

Arriving on the corner we are about to hear a little more about Usk from Margaret, who has some information about what we can see before us.



" I suppose the relationship between Usk and flowers should be mentioned. Usk has won 'Wales in Bloom' and 'Britain in Bloom' a few times and the town prides itself on its many floral displays. This has not been without some controversy

however as Usk won the 'large village' category when some people (sore losers!) believed it should have been in the 'small town' category. The Open Gardens weekend each year is magnificent and a visit is well recommended. Have a look at some of the gardens from last year on my iPad.

Not only do we take turns to have a look but also take turns to `oh and ah`









Margaret continues "Around 20 of the private gardens in Usk are open to visitors 10am-5pm, to raise money for local charities.

The gardens range from small cottage gardens to the grand sweep of where we have just been, Usk Castle. All are in walking distance of the car parks and there is a regular mini-bus service around the town (10am - 4.45pm)".



More than one of you tell each other that perhaps they will use their bus pass to come back to Usk just for the flowers.

"Look out for traffic please, it's time to cross over, but before we do let me tell you what we are going to do next. You can come with me to the main church in Usk the Priory Church of St Mary which is just a little further on from the other end of the square.. You will still have a little time for going back to the shops we passed earlier. There are also a few coffee stops around the town if that's your cup of tea".

Three sets of eyes light up. But not for tea.

"We meet back at the bus stop which is on the other side of the square to our arrival. The bus back to Newport leaves at 5.33 and it is the best part of two hours to the next one. So over we go and



those that wish to visit the church follow me please."

We walk across Twyn Square to



Priory Street. Now I wonder why it called that ....



where we will see the church grounds to the left and in front of us, the Gate House. That was built in 1535 and is now a private residence, nice!



In we go through the newer church gates to the church grounds.



Its origin was as the church of the Benedictine nunnery (one of only three in Wales) of Usk Priory. The Priory was founded by Richard de Clare, 2nd Earl of Pembroke in the twelfth century.

It was burned in 1405 during Owain Glyndwr's rebellion and had to be rebuilt. During the 15th century it became a gathering place of pilgrims to the shrine of St Radagund.

After the Dissolution of the Monasteries in the late 1530s as it was used by the townspeople of Usk it escaped slighting and become the parish church of the town.



In the graveyard, near the main entrance is a slab laid in 1994 in memory of St David Lewis, who conducted illegal, at the time, Catholic services in various places, such as the attic of the Gunter mansion in his native Abergavenny. He was hanged, drawn and quartered in Usk in 1679 and buried outside St Mary's Church, despite the law prohibiting martyrs' burial in church ground



Walking now as far as the porch, and then passing through it, we can take in some of the interior of the church.



One of the most impressive features of which is its massive pipe organ.

Originally built in 1861 for Llandaff Cathedral it was purchased by St Mary's in 1900 after it was considered no longer good enough for the cathedral!







Here we see a beautifully carved 15th century screen separating the nave from the chancel. One of the finest screens in Wales. It has been restored and painted, the quality of the Medieval craftsmanship is however still very evident.



Behind the screen is a box. As you can probably guess, it's not any old box.

It's a rather worn oak chest. And what might its purpose be?



It contains parish records dating back to the 16th century. I expect that there are a few stories therein!

I expect none of us looking at it today, but pass or no bus pass, were around at that time?





The church has lots of stained glass windows.



Some are quite old but there are some modern additions.



Of course, the font. Were you immersed as a child and did you scream?





This once was a 'triple decker' pulpit.



An Elizabethan wall monument to Walter Jones who fought on the Isle of Ree, just off the coast of France. It was originally his 1656 gravestone.

Alison and I have stayed on the Isle of Ree, but NOT in 1656!

Time to go!

Back up Priory Street towards Twyn Square and out bus stop. Let's hope those that didn't come to church will meet us in time for our bus back to Newport.







As we enter Twyn Square, we see on our left;



a bookshop which these days is a rarity; called Mandalay Books. Now I wonder why? Today, Mandalay is the economic centre of Upper Myanmar (note upper, I wonder if it reminds you of the original St Mellons now calling itself Old St Mellons to distinguish itself from the 'new' St Mellons?) and is considered the centre of Burmese culture. Anyway, I ask Meg. "Interesting". I gather by the way she replies that she is giving it a lot of thought. No one at the bus stop, I wonder if they are in the pub ..... having coffee?





They were, and so they emerge to join the rest of us just in time to listen to Peter who is telling us a little about the Town Clock which dominates the square. "It was built in 1887 by public conscription to celebrate Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee, and quickly became a major focal point of Usk itself. It moved from its original position near the chapel opposite to its present position in the 1970s. However time took its toll on the structure requiring very necessary repair work to its brickwork to stop it falling apart. Money for the restoration was raised mainly by donations and small grants obtained via a steering group of local people. As far as I know the clock mechanism is still performing well even though it is showing the time incorrectly"! It's now a Grade II listed building".

Just as Peter finishes our bus turns up, what timing! On we go back to Newport and onwards to Cardiff after yet another successful BPT! Remember to get off at the Heath, Pat and Lilian!

