

LLANDOVERY



It is a tiny market town with a population of just over 1700, and Anne and I intended only a brief lunchtime stop at Llandovery before continuing our leisurely journey home from Mid Wales, but it turned out to be an attractive little place that proved well worth a second look. Set in the Towy Valley some 26 miles from Carmarthen the day of our visit the streets were virtually deserted, probably because it was early spring and the weather was threatening rain, but in summer I suspect it becomes a popular centre for ramblers and visitors enjoying the facilities in the surrounding countryside. The weather in fact cut short our own stroll about the town centre, but not before we had we had taken in the castle, town hall and two striking statues which together told something of the town's history.

In South Wales the name Llandovery is virtually synonymous with the drovers who were, until the coming of the railways, a hugely important element in its economic life; annually buying up cattle across the country and moving them through the countryside along well defined "drovers' roads" into England. The vast majority were taken to the vicinity of London where they were fattened up to be sold in the markets of the capital. In general drovers were reckoned to be a rough and ready sort of breed, yet they enjoyed the trust of the local population and were used to make purchases and banking transactions on their behalf during these visits to the capital.



“Y Porthmon” (“The Drover”), a statue on the access road to the car park at Llandovery is a reminder of this connection for the town stood at the junction of three major droving roads from Cardigan, Carmarthen and London which played an important role in its development.. In 1799 the “Black Ox Bank”, the first independent Welsh bank, was founded here by a wealthy drover and operated until 1909 when it amalgamated with Lloyds. The town’s principal inn is still known as “The Drovers” and this is also the nickname of the local rugby team.



Overlooking the car park are the scant remains of Llandovery Castle which was first built by the Normans in 1110 and subsequently changed hands several times up to the time of King Edward I and the end of the Wars of Welsh Independence. On the North side is a magnificent statue to a local hero, Llewelyn ap Gruffydd Fychan who led King Henry IV and his army a merry dance on the pretext that he would help them capture the rebel Owain

Glyndwr. Eventually realising that he was only being taken on a wild goose chase the King had him hung, drawn and quartered on the land occupied by the town car park. The statue, which is in stainless steel, is the work of Toby and Gideon Paterson.



At this point our visit was abruptly terminated by the weather, but Llandovery had already revealed itself as an attractive little town that hopefully we will visit again when next we visit this area.