charles Rolls in cars, balloons and aeroplanes are featured here; one of the most evocative pictures is of Rolls in the basket of his Midget balloon at Monmouth Gasworks in about 1908. Some five miles from the town is the Rolls estate where Charles grew up and developed an early interest in engineering and motoring that led to his forming the Rolls-Royce company. Charles died in an air accident in 1910 and his statue, along with a monument to Henry V, can be seen in the town's main Agincourt Square. He is buried in the churchyard of St Cadoc's, at Llangattock-vibon-Avel, not far from Monmouth.






Just to the west of the town, and practically on the border with England, lies **The Kymin**, a National Trust-owned hill overlooking the River Wye. From here there are spectacular views across the picturesque landscape. Lord Nelson visited The Kymin and declared the view the best he had ever seen. The **Round House**, also found here, was erected by the Kymin Club in 1794. The members of this club were local worthies who liked to hold open-air lunch parties on the Kymin. They decided to construct a building so that they could picnic inside in bad weather, and the

result is the Round House - round so that the views could be enjoyed from every part of the house. Offa's Dyke footpath runs through the land. Nearby is the **Naval Temple**, opened in the early 19th century to commemorate the Battle of the Nile.

Around Monmouth

TRELLECK

4½ miles S of Monmouth on the B4293

-  Parish Church of St Nicholas  Harold's Stones
-  Preaching Cross  Tump Turret
-  Bertrand Russell

Trelleck's name means Three Stones and these large prehistoric monoliths can be found to the southwest of the village. For reasons unknown, they are called **Harold's Stones**. They do not represent all the historical interest here, as the **Parish Church of St Nicholas** is also worth visiting. It dates from the 13th and 14th century, and stands on the site of a church built in the 7th century and endowed by the ancient kings of Gwent. The **Preaching Cross** in the churchyard probably dates from that period. Close to the church a mound known as **Tump Turret**, which is all that remains of a Norman motte and bailey.




To the east of the village is the Virtuous Well, also called St Anne's Well. The water is full of iron, and it was once drunk as a curative. In medieval times, Trelleck was one of the most important towns in Wales, and a local field, where stone and masonry have been discovered, is said to mark the location of its main buildings.

The village was the birthplace of the philosopher **Bertrand Russell** (1872-1970). He was the grandson of the 1st Earl Russell.

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TINTERN PARVA

7½ miles S of Monmouth off the A466

 Tintern Abbey  Parish Church of St Mary
 Old Station

This riverside village, which nestles among the wooded slopes of the lovely Wye Valley, is a very beautiful place, and the whole of the valley between Monmouth and Chepstow is designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Here are found the enchanting ruins of **Tintern Abbey** (CADW), which stand beside the river. The abbey was founded by Cistercian monks in 1131, and largely rebuilt in the 13th century by Roger Bigod, the Lord of Chepstow Castle. The monks farmed the rich agricultural land as well as dedicating themselves to their rigorous regime of religious devotions right up until the time of the Dissolution. A rich and powerful abbey in its day, Tintern is now a majestic ruin with much delicate tracery and great soaring archways, in a glorious setting that has inspired painters and poets such as Turner and Wordsworth.

However, the abbey is not the only ruin in the vicinity. The ruins of the former **Parish Church of St Mary** lie close to the Beaufort Hotel, and originally served the parish of

Chapel Hill, to the south of Tintern Parva. The church remained in use until 1972, but was burnt down in 1977.

A mile from the abbey, along the A466 Chepstow-Monmouth road, is the Victorian **Old Station**, which now acts as a visitor centre for the Wye Valley. Here, too, are a countryside exhibition, a collection of signal boxes, a gift shop and a model railway.

CHEPSTOW

12½ miles S of Monmouth on the A48

 Chepstow Castle  Parish Church of St Mary
 Town Gate  Chepstow Museum  Port Wall











This splendid old market town, which lies on the border with England, takes its name from the Old English “chepe stow”, meaning market place. It occupies a strategic crossing on the River Wye between England and Wales, and looks across the river into England. Situated on a crag are the massive and well-preserved ruins of **Chepstow Castle**, which William Fitzosbern, Earl of Hereford, began building in 1067 as a base for the Norman conquest of southeast Wales. Its importance can be judged from its huge size and the fact that it was built of stone, when most Norman fortresses of the time were in motte and bailey form and built

from earth and timber. The castle began life as a keep, and towers, walls, fortifications and gatehouses were added to prepare it for the Welsh wars, in which, as it happened, it played no part. It is open throughout the year. The magnificent Great Hall is the oldest surviving stone fortification in Britain and, along with 13th century kitchen, displays the domestic side of life at the castle.

A major exhibition within its walls, *A Castle at War*, relates its history, and



Tintern Abbey

 historic building  museum and heritage  historic site  scenic attraction  flora and fauna
 stories and anecdotes  famous people  art and craft  entertainment and sport  walks

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a group of local people have come together to form the Chepstow Garrison; dressing up and re-enacting scenes from Chepstow's past, they have become a popular attraction for both local residents and tourists.

Built at the same time as the castle keep, and by the same William Fitzosbern, is the **Parish Church of St Mary**. It was the church of a former Benedictine priory that suffered considerable damage after the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1536. It suffered further damage in 1701 when the massive central tower collapsed. The vast three-storey original nave gives some idea of the grand scale on which it was built. The church contains some imposing and interesting monuments, including the Jacobean tomb of Margaret Cleyton with her two husbands and 12 children. This lady paid for the town's gatehouse to be rebuilt in 1609. This sturdy building now houses some town council offices. Also entombed in St Mary's is Henry Marten, friend of Oliver Cromwell and signatory to the death warrant of Charles I. Marten spent many years imprisoned in Chepstow Castle, in the tower that now bears his name. William Fitzosbern also founded the Abbey at Cormeilles in Normandy, a town with which Chepstow is now twinned.

Opposite the castle is **Chepstow Museum**, housed in an elegant 18th-century merchant's house and here the rich and varied history of this border town is revealed. The museum has displays on the town's many industries, including shipbuilding, fishing and the wine trade. Chepstow was at one time an important centre for shipbuilding, and one of the many photographs in the exhibition shows the closing stages in the building of *War Genius* in National Shipyard No 1 in 1920. Ships were built well into the 1920s, and the tradition was

revived during World War II with the construction of tank landing craft.

Throughout the town itself, the medieval street pattern is still much in evidence, along with surviving sections of the town wall, called the **Port Wall**, and the impressive **Town Gate**. But Chepstow is also a thriving modern town, and its attractions include an excellent racecourse offering both Flat and National Hunt racing; the highlight of the jumping season is the valuable and prestigious Welsh Grand National. The racecourse lies within the grounds of historic Piercefield Park.

Piercefield Picturesque Walk was created in the 1750s by Valentine Morris the Younger, and follows the Wye river cliff up to the Eagle's Nest. Chepstow is at one end of Offa's Dyke, the 8th-century defensive ditch and bank built by the King of Mercia. It is also the starting point for the long-distance Wye Valley and Gloucestershire Way walks.

CALDICOT

15 miles S of Monmouth on the B4245

 Caldicot Castle  Parish Church of St Mary

Caldicot Castle dates from Norman times and was restored for use as a family house in the 1880s. It was originally built by Humphrey de Bohun in the early 13th century. Of particular note is the sturdy round keep and the gatehouse dating from the 14th century. Inside, there's an interesting collection of furniture from the 17th to the 19th centuries. The castle is set in 55 acres of country park through which the River Neddern winds its way. There's a children's activity centre, a giant chess game, and the castle hosts occasional medieval banquets in its splendid Great Hall.

The **Parish Church of St Mary** dates originally from the 12th century, though it is now mainly from the 14th and 15th century. It

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was founded by Milo Fitzwalter on the site of an earlier church dedicated to St Bride.

CAERWENT

14 miles SW of Monmouth off the A48



 Parish Church of St Stephen  Venta Silurum

Close to the Wentwood Forest, this town - which is now more of a village - was the site of **Venta Silurum**, a walled Roman city built by the invaders for the local Celtic Silures tribe. Sections of the Roman defences still stand and are some of the best preserved in Britain. Inside the walls, can be seen the remains of the forum basilica and the Romano-Celtic temple. Venta Silurum is thought to have been the largest centre of civilian population in Roman occupied Wales, and covered over 44 acres. It is yet another suggested site for King Arthur's Camelot.

Much of the present village is built of stone taken from the Roman site, including the **Parish Church of St Stephen**, which was constructed in medieval times.

RAGLAN

6½ miles SW of Monmouth off the A40

 Raglan Castle  Clytha Castle











To the north of this pretty village of shops and inns and a mix of old and modern buildings, lies **Raglan Castle**, one of the finest late medieval fortresses in Britain. It was built towards the end of the Middle Ages, and thus in relatively peaceful times. The castle was also constructed with




comfort in mind, and it represents wealth and social aspirations as much as military might. Started in 1435 by Sir William ap Thomas, who fought at Agincourt, the building work was continued in the same lavish manner by the next owner, William Herbert, who was responsible for the addition of the formal state apartments and the magnificent gatehouse. Despite being more a palace than a fortress, Raglan Castle withstood one of the longest sieges of the Civil War. To the west stands **Clytha Castle**, a folly designed in the Strawberry Hill Gothick style by John Nash for an owner of the Clytha Park estate in memory of his wife. Inevitably, it has been described as the 'Taj Mahal of Wales'. Built between 1790 and 1792, this extraordinary building is now owned by the Landmark Trust so it is possible to take a holiday in a memorial.

The village indirectly gives its name to the Raglan sleeve, which is joined to the main part of a pullover in a diagonal manner, from collarbone to armpit. It was named after Fitzroy James Henry Somerset, 1st Baron Raglan (1788-1855), who lost an arm at the Battle of Waterloo.



Raglan Castle

 historic building  museum and heritage  historic site  scenic attraction  flora and fauna
 stories and anecdotes  famous people  art and craft  entertainment and sport  walks


Looking for somewhere to stay, eat, drink or shop? www.findSOMEWHERE.CO.UK**USK***11½ miles SW of Monmouth on the A472* **Usk Castle**  **Parish Church of St Mary** **Gwent Rural Life Museum**

This delightful small town, which takes its name from the river beside which it sits, was founded by the Romans in AD75. Well known for its excellent local fishing - the River Usk is a fine salmon river - the town attracts fishermen from far and wide. The heart of the town is picturesque Twyn Square with its restored clock tower and 13th century gatehouse. Also noted for its floral displays and historic buildings, Usk is home to the **Gwent Rural Life Museum**, housed in several historic buildings, which tells the story of life in this Welsh border region from Victorian times up until the end of World War II. Amassed over many decades by hundreds of local residents, the collection is huge and includes many vintage agricultural implements along with re-creations of a dairy (complete with a life-size milkable Friesian cow), brewery, carpenter's, a laundry and a thatcher's. Adjacent barns contain collections of stage coaches and farm carts, and an exhibit on the Great Western Railway.

Usk Castle was built in the early 12th century, and passed to and fro between the English and the Welsh. It was strengthened by Gilbert de Clare in the late 13th and early 14th century when he built the tower keep. De Clare was eventually killed at Bannockburn, and it then passed to Elizabeth de Burgh and eventually, the Mortimer family. The Duchy of Lancaster, which owned it next, allowed it to fall into decay. The ancient walls and old stone towers covered with creeper are highly evocative and the setting is serene.


The **Parish Church of St Mary** was

formerly the church of a Benedictine priory for nuns founded in the 12th century, and has a 15th-century roodscreen.

LLANVETHERINE*9 miles NW of Monmouth on the B4521* **White Castle** **Parish Church of St James the Elder**

To the east of the village stands one of the Three Castles, **White Castle** (CADW), which is so called because when it was built the masonry was rendered with gleaming white plaster, patches of which can still be seen. Starting life as a simple earthwork not long after the Norman Conquest, White Castle was rebuilt in stone during the late 12th and 13th century to provide, along with Skenfrith and Grosmont castles, a triangle of fortresses to control this strategic entry point into Wales. Situated in a beautiful and isolated place, the extensive ruins, including four D-shaped towers, are still able to conjure up the romance of the Middle Ages. Much later, during World War II, Hitler's deputy, Rudolf Hess, fed the swans on the castle's moat while held at a local mental hospital following his mysterious flight from Nazi Germany.

The **Parish Church of St James the Elder** dates from the 14th century, though it was restored in 1872. The Arts and Crafts pulpit dates from 1900.

GROSMONT*9½ miles NW of Monmouth on the B4347* **Grosmont Castle** **Parish Church of St Nicholas**



This village takes its name from the French, 'gros mont', meaning big hill; it is the site of **Grosmont Castle**, the most northerly of the Three Castles.

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Now in ruins, Grosmont started life as a steep earthen mound but, after having been replaced by a stone fortification, it was unsuccessfully besieged by both Llywelyn the Great and Owain Glyndwr. During exploration of the ruins, an Arabic 'faience jar' was found here - undoubtedly a relic from the Crusades. The 13th-century **Parish Church of St Nicholas** has an octagonal tower surmounted by a spire. The nave has an unusual tomb - the stone carving of the recumbent knight above it was never finished.

SKENFRITH

5½ miles NW of Monmouth on the B4521

 Skenfrith Castle  Parish Church of St Bridget

At this point the Monnow Valley forms something of a gap in the natural defences of the Welsh Marches and it was here that the Normans built **Skenfrith Castle** (NT), the last of the Three Castles - the others being White



Skenfrith Castle

and Grosmont. Situated beside the river, Skenfrith Castle was built in the 13th century by Hubert de Burgh and is noted for its fine round tower keep and its well-preserved Great Hall and curtain wall. Once the troubled domain of medieval warlords, this border region is today peaceful and undisturbed.

The **Parish Church of St Bridget** dates from the 13th century with later additions, and sits close to the River Monnow, where stand the remains of a medieval quay.

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