

Trails & Tales for Families

Chapels and Churches

ABERGAVENNY

DISSENTERS, RECUSANTS
& ANGLICANS

Chapels and Churches

TRAIL DIRECTIONS

1 Gunter Mansion is on the lower part of Cross Street. A Blue Plaque marks the spot and the ground floor shops face Cross Street.

The South Gate of the Medieval town was demolished in 1795. It was just up the slope by the Coach and Horses Inn.

Gunter Mansion is a Grade II* listed, largely 17th Century, mansion house formerly belonging to the Gunter family. It houses an important recusant Catholic chapel (dating from when it was illegal not to attend the Anglican church) which was hidden for over two centuries. In

1678 Charles II issued a warrant for the immediate

arrest of all papists and Jesuits. The priests Philip Evans and David Lewis, who regularly held mass at the Chapel in Gunter



Mansion supported by Thomas Gunter, were arrested by the end of the year and subsequently condemned to death for their religion. The chapel was rediscovered during the conversion of the house in 1907. A painting from the chapel is on display in the Museum in the Castle. The two priests were canonised in 1970 as two of the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales.

The house has a particularly fine 17th Century plaster ceiling on the first floor. The attic chapel contains important graffiti dating from the 17th Century in

Gunter ownership which gives an insight into the period. The Welsh Georgian Trust have bought the property and will restore it. Look up Cross Street to the crossroads.

On the corner on your right was the site of the first Non-conformist Chapel built in 1690, and replaced later by the Great George Inn. Many Non-conformist denominations which dissented from the established Anglican church had an early start in Abergavenny.

2 From Gunter House walk up Cross Street and cross at the pedestrian crossing. Walk up towards the Angel Hotel, turn left into Castle Street (Lower).

Walk up and turn right. If you want to visit the Museum and Castle they are to the left.

Walk along Castle Street, looking at the chapels along the right-hand side, best seen from the opposite pavement.

Castle Street United Reformed Chapel was rebuilt on this site in 1707, 1792, and again in 1838. The present chapel was built in the Simple Round-Headed style of the gable-entry type and the interior much refurnished during the late twentieth century. Its School Room is now an architects' offices and dance school.



Castle Street Methodist Chapel was built in 1829 in the Simple Round-Headed style of the short-wall entry type. The interior was altered during the late nineteenth century and again in 1997.

3 Continue on past the King's Arms into Tudor Street. Follow this past the doctors' surgery and turn right into Baker Street. Part way along Baker Street you will find Holy Trinity Church (Church in Wales) on the left.

Holy Trinity is surrounded by its alms houses, still in use, so be mindful of the privacy of the residents. It was built in 1840-42 to designs of architect T.H Wyatt as the centre of a Gothic group which included alms houses and vicarage. The aisles were built by EA Johnson of Abergavenny, the south in 1897 and north in 1909.

The church is constructed of coursed, squared rock-faced grey sandstone with

Bath limestone dressings and natural slate roofs, low-pitched and separate for nave and chancel. In addition to nave and chancel, it has north and south cross-gabled aisles, and a west gable bell-cote. It is Tudor Gothic in style in collegiate chapel form, while the added aisles are Decorated in character and the chancel is Perpendicular.

Inside, the five-bay nave has Transitional type arcades (by Johnson) with circular piers on octagonal bases and two-centred arches. The pulpit is French Gothic and dates from c.1870. The altar slab is said to be medieval and to have come from St. John's parish church (now the Masonic Lodge, St. John's Street). Other fittings include a fifteenth-century type timber choir screen and an elaborate reredos.



4 Continue on past the Library and to the end of Baker Street. Turn left and look across to see the rose window of the Baptist Church at the end of Frogmore Street.

Just past the Library, a diversion through Library Square down Victoria Street will find the Salvation Army Citadel on the left. Return to Baker Street.



The Baptist Church was built in 1807 and rebuilt in 1877 by architect George Morgan of Carmarthen. The present chapel, dated 1877, is built in the Lombardic/Italian style, with a gable-entry plan, flanking towers and a wheel window. Frogmore Street Church is now Grade 2 Listed for its special architectural interest

as a fine example of George Morgan's work. A new floor was added in 1980 so that the chapel is on the first floor with the schoolroom below. The original chapel replaced one in Tudor Street.

Llanwenarth, near Abergavenny, maintains its status as one of the first Baptist churches in Wales (it is now the oldest still in existence) and in 1866, the Welsh Baptist Union was formed at Llanwenarth. On 1 January 1807, the Abergavenny Baptist Academy started for the education of young men for the Ministry. In 1836, the Academy was removed to Pontypool and then to Cardiff. The Academy of 1807 was situated on the site of the Old Sunday School or Enon House, Pen y Pound. The Sunday School was demolished in the 1970s for an extension of Tesco's supermarket (opposite).

5 Walk to the end of the road past the War Memorial in the centre of the road and keep left. Cross the road at the central reservation, turn and look back at the shops there.

Opposite is an early Presbyterian chapel (now a dance studio). This was built in the Gothic style with three 'Y' tracery windows on the main gable-end stone facade, gable entry type by architect and builder Mr White of Abergavenny.

To your right is the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) building, now a shop.



6 Walk past the Baptist Church on your left and turn left into Pen-y-pound. Walk up the road to the Catholic Church on the left.



Our Lady and St Michael's was built in 1858-60. It was paid for by a local solicitor, John Baker Gabb and designed

by Benjamin Bucknall, shortly after he had finished Woodchester Park near Stroud in Gloucestershire. It is built of local red sandstone with Bath stone dressings and the steep ended chancel gives a view of the Decorated style six-light window visible from the road. Inside the high arches lift the eyes to the windows and towards the reredos (1883) which carries a complex intricate woven pattern of angels adoring the central host.

The chantry chapel added in 1894 commemorates local Catholics with an oil painting of Saint David Lewis and a sculptured roundel for Father Augustine Baker. A stained glass window illustrates portraits of members of the Baker family and their patron saints.

Opposite the Catholic Church is the Old Grammar School that replaced the one in St John's Church, before it in turn was replaced by the present school further up the hill.

7 Cross the road carefully and walk back down past Whitfield Presbyterian Church.

Whitfield Presbyterian Church also built by E A Johnson but in 1907-10 with rock faced stone from Llangatock with Bath stone dressings in an Arts & Crafts perpendicular style. There is a contemporary school room and hall at the rear.

This replaced the earlier chapel on Frogmore Street.



Turn left at the bottom of Pen-y-pound and use the crossing to gain the other side of Park Road. Walk along here until you reach the pedestrianised Cibi Walk (just past the builder's merchants.) Walk through Cibi Walk.

Cibi Walk replaced some old buildings, but its statue of a shepherd in the centre reminds us of the importance of farming, wool and flannel to Abergavenny.

8 Turn left, cross into the pedestrianised High Street. Walk along and at the mural, turn into the lane on the right. Walk towards the tower and church on your right.



St John's here is now a Masonic Lodge not open to the public. It was the parish church until the reformation, when it became King Henry VIII Grammar School (plaque). The tower and schoolroom were rebuilt between 1770 – 1772. The school was replaced by a new building in Pen-y-pound in 1898.

9 Return to the High Street and walk down to the Town Hall, turn left into Market Street and walk down to Bethany Chapel on the right beyond the Brewery Yard of the Market.



Bethany Baptist Church on the edge of Brewery Yard is now converted into a gallery where exhibitions and concerts are held. The lower floor is a café with craft for sale. It was built in 1822 for £,600 by EA Johnson, the well-known local builder, in a Gothic style of red sandstone faced with Bath stone dressings. It was built after a schism within the Baptists who continued at Frogmore Street.

Walk back to the Town Hall and turn left down Cross Street.

You may like to make a visit into the Market Hall decorated with interesting figures each year for the Food Festival.

10 Opposite the Angel turn left into Monk Street. Walk to the crossing and then back to visit St Mary's Priory Anglican church.

A Benedictine Monastery was founded here in 1087 by Hamelin De Ballon, who had recently built the Norman Castle to control the area. The church was altered in the C19 to its current open format but houses an outstanding collection of



tombs and monuments of the local high-born residents over many years. The rare wooden Jesse tree, which must have been an imposing sight when towering up and brightly coloured, is an important reminder of the visual aids which helped our fore-bearers to understand the liturgy.

The Priory church was saved by the efforts of the local population. They persuaded King Henry VIII to give them this church as their parish church. The old parish church, St John's, in the centre of town, became King Henry VIII grammar school supported by some of the tithes from St Mary's Priory.



The restored Tithe Barn opposite contains an exhibition about the history of Abergavenny and a tapestry showing scenes from local history.

Chapels and Churches

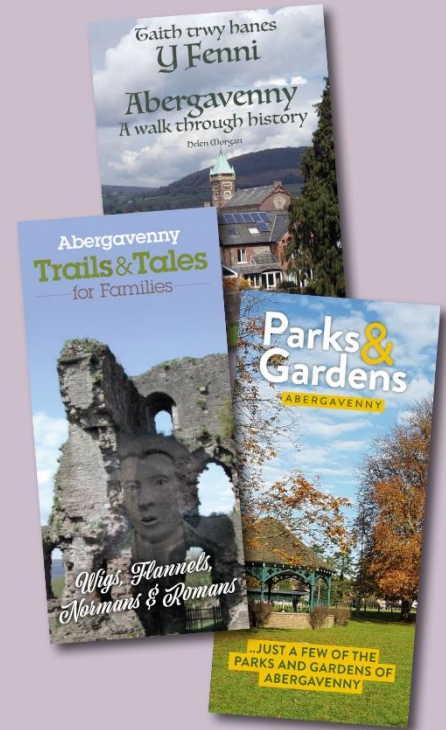
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This trail cannot cover all the chapels and churches in this area, many of which are also worth a visit.

Ask in the Tourist Information Centre if you would like to find some of the others – like the interesting Christchurch in North Street, a wooden church on an iron frame.



TRY SOME OF OUR OTHER WALKS & TRAILS AROUND ABERGAVENNY!



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