

The longest river in the UK was known as Sabrina in Roman times, Hafren in Welsh, and in English it is the Severn. My first visit ever to Wales occurred in May, to Central Wales (or known as mid-Wales) where this river historically facilitated flannel making from the local wool, which together with weaving and lead mining were the principal industries. The heyday of this part of Wales was the second half of the 19thC and many of the most substantial towns and buildings date from this period. The arrival of the railroad in the 1880's contributed to the prosperity. Today you can get there in a two-hour drive from any of Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, Bristol or Cardiff.

After flying Royal Air Maroc from Agadir via Casablanca to Manchester (a route that only started in March of this year), it took three trains to reach our stop of Caersws, still about a 20 minute drive to the valley where our friends live in a 350 year old half-timbered house. Other

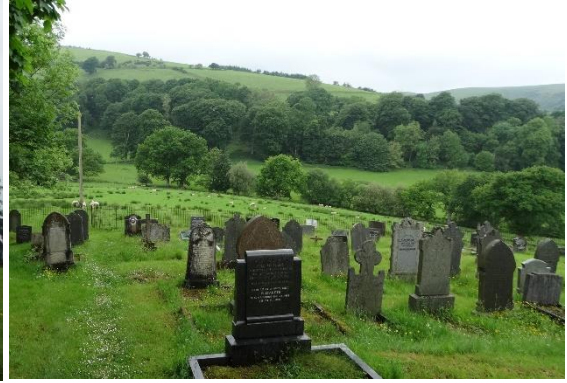


than sheep, the valley is shared by only two other dwellings. With vegetable growing (including a greenhouse area), bees for honey, chickens for eggs and an orchard, a large amount of self-sufficiency can be obtained.



Among the rolling hills of hay and sheep, demarcated by rock walls or hedgerows, one finds villages with such interesting names as Dylife, Van, Llanbrynmair, Pennant, Tyisaf, Bort Dolgadfan and Talerddig, many of which seem quite difficult to pronounce.

Often the cemeteries in the small villages provided a lot of history such as in Llan.



We did day trips to nearby sights, the most famous of which is probably Powis Castle. On the day of our visit there were many families picnicking and touring the gardens as well as the



castle itself. One of the most amazing parts of the property to me are the 330 year old Yew trees which have been sculpted along the hillside and whose interiors function like



caves or tunnels for passageways. It takes 4 staff 3 months' work each year to maintain them. The gardens also

contain a surprising variety of plants for this climate, including a banana relative.



Photography was not permitted inside the Castle but I sneaked a couple of photos.



Another day we visited the historic market town of Llanidloes (originally chartered in 1280) where there is a museum dedicated to timber framed buildings in the UK in the Old Market Hall (which dates from 1600). I learned that



timber framed buildings were built for a wide range of merchants' city and the most Towers, late as the Wild

uses, from dovecot to barn to guild hall to churches as well as rural houses. A photo of possibly impressive of these is Beeston Beeston, Cheshire built in the Victorian era and today operated Boar Inn Luxury Hotel.

And, interestingly, tree ring dating is now being used to validate the age of timber houses!



There is a wide variety of this town, including a



architectural styles present in



Renaissance style Town Hall from 1908. And, lest we forget that lamb is king in this region



Llanidloes has churches of many denominations (this is the Methodist Church which dates from 1873) which seem to unite in support of causes, such as refugee support.



It was at The Baptist Church that I found one of my ancestral names, Powell. Unfortunately, since it is a very common name in Wales (think Smith or Jones) we were never able to trace exactly from which part of Wales that family emigrated to the U.S.

The River Severn actually has its source 9 miles west of Llanidloes in the mountains and one of its tributaries, the Clywedog was dammed in the 1960's to regulate the river flow and now provides a 6 mile long narrow lake used for recreation.



Another day, en route to Machynlleth, an ancient capital of Wales, we passed the Dylife gorge, formed by the first ice age and continuing to be carved by the fast-flowing River Twymyn. There are lots of good walking trails in this part of Wales, for all levels of walkers.





In general, all signs were in Welsh and English, except sometimes only in Welsh as for example on the Old Parliament House in Machynlleth and what I assume is the Presbyterian Church.



It was market day when we visited so the town was bustling, although most stalls were closing up when we arrived (as in France market is a morning event usually lasting from 9 am to 1 pm as the merchants are traveling from some distances). The architecture here was different from



that of Llanidloes.



We saw evidence of whimsical humor here in a garden, as well as with the man who created Machinations, full of automata!



Pub life is ubiquitous in Wales. Unfortunately most of my interior photos did not come out well, but picture a convivial atmosphere, communal tables, and sometimes living room type seating areas. Fireplaces of course. You order your food and drinks (and pay) at the bar. Main dish “pies”, such as steak and kidney are a frequent offering and sometimes it’s just a snack you want.



Another day visit was to Shrewsbury, 9 miles east of the Welsh border in England. Shrewsbury is the birthplace of Charles Darwin and is the major commercial center for mid-Wales. The



medieval town is virtually entirely encircled by the River Severn and between the river and five railroad lines, transport and commerce have been its mainstay. Although the original castle, which guards the only land entrance to the city, dates from 1074, the red sandstone version (restored in the 1920's) probably dates to about 1300. Nine bridges cross the river, four of them for pedestrians. The English Bridge was rebuilt in 1925 re-using every sound stone from the original 1768 bridge.



The medieval street pattern is largely in tact with many small passages. Those that pass through buildings from one street to the next are called "shuts" as to "shoot through" from one street to another. Some of them have unusual names such as Grope Lane and The Bear Steps.





There are also a number of timber buildings dating from the 15th and 16th Centuries.



The Unitarian Church was founded in 1662 and the current Italian façade was added to the building in 1839.

