

LOOKING
FOR
LLANTWIT
MAJOR

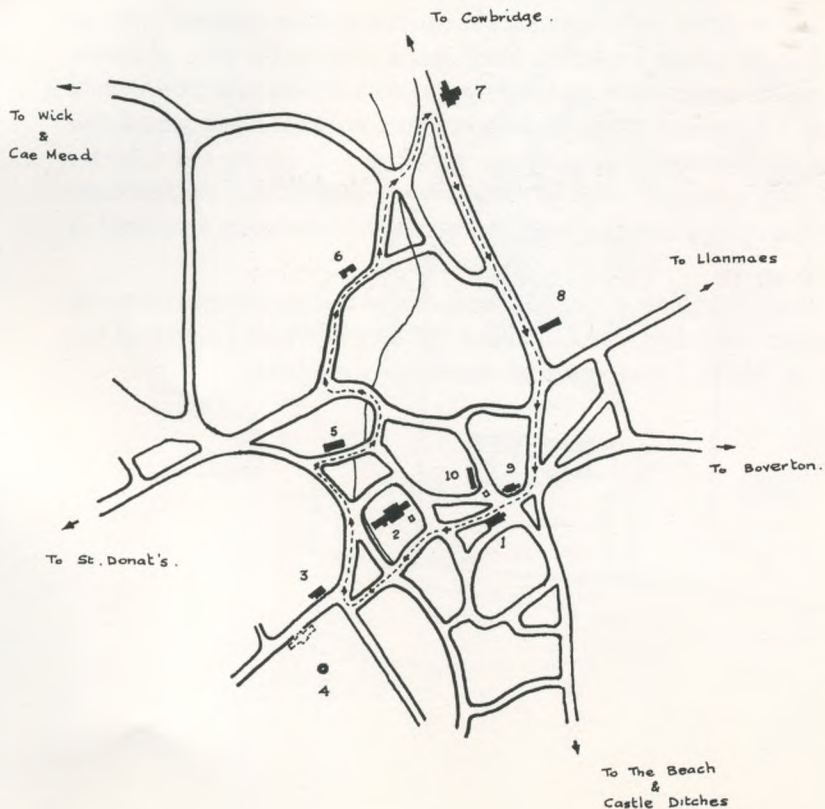


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Llantwit Major - A History Trail.



1. Town Hall
2. St. Iltyd Church
3. Monastic Gatehouse
4. Dovecot & Site of Tythe Barn
5. Plymouth House
6. Llantwit Place
7. Great House
8. Court House
9. Swan Inn
10. White Hart Inn

1.

THE TOWN HALL

The building of the town hall is usually attributed to Gilbert de Clare Lord of Glamorgan 1295 but there is no direct evidence for this. It is more likely the work of the medieval church authorities in connection with the Grange of Tewkesbury Abbey because the earliest written evidence refers to the building as a Guildhall underneath which Treharon Snell had a shop in the time of Henry VIII. The building fell into decay in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when it was farmed out to several individuals for use as a barn with rooms underneath variously used as a school and smithy. During the latter half of the nineteenth century the building was let by the Charity Commission to the Oddfellows Society who undertook its maintenance and most of the functions associated with that society as well as other parochial and civic occasions have since been held in the Town Hall.

The Gastineau drawing of 1840 shows that little change has occurred in this picturesque corner of Llantwit since that time. The original clock was replaced about 1881 by William Thomas of Ivy House (Court House) the father of Marie Trevelyan and noteworthy antiquary.



THE CHURCH

The church almost certainly occupies the site of the original 'Llan' of Illtyd dating from the sixth century. Its continuation during the Dark Ages is testified by the fine collection of stone monuments of that period inside the church.

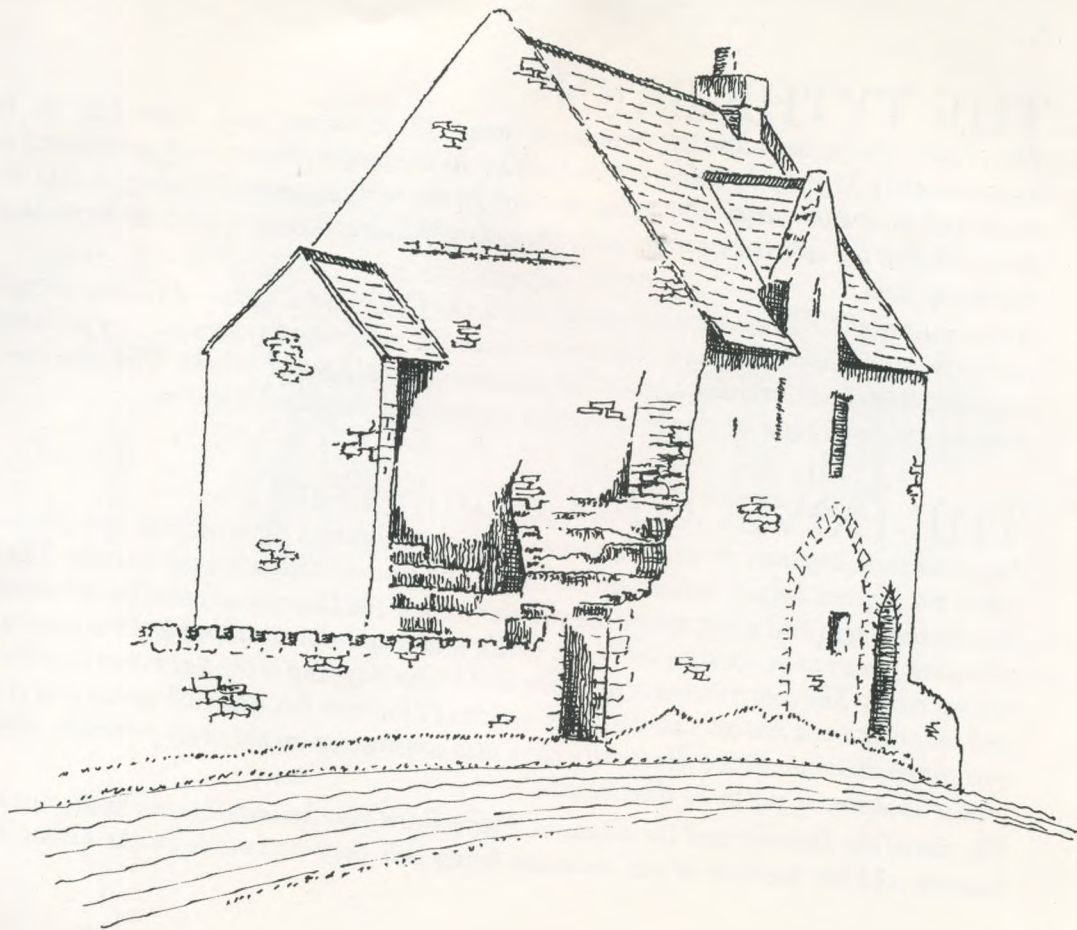
No part of the present church however is older than the twelfth century when it was given to Tewkesbury Abbey by Robert Fitz Hamon, the then Lord of Glamorgan. Subsequently the church was enlarged and the roof raised on several occasions and examples representing the main periods of medieval church architecture can be seen throughout the church. The most recent occurred on the West end with the building of a Chantry, the Lady's Chapel of the West End. This was founded and endowed by Robert Raglan about 1480, but was the first part to fall into ruin after the dissolution of the monasteries and chantries in the time of Henry VIII. The church is of a remarkable size reflecting the relative prosperity of the town with its sizeable population of the parish up to the middle of the fourteenth century after which the Black Death and the Owain Gynedwr revolt brought about an economic collapse, so much so that there were serious proposals at the end of the last century to pull it down.



THE GATEHOUSE

This is the only surviving building of a large group of farm and domestic buildings which once covered the site between the Barnsway and the St. Donats road. This was the Grange of Tewkesbury Abbey, the entrance to which can still be traced in the walled up archways to the front and back of the building. It functioned as a communal farm until the fourteenth century when parts were let to various individuals to work on their own account. Two excavations of the site have been made, the first 1911 - 14 of the Bishops Palace fields, where a large building, probably the bailiffs house was uncovered, and the second in 1937 under Nash Williams when the remainder of the site was excavated. Both these digs yielded a great deal of medieval pottery and iron work.

The parts of the grange had been let or sold off long before the remainder was bought by Edward Stradling in Elizabethan times. The Gatehouse and the Dovecot on the opposite side of Barnsway date from the thirteenth century, and has remained in the hands of the church to the present day.



THE TYTHE BARN

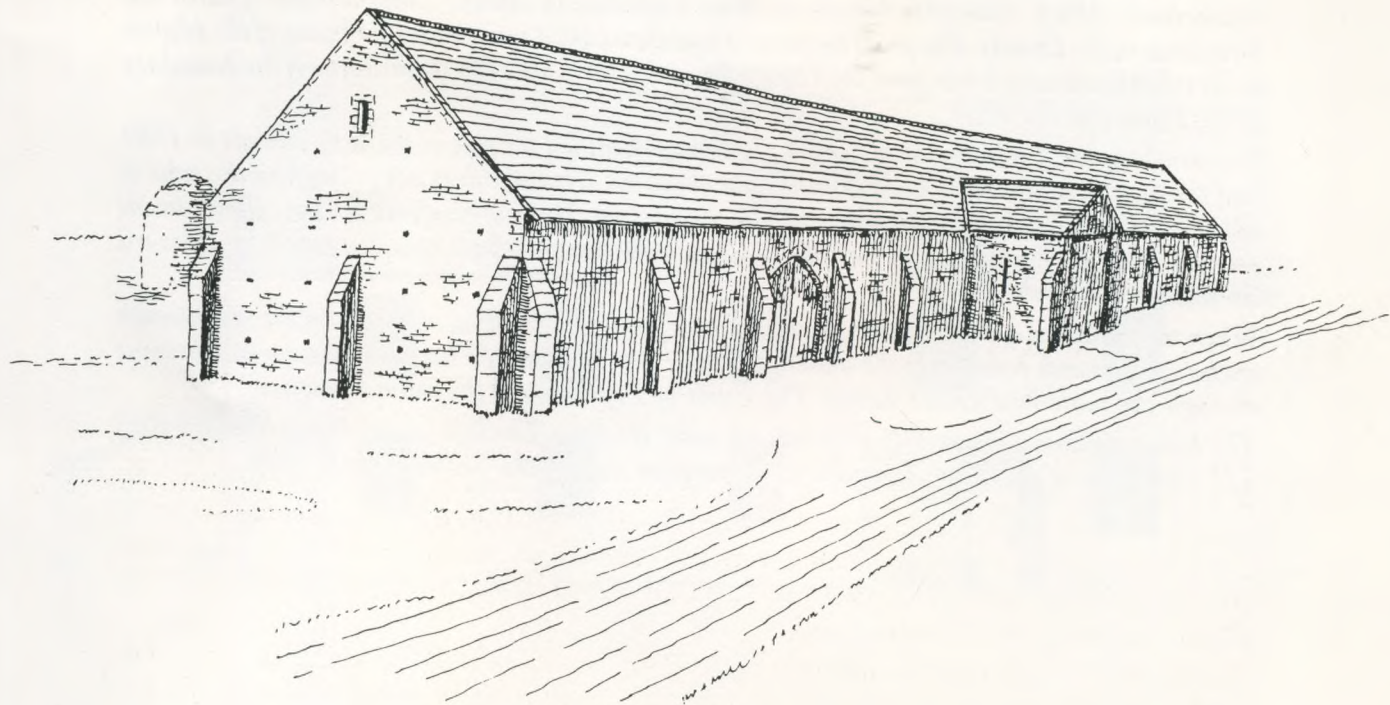
The Tythe Barn at Llantwit measured some 35 ft. across and some 122 ft. long and approximately 25 ft. to the ridge. It was built in the thirteenth century with substantial buttressed walls and stout oak trusses supporting the roof. In the early nineteenth century it was recorded as being filled to the roof with corn closely packed, while eleven large wheat stacks encumbered the adjoining field.

At the time of the Tythe commutation in 1836, the Dean and Chapter of Gloucester allowed the roof to be taken down and sold, following which the walls were systematically pillaged by local builders. It had all but disappeared at the time of the Second World War and now nothing remains above ground of this magnificent example of medieval building.

THE DOVECOT (Columbarium)

Dovecots were common in most medieval granges and farms, especially in corn growing regions where the pigeons helped to clear up the waste and spillage following the harvest. The birds were kept for their eggs and meat, where the circular form of the Dovecot allowed the maximum number of nesting places to be constructed in the walls, and a circular wooden platform gave access to the nesting boxes. The construction of the stone roof by overlapping of the flat stones is called corbelling and was employed not only in the construction of Dovecots but also in Pigsties and it is surmised that the earliest monastic cells locally were also constructed on the same principle, although their precise location is yet to be discovered.

The site of the Dovecot and the adjacent Tythe Barn once belonged to the walled'in centre of the Grange and the position of the enclosure being still very noticeable in the Great Ley field.



PLYMOUTH HOUSE

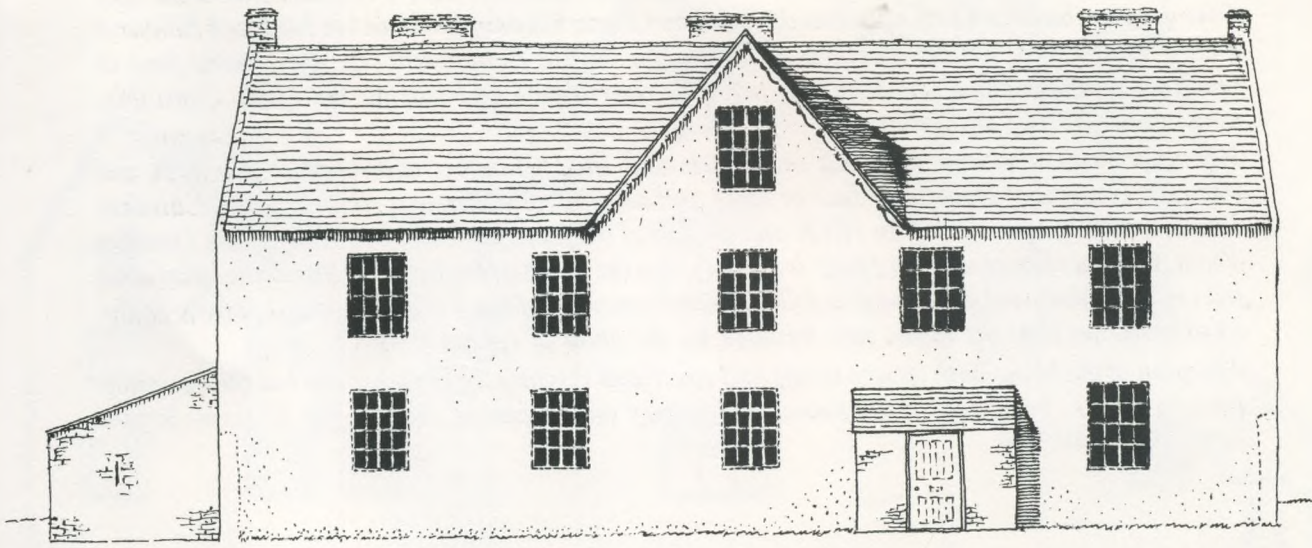
When the properties of the dissolved monasteries were sold off by the Crown, the Grange of Tewkesbury Abbey, otherwise known as West Llantwit or Abbots Llantwit was sold to the Stradlings of St. Donats. The great house as it was then called was the manor house of the Manor of West Llantwit which ran from the Ogney Brook by the Church to Rhosillian on the boundary of St. Donats to the West.

Edward Stradling, a kinsman of Sir Ed. Stradling obtained the title of the little Manor in 1584 and the present house dates at least from that time, but certainly does not go back to the time of Illtyd as Iolo Morgannwg suggested, nor was it one of the Halls of residence for the college. In all probability it was originally a bailiffs house or court house which was improved by Edward Stradling.

When the male line of the Stradlings ended with Lamrock Stradling of Roath in the seventeenth century, the manor reverted to the maternal side — the Lewises of Van who subsequently became through the male heir Other Lewis, The Earls of Plymouth of the second creation.

The house continued essentially a farmhouse until recently. The last farmer being Morgan Rees J.P. chairman of the War Agricultural Committee during the Second World War.

PLAN OF THE HOUSE



LLANTWIT PLACE

This house is easier to date than most, being mentioned in a book by John Stradling "The Lower Burroughs Dispute". Stradling says that the house was built by a Catholic lawyer Griffith Williams who moved from Candleston on the edge of the Merthyr Mazr Warren. The house was three quarters built in 1596 and soon occupied by Grace, his daughter and her husband Edmund Vann. Vann was himself a lawyer of Grays Inn with a flamboyant life style, being fond of smoking, giving picnics and banquets near the churchyard and teasing the High Constable, Christopher Portrey of Boverton.

Edmund Vann was also involved in a celebrated Star Chamber case with Roger Seys, the Attorney General of Boverton Place in 1597 and heavily fined. He was succeeded by his brother Edward who became Sheriff in 1612, and the last of the family to occupy the house was Dorothy Vann, who was living there in 1680. It is likely that the house as predicted by Stradling, soon after fell into disrepair and only the dim folk memory remained of the Vann (or Avan) family in the local tradition that the house was haunted by the ghost of a Dutchman.

The plan of the house with its two wings and courtyard is typically Elizabethan but the enclosing curtain wall so very close to the house itself is very reminiscent of the Griffith Williams former house at Candleston.



THE GREAT HOUSE

This house has always been associated with the Nichol family. Its square ground plan and gable elevations suggest that it is late fifteenth or early sixteenth century with the later addition of a South wing. This is most certainly the house referred to in a conveyance by John Nichol of London, Artist, to his mother in 1620 for the sum of £26. At the time the house was generally known from its dominating position near the Turngate Well (Turkey Street). About this time it ceased to be the principal house of the Nichol family, who had now taken up residence at the Ham, following the marriage of Illyd Nichol with Cecile Turberville, but other members of the family, many of whom were Chirurgeons continued to occupy the house well into the eighteenth century.

Early this century the house was in a state of disrepair, but fortunately it has now been restored.



THE COURTHOUSE

The house was generally known as Ivy House until recently. It was the home of William Thomas who donated the clock on the Town Hall. He had a great antiquarian interest in the town which he passed on to his daughter Marie Trevelyan.

Earlier in the nineteenth century the house was occupied by Elias Basset, the respected Solicitor whose name appears on most of the deeds in the first half of that century. Whether Elias Basset was the builder is not certain. It certainly has Georgian features which suggest late eighteenth or early nineteenth century building.

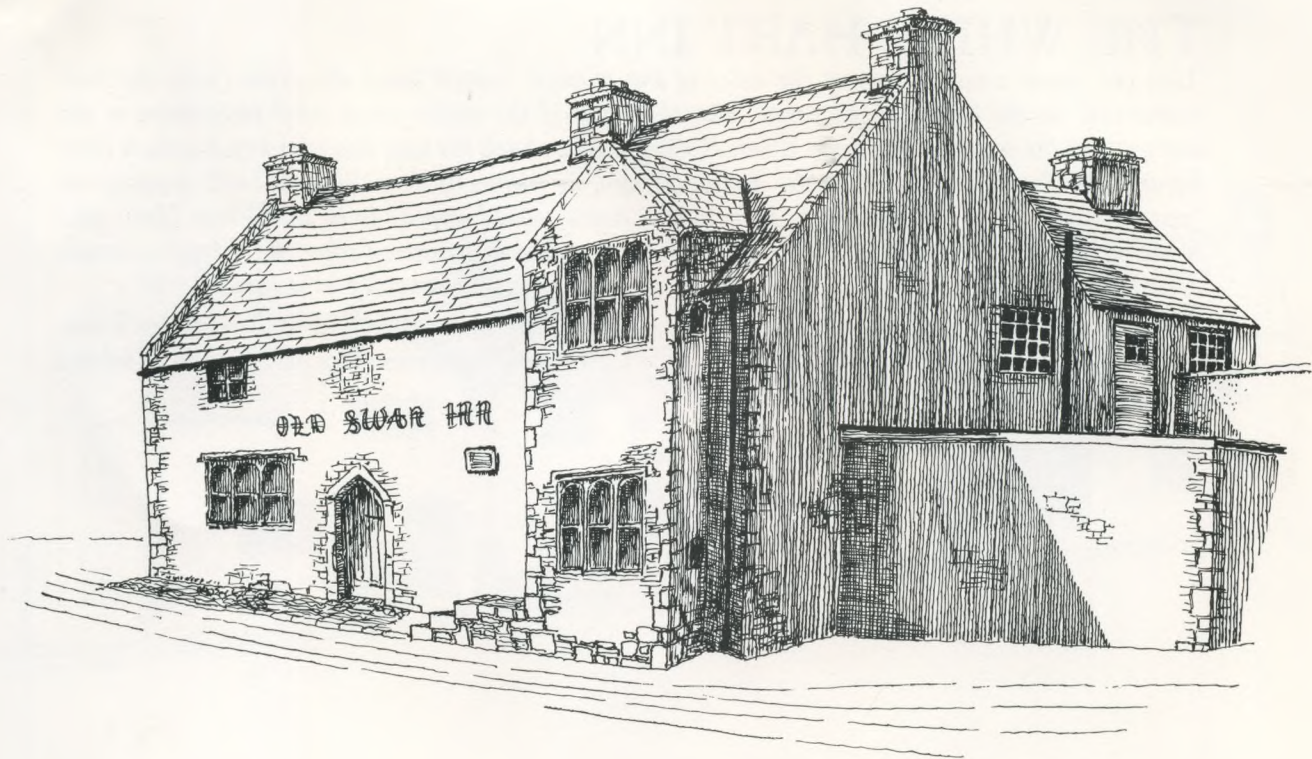


THE SWAN INN

The problem with Inns is that they were not generally identified by name until the nineteenth century, but were simply known by the name of the landlord.

However the Swan, with its mounting block and its central position suggests a semi public building from the beginning. It may be one of the houses built by the Raglan family in the fifteenth century or it may have been the house of the Bailiff of the manor. However it was certainly in use as a public house by the time of the Civil War 1642, when the Maddocks family used these and nearby premises for casting and issuing brass coins or tokens. (Examples can be seen in the National Museum in Cardiff.) Hence the reputation of the Swan as a mint, although wrongly attributed to the time of Gilbert de Clare.

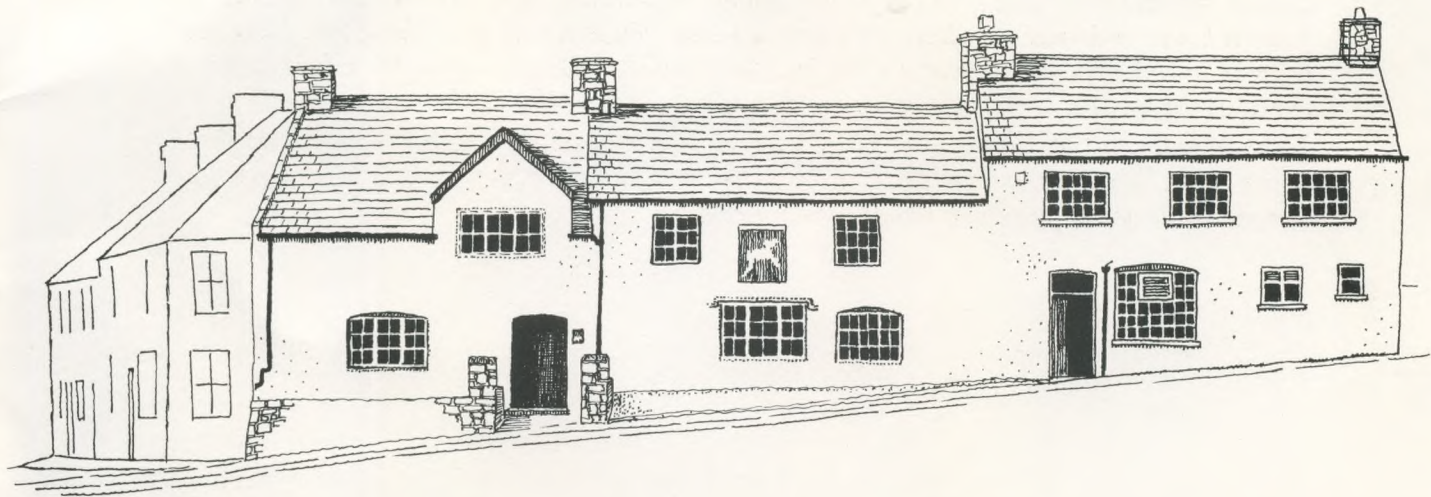
More recently and into the twentieth century, the pub was the centre for the holding of the Court Leet for the manor of Llantzvit under the Lord, The Marquis of Bute.



THE WHITE HART INN

This old house occupies one of the sides of the triangle which faced the cross (now the war memorial) in the centre of the town. The thickness of the walls are a good indication of the antiquity of the original building. When Robert Raglan built his new house in 1465, which later became the Presbytery and then the Junior School, he mentions that this was built opposite his 'yestern house' or former dwelling. This yestern house would appear to be the White Hart and being so would have been one of the first buildings raised in Llantwit after the Glyndwr revolt destroyed most of the town. It can be dated therefore, circumstantially to around 1420.

There is no record of the Inn ever being used as a court in spite of the so-called judges room, however it is likely that the coolstring courts for trying scolding wives were held here by Richard Punter in the early decades of the Nineteenth century.



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