

## Cowbridge Grammar School & its Church Street Buildings

### Cowbridge: the historical background

Cowbridge is a small town of about 6,000 inhabitants, lying in the undulating and fertile Vale of Glamorgan, about 14 miles west of Cardiff and six miles south of the hills and valleys of the south Wales coalfield. It has always been on the major east-west route through Glamorgan, from the Roman *Via Julia Maritima* through to the stage-coach and turnpike routes of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the A48 of the twentieth century, though the A48 today deviates to by-pass the town. Despite its small size, Cowbridge has long acted as the 'central place' for the Vale of Glamorgan, exercising a marketing, retail and commercial role far greater than its population size would appear to warrant.

Very few prehistoric remains have been found in Cowbridge: a Neolithic standing stone in Eastgate, and a stone axe found on the Girls' High School site, and a stone structure – probably a burial cairn - of the Bronze Age exposed during excavations at 11a Westgate. The evidence for Roman settlement is however much more extensive: artefacts and buildings have been uncovered from the Town Hall in the east (coins and pottery) to Hopyard Meadow (a carved lion, probably a funerary monument) in the west. The main road through Cowbridge follows the line of the Roman road. On the northern side, there have been many finds in road-side sites, and somewhat further north, the Arthur John car park exposed a Roman military bath house and a small cemetery, while the Bear Field showed signs of industrial activity. South of the road, there has been less opportunity to discover the town's Roman past, although evidence of Roman settlement has been obtained from some digs on the south side of Westgate. Whether Cowbridge is Bomium, the town named in *Iter XII* of the Antonine Itinerary, is not yet clear; what is clear, however, is that Cowbridge was a Roman settlement of some size.

Of the history of Cowbridge between the departure of the Romans and the post-Norman conquest settlement of south Wales, there is little evidence; the documented history of Cowbridge begins with the granting of the borough charter in 1254.

The Lord of Glamorgan, Richard de Clare, established what was effectively a 'new town' essentially for trading purposes: it was created as a market town deriving income from tolls. To control the market trade, the town walls were built very soon after the granting of the charter. Access to the market, which had been established in the centre of the town, was only possible through four gates in the walls, where the tolls were charged. Today the town walls – though certainly rebuilt or repaired from time to time - exist clearly around Old Hall gardens in the south-west of the town core, while the Grammar School boundary wall is assumed to lie along the line of the ancient town walls. Of the four gates, the South Gate is now the only one which still stands, and is indeed the only one remaining in all the former walled towns of Glamorgan.

Essential to the Lord of Glamorgan's revenues from the town were the burgage rentals. In the planning of the settlement, plots were laid out, usually extending back from the road to the walls of the town. Houses were built on the roadside of these long narrow plots, and gardens occupied the rear. The inhabitants of the borough, the burgesses, who had certain rights and privileges, had to pay a rental of a shilling a year

for each burgage plot. As details of the income from these burgage plots are known from the late-thirteenth century onwards, the number of occupied plots can be calculated. In 1263, the income from burgage rents was £2.19s, showing that (with an annual income of a shilling per plot) there were 59 burgage plots. An examination of the detailed burgage rentals from 1738 onwards suggests that within the walled town area there were 59½ burgages, and so we can estimate that the walled area was almost completely settled by 1263.

[Robinson, without the benefit of the use of the later rental details, suggested that within the walls the number of plots “would have been at most 80-90”; Soulsby and Jones, similarly without knowledge of the burgage rentals, suggested 70; James, 70. All agree that the walled town would have been fully settled before the end of the thirteenth century. *Sources: Cowbridge, Archaeology and Topography, David M Robinson, GGAT, 1980; Soulsby & Jones, in Robinson, op cit; Cowbridge and Llanblethian Past and Present, James and Francis, Cowbridge, 1979*].

Though the intersection of Church Street with High Street creates some complications in the layout of the burgage plots within Church Street itself, and the existence of the church 'blocks off' a large part of the south-east side of Church Street, it is clear that burgage plots were laid out here as well.

The burgage rentals in the Bute Collection at the National Library of Wales give information about landowners and tenants from 1738 onwards; land tax assessments also tell of ownership and tenancy from 1773. The tithe map of 1843 (see Fig 1) gives us the first detailed map of individual properties, while censuses from 1851 give more details of those residing in the houses.

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**Letter from Mr Daniel Walters, Free School, Cowbridge to the Earl of Bute – dated 21<sup>st</sup> July 1786**

My Lord,

In consequence of the great increase of Cowbridge School it is found necessary to alter and enlarge the house. The intention is to erect a new kitchen and chamber over it and to convert the present into a dining hall and sitting room for the boarders. For this purpose the society of Jesus College has subscribed £20 to which Dr Howe has very generously added £10 and on account of the great advantages which the (?) county must necessarily derive from the prosperity of this seminary has recommended an application to the principal gentlemen in the vicinity for their assistance.

*Bute deeds (held in Glamorgan Record Office) L/44/32*

*(Transcript by B. Alden)*

*Note – the Revd. Daniel Walters became headmaster of the school in 1783. He died of consumption at the age of 23 in 1787*

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## **COWBRIDGE GRAMMAR SCHOOL SITE**

This occupies the land in the south-east corner of the walled town. Architectural evidence suggests that a church had been built before the end of the thirteenth century, though no written evidence survives. Such a valuable site between the church, Church Street (earlier known as Rood Street), South Gate and the walls, was probably divided into at least three burgage plots, with early-medieval buildings being erected here, but the earliest written record extant for the complete plot of land is of 1603. This was a conveyance of the property (not at that time divided into separate burgage plots) from Edmund Toolye of Llanblethian to Anthony Griffith of Cowbridge, but it must have been almost immediately transferred to Sir Edward Stradling of St Donat's as it was the latter who caused the school to be built on this site in or around 1608.

*1603 Conveyance, Edmund Toolye of Llanblethian, tailor, to Anthony Griffith of Cowbridge, mercer, that toft and parcel of land lying between the cemetery on the east, the walls of the town on the south, and Roode Street on the west*

Sir Edward and his son, Sir John Stradling, were the founders of the school, which thrived and was considered to be of some consequence in the seventeenth century. Thus it is not surprising that Cowbridge Free School and its site (and other lands in the Vale of Glamorgan) were purchased from the Stradling family by Sir Leoline Jenkins, Secretary of State to Charles II and a former pupil of the school; he bequeathed them in his will to Jesus College, Oxford, which owned the school from 1685, the date of the bequest, until 1920.

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### **The schoolroom and school house**

The schoolhouse was little more than a sizeable cottage with a porch near where the front door is today, while the schoolroom ran at right angles to the street (see Figs 2 and 3). The schoolroom fell into a poor state of repair within a century or so; the east wall gave way in 1734 and part of the roof collapsed, necessitating much rebuilding. A new and separate building was also put up in the 1730s as a dining room, with two chambers and a garret over – this is the building which is today referred to as the boot house. Reconstruction and maintenance continued on the main school (a considerable amount of work was carried out in 1764, for example) and eventually a scholar's dining room was created in the schoolhouse. The condition of the school continued to deteriorate, however, until the building was judged to be beyond repair in the mid-nineteenth century.

Jesus College archives contain a plan of the former buildings drawn in 1847 by John Prichard, the diocesan architect who was engaged by Jesus College to replace the dilapidated Cowbridge School. This plan (Fig 4) shows the narrow school house – about 27 metres in length but only 7 metres deep – with the schoolroom to the north-east, running at right angles to the school house and to the street. The schoolroom was about 13 metres long and 6 metres wide. Behind the school were two flower gardens, and then, beyond a wall running northeast - southwest, one of the two kitchen gardens. The other kitchen garden was northeast of the schoolroom, where the tally court stands today.

Behind the kitchen at the southwest end of the property was a 'back court'. Adjoining the southwest boundary wall was the building then described as 'Stable and Brewhouse', ie the boot house and stable block.

The 33 metre length of the old school was somewhat smaller than the present building which is nearly 42 metres long. The maximum width of the present building is nearly twice that of the pre-1847 school, and extends back from the road to the position of the earlier wall separating the flower gardens from the rear kitchen garden. Prichard complained about the inconvenient nature of the old buildings: it would seem that the only access to the earlier schoolroom was via the porch and the central passage and then the flower garden, and the headmaster's ground floor accommodation was positioned between the schoolroom and the corridor, with the scholars' dining room beyond.

An extension to Prichard's building was put up at the end of the nineteenth century, when the 'corridor block' running at right angles to the schoolroom, was built. This was subsequently extended beyond the line of the garden walls to accommodate the boiler house. It was noted that this must have extended into the town ditch around the former town walls, as no solid rock was found when the foundations were being put into place.

### **The boot house and stable block**

There is evidence for at least three different uses for the building.

When it was first erected in the 1730s it was built to serve as a dining room for the pupils, with chambers above.

Before 1847 it had been subdivided to create stables in the north-western part, and a brew-house in the south-eastern part.

A plan, undated but probably reflecting the situation in 1960 (Fig 5), shows the building subdivided into four internal rooms on the ground floor: from northwest to southeast, coal storage (with stairs up), tool storage, boot room with boiler, and coal storage, with stairs up. Outside were two earth closets.

A yard separated the building from the main school; there was probably a well in the yard, outside the boot room.

### **The boundary wall**

The town walls when first built were at least seven feet wide, faced on both sides with dressed stone, and with a rubble interior. The existing wall around the Grammar School garden is only just over a foot wide, and dressed on both sides. As this garden wall includes a bastion at the south-east corner which mirrors the original bastion in the south-west corner, it has always been assumed that the wall follows the line of the original town walls. Furthermore, that part of the 'corridor block' which extends beyond the line of the garden walls was built on to the alluvium of the town ditch, which formerly ran around the outside of the town walls.

## THE 'DEPOT' (or Covered Playground) SITE

This site on the western side of Church Street adjoins the two remaining cottages (6 and 7 Church Street). Throughout the known history of the site it has been occupied by two houses or cottages which for convenience are numbered 8 and 9 Church Street. The land slopes very gently upwards towards the west away from the street, though at the rear the adjoining properties to the north have gardens up to a metre higher than the depot site itself.

The site occupies two burgages and was undoubtedly settled soon after the creation of the borough of Cowbridge in 1254. The earliest documentation however, is of 1701 when one of the two plots was leased to Alice a Dean of Cowbridge by William Williams of Cullompton in Devon, thereby giving Alice a Dean possession of the two plots.

1701 Lease for 3 lives - William Williams of Cullompton, Devon, saddler, to Alice a Dean of Cowbridge, widow, for 11 guineas, one house and garden etc in the lane leading from the Cross to the church of the said town and adjoining the now dwelling house of Alice a Dean, for the lives of Frances Dean, daughter of Alice; Ann Barton, daughter of John Barton, innkeeper, Cowbridge; Matthew Barton, son of John Barton  
*Glamorgan Record Office, D/D Xjr 8*

From subsequent burgage rentals of the eighteenth century, it appears that the two burgages came into the possession of Ann Carne, widow, and in 1744 one of them (probably No 8) was described as a house and stable.

1738	No 8, Church St.- Anne Carne, widow, 1 burgage in ten of Morgan Miles tailor, 1/-	BR
	No 9- Anne Carne, widow, 1 burgage in ten of Richard Gregory, 1/-	BR
1744	No 8- Anne Carne, widow for house and stable	BR
	No 9- The same, tenant Mr Gregory	BR (burgage rents)

By 1762 ownership had passed to the Thomas family of Tregroes who continued to own the two properties until they were sold to Jesus College, Oxford (to provide facilities for the Grammar School) in 1868.

The stable of No 8 Church Street was frequently let quite separately from the house, as can be noted from the burgage rentals and land tax assessments.

1762-78	No 8 (Church St)- Morgan Thomas Clerk, late Anne Carne widow, owner; Mrs Hudson widow, tenant, house and stable, 1 burgage	BR
	No 9- owner as above; tenant late Mrs Gregory	BR

1773	No 8- Edward Thomas, Esq for the stable, 1/-; do for Hopkin David, 2/-	LTA
	No 9- Nathaniel Young, 5/-	LTA

	No 8- house, 6 windows	Window tax
	No 9- house, 13 windows	Window Tax
1783	No 8-Edward Thomas, Esq, 1 burgage; house; tenants Mr Cole and Ann Rosser	BR
	No 9-as above, ten Nathaniel Young	BR
1784	No 8- Edward Thomas, o, John Cole, occ stable, 1/-; Anne Rosser, occ House	LTA
	No 9- Edward Thomas, o, Elizabeth Williams, widow, occ	LTA
1784-1804 inclusive	No 8-Edward Thomas, Esq; ten Evan David, 1b; house	BR
	No 9-as above; tenant Mrs Williams, changing to Mrs Savours between 1798 and 1804	BR
1800	No 8- Edward Thomas, o, a stable, 1/4d; Evan David, occ, 2/8d	LTA (land tax assessment)
	No 9- Edward Thomas, o, Mrs Savours, occ, 6/8d	LTA
1815	No 8-Edward Thomas, Esq; ten Evan David, 1b; house	BR
	No 9-as above; ten Mrs Savours	BR
1815	Land Tax Assessment is identical	
1830	No 8- Mrs Davies, Tregrose, o, Wm Morris stable 1/4d, Evan David, house and gdn, 2/8d	LTA
	No 9- Mrs Davies, Tregrose, o, Wm Morris Ho and gdn, 6/8d	LTA
1833	No 8-Edward Thomas, Esq, o; ten Evan David	BR
	No 9-Edward Thomas, Esq, o; ten James Davies	BR

*The tithe map of 1843 does not give any extra information, although it shows different tenants.*

1843	No 8 – William Thomas, o, Hannah Howe, occ	Tithe
	No 9 – William Thomas, o, Charles Redwood, occ	Tithe

*Census information for 1851 shows the following:*

1851 No 8 – Hannah Howe, widow of woollen manufacturer, employing 1, b Eglwysilan and 2 daughters (Mary, 30, and Charlotte, 18) and 2 lodgers (Thos Goodfellow, carpenter, b Llandaff, and Richard Aubrey, 25, wheelwright, b St Hilary )

No 9 – Mathew Morgan, 45, gardener, b.Bonvilston and Elizabeth Morgan, 46, b.Penllyn

*The census does not show details of how the houses were occupied but we know that some of the rooms of the larger house, No 9, were used as an office by William Edmondes of Llanblethian. He embezzled £1200 from the Bridgend and Cowbridge Union, and committed suicide in an upper room of the house in 1855. David Jones of Wallington, the historian of the Vale in the nineteenth century, recollected seeing, as he went to church on the following day, some of the brains of the deceased on the windows of the room.*

1861 No 8 (probably) -Hannah Howe, 68, cotton and woollen weaver, and dau Mary, 38, and lodger Thos Morgan, 24, blacksmith, St Hilary Census

*Hannah Howe was the last hand-weaver in Cowbridge; she must have soon left the property, and both houses were then used by the Grammar School as confirmed in a letter from the headmaster of the School to the bursar of Jesus College.*

27/2/1868, letter from Thomas Williams, headmaster of Cowbridge Grammar School, to Mr Bursar of Jesus College:

“A small property – 2 cottages with gardens, fronting the school, will shortly be sold. . . of one of the cottages I am tenant, using it for the daily work of the school in part (as a classroom where one master works) and having an infirmary in case of illness, supplying also 2 studies for senior boys. The other cottage is inhabited by my manservant. The rent of both cottages amounts to about £25 a yr.” [*Jesus College Archives*]

*Both properties were sold by the Tregroes estate to Jesus College Oxford for the use of Cowbridge School in 1868. (Map, Fig 6)*

23/10/1868, conveyance, JB Dawson to Jesus College, two houses in Church Street, bounded on N by stables of WM Alexander of Cardiff and a garden belonging to Mrs Mary Ann Thomas of Cowbridge

The houses continued to be used by the school for some time, that nearer the South Gate being used for both dormitories and classrooms. [*A description of the houses in the 1870s is provided as an appendix*]. They gradually fell into disrepair, and were demolished in 1894. They were replaced by lawns at the front and by a drill shed, carpentry workshop and lavatory at the back of the site.

1894 “The gloomy old cottages have now entirely vanished, and a drill shed, carpenter's shop and lavatory have emerged.”  
Editorial, *The Bovian*, July 1894

1894 “The headmaster alluded to the great event of the year, the demolition of the old and ruinous cottages which had been for so long an eyesore... The space thus opened up with the two large stretches of turf and the gay flower bed running along one side.... certainly a great addition to the charms of Church Street”  
*Comments on Speech Day in The Bovian, No 3, Nov 1894, p 7*

June 1899 ‘A new and larger carpenter’s shop in process of construction. The old one will be used as a bicycle house.’  
*Bovian*

This land and buildings, together with the school buildings, were conveyed to the Cowbridge Grammar School Trust in 1919, though the Jesus College archives record the final conveyance in 1920.

1920: Conveyance of site and buildings of Cowbridge Grammar School, and property on the other side of Church Street, Jesus College to Glamorgan County Council.  
*[Jesus College Archives]*

The drill shed became known as 'the covered playground' and was used for PE until the gymnasium on Town Mill Road was built just before the second world war; the carpentry workshop became eventually the 'classics shed' and was used as such until the development of comprehensive education in 1974. The building was unused for a few years until the use of the site as a depot for South Glamorgan CC.

APPENDIX : THE COTTAGES IN THE 1870S

"The larger house nearest to Mrs. Edmond's garden was quite a commodious dwelling, and had been occupied in past ages by folk of the professional class. This was utilised for school purposes. The other was smaller, being more of a cottage, and was occupied for many years by someone in the school employ. Between it and Mr. John's cottage was a large stable, the pitched passage from the street to it still remaining in the irregular pavement. Over the doorway of the stable was a large lintel of fine sandstone known as quarella stone upside down. This is now to be seen over the door way in the play shed, right side up. There is little doubt but that it originally had been a mantelpiece taken three hundred and fifty years ago, for that was the age of the building, from some ruined house near at hand. In its wrong position over the stable door it was long an object of curiosity.

"The College spent a considerable sum in fitting up the larger house, the depth of which can be seen from the position of the angle in Mrs. Edmond's garden wall. There was a pleasant stone porch that came out almost to the channel by the roadside, a favourite place with boys to sit and gossip out of school hours. Passing from the porch through a thoroughfare you came to a little court-yard gaily smiling with flower beds, but, alas, these did not remain very long. At the end of the court-yard was an open scullery with a pump where excellent water was obtained. On warm summer days it was a pure joy to get someone to pump over your head and incidentally down your neck. A slight depression at top of the left-hand lawn still marks the position of this old well. "Here for a good many years the boys kept rabbits, jackdaws, and other small animals, and great trade at one time was done with the day boys in this kind of live-stock. Pistol-shooting was also freely carried on behind in the garden. How it was that no-one was shot is a mystery still. A Plum tree that bore freely caused many an internal ache, and the deadly nature of a green plum was then learnt by painful experience. This tree was only quite recently removed . . . !

"Two of the front rooms, upstairs and down, were used as class rooms and many a whacking was administered in the mathematical room above. I am afraid we played the fool in the lower one instead of writing Latin verse, taking advantage of the good nature of the classical master who was too lenient with us. Still there was a limit even to his patience and occasionally his wrath would boil over and then it was only the fact of the ceiling being low and thus preventing the stick from going too high that saved our skins from being cut through . . .

"In one corner of the upper class room there were dark splashes on the old planks of the flooring which always filled us with awe, for they were said to be the marks of human blood shed years before under terrible circumstances. Such stains really never come out of wood and undoubtedly tradition in this case was founded on fact.

"The other rooms were fitted up as boys' studies. There were four altogether. As the writer was only a small boy and the occupiers of those rooms were high up in the sixth, real heroes and unapproachable by mere contemptible lower school



boys, he cannot tell what went on. Whispers went round at times of marvellous feats of cookery being achieved even to the roasting of a goose . . ." [*The Bovian*, No 62, June 1914]

1894 Demolition of these buildings mentioned in a Speech Day report. *Bovian No 3*, page 7, November 1894

1920 Conveyance of grammar school's site and buildings, and above property, from Jesus College, Oxford to Glamorgan County Council' *Jesus College archives*

### **The Talley Court**

July 1896 Letter suggesting that the old playground adjoining the big schoolroom be turned into a fives court. It is already used for a similar game, and by building up one of the walls and cementing the floor it would be turned into a real court.

Nov 1897 Letter...."as extensive alterations are being made to the old fives court....lovers of the old game of Talley..." *Bovian magazines*

2006 The long-redundant talley court was demolished to make a car parking area for the residents of the new apartments in what had been the former Grammar School. Holy Cross church, behind, consequently became much more on display from Church Street.

*Researched & written by Jeff Alden*