

# 1. Llandysul Town Historic Walk

**Distance and Estimated Time:** 1.1km (1.8 miles) 1 hour excluding rest stops. This walk can easily be combined with other walks in the Llandysul area.

**Terrain:** The walk circles the town with a short uphill section at the start. The Victorian and Edwardian architecture and the numerous small shops make it an ideal short stroll through the town's history. It also provides some fine views across the surrounding countryside. Dogs should be kept on a lead. Stout footwear is not required.

**Suitable for:** Anyone.

**Grade:** C in accord with the criteria on page 1.

**Start:** Car park (P) in Llandysul is at OS SN418406.

**Refreshments:** Llandysul offers a choice of cafés, restaurants and traditional pubs ([www.llandysul-ponttyweli.co.uk](http://www.llandysul-ponttyweli.co.uk)) and picnic benches are located in the park adjacent to the car park and bus stop.

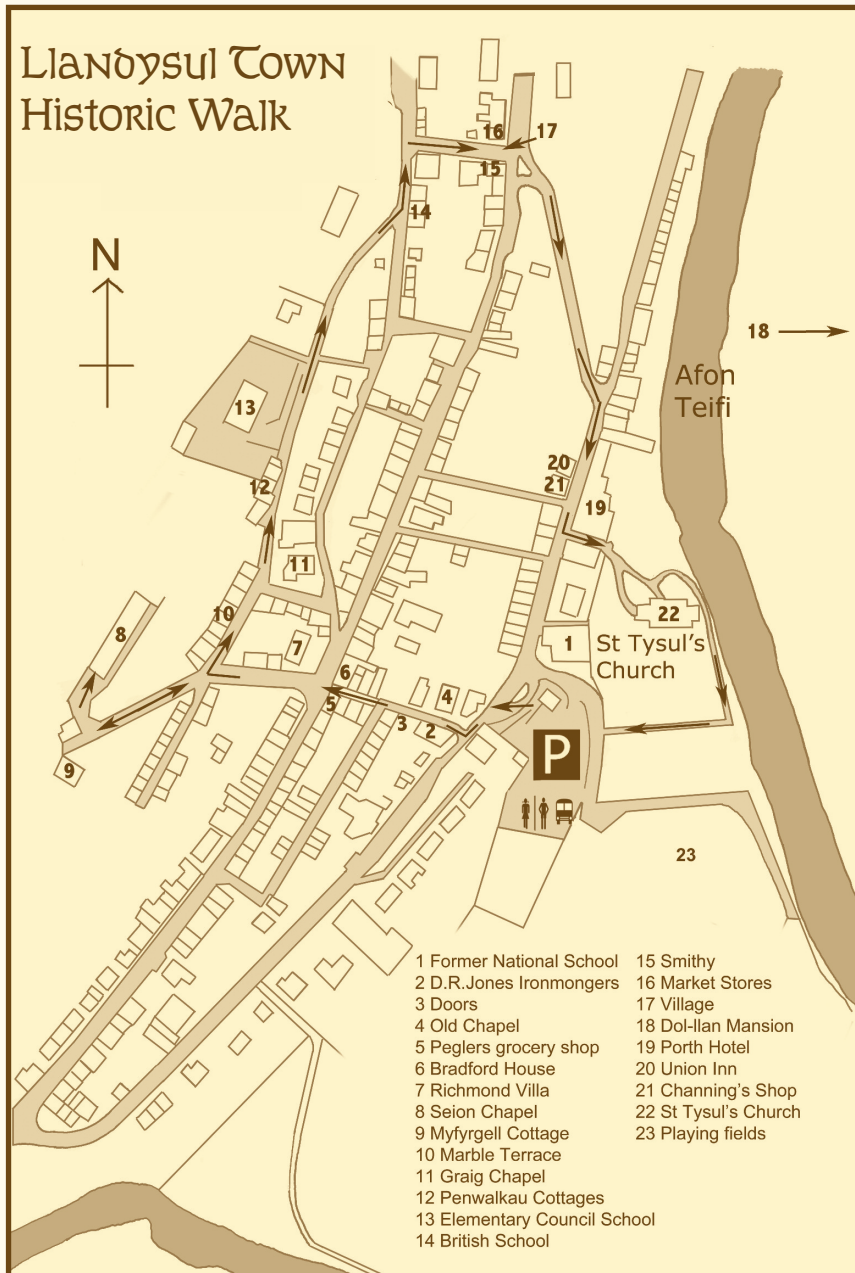
**Public Toilets:** Llandysul – Car park (accessible by disabled persons and has baby changing facilities) OS SN418406.

**Maps:** O/S map Explorer 185 1:25000 Newcastle Emlyn/Castell Newydd Emlyn.

## Detailed route description

*This should be read in conjunction with the information below describing the individual historic buildings.*

**1 hour:** Leave the car park in Llandysul and turn left onto New Road. After a few metres turn right into Lôn Wesley (signposted Town Centre). Walk up the hill and at the junction with the main street, cross the road into Seion Hill. After 30m turn right into Marble Terrace (or continue up the hill to visit Seion Chapel and Myfyrgell cottage). Follow Marble Terrace until it reaches Graig Road (160m), bear/turn left and after 40m turn right and go downhill to a junction with the main road. Cross the road and descend Lôn Letty to Church Street. Immediately after the Porth Hotel, turn left and follow the trail around the back of the church to reach the car park.



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## INTRODUCTION

Situated in the county of Ceredigion, Llandysul is a busy rural market town that spreads up the steep hillside above the Afon Teifi and the border with Carmarthenshire. Its sister village, Pont Tyweli, sits on the other side of Llandysul Bridge on the Carmarthenshire bank of the river. Llandysul derives its name from the Celtic saint, Tysul (462 to 544 AD), who founded a church here and *Llan* means sacred ground, cemetery or church, although earlier translations also include enclosure.

The rich upland grassland surrounding Llandysul and the fast flowing Afon Teifi with its tributaries help to explain why Llandysul and Pont Tyweli flourished here. The hills are excellent for sheep grazing and before the advent of steam engines or electricity the rushing waters of the rivers powered the water mills that spun wool and weaved cloth. The success of agriculture, the growth of the woollen industry and the proliferation of flannel shirt factories, provided work in the local area. The arrival of the railway at Pont-Tyweli in the late 19th century increased Llandysul's trade with the rest of the UK.

Sadly the once successful woollen industry has declined, along with the population of the parish, but the importance of the mill industry to the heritage of Wales is celebrated by the fact that the National Museum of the Welsh Woollen Industry can be found a few kilometres away at Drefach Felindre (open April to September, 10am to 5pm every day and Tuesday to Saturday during October to March).

The mills in the town have long been converted into other uses, but a small number have survived. Including the only remaining waterwheel powered commercial woollen mill in Wales, at Rock Mills, in Capel Dewi (see walk 4/5 North and South Clettwr Valley and [www.rockmillwales.co.uk](http://www.rockmillwales.co.uk) for more information)

The atmosphere of the Victorian and Edwardian period is still felt in Llandysul as you wander the streets and is often seen in the architecture of the shops and buildings in the High Street. This makes Llandysul an ideal place for a short stroll through the town's history, sparking one's imagination about what life must have been like a hundred and more years ago. The walk also provides some fine views across the surrounding countryside and the town.

## About the walk

On leaving the car park the building to the right **(1)** is the former National School that was run by the church. Opened in 1851 and closed approximately 100 years later it now houses the library and computer rooms, and upstairs there is a 'local history exhibition'. The building's clock tower is an interesting feature – it has a clock face only on 3 sides, because the owners of the Dôl-Llan estate, on the other side of the river, would not give any money towards the building of it. It was the town's people's way of getting back at the estate owners by preventing them seeing the clock!

After leaving the car park the walk soon enters Lôn Wesley, which was the old main thoroughfare for Llandysul town, until New Road was built in 1895. The first building on the left **(2)** is D.R. Jones, Ironmonger that celebrated 90 years in business in 2009! In the past it also sold cycles and motorcycles, as well as agricultural machinery and wares. Look up to see the old hoist used to lift stock into the building.

As you walk up Lôn Wesley the houses on the left, still have the original doors and windows **(3)**, which give the impression of how Llandysul looked in times gone by. The large building to the right **(4)** – Tysul Youth Centre – was originally Peniel Wesleyan Chapel. It was established c1806 by the Rev. Edward Jones who usually preached on the horse block by the Kings Head. One day he was accused of being drunk, and in reply he gave the following verse at the end of the sermon:

*They say where hills and valleys wind,  
That I am drunk and out of mind;  
I'll not deny I'm drunk and odd  
But only on sweet wine from the cellar of God.*

From *Hanes Plwyf Llandysul*  
gan Y Parch WJ Davies.

At the top of the pedestrian cobbled section of Lôn Wesley you reach Bradford Square, today's main street. The building to the left **(5)** has a front door step marked Peglers. This was a chain of grocers in the 1950s, but this building had been a grocery and butchers shop since at least the early 1900s. To the right **(6)** is Bradford House, opened in 1861 by John Daniel Thomas as a Drapers, Grocers and Ironmongers. This shop remained as an outfitters and haberdashers until the late 1970s.

The building opposite Bradford House, Richmond Villa **(7)** was originally a bank, but now it is a private residence.





As you ascend Seion Hill, above you is Seion Chapel **(8)**, completed in 1871. The architect was the Rev. Thomas Thomas, who designed around 900 chapels throughout Wales. Rachel Evans was the first person to be buried in the graveyard in 1878.

Further up the hill on the left is a small white cottage called Myfyrgell **(9)**. Here William Thomas, better known by his bardic name Gwilym Marles (born 1834) opened Llandysul's first grammar school (commemoration plaque on house). He was a Unitarian preacher from 1860 at the first Unitarian chapel in Wales at Llwynrhydowen and is regarded as the founder of modern Unitarianism in Wales, but he was also a fierce radical champion of the people against landlordism and championed the farmers in the tithe war (tithes were an early taxation system). This antagonised local landlords resulting in confrontation in 1876 when he and his congregation were evicted from the chapel. A sad sequel to the events was that matters affected him so badly that he died prematurely at the young age of 45.

Both Thomas and Marlais give clues to a link with Wales' most famous writer. He was the paternal great-uncle of Dylan Thomas and apparently a significant influence on his nephew, D.J. Thomas – Dylan's father. Dylan was given his middle name Marlais, in honour of him and it is thought that he was the inspiration for the character of Rev Eli Jenkins in the play Under Milk Wood.

On returning down the hill from the chapel the walk follows Marble Terrace **(10)** on the left. Residents of this terrace appear on the 1871 census with occupations such as schoolmaster, theology student, seaman's wife and superintendent of Police. At No. 2, Miss Hill ran the last private school to be held in Llandysul.

Further along look down to the right at the Gothic style, Welsh Unitarian, Graig Chapel **(11)**, built in 1884 and designed by architect John Wills of Derby. In 1906 the chapel had some rebuilding done and the tower was added. This rebuilding reflects the progression of chapels generally – a hundred years ago the locals would have listened to their preacher outside, beside trees and then in old barns and sheds finally the congregations built permanent places of worship.

To the left, a little further along the walk, are some of the oldest cottages in the village, early 1800s – Penwalkau Cottages **(12)**. Census entries for these show them to be occupied in 1861 by Sarah James, a carpenter's widow, James Jones, a miner and John Williams, an agricultural labourer.

From here there is a great view of the different levels of Llandysul town,

with its small roads running parallel and every so often footpaths leading down to the next level. It is this village structure that has given Llandysul its village conservation status.

This area of Llandysul is called Bryn Hyfryd or Sunny Hill and the large building to the left **(13)** is now the home of Telynnau Teifi. It was originally the Elementary Council School, known locally as Ysgol Uchaf (The Top School), opened in 1898; the same time as the new County School, now Ysgol Dyffryn Teifi. This building now houses Wales' only harp maker and visits can be organised by appointment (01559 363222, [www.welsh-harps.com](http://www.welsh-harps.com)).

The road now starts to descend to a junction; the three cottages opposite were originally a private school, opened circa 1838 **(14)**. The headmaster was Mr. Evans who died in 1845. About that time it became the British School and later the Board School. Now sympathetically renovated, you can still see where the original windows were.

After bearing right further along the hill you come to a junction with the main road. The building to the right **(15)** was the smithy; built by Henry Jones in the 1860's it remained a Blacksmith's shop until the mid 1900s. Here children with warts would dip their hands into the blacksmith's water trough for a local cure!

Opposite the smithy is Market Stores **(16)**, now three houses. In 1881 this impressive building housed a grocery shop owned by David Lewis, the father of John David Lewis founder of Gomer Press.

Further up Well Street (formerly Spring Street) is Tyssul spring, one of the early sources of water to the village. In 1892 villagers subscribed money to build a water tank and pump to improve the efficiency of the water supply. A village pump can be seen on the corner opposite the smithy **(17)**.

After descending Lôn Letty you pass the Porth Hotel **(19)**. A hostelry is likely to have been on this site since medieval times and the public rooms still feature old oak beams and panels. The arched windows show where the stables used to be and the assembly room above was used for dances during World War II, attended by GIs based locally preparing for the D-Day landings. It was the local headquarters of the Cycling Club of Great Britain and the sign can still be seen on the front wall. Today, Llandysul's cycling heritage is still going strong as the Sustrans National Route 82 Lôn Teifi (between Aberystwyth and Fishguard) passes in front of the Porth Hotel.

The building opposite the Porth hotel (20) used to be the Union Inn. Opened in 1707 it was named in celebration of the union between England and Scotland.

Next-door is Channings Shop (21). Thomas Protheroe, a butter merchant, occupied this building in 1871. A grocery business, later owned by the Channing family, continued in this shop until the late 1970s. The growth of motoring even saw the installation of a petrol pump outside the shop.

Immediately past the Porth Hotel and visible from the car park is the left turn leading to the majestic stone church of Saint Tysul (22). The church is worthy of a visit (a short history and guide can be purchased inside). Enter the graveyard through the lych gate. Saint Tysul had a rich pedigree – he was the son of Corun, the son of Ceredig, who was a son of Cunedda, a chieftain of North Britain. Ceredig repelled an invasion of Wales by the Irish Scots in the middle of the fifth century and was rewarded for his valour with land in South West Wales, called Tyno-Côch (Red Valley). This region subsequently became known as the Land of Ceredig or Ceredigion. However Ceredig had another son, Sant, who fathered a son called David, and it was this son, Tysul's cousin, who went on to be the Patron Saint of Wales – Saint David.

The stone church stands on the foundations of a place of worship created by Saint Tysul, and has a great significance for the history of the area. The original church was probably made of wattle and daub, with a roof thatched with reed and a rough, hewn, stone used as an altar. The current church is the oldest building in Llandysul, much of it dating from the 13th century. Apparently it still had a thatched roof until 1783 when a series of restorations over the next 150 years started. The original stone church building of St Tysul's, including the window and door dressings, is built in local slate and sandstone. However, recent replacements to the windows have been carried out using Bath stone. Inside, the pulpit is made of a Jurassic limestone, possibly from Painswick in Gloucestershire. The tower originally had two bells, but in the late 18th century four more were made by the celebrated bell maker Thomas Rudhall from Gloucester. The chamber for bell ringing is now highly regarded by bell ringers. On closer examination the four different types of stone can be seen showing the different periods during which the tower's height grew from 6.1m to 21.4m (20 to 70 ft). The walled up window in the south wall is regarded as one of the oldest pieces of stone ecclesiastical architecture in the whole of Wales. The church also houses a venerable pipe organ installed in 1899.



The church has some important and unique relics of early Christianity in Wales. An ancient altar with its early Christian incisions was discovered nearby at Coed y Foel and is incorporated into the stone alter of the Lady Chapel. In the choir vestry there is a collection of inscribed stones, amongst which is the Velvor Stone that has a bilingual inscription, in Latin and Ogham commemorating Velvoria, daughter of Brohomaglus. The stone is a fragment from a larger stone that made up a stile leading into the church. The importance of this stone should not be underestimated; it is one of only 400 in the world that shows the alphabet of the ancient Celtic language – Ogham. Possibly predating Christianity it is thought to be Irish in origin, which provides further evidence that the Irish settled here between 400 and 500 AD. The origin of Ogham is uncertain, but current understanding is that the lines symbolise the names of the main twenty letters, which are also the names of twenty trees sacred to the Druids.

From the time that it was established in the 6th century the church would have been central to the life in the area and Llandysul would have grown up around it with the main roads all leading to the church and the river crossing. It is believed that not until a bridge was built between Llandysul and Tyweli, that the High Street as we know it was built.

If you follow the path around the church, look across the river to Dôl-llan mansion (18). This important Georgian Mansion house was the site of the mysterious death of Major Cass in 1929. Major Cass was found dead in his bedroom of a gunshot wound, which was reported in the press as suicide. But the local rumour was that the butler did it! Major Cass was a popular figure in village life and the funeral was attended by a large number of local people. Many years later, a local builder was working outside the property and claimed to have seen through the window the ghost of Major Cass walking on the stairs. Of course this may have been a reflection of the sun on the window.

Follow the path through the graveyard to the black iron gates, where you will return to the car park.