

Penmark History and Heritage Trail



The village of Penmark situated in the rural Vale of Glamorgan can trace its history back to the 12th Century when the castle was established by the de Umfraville family who were Norman settlers. The church , St Mary's, was also established in the 12th Century and remains in Penmark today whereas the castle now lies in ruins.

The Castle was transformed into a stone structure around the middle of the 13th century by Gilbert de Umfraville and remained in the family until 1420 when the ownership passed through marriage to Alexander de St John whose family also owned Fonmon Castle and extensive lands in the Vale of Glamorgan. By the end of the 17th Century the castle fell into disrepair, though the village of Penmark continued to thrive

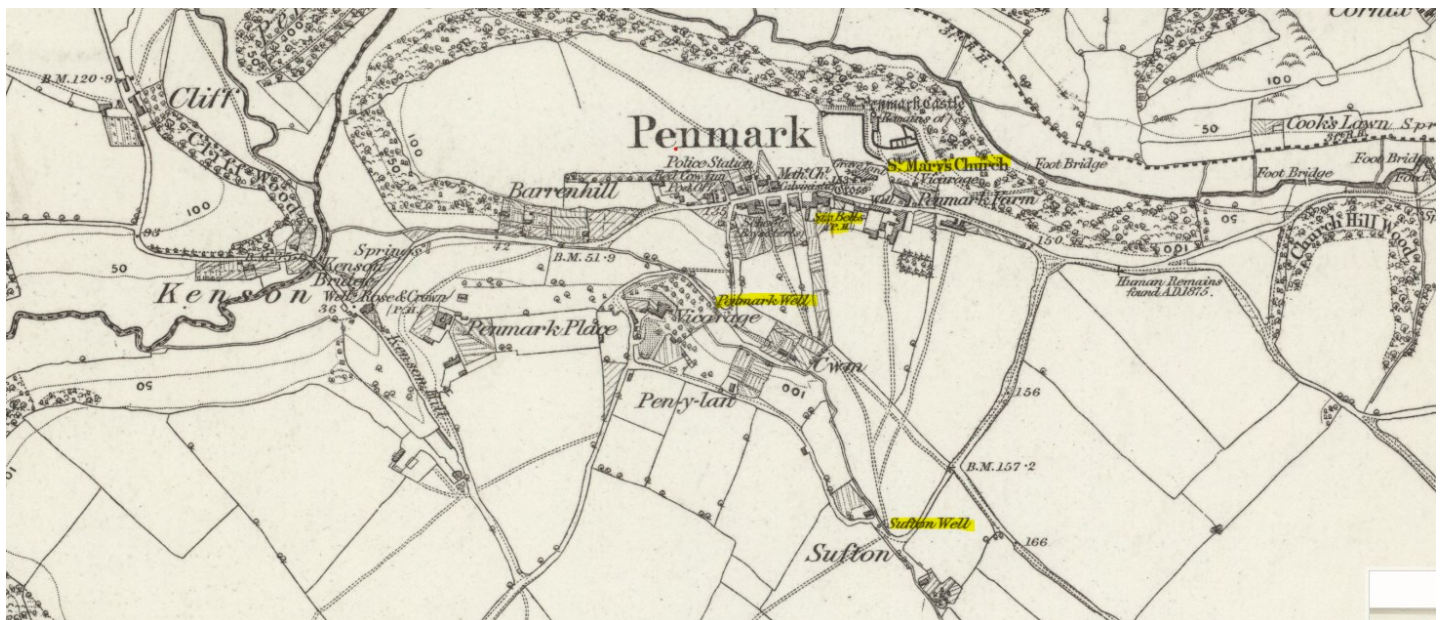
The Penmark Heritage Trail

The Heritage trail through Penmark takes in some of the older building of the village and takes you on a circular walk though the main road and then into the countryside returning to the village, the walk is about 1 mile and does contain some ascents and descents but it on paved roads.

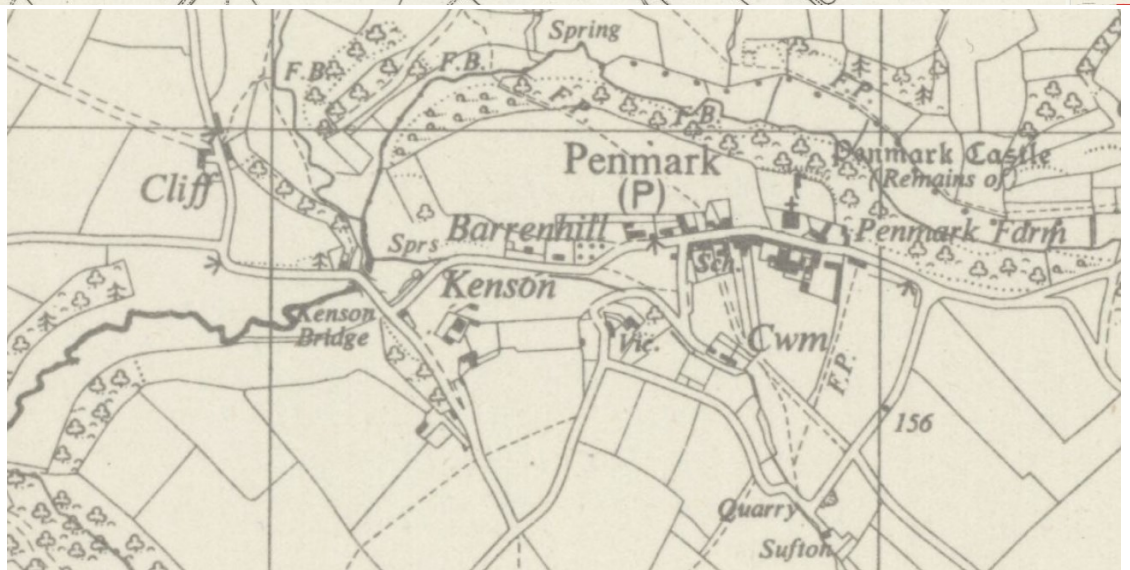
There are a number of stops along the way these are

1. The Six Bells Inn conveniently located in the centre of the Village , this is the start and end point of the trail
2. The Village Hall, formerly the school building
3. The Well in the Cwm
4. The well at Sufton
5. The Church

The map of 1885 below show the points of interest highlighted



The village still remains much the same as the 1885 map as can be seen in the map from the 1950s on the right.



The Penmark Heritage Trail

1. The Six Bells Inn

The Six Bells Inn is the only remaining pub in the village. The village used to have three pubs namely the Red Cow which ceased to be a pub in 1907 and is now currently named as Gilston House on the main road in Penmark, the Rose and Crown which was located at the western end of the village in Kenson and the remaining Six Bells Inn.

The Six Bells is located in the centre of the village close to the church and occupies a 16th Century building that has undergone several refurbishments notably in the early 19th century, the doorway as seen below is the only remaining original part of the building with its four centered chamfered design.



In the early 19th Century the village has a thriving commercial scene and was a 'shopping centre' for the surrounding villages, the village contained a shoemaker, butcher, wheelwrights, carpenters in addition to the slaughter house. The last remaining shops were still active in the 1950s but closed soon after as the advent of the railways made it easier to get to Barry and Cardiff.

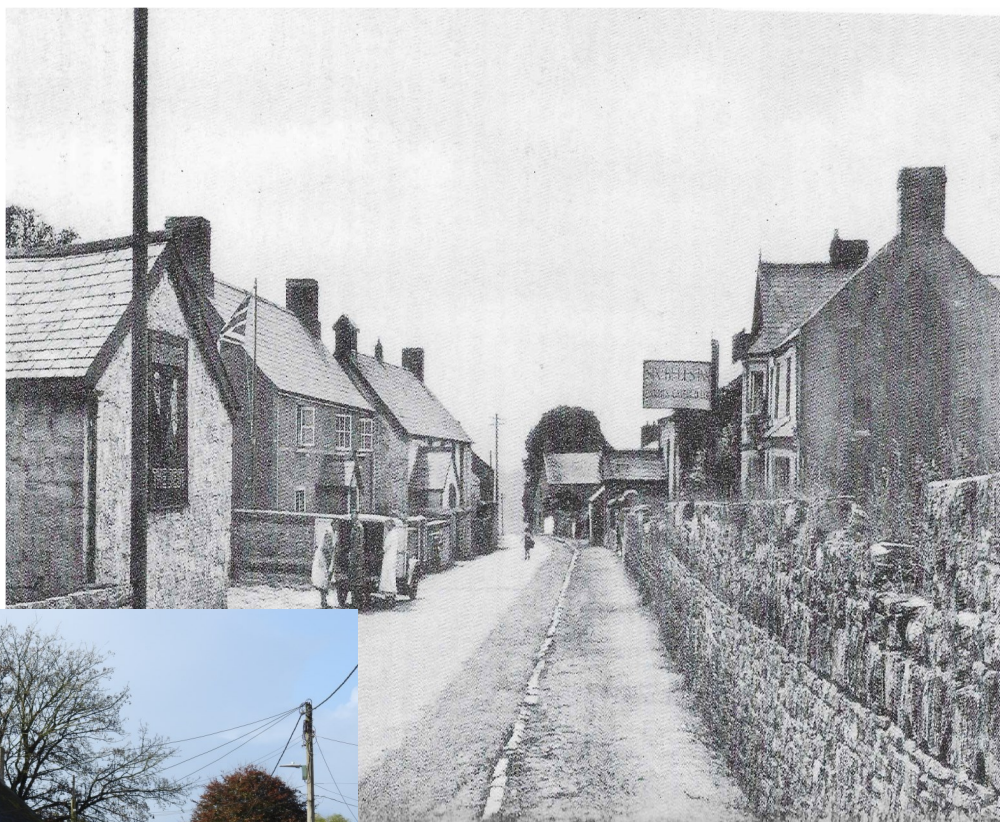
In the 1842 census the village had 6 shopkeepers, 3 publicans, 3 farmers, 2 millers, 2 blacksmiths, 2 carpenters, a shoemaker and a tiler, and the size of the village was 193 people.

Prior to the opening of the Vale of Glamorgan railway line that connected Barry to Bridgend the Vale of Glamorgan was fairly insular with only 14 people from the 193 in the 1841 census having been born outside Glamorgan.

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The view below taken in 1935 shows the Six Bells Inn on the left as you look down the main road towards the village hall and the buildings are still recognizable today

As we walk along the main road passing the Six Bells Inn on the left hand side we will pass the old Slaughterhouse before arriving at the Village Hall which was formally the school building.



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2. The Village Hall

You will note on the eastern wall of the Village hall the date 1895, which was when the village hall was modernized and made into the school. Prior to this date the hall had a number of uses, it was used as a poor house, part of the building was already used as school since the 1800s. Prior to its modernization in 1895 the building had an external stone staircase and contained both upper and lower levels.

The upper rooms were used to hold the Sunday School and a day school whilst the lower level contained the School Mistresses house and an alms house. It also was used as a Vestry room for the church.

Prior to 1846 the building was owned by the Parish but in 1846 it was sold to the Church for the princely sum of £30 with the condition that it be used for providing Sunday school and day schooling to the poor of Penmark and to provide accommodation for the school master or mistress.



The layout of the hall was deemed not to be fitting for the school and the number of pupils present and thus the modernization of the hall in 1895 removed the external stairs, internally the walls were paneled using old pews from the Church, a gallery was built at the eastern part of the hall and internal stairs provided to the new galleried space. The cost of the modernization including architects drawings was £240.

The day school taught between 40 and 90 children of the parish between 1846 until its closure in the 1930s and was assessed as being below standard for many years, due to insufficient staff. By 1904 the number of pupils at the school had risen to 82. The school was closed in 1933 with the pupils attending a new council school in Rhose.

A village hall committee took over the running of the building in the 1960s leasing the building from the church and running events for the local community and further building work was completed to add an extension to the rear to house a kitchen and toilet facilities and a new entrance at the western end of the building as seen below



Continuing East from the Village hall passing Croft John, you will take the road to the Lest venturing down into the Cwm where the Village well is situated...

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3. The Wells

Water supplies in villages came from natural sources springs and wells.

In Penmark there were three wells, the largest being the well in the Cwm which was fed from the stream and then smaller wells at Kenson and Sufton

The pictures to the right show the old well in the Cwm and the newly renovated well there today, people from the village had to walk down to the well and then carry heavy buckets of water back up the hill to the main part of the village.

It was not until 1899 that the first proposal to install a water main into the village was made, the plan was to pipe water from Rhoose to Fontegary and then on to the villages of Burton, Fonmon and Penmark. After a parish meeting the proposal and the associated costs were unanimously rejected and the wells continued to be the sole source of water for the village

After the first proposal in 1899 to bring piped water into the village there were various schemes and upgrades to the wells but the subject of mains water did not come back until 1932.

Following the request for a way of transporting the water from the well in the Cwm to the main part of the village, the District Council ruled that such a scheme was unfeasible and again proposed installation of mains water to the village.



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In 1932 the Council voted to install mains water to the villages of Penmark and Aberthaw, though at the parish meeting 14 people objected to the proposal the amendment was passed. It was not until 1935 that the contract was tendered and work starting for the installation of the water main. However even after the installation of the water main the wells were still used as each property only had one cold tap installed. And thus it took over 30 years from the first proposal for the village of Penmark to be connected to mains water.

It seems that the village of Penmark was adverse to change, the effort to get electricity into the village took even longer than the water saga. Street lighting came to the village in 1939 but ironically due the blackout in the war could not be turned on...



From the well in the Cwm continue along the road climbing up through what has been known as 'Sudden Death Hill', you will pass the multi chimneyed Vicarage on your left and then Turn left to follow the road to the Quarry at Sufton where another of the village wells was located..

Continuing on this round you will return to the village of Penmark, via the triangle and the enter the village heading East to pass by Higher end and the newer development of the barns and the older Penmark Farm House before arriving at the church of St Mary on the right hand side

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4. The Church

The parish church of St Mary dates from the 12th century and is one of the largest in the Vale of Glamorgan, it consists of a chancel, nave, south porch and western tower open to the nave. The tower contains six bells which are still rung on special occasions and gives the name to the Pub.

The western tower can be seen in the photograph opposite.

The ring of six bells were originally cast in 1721 in Gloucester, however through over enthusiastic ringing in the 19th Century when it was said that the bells were struck with sledgehammers to increase the sound in competition with neighboring villages, three of the six bells developed cracks. These three bells, the second, fourth and tenor bells were recast with their original inscriptions in 1899 and then later the third bell was re-hung in 1976 in the iron frames that replaced the old oak frames when the bells were recast in 1899.



The chancel arch dates back to the Norman era and has numerous moldings and carvings.

The south wall was rebuilt around 1800 as part of the restoration the perpendicular windows were installed as seen in the photographs opposite and on the next page



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The south side of the nave has the original windows and font from the 13th century.

Additional windows were installed into the eastern end of the building on around 1860.

The picture below shows the western tower and the Northern side of the building.

Patrons and visitors to the church have included the Dean and Chapter of Gloucester, the dean and Chapter of Llandaff and John Wesley, at the age of 74, preached from the Jacobean pulpit in 1777.



Other celebrations at the church included the unveiling of the new stained glass window which was erected in 1899, the Lord Bishop of Llandaff attended with a large number of clergy. In fact the event was so important that the school closed for three days to celebrate the occasion which was also reported on by the Western Mail. The newly recast bells were also used for the public luncheon on the 14th March 1899 as reported in the Press remarking in the improvement to the church but also noting that a kind donor was needed to replace the harmonium with an organ. This request fell on deaf ears for 46 years until an organ was donated to the church in 1945.

In the churchyard the original stocks that were under one of the Yew trees have long since disappeared but here is a large cross from the 19th century which was laid to rest on steps that date back to the Medieval era. The northern part of the Churchyard overlooks fields at the end of which can be seen the old walls of Penmark Castle, of which only the wall and other ruins remain.

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The church registers date back to 1696, however the earliest now available is from 1751. As the parish then bordered the sea, there are many entries concerning folk lost at sea, or as sometimes recorded 'body on beach'.

Several other sea tragedies are recorded here in Penmark and also at the church in Porthkerry, such as the loss of life asso-

ciated with the sinking of merchant ships leaving Cardiff docks. One such ship the *Ida of Stretton* which left Cardiff headed to Tenerife in Jan 1880 when it was hit by a storm in the Bristol channel and tried to return to Cardiff before succumbing to the storm that night with the loss of all but one of the crew, Five German sailors from the ship are buried in Penmark with a further 4 in Porthkerry.

It is typical to think of the imposing church to be central to the village but there were other places of worship that were sometimes more popular than the church. Calvinist Methodists worshipped in the Chapel near to the current village hall, this building could hold over 200 people and was often full for the evening services. The chapel flourished until, a new chapel was built in Rhoose in 1931.

Also at this time Penmark became known as 'Little Ireland' as it was the centre of the Catholic population in the Vale of Glamorgan, the first Irish family arrived in the parish in 1850 and within a decade over 10 percent of the Parish was of Irish descent. By 1889 there were 146 Roman Catholics in the Parish with many of whom attended mass at the thatched Wenvoe Arms in Cadoxton where an altar was erected each Sunday morning. Later in the 1900s mass was celebrated at what is now Holy Cottages opposite the village hall and this continued until a building was dedicated in Rhoose in 1927

From the church you can continue west and will be back at the Six Bells Inn

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Sources for this Heritage trail include the following

Penmark Past a book written by the former resident of the village Maureen Bullows

The Libraries in the vale of Glamorgan and Cardiff

Records of the Church of St Mary, Penmark

It is hoped that this heritage trail is just the start for further information being collated about the village of Penmark and the Vale of Glamorgan, including accounts from the older residents of the village many of whose families have lived in the area for many decades

A thank you to the Heritage Lottery fund for the funding not only for this heritage trail leaflet but also for the physical restoration of the wells in both the Cwm and at Sufton

Thanks to the many members of the Village that helped with these works

