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RURAL DISTRICT • BRECKNOCK



The Official Guide

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# YSTRADGYNLAIS

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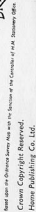
the SEA, the TOWN and the COUNTRYSIDE



## *The Official Guide*

*Issued by Authority of*

**THE YSTRADGYNLAIS RURAL DISTRICT COUNCIL**  
COUNCIL OFFICES, YSTRADGYNLAIS, SWANSEA



### Ystradgynlais—General View

## Here we live

We are the people of Ystradgynlais and District. We live on the South-Western borders of Breconshire in the Tawe Valley, or, as some people would prefer, "The Swansea Valley." Perhaps it is easier to say that way.

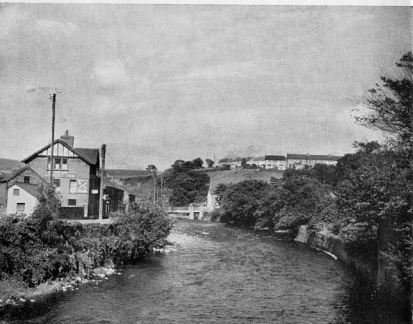
We occupy some 22,000 gorgeous acres of the upper part of the valley and we claim, much to the good-natured chagrin of our neighbours, that these are by far the finest acres in the whole of the valley. The majority of them constitute a part of the National Park.

There are about 11,000 of us, and we live mainly in four large hamlets and a few smaller ones. Ystradgynlais is the largest and the centre for business. Abercrave, Cwmtwrch, and Colbren follow in size in that order.

Nature has been kind to us and has endowed us with many things beside beautiful surroundings. We are sheltered from the North and the East winds by two noble ranges of highlands—the Black Mountains on the one side and the Breconshire Beacons on the other, and these keep the chill out. We also derive the benefits of the warmth brought up this splendid valley by the gentle Atlantic winds after parting company with the Gulf Stream.

The River Tawe at Ystradgynlais

(Photo : Llew E. Morgan)



(Photo : Llew E. Morgan)

The Cross, Ystradgynlais

In that favoured way we are tucked in snugly in a near pear-shaped hollow at altitudes ranging from 300 to 800 feet above sea-level.

We are proud of our bright and well-kept homes which are mostly owned by the people who live in them. For those not in this category, the extensive Housing Schemes erected in central and healthy positions and which are expanding at a fast rate, will soon give every family who need a home accommodation in one of these fine houses.

We have excellent shopping and other facilities, and although we do not boast of any large hotels we have, on the other hand, some very good hostelrys where the accommodation, food and cooking is of a very high standard.

If, as yet, you have not had the good fortune of tasting some of the delicious Welsh dishes, then at these places you have a treat in store. The proverbial Welsh "Cawl," or eggs with Welsh cured ham and Welsh cakes to follow, are just a few of the delicacies we specialize in around here and with which you do not meet with in other parts of the world.



Gorsedd Circle

(Photo : T. J. Davies)

## Hereabouts

Our neighbours are all excellent people. They are easily accessible, and every journey undertaken outside our own area should be a pleasurable one.

Swansea is but 14 miles away, and the delectable Gower Coast is just a few miles more, with a good bus service all the way. If you have a car you might like to go further afield. Then it is a very fine run across the Black Mountains, climbing over easy gradients and on a very good road to a height of 2,000 feet above sea-level to behold a most marvellous and extensive panoramic view of the beautiful countryside below—a sight not easily forgotten. Proceeding down the other side you will come to Llandovery—an ancient and historic Borough, with, so it is said, a pub to every 70 of its 2,000 inhabitants. After a nice cup of tea here you can take a short cut back home through Sennybridge, or if the mood moves you, make a wider detour and take in the two spas, Llanwrtyd and Builth Wells, before returning home through Brecon.

One of the advantages of Ystradgynlais as a centre is that there are so many exits and accesses that every trip can be made a circular one, a mysterious one at that, and no one but yourself need know where you are heading for or where you have come from. There is one such route through the beautiful Vale of Neath, which can land you either on the Brecon Beacons or in Cardiff, depending on which

turning you take at Hirwaun. You return on different roads. And by the way, Brecon Beacons—what Beacons ! There are four of them—Corn Du, Penylan, Crubyn, and Fan-Big, everlastingly standing guard like sentinels over that fine and ancient Borough of Brecon. This quaint and grand old county town is worth all this guarding.

Then there are Neath, Merthyr, Aberdare, the Rhondda, Porthcawl and many more all sizeable towns, all within pleasant running distances and, above all, all good neighbours.

(Photo : Llew E. Morgan)

Sewd yr Henrhyd, Colbren





Penrhos and Cae'rbon

(Photo: T. J. and D. Davies)

## Here in the valley

Most strangers have a little difficulty at first in pronouncing the name of our central town, and occasionally it is made the reason for a little good-natured mirth. It has been called by many names, but the one that appeals most of all to us is "Just a Guinness." We can't really condone even that one, so we would prefer that you get it properly from the commencement. This is not the place for a Welsh lesson, but if you will only change the Welsh "Y" for the English "U" you will then get Us-trad-gun-lais, and that is just how it should be pronounced. We anticipate your first question, though—what on earth does it mean? It has been asked thousands of times before, but the answer to that poser is a long story. Briefly it is said to mean the "Estate of Cynlais." And again, who was Cynlais? He was a man who afterwards became a Saint, but before that he was a ruler of this region and acquired the estate through marriage. He died in one of the local caves in A.D. 527. We, ourselves, wonder however, whether his bones were not amongst a recent well-preserved collection found there and now reposing at the National Museum of Wales. Ystradgynlais is the hub of this district, and all the administrative offices are located here. It has a little bustle peculiarly its own. Actually, it is very easy to reach by car or by bus. It is a good centre for jaunts since four roads lead away from this place to many beautiful and varying landscapes. To those of you who travel without a car, good and very frequent bus services will take you anywhere you want to go and, we hope, bring you back again.

We have no particular main streets, all our streets are main ones and they are known as Brecon Road, Station Road, Commercial Street, and Church Street. They all lead to some very fine and interesting places.

Brecon Road goes on past the Welfare Hall and Institute, a splendid building which is the cultural centre of the town. The studios as well as the playful type are catered for in this Institute. During the proper season one may enjoy Operas, Dramas, and Concerts, etc., given by our own amateurs of an unbelievably high standard for a town of this size, and if you desire a seat at one of these entertainments you will be well advised to make a reservation in advance, for patrons come from far and near.

Most towns boast of a Cinema. Well, we have two, and both are good and comply with the Fire Services Safety Regulation.

Of Churches, we have quite a few, presumably because we are such a good people. The oldest, of course, is the Parish Church named after St. Cynlais. Most of the free churches are also represented here, too, some by large and imposing buildings and some not so large. You need, therefore, have no qualms of not having the religious and moral side of you well looked after.

We have, as well, lots of other interesting Institutions which cater for man's needs in divers ways.

The story of our countryside must rightly start with Cwmtwrch. It is a long, winding village, so long that it has to be known as either the Upper or the Lower. It does not entirely belong to our County. It is shared also by the Counties of Glamorgan and Carmarthen. It

is so narrow that your first impression is that the River (Twrch), the Railway and the Highway are for ever contesting for possession. They zig-zag over each other, and have no respect whatsoever for the poor County boundary. Thus, they run for about two miles until they part company near the George IV Inn, when each goes its own independent way. If you must follow one or the other, then we suggest a tramp up on the banks of the cascading river. It abounds with fine trout, and if you follow it far enough you will pass a noted picnic rendezvous at Ffrydiau Twrch and eventually arrive at one of the Van Lakes (Llynfan Fach)—a most magnificent spectacle. Returning over the eight or so miles you have traversed you might well feel, as did King George IV before you, and make a call at the pub to which he gave his name, or one of the other similar establishments in the vicinity. Maybe, however, you would prefer to proceed a little further down the valley and try the waters of the Sulphur Spring. It is not very nice to the palate, but the Spring itself has a far and wide reputation for its curative properties. Hence Cwmwtwrch (Valley of the Wild Boar) enjoys a large clientele of its own.

Moving along through two pleasant little hamlets, Gurnos (Night Fold) and Ganhryd (Near the Ford), we arrive back in Ystradgynlais and turn left into Cwmgiedd. This is a pretty little dingle, very wooded in its upper reaches and sometimes known as Swiss Valley. Here we find the Yorath Methodist Chapel, the present one, however, being the third building, a very old and well-known place of worship, and occasionally also known as the Mother of Chapels. Around the chapel there have been nurtured eminent men of letters with a national reputation, and of whom the local inhabitants refer to in conversation with considerable reverence.

Here, too, from the resemblance of Cwmgiedd to the stricken village of Lidice in Czechoslovakia, the documentary film, "The Silent Village," was taken. A large number of the local people, almost unknowingly to themselves, became film stars at short notice, showing on theatrical screens all over the country.

Returning and moving up Brecon Road, we pass on the left the Castle Hotel, where one of Madame Patti's oak beds is still in use, alas, not by her, but by visitors like yourself. Up again and on our right across the river, we come to the Lamb and Flag Inn, the reputed shelter for a night for Oliver Cromwell. Following the path past this house we come to the round house, now used as a farm building, but, nevertheless, interesting and unique in its construction.

Retracing our steps we proceed along to Abercrave (Aber-Mouth, Craf-Welsh Garlic). Here we have another cinema, a Welfare Hall, a very nice and well-kept Church and more chapels. The geological formation begins to change here and with that the scenery too.

Turning right at Abercrave we proceed to Colbren. Alongside this village passes a Roman Road (Sarn Helen). Colbren, however, is noted chiefly for a very fine falls (Sewd yr Henrhyd) in the River Llech, now the property of the National Trust. It has a drop of over 100 feet and the falling waters can be heard for long distances when in flood. Only the young and the daring should try to descend to the bottom of the falls. The climb back again is a very difficult one.

Turning left at Colbren, and travelling about a mile and a half over undulating country of truly romantic rural beauty, with magnificent views from several vantage points, we arrive back on the Brecon



(Photo: T. J. and D. Davies)

Cwmgiedd





Abercrave Church

(Photo : T. J. and D. Davies)

Road near to the Penycae Inn in Penycae Village. Moving quietly up the valley we automatically feel an awareness of the majestic surroundings. Just around a bend in the road we take a first glimpse of Craig-y-Nos (The Rock of the Night) Castle, the home for about forty years of the beautiful, lavishly wealthy, three-times married Prima-donna, Madame Adelina Patti, who lived there in regal splendour. At this point a little trip down the side road and up the far side of the river towards Penwyllt will give us a full view of the Castle and its setting, beautifully situated on the turn of the river. If this elegant picture does not momentarily catch your breath you are likely, so the saying goes, to go on breathing to a very ripe old age.

Penwyllt has an altitude of nearly 1,000 feet above sea-level, virtually on top of the mountain, and is complete with its own Works (Quarrying), and Post Office. The Castle itself is now used as a hospital, but it still retains its old characteristics. One of its novel features is the Theatre, a miniature in great detail of Drury Lane, which she loved most of all the theatres with which she was connected.

Returning to the highway and skirting the Castle we arrive at the Gwyn Arms—a noted fishing hostelry.

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FOR MAP OF YSTRADGYNLAIS RURAL DISTRICT

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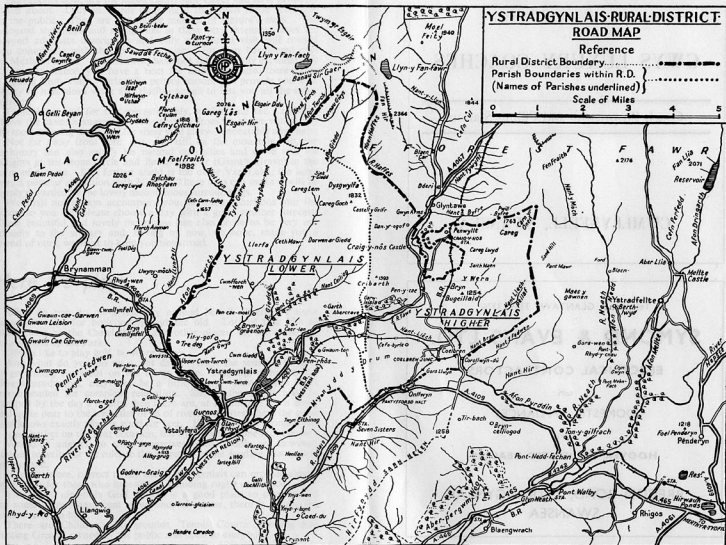
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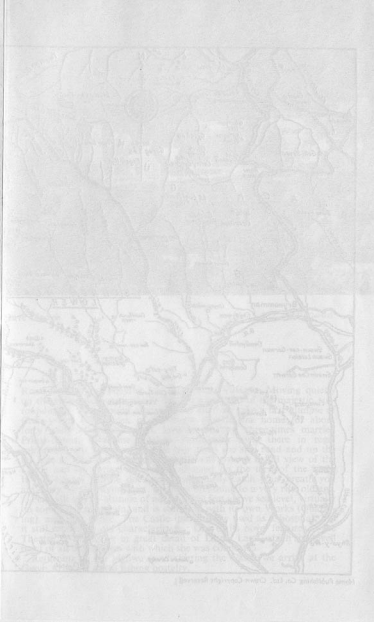
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Hereabouts now, are the noted Danyrogof Caves you have probably heard about. Only in recent times have they been made accessible to the public. They are one of the marvels of Nature's work. The coloured stalactites and stalagmites in these very extensive caves are beyond adequate description and only a personal visit will reward you completely with the spectacle designed for your bewildered eyes by Mother Nature. All the caves have not yet been fully explored and if, by any chance, you have a bent for such adventure, there exists a Caving Club which, during the proper season, will provide you with plenty of hazardous work and thrills enough to last you all the other seasons.

From here, and for the energetic only, a climb up the Cribbarth above the caves is suggested. The scenery from up above will satisfy the most exacting tastes and for sheer wild glory—unbeatable anywhere.

Not far away from here, too, and still on the mountain top, the antiquary can also satisfy his natural curiosities and delve into his delights at the stone circle and Beddy-y-Cawr (Giant's Grave) in the form of a cairn. Still further afield is the other Van Lake, the large one, a popular attraction with hikers. Those who can make it will be amply rewarded by the lovely mountainous surroundings.

We shall not always accompany you on these excursions into the wilds, so you will please choose a day with a good weather forecast. These beautiful and lovely mountains can also prove to be very unfriendly to the unwary and, having by now, we hope, made you a friend of ours, we want to keep you unharmed.

## Here we play

What do you do on a fine day around here? There are some beautiful walks for both young and the old. Lots of folk like to romanticise on the Canal Walks and other places, or, for a change, take a stroll up the Park.

Others like to play golf, bowls or tennis.

And what do you do on a wet day? Why, the sensible thing is to go fishing for trout on the River Tawe. Angling, although not always productive, may also be a little damp. Nevertheless, it is recommended for complete relaxation. Should the spirits also be damped by the day's results, then there are, at convenient spots along and quite near to the ten miles or so of river, hostleries where the good host knows exactly what is good for you. He might even promise you a good basket on the next occasion, but by pre-arrangement of course!

Would-be anglers, to save themselves from trouble are however, advised to write for the rules to the Secretary of the Angling Association beforehand.

It is, therefore, correct to say that Ystradgynlais can provide almost everything for those who love sport, including rugby and soccer.

The Palleg nine-hole Golf Course is a good place to play and to see some more magnificent views and, of course, there is always the attractive tenth-hole.

There are Children's Playgrounds, Tennis Courts, Bowling and Putting Greens, owned by the public and open to everybody.



Wind Road and Gurnos, showing the Enfield Clock  
and the Anglo-Celtic Watch Factories.

(Photo : Llew. E. Morgan)

## Here we toil

You may say you get plenty of window gazing in your hometown—but you'll discover that at least the ladies of your party love looking at shops away from where they live all the year round.

The local shops are self-sufficient ; they are bright and well stocked with first-class bakery goods and many other excellent things besides.

*As for Industries . . .* At the beginning of the nineteenth century it was a very important centre for the production of iron, but it's a long time since they turned out any iron. Then it became an important centre of the coal and tinplate industries. Now the tinplates have gone but we still have the collieries. Not so many by a long way now as, say, 20 years ago, but three have survived to this day. They turn out some of the best grades of Anthracite in the coalfield, but at a price in human lives and human sufferings. These casualties have been pretty heavy.

Then, since the war, and with the whole-hearted co-operation of our friends from over the Welsh border, and also the Government, we have acquired something entirely novel and new to this part of the country—Light Engineering Industries. These factories are impressive and planned with thoughtful care to preserve the amenities (official phrase !) of this beautiful district. Now they turn out watches and clocks by the thousands week in week out, and you will probably see these at your own jeweller wherever your home-town may be, whether in this country or abroad. The surprising thing about them is that the whole of the labour force engaged, excepting a handful of experts, is made up of our own local people who have acquired with remarkable speed the knowledge, the nimbleness, and the technique in this highly-skilled precision work.

The Companies concerned are always most obliging and co-operative in arranging conducted, organized parties around the works. After one of these inspections, you will be impressed at the dexterity of the operatives and the almost luxurious set-up of the organization which turns out such fine work.

An industry that gained considerable momentum just before the war was Tourism, and figured then to become a major one. The opening of the Danyrogof Caves to the public brought in many thousands of delighted sightseers, and it is hoped that before long this industry will be renewed to our natural advantage.

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Jan. 1964.

*The Chairman and Members of the  
Rural District Council of Ystradgynlais.*

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*Whilst every care has been taken in the preparation of this Guide and the statements contained herein are believed to be correct, the Publishers and the Promoters of this publication cannot accept responsibility for any inaccuracies.*

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