

# Castle steeped in legendary tales of mysterious dwellers

**THE sleepy village of Llanblethian lies one mile south west of Cowbridge, with attractive houses looking down on the area below.**

A gentleman called Thomas Carlyle wrote about *"The cheerful group of human homes clustered like sleeping cataract of white houses with trees overlooking and fringing it dotted over the hillside overlooking the village in a hollow"*.

Carlyle's friend, John Sterling (1806-44), lived at Llanblethian. He was a journalist and critic on the affairs of the Peninsula War, writing about military matters as he was a retired Army Officer.

He lived over the brow of the hill at a guest house overlooking the church and castle.

Once named St Quentins, the listed Llanblethian hill fort (also known as Caer Dynnaf) is set on the hillside. It is thought to have evolved from the Norman period as a ruinous building of rectangular shape with 1.2m thick walls from around 1200.

However, the surrounding walls and gateway are additions by Gilbert de Clare from 1307, which were sadly not completed until after his death in 1314 at the battle of Brannock.

Other parts of the hill fort include ruinous semi-octagonal towers to the south east and south west corners. The ivy-clad gatehouse is bordered by towers and arrow loops (holes).

It also had a passageway to a coiled staircase to the rear, and the remains of a keep are still visible 10 metres south of the gatehouse.

The gatehouse once had guard rooms on each side, and was in

service as a prison for a long period of time. It was reportedly three or four storeys high and built over earthworks from the 14th Century. The fortress was held by the Lord of Glamorgan, and also had connections with the Herbert and Fitzhamon families, who had all disappeared from records by the first quarter of the 14th Century.

The castle was used by many Lords of Glamorgan until the late 19th Century, when it was downgraded to a cowshed. With very little remains of such a grand building, it was given to the state in 1994, with the 14th Century gatehouse undergoing restoration by CADW.

Llanblethian Church is dedicated to St John the Baptist, and stands on the hill behind the castle leaning towards Llysworney.

Iron Age remains were also found here, as well as evidence of Roman existence within the vicinity.

Legendary tales are aplenty around the area of the castle, the most famous being of its people claiming to outsmart the devil.

St Quentin is said to have conducted battles with the evil one around the area. He is supposed to have wounded Satan, leaving him lame for three days.

Eerily relating to this fable, the slopes on the hills are reported to hold the marks from the battle, and have been named 'The Devil's Right Knee Cap and Left Foot', because of the severity of his wounds.

Another mystifying tale involves pixies who are described as wearing red military uniforms. They seem intent on dancing around the castle site supposedly guarding it from attack.

But where could these little people have come from, and why

would they want to parade around an area outside their normal habitat?

The startling image of a gracious looking lady in red has been seen floating around the top of the gatehouse, only to slowly fade away into oblivion. Could this strange spectacle be searching for someone from another world beyond our understanding, or just an illusory trick of the mind?

Visitors to the castle have reported the feeling of being pushed, only to discover that no physical person is performing this mischievous deed.

Could the inhabitants of yesterday be trying to remind us that this once enchanting building was their home, or just a misjudgment of emotion at such an ancient location?

The shadowy cloaked figure of a man has been seen walking around the embattlements as if in human form. What is this creepy image, and why would it choose to roam an area unrecognisable to him today as its outward appearance is an antiquated ruin?

An ancient soldier wearing a suit of armour has occasionally been seen around the gatehouse, wandering as if in search of something or someone. But why would a gallantry warrior want to return to a place beyond his own realm?

An implausible story, passed down through the generations of time, conveys the sighting of a headless dog, which is said to have belonged to a giant who roamed the hills. He is alleged to have decapitated his canine companion by accidentally tugging too harshly on the leash.

*Fact or fiction? It's up to you to decide ...*

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