

Abergavenny - Notes

Welcome to Abergavenny. Surrounded by the hills: Bloreng, Skirrid, Deri. Sugar Loaf.

Abergavenny Station

Welcome to Abergavenny station - our first visit to a historic station building (even Cardiff Central is a 1930s major remodelling of the original station there). This station is Grade II listed and was designed by [Charles Liddell](#), in an Italianate architectural style when he was Chief Engineer. Liddell was a student and educated by the gear railway engineer George Stephenson. Also designed the Hengoed viaduct.

Untruth: After the Hengoed Viaduct he went on to design the Taj Mahal and then the Hanging Gardens of Babylon

Gorsedd Circle

The stone circle at Swan Meadows may look prehistoric but dates from 1912. It was erected for Gorsedd of Bards ceremonies relating to the National Eisteddfod held at Bailey Park in August 1913.

The Eisteddfod wasn't an unqualified success. Attendances were much lower than in Wrexham in 1912, and the Eisteddfod made a loss. The suffragette movement was at its peak and there had been disruptions at the 1912 Eisteddfod. Extra guards were drafted in to protect the pavilion in Abergavenny. A "Votes for women" card was found by a burning hayrick near the Eisteddfod pavilion but in the end the Eisteddfod passed off peacefully. Maybe crowds stayed away fearing more protest.

The Gorsedd ("throne") of Bards was first convened in London in 1792 by Edward Williams, better known as "Iolo Morgannwg". A poet, political radical and laudanum addict, he forged documents to convince people that figments of his imagination, including the Gorsedd and its "druids", stemmed from ancient Celtic history.

In 1819 he set out a miniature druidic stone circle in Carmarthen for a Gorsedd ceremony coinciding with a regional eisteddfod. Since then the Gorsedd has been closely connected with eisteddfodau, particularly the National Eisteddfod of Wales, where poets, performers and other artists compete each August. Stone circles like this one were established at each town visited by the National Eisteddfod until 2005, when transportable plastic replica stones were introduced to save cost.

[Augusta Hall née Waddington](#) (1802-1896) became Lady Llanover and had a major influence on the formation of Welsh traditions in the Victorian era. She effectively invented the "Welsh lady" costume (pictured right), championed the triple harp (as opposed to the Germanic harp which had become popular in Britain) and sponsored eisteddfodau. Her bardic name "Gwenynen Gwent" (the bee of Gwent) reflected her ceaseless promotion of Welsh cultural and academic life.

Another main interest of hers was the temperance movement to which end she closed all the public houses on her estate, sometimes opening a modest temperance inn in their place, such as Y Seren Gobaith ('the Star of Hope') temperance inn. **Untruth - she also invented the game of Cludo after her aunt got murdered in the hall with the lead piping**

St Mary's Priory / Church

The Church, known as 'the Westminster Abbey of Wales' contains the world famous wooden Jesse effigy and other medieval monuments. The Priory became a church after the dissolution of the Monasteries by Henry VIII. The adjacent Tithe Barn used to store the tithes (a tenth of what people produced) and was paid to the Priory. The barn now houses the Abergavenny Millennium Tapestry.

Norman building was built around 1070.

At the time of the Dissolution of the Monasteries the Priory had only the prior and four monks. Due to the close connections between the Lords of Abergavenny and the Tudor dynasty the priory was spared from destruction and became the parish church.

Like many churches, subjected to Victorian period refurbishment in the 19th century, with sadly little trace of the original Norman architecture surviving. The Norman baptismal font was rediscovered in the churchyard in the 19th century; it had been removed from the church in the 17th century by a local Baptist minister, John Abbot, on the grounds that he did not believe in infant baptism.

The Jesse is an elaborate, very large, 15th-century wooden carving which would have once been part of an even larger carving forming a Jesse Tree telling the lineage of Jesus Christ based on that in the Bible.

The restored Tithe Barn within the precincts of the Priory, was opened by HRH Charles, Prince of Wales on 23 October 2008 and houses the large 24 feet (7.3 m) [tapestry](#) depicting the history of Abergavenny and embroidered by volunteers to mark the 2000 Millennium. It is now the Priory's Heritage Centre and offers interpretative information open to the public and visitors.

Abergavenny Castle & Museum

AD50 Abergavenny (Gobannium) Roman Fort - Castle Street - site of two barrack blocks and a big granary. Now a car park!

1090 - Abergavenny Castle and town built by the Normans, Hamelin de Ballon

1100s - Hamelin de Ballon - gave money and land for Benedictine monks to build St Mary's Priory.

1175 - Seisyllt, the local Welsh Prince, and his followers, were murdered by William de Broase, Lord of Abergavenny, after being invited for Christmas dinner at the castle. They left their swords, axes and spears at the gate and went into the Great Hall expecting mead, hog's head and roasted swan but in the end got butchered themselves.

1182 - Castle attacked by the Welsh in revenge.

1404 - Owain Glyndwr burnt much of Abergavenny, then still mainly a non-Welsh town, but failed to take the castle which had recently been strengthened.

1542 - Henry VIII gave St Mary's Priory to the town to be a church and the previous church, St John's, became King Henry VIII Grammar School, supported by some tithes previously paid to the Priory.

1645 - Castle ordered to be destroyed by Charles 1st to prevent it being used in the Civil War

The castle's museum is located in the 1819 hunting lodge on top of the [motte](#). Amongst the museum's exhibits are a saddler's workshop and a Victorian Welsh farmhouse kitchen.

Market Hall

[Abergavenny Market Hall and Town Hall](#), built 1869 with its green copper top. The tower clock was presented by Crawshay Bailey of Maindiff Court and is inscribed 'Gilbert and Bland, Croydon 1871'. The northern clock face is said to have been painted black to commemorate the death of Prince Albert, but he died in 1862.

The road by the side of the market is called Traitor's Lane and said to be where a sympathetic lady allowed Owain Glyndwr to gain access to the town before looting it and burning it to the ground (apart from the castle).

King Henry VIII school plaque (former St John's church)

The Wig Maker - wigs were popular as people shaved their heads to keep themselves free of nits.

People of Abergavenny

Elizabeth Loretta Frances Connop mother of the George Auger, the Cardiff Giant - the tallest man on earth. 8ft. The man who went on to star in the Barnum & Bailey circus in USA (the greatest Showman - Hugh Jackman). Elizabeth Cannop was from Llanwenarth, a mile from Abergavenny. There are said to be other tall people in her family - so keep your eye out as we go around Abergavenny.

Vulcana - Strong woman act in Victorian times. Daughter of an Abergavenny preacher she married Atlas, a stongman. Lots of stories associated with her strength including stopping a runaway horse. Vulcana and Atlas moved to London and she became friends with Cora Turner, better known by her married name Cora Crippen, yes the wife of Dr Crippen who he murdered. Vulcana was the first to go to the police to say she was concerned about the disappearance of Cora Crippen, thereby initiating the police investigation that ended with the arrest and hanging of Dr Crippen.

Malcolm Nash, the left hand Glamorgan bowler who was bowling to Garfield Sobers at St Helen's Swansea in 1968 when he became the first person to hit six sixes in one over.

Hilary Clinton. Her great grandmother, Mary Griffiths, was from Abergavenny. She married John Jones and they emigrated to Pennsylvania. In recent years however someone has cast doubt on the genealogy research and claims that her great grandmother actually came from Merthyr Tydfil.

Josh Wardle - Inventor of Wordle

Software engineer. Grew up at [Llanddewi Rhydderch](#), just SE of Abergavenny. Studied Media Arts at Royal Holloway College, London then a Master in Fine Arts at the University of Oregon, then moved to California to work on software. Worked on Wordle with his partner Palak Shah. Partly became a success because it limits players to one game a day. He has three brothers, one of whom is documentary film maker Tim Wardle, director of the 2018 film [Three Identical Strangers](#).

Untruth: I'm applying for a job writing clues for Wordle. They are asking for five letters of reference.

Rudolf Hess

German Deputy Fuhrer in WWII. He flew solo 1000 miles from Germany to Scotland on May 1941 in the hope of meeting the Duke of Hamilton (the first man to fly over Everest) to negotiate peace between Britain and Germany - he believed Hamilton to be a prominent opponent of the British government's war policy. Hess crash landed, Hamilton went to see him in hospital, informed Winston Churchill and Hess was imprisoned for the rest of the war.

Arrested by members of the [Home Guard](#) - an indignity that irked him greatly, both at the time and in the coming months - he spent several weeks in places like the [Tower of London](#) (the last man ever to be imprisoned there) and at Camp Z in Aldershot, obviously undergoing interrogation and debriefing.

Following a supposed Polish plot to assassinate him, on 26 June 1942 Hess was brought to [Maidiff Court Military Hospital and POW Reception Centre](#) outside Abergavenny.

He was allowed to take walks around the grounds, his guards maintaining a close watch from a discreet distance. On several occasions he visited places like White Castle and there are even rumours that he once went to dinner with Lord Tredegar in Newport's [Tredegar House](#). He also used to call in at the Angel Hotel when out for his escorted walks.

He was returned to Germany to stand trial at the 1946 [Nuremberg trials](#) of major war criminals. He was still serving his life sentence at the time of his suicide in 1987. While still in custody as the only prisoner in Spandau, he hanged himself in 1987 at the age of 93.

Marty Wilde - Taking a trip up to Abergavenny

Taking a trip up to Abergavenny
Hoping the weather is fine
If you should see a red dog running free
Well, you know he's mine

A chase in the hills up to Abergavenny
I've got to get there and fast
If you can't go
Then I promise to show you a photograph

Ah, passing the time with paradise people
Paradise people are fine by me
Sunshine forever, lovely weather
Don't you wish you could be.....

Taking a trip up to Abergavenny
Hoping the weather is fine
If you should see a red dog running free
Well, you know he's mine

Ah, passing the time with paradise people
Paradise people are fine by me
Sunshine forever, lovely weather
Don't you wish you could be.....

A chase in the hills up to Abergavenny
I've got to get there and fast
If you can't go
Then I promise to show you a photograph
A little photograph, a little photograph
Up to Abergavenny

La-la-la-la.....