

## HISTORICAL SUMMARY OF St QUENTIN'S CASTLE

### LLANBLETHIAN

The castle stands on the high ground, 1.5 km south west of Cowbridge. It was built between 1312 and 1314 by Gilbert de Clare and, it is believed, was left unfinished at his death. In 1311, Gilbert was keeper of the realm during Edwards II's absence in Scotland, where Gilbert also fought against Robert the Bruce. He was killed at the Battle of Bannockburn.

Gilbert was a descendant of Sir Richard de Clare who had acquired the manor of Llanblethian in 1245. Prior to this, Llanblethian had been part of the Lordship of Talyvan, as assigned to Robert de St Quentin by Fitzhammon. The male line having failed, the St Quentins had disappeared from the scene long before the present castle was started. Had there been an earlier construction by the St Quentins to explain the name ?

Gilbert was succeeded by his sister Elinor who married Hugh Spencer (Hugh the Despenser), Chamberlain to Edward II and executed at Harford in 1325. Through the Spencer line it belonged to Edward Lord Despenser who died here in 1375, probably as a result of the campaigns alongside the Black Prince in France.

Through marriage and succession, the castle was subsequently owned in turn by the Earls of Worcester, Warwick, Salisbury and the Duke of Gloucester.

Confiscated by Henry VII and given to his uncle Jasper, Duke of Bedford, it reverted to Henry VIII on Jasper's death. Recorded as the 'King's property' by John Leyland in 1540, he described it as a prison, as already noted in 1477.

Included in the series of engraving by the Bucks' in 1740 as owned by Viscount Windsor. A century later, Captain William Royds is the owner and a contemporary census shows the castle apparently inhabited by a man and a boy (guardians?). The current owner purchased the castle twenty six years ago.

The principal remains now consist of the keep of three floors with two demi-hexagonal towers set forward from the remains of the curtain wall. The passage contains the openings for a double portcullis with covering loopholes from the flanking guardroom. There are openings to the dungeons below.

What should be Cowbridge's principal historical building is in a disgraceful state of neglect, almost invisible under the vegetation; the ivy is worked deep into the stonework. At different heights tree trunks of several inches diameter are rooted in the walls; with the action of the wind, these act as giant levers prising out the stone, masonry and coping alike. Very large trees around the keep menace it by both their height and root systems.

The grounds of the castle contain several mounds and doorways (please see plan). Under proper management, these could be examined for possibilities of earlier structures to Gilbert de Clare's and perhaps solve the question of the castle's name.

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## LLANBLETHIAN (St QUENTIN'S) CASTLE

The impressive gatehouse of the castle confronts all who drive past. Covered in ivy and with a sad air of neglect, it has a fascinating history.

The castle stands on high ground falling to the West and North about a mile to the South West of the walled town of Cowbridge. Stone walls surround an irregular rectangle about 210' x 180'. In the centre of these is an overgrown mound with walls, visible in places, 8' thick, suggesting a tower or keep. The North East corner contains the remains of a mural stair and passage together with a section of battered outer face. It may well date from the time the St Quentin's were Lords of Talyfan and owned the manor of Llanblethian in the 12th century..

The splendid gatehouse is later and was probably built by Gilbert de Clare, Lord of Glamorgan in the early 14th century before his death at the battle of Bannockburn in 1314, in the fashion of castle building of that time. There are three floors to the gatehouse and two half hexagonal towers set well forward of the curtain but their backs flank with the inner face. The passage was defended by two portcullises and flanked by guardrooms with covering roofs.

One can only surmise that it must have been in good condition and could provide reasonable accommodation as a later owner Edward, Lord Despenser, he of Glamorgan, died there probably between 10 and 12 November 1375. Edward, like Gilbert, was a very great magnate and friend of the reigning king.

We know that in later years of 1400's and mid 1500's it was used as a prison.

Expert care and attention would preserve this castle and enable the public to enjoy it.