



*Llanblethian as it appears to the traveller from Cowbridge to Llantwit Major.*

## South Wales Villages

# LLANBLETHIAN

by STEWART WILLIAMS

ABOUT 1840 THOMAS CARLYLE stayed at Hill House, Llanblethian, and described the village as 'a cheerful group of human homes... a little sleeping cataract of white houses with trees overshadowing and fringing it'. Hill House was then occupied by John Sterling whose biography Carlyle wrote. A retired Army officer, Sterling is regarded as the pioneer of military journalism. His caustic criticisms of the handling of the Peninsula War led to his appointment by *The Times* as writer on military topics.

According to Carlyle, his friend Sterling, eager to receive the despatches from the front, would walk to the top of Llanblethian Hill to watch the mail coach cross Stalling Down on its way to Cowbridge.

The village has much of interest to offer the visitor. Great House—Ty Mawr as it is still called by the older inhabitants



*The modern village shop blends quietly with its ancient surroundings.*

*The Great House, still known to older inhabitants as Ty Mawr.*



was occupied by a member of the Bruce family. Its sundial is dated 1702.

Llanblethian House, situated just below the former vicarage, is a building of the same period as Great House. At the turn of this century it was the home of Colonel Wyndham Quin, later Earl of Dunraven.

Possibly the oldest inhabited house in Llanblethian is the former woollen factory at the extreme western end of the village. The mill-wheel and looms are now located at the Welsh Folk Museum, St. Fagans.



*The main road from Cowbridge to Llantwit Major runs through the village.*

For its size the village has a maze of lanes, some with unusual names such as Piccadilly and Broadway, and almost every house faces south.

The remains of St. Quentin's Castle, started by Gilbert de Clare in 1314, occupy a site formed by the horse-shoe bend in the River Thaw. The Gatehouse and part of the curtain walls remain, although many of the houses in the village have been built from stone taken from the castle. Hardly anything remains of the keep; below it were dungeons with, it is said, an underground passage to Penllyn Castle. This is highly unlikely considering the marsh between.

Commanding a splendid view of the village below, the church stands on an early Christian site and is dedicated to St. John the Baptist. The Perpendicular tower dates from the 15th century. The tenor bell—one of six—was presented to the church by Sir Leoline Jenkins and is dated 1685. Inside the church is a monument erected to his memory by Jesus College, Oxford, in the middle of the 18th century. A native of the Vale, Sir Leoline, Judge of the Admiralty and Home Secretary under Charles II, bought Cowbridge Grammar School from the Stradlings of St. Donat's and bequeathed it to the Governing Body of Jesus College.

The handsome altar rails are of considerable age and it is interesting to note

that the frontal and carpet were made from materials used in Westminster Abbey at the last Coronation. In the north wall of the nave is a Norman lancet. A Dedication Cross was found in the window. The interior of the church is rather dark, particularly during the winter months, due to the stained glass windows.

Llanblethian is now a 'dry' village, but a century ago there were two inns—the General Picton and the King's Head. To quote David Jones, who has already been referred to in connection with Great House: 'Dancing for some years has been discontinued and the revel has sunk into a mere saltish carousal. Our host John o' the Picton emulates his neighbour Shony-Gwaith as to who shall have the best tap and the competition for that honour causes each of them to add an extra bushel of malt to his brewing, to gratify the village toppers. The thing is probably finished up with a little fighting, at least it is a portion of the standing annual gossip of the village to enquire after the event 'Has there been any fighting?' The General Picton is by far the best house of the two. Close to the Church, it derives all the benefit that bell-ringing, marriages and burials can bring it as well as being the place of meeting for all parish vestries'.

Alas, the thirsty now have to make the short journey to Cowbridge when they require a drink!

*Hill House, where Thomas Carlyle stayed more than a hundred years ago.*



*The parish church, dedicated to St. John the Baptist.*

*Photos by Hill's Welsh Press Ltd.*

*The ivy covered gatehouse of 14th century St. Quentin's Castle.*

