

## Newnham, Bullo Pill, and Blaize Bailey

An attractive riverside village, former ports, early railway tunnels, and a spectacular viewpoint. The walk is mainly on field paths and forest tracks, with a steady climb to Blaize Bailey and descent back to Newnham; 13 stiles.

Riverside car park off A48 at northern end of Newnham: GR SO 694120. Alternative parking along the High Steeet. **Refreshments:** Railway and Ship Inns, tea shop and shops in Newnham; snack bar in the riverside car park at popular times. **Bus:** 73 (Gloucester–Chepstow) to Newnham.



TURN LEFT out of the car park and follow Church Road past cottages, partly constructed of black slag blocks, Quay House, and the Drill Hall (former warehouses). Turn right opposite the latter into Beeches Road, then turn left into the High Street, passing the Clock Tower. Lined with old buildings, High Street is particularly attractive in March when the daffodils are in bloom (1). Turn left into Severn Street, noting the slag blocks in the wall on the left. Turn right past Passage House at the bottom of the hill, the old ferry slipway being just ahead here (2). Pass the former Brightlands School on the left, and, just after the road bends right, turn left through a metal gate (“Peace Garden”) at the bottom of the churchyard. Follow the iron railings uphill above the river, passing to the left of the church (3). There is an excellent view of the Severn and Cotswold Hills from here (4). Continue onto a tarmac footpath which leads downhill onto the main road. Where the road bends right, by Underhill House, turn left and then right on a tarmac drive. Bear left by some buildings onto a grass path, go through a kissing gate, and continue straight ahead through a gate to the field beyond. Keep between the river and a railway line, climbing a small rise. Ahead can be seen Portlands Nab, and behind is Newnham Church, The Nab, and Collow Pill, where a marine engineering company usually has some interesting boats. A slight depression where the field narrows marks the site of an ill-fated attempt to build a tunnel under the river (5).

Continue above the river and go through a kissing gate into trees, an area rich in wild flowers in spring. Pass another kissing gate and follow the path between a fence and hedge to another gate by a house. Keep ahead along a gravel road, which soon bends right. To the left is Bullo Pill (6) and ahead a railway viaduct, part of the former South Wales Railway (7). Follow the lane under the archway and out onto the main road. Turn right for 20 yds, cross with care, and take the tarmac lane (signposted bridleway) by the telephone box. On the left is the red-

brick Bullo House, built in the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century for the harbour master at Bullo Pill. The lane, which soon becomes a dirt track, passes Bullo Farm, Hulin’s, and Grove Farm, approaching which a large house (Oaklands Park, 8) can be seen through trees on the left. At Grove Farm, go through a wooden gate on the right, then turn left to follow a hedge and then a sunken track on your left. In the trees at the bottom of the cutting on your right is the trackbed of the former Forest of Dean Branch (9), which leads to the Haie Hill Tunnel. The large pink house above is The Haie (10). Continue with a fence on your left, ignoring a stile, to go through a wooden gate into woodland. The path goes uphill to a gravel track where you bear left. Where this track turns sharp left (to Swiss Cottage), continue ahead on a dirt track to a gate, just before which is a stile on the left. Cross this and bear right to follow a path, which may be rather overgrown in summer, just inside the edge of the woods. Cross another stile and continue along the path, which becomes a broader grassy track and descends to a T-junction.

Turn right and follow this track, which soon becomes gravel, uphill through a pine plantation. Bear slightly right at a track junction, and eventually come to a small clearing, where you bear left uphill to Blaize Bailey lookout (11). Continue on the gravel track, bearing slightly right at a junction. Where the track bends left downhill, bear right past a barrier and a house onto a tarmac lane, where you turn left. After 70 yds climb a stile on the right by a metal gate and turn left to follow the hedge on your left. Cross a pair of stiles and then another by a gate to emerge back onto the lane. *This route gives more good views of the Severn Vale, with the early 17<sup>th</sup> century multi-gabled Staure Farmhouse down the hill towards Newnham. However, if the grass in the fields is too long you can remain on the lane instead.* Continue ahead on the lane for a short distance past “The Bungalow” (on your right) to a junction. Bearing left here takes you into Littledean (12), but turn sharp right downhill to continue the walk.

After 100 yds, turn left at a footpath sign, to head steeply downhill between hedges (not through the kissing gate) and over a stile. Cross another stile onto a tarmac lane, continue ahead past a house, and then, where the road bends right, take the bridleway (not the stile) ahead. Go between hedges through two gates into a field. Follow the hedge on your right, passing a gate/stile, after which the hedge and path bend left downhill past ancient oaks, with lovely views of May Hill (13) and Chestnuts Hill to the left. Look out ahead for a metal gate, which leads to a sunken track between hedges. Follow this, ignoring a stile on the right, through two more gates into a field. Follow the fence on your right for 70 yds and, just past a small hollow, cross a stile (not easy to see) and go through a hedge gap. Bear slightly right across the field ahead, keeping

parallel to the right-hand edge, to a marker post and footbridge, which only come into view as you get close. Cross the bridge and a stile and then continue in the same direction to another stile. Bear slightly left across the next field, aiming to go past an isolated tree to a stile in the hedge a little to the left of a house. Climb this and go through a gap in the hedge (by a marker post) a short distance ahead. Bear right, going left of a house (Little Hyde) onto a gravel track and turning left past a shed. The track bends left and then right to join a tarmac lane, where you turn right. Follow the lane as it turns sharp left over the railway line, the site of Newnham Station (14) being on the left and Newnham Tunnel on the right. Continue along the road to the T-junction by the Clock Tower and turn left to return to the car park.

### Newnham (1)

The history of Newnham is closely linked with the River Severn. In Roman times, three important roads converged on the site and there was a ford and possibly even port facilities. A small hamlet had grown up by Saxon times, and by the late medieval period Newnham had become an important port with trading links to Ireland, London, Bristol, and the Midlands. In 1171 Henry II sailed from the town with an army to invade Ireland. It was also much visited by kings for hunting in the Forest of Dean. Newnham continued to grow until the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, when it had become one of the most important ports on the Severn, exporting goods such as timber, bark, hides, and, increasingly, coal. Ships were built here, including one of 600 tons in 1778. There were few other industries, although

Sir Edward Mansell erected a glass furnace in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, said to be the first in the country to be fired by coal; this had closed by 1700. There were also tanneries and a chemical works (verdigris factory). Trade was lost to Bullo when a tramroad was opened in 1810, and opening of the Gloucester and Sharpness Canal in 1827 was a further setback. Newnham's history as a port thus came to an end and the town's fortunes declined, although there were still over 40 shops and trades (cobblers, tailors, etc.) active in 1902.



In spite of this, Newnham is today an attractive village with a reasonable (if depleted) range of facilities. The tree-lined High Street, with its clock tower, is particularly worth a visit in the spring, when the daffodils are in bloom. It is lined with fine buildings, many of them listed. Particularly noteworthy are Britannia House, Kingston House, Lamb House (formerly Lamb & Flag Inn), Olde Bank House, Olde King's Head, Old House, The Limes & White House, The Sanctuary (formerly the Upper George Inn), and Wilcox House (all 17<sup>th</sup> century or older), and Ashley House, Church House, and Unlawater

(18<sup>th</sup> century). There are also many 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings, including Newnham House and The Club, originally the Town Hall, of about 1850. Some of these were originally inns, of which there were 18 at one time or another. Only two survive, the Railway and Ship Inns, the early 18<sup>th</sup> century Victoria Hotel (a former coaching inn) having recently closed. Cottages in Church Street and walls in Severn Street are partly constructed of black slag blocks. These are of copper slag, probably brought up-river as ballast from works at Swansea, rather than being from the Newnham glass works as some sources have claimed. The 17<sup>th</sup> century Passage House at the bottom of Severn Street was once the Bear Inn (and Passage Inn). By the river are the 17/18<sup>th</sup> century Quay House and the Quay Warehouses, the latter built in about 1755 by a local shipping entrepreneur, Robert Pyrke, partly using slag blocks and an important relic of Newnham's period as a port. Brightlands was built in 1868 as the Severn Bank Hotel, but soon became a private house (Riverdale), then a school, and now flats.

### Severn Ferry (2)

Newnham was probably first settled because the river is relatively easy to cross here. Indeed it is occasionally possible to walk across when both the tide and river flow are low, although not without expert local knowledge! A ferry was recorded here in 1238, although there is some evidence that its western end



Cottages partly constructed of slag blocks.

Newnham Ferry in c.1908. From an old postcard.





Newnham Nab, with the church and boats at Collow Pill.

was originally  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile south near Portlands Nab. This site appears to have abandoned in about 1600, possibly because of erosion of the river bank. The ferry remained in use until after the Second World War — clearly the opening of the Severn Railway Bridge a few miles downstream in 1879 did not divert all the ferry traffic away. Small rowing boats were used for passengers, who had to be carried across the mud between the boat and the river bank. Larger boats were used for animals (horses, cattle, sheep,

etc.) or carts. In June 2000 two Royal Marines hovercraft were used in a re-enactment of the Newnham to Arlingham ferry as part of the local millennium celebrations.

### Newnham Church (3)

Newnham's Church of St Peter stands on high ground above the River Severn. The first church here was built in 1380 on land donated by Humphrey de Bohun near his castle, to replace an earlier church, which had been damaged by floods, lower in the town. The church was completely rebuilt by Waller and Son of Gloucester in 1874. It was almost completely destroyed by fire in 1881 and was again rebuilt by Waller. Of the 14<sup>th</sup> century church, only parts of the tower and north porch survive. However, a Norman font with twelve niches containing figures of the Apostles, and a fragment of a tympanum showing the Tree of Life can be seen. The original church was the scene of a battle in 1644 during the Civil War when it was captured from the Royalists by Colonel Massey, some damage being done when a gunpowder keg exploded.

### View from churchyard (4)

The wonderful view from the churchyard takes in the part of the Severn Vale, including the impressive meander (a complete U-bend) of the River Severn. Just opposite is the Passage Inn, near the ferry landing place; beyond this is Arlingham's church tower, and, in the distance, Stonehouse and Stroud. The cities of Gloucester, with the Cathedral tower prominent, and



Cheltenham can be seen away on the left. The Cotswold Escarpment forms the skyline, including (from left to right) Cleve Hill (beyond Gloucester), Haresfield Beacon, and Stinchcombe Hill (above Dursley). Just downstream, towards Bullo, is the small headland of Portlands Nab, apparently the ferry terminus until about 1600. Portlands Nab was once much larger — until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century a hundred people could dance upon it! Like the cliffs on this section of the river, it consists of Triassic Keuper Marl (part of the Mercia Mudstone Group). Newnham is a good place to watch the famous Severn Bore, a large natural wave formed as the incoming tide travels upstream into the narrowing river. The phenomenon depends on the unusually large tidal range (up to nearly 50 ft) in the Severn Estuary, said to be the second largest in the world, after the Bay of Fundy in Canada. The bore occurs at any time of spring tides, but is biggest near the spring (February–April) and autumn (August–October) equinoxes. The highest recorded bore (9 $\frac{1}{4}$  ft) was on 15 October 1966 near Minsterworth, but 4 ft is more typical. The bore becomes bigger as it moves upstream, and so will be higher there than at Newnham. Its speed averages around 10 mph. Bore size is affected by wind direction, pressure, and the amount of fresh water in the river: southwest winds, low pressure, and low water levels are favourable.

### Severn Tunnel (5)

The Bullo Pill Railway's tramroad opened in about 1810, but it was apparent that business would be adversely affected by competition from the Severn and Wye Railway, whose outlet at Lydney Docks was much better placed to make use of the proposed Gloucester and Sharpness Canal (eventually opened in 1827). Transshipment of goods to trows, and the subsequent voyage upriver was both slow and risky. An alternative means of access to Gloucester and beyond was thus needed, and this resulted in the Severn Tunnel Co. being incorporated on 24 May 1810. The aim was to build a tunnel of 12x13 ft section beneath the river between the parishes of Newnham and Arlingham, suitable for use by railway wagons, carriages, and foot passengers. Construction was soon started by Robert Tipping and was well advanced when, in November 1812, water broke into the workings, which had to be abandoned. Thus ended a valiant attempt to build what would have been the first subaqueous tunnel in the world. In the event, it was Marc Brunel who achieved this when his Thames Tunnel was opened in 1843. The masonry-lined top of the shaft near Newnham was still visible in 1965, and it was only in the mid-2000s that it was finally obliterated.

### Bullo Pill (6)

Bullo Pill was just a small tidal inlet used for boat building until the Bullo Pill Railway Co. (*see 9*) was formed in 1809 to develop it as a port for exporting Forest coal and stone. A large dock basin with tidal lock gates and an upper basin for water storage were



constructed, and coal tips were eventually built on both the dock basin and river wharves, the latter then handling most of the traffic. The company's tramroad from Cinderford Bridge and Churchway had opened in about 1810, and when this was converted to a broad-gauge railway 1854, a short branch into the docks from the South Wales Railway's main line was constructed to replace the tramroad connection. An engine shed and two signal boxes were built by the main line at Bullo Pill Junction, where both the Bullo Pill and Cinderford Branches diverged. By this time Bullo had grown into one of the most important ports in the area, which, at its height, was handling over 1000 tons of cargo per day. Jelf's marble works, Boucher's wagon works, and Newnham Rubber Mills were here at different times. However, Bullo's trade declined during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, much having been lost to the better facilities at Lydney and Sharpness (*see Walk 4*), and the last boat called in 1926, although the rail connection to the rubber works lasted until 1963. The lock gates collapsed and the basin began to silt up, but new gates were installed in 1991 with a view to developing the basin into a marina. Nothing has come of this as yet, although some private vessels are currently stored here.

### South Wales Railway. (7)

The main line of the South Wales Railway (SWR) ran from Grange Court Junction, north of Westbury, to Neyland in Pembrokeshire, via Cardiff and Swansea. It opened in stages between 1850 and 1856. The section between Grange Court and Chepstow East opened on 19 September 1851, and I.K. Brunel's tubular suspension bridge over the River Wye at Chepstow was completed in the following July. The SWR was amalgamated with the Great Western Railway on 1 August 1863. The SWR was built to broad gauge, but converted to standard gauge over a single weekend in 1872. Today it is the only surviving railway in the area (other than the preserved Dean Forest Railway), being part of the busy main line from Gloucester and the Midlands to South Wales. (*See Walk 4 for more details of the SWR.*)

### Oaklands Park (8)

The original house at Oaklands Park was built in the early 19th century by Sir James Jelf, formerly a Gloucester banker and a partner in the nearby Bullo Pill Tramroad. In about 1850 the house, park, and adjoining land, including Oaklands farm, were bought by the ironmaster and coal owner Henry Crawshay, who built a large new house in Renaissance style. The original house survives as a low wing at the north end of the present house, and some adjacent outbuildings and the lodge on the main road are contemporary with it. Crawshay, who owned Lightmoor and Foxes Bridge Collieries, Buckshaft and Shakemantle iron mines, and Cinderford and Parkend ironworks, died in 1879 and his widow Liza owned the state until her death in 1895. It was sold in 1899 to William Gwynne-Evans of Fordham (Essex) and remained in the family until 1976. The house and park were then bought by the Camphill Village Trust, a charity for the care of adults with learning difficulties. The community comprises about a hundred people who live according to principles based on the ideas of Rudolph Steiner. They farm 150 acres, producing milk and wool and growing organic fruit and vegetables, as well as doing craft work. Given their respect for the natural world, and resistance to the exploitation and abuse of people and animals, it is not surprising that the community refused to allow the slaughter of their healthy stock during the foot-and-mouth cull of 2001.

### Forest of Dean Branch (9)

The Bullo Pill Railway Co. opened a horse tramroad from Bullo Pill to Cinderford Bridge and Churchway in about 1810. It was used to transport coal, iron ore, stone, and other goods down to the Severn. The Forest of Dean Railway Co. was formed in 1826, but

this, in turn, was taken over by the South Wales Railway (SWR) in 1851. The tramroad was replaced by a broad-gauge locomotive railway to Churchway, which opened to goods traffic on 24 July 1854. The SWR became part of the Great Western Railway in 1863, and the line was converted to standard gauge in 1872. Passenger services between Newnham, on the SWR main line, and Steam Mills (soon extended to Drybrook) began on 3 August 1907, and a loop to Cinderford was opened in April 1908. Passenger services to Cinderford ceased on 1 November 1958, but goods traffic lasted until 1967 (*see also Walk 3*). The major engineering feature on the Forest of Dean Railway was the 1064 yard long Haie Hill Tunnel, originally constructed in 1809 as part of the Bullo Pill Railway's tramroad and enlarged to accommodate broad-gauge trains in 1851–4. When built, it was one of the longest railway tunnels in the world. The far end is seen on Walk 3.

### The Haie (10)

The Haie, long-term home of the Kerr family, was built in about 1840, but a large portecochere (with the Kerr family arms) and staircase hall were added to the north front in 1883. Captain Ralph Kerr CBE (born 1891) went down with his ship, the battle cruiser *HMS Hood* when it was sunk in the Denmark Strait by the German battleship *Bismarck* on 24th May 1941. He made no attempt to leave the sinking vessel, preferring to remain at his station alongside Vice-Admiral Lancelot Holland, and was posthumously Mentioned in Despatches. The deaths of 1415 crew members of the *Hood* constituted the Royal Navy's greatest single ship loss of the Second World War. The Haie Estate was sold soon after the war.

### Blaize Bailey (11)

The Blaize Bailey viewpoint was constructed using stone from a disused railway bridge at Fetter Hill in the Forest. The name comes from the Blythe or Bleith family, who owned the estate centred on Blythes Court, now the Culver House, down towards Newnham, in the late 13<sup>th</sup> century. In about 1876 the estate was merged with the Kerr family's Haie Estate. The view from here is even wider ranging than that from Newnham, including the meandering River Severn, with Gloucester and the Cotswold Hills beyond. To the left is Bredon Hill, and you may also be able to make out the tower of Tewkesbury Abbey. Newnham is below, Broadoak is just upstream to the left, and Westbury, with its prominent church spire, beyond. Most of the church was built in about 1300, and it is unusual for its detached bell tower of about 1270; the first spire was added in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, but has rebuilt several times. Westbury Court Garden (first laid out in 1696–1705, now National Trust), is nearby.

This is also a good place to look at the geology; a look at the geological section and map in the "Short History of Dean" chapter should help

Horseshoe bend in the Severn, with the Cotswolds beyond.



to make sense of the plethora of names. Blaize Bailey is situated on the eastern side of the Forest of Dean basin, on Lower Old Red Sandstone Brownstones (sandstones of Devonian age). These rocks dip steeply to the west here (away from the river), under the Carboniferous rocks which make up the central part of the Forest. Towards the river are older Devonian and Silurian rocks underlying the Brownstones: the marls (limey mudstone) and sandstones of the St Maughan's and Raglan Mudstone Groups. Below them are Silurian sandstones, limestones, and shales of the Ludlow, Wenlock, and Llandovery Series, but these are seen mainly north of Blaisdon. In contrast, the Vale of Gloucester and Cotswold Hills consist mainly of much younger Triassic and Jurassic rocks, which are separated from the Silurian–Devonian rocks by the Blaisdon Fault and other faults (see *Walk 11*). These younger rocks are much less strongly folded and only gently dipping. Much of the lower ground on this side of the Severn north of Bullo (including the cliffs near Newnham) consists of Triassic Keuper Marl (Mercia Mudstone Group), mainly mudstones, with some marls and sandstones, deposited in inland lakes under desert conditions. At Garden Cliff (just upstream of Westbury), the Keuper Marl is overlain by Rhaetic (uppermost Triassic) and Liassic (Lower Jurassic) rocks. The Rhaetic beds (Penarth Group) represent a change to marine conditions, and are mostly black shales, but include layers of sandstone with abundant bivalve fossils. Of particular interest is the *Ceratodus* Bone Bed, a sandy limestone full of the fragmentary remains of fish (teeth, scales, and spines) and marine reptiles (bones and teeth). The low ground across the river is largely of Lower Lias mudstones (with some limestone layers); the same rocks are seen around Whitby in Yorkshire and Lyme Regis in Devon, world-famous localities which are a rich source of ammonites and other fossils. There are good exposures at Hock Cliff, just across the river south of Arlingham. Small ammonites and belemnites (the bullet-shaped internal shells of extinct cuttlefish-like animals) can be found there, as well as excellent specimens of the bivalve *Gryphaea* (the Devil's toenail). Overlying these are Middle and Upper Lias mudstones, marls, silts, and sands (Cotteswold Sands), which are exposed near the base of the Cotswold Escarpment and on Robinswood and Churchdown Hills near Gloucester. The youngest solid rocks in the area seen here are the Middle Jurassic oolitic limestones (Inferior and Great Oolite Series) of the Cotswold Hills. These are the famous cream-coloured limestones so characteristic of the area and seen in numerous dry-stone walls and buildings. Like the Liassic rocks, they are commonly highly fossiliferous, with brachiopods, bivalves, and echinoids (sea-urchins) being particularly common.

Lying on top of these solid rocks along the Severn Valley are the remnants of a series of Quaternary river terraces (sand and gravel), deposited when sea levels were higher than today at different times during interglacial periods. Evidence for at least six distinct terraces are known, the highest and oldest probably having formed several hundred thousand years ago. Much younger (<10 000 years) are the deposits of alluvium (mainly sand, clay, and peat) which cover large areas near the river. Interestingly, it was only at the end of the last Ice Age that the River Severn took up its present course. Before then it had flowed north, but its course was blocked by ice and it was forced to find an alternative outlet to the south. This occurred either by the overflow of a huge lake of glacial melt water, or by water flowing beneath the ice sheet under very high pressure. The result was the formation of the Severn Gorge near Ironbridge in Shropshire. This area is famous as the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution (although the Forest also had its role to play), but this was dependent on the availability of the necessary raw materials (limestone, ironstone, sandstone, coal, and clay) which had been exposed in the steep-sided gorge by the action of glacial melt water. The Industrial Revolution would undoubtedly have

happened, but had it not been for this geological event, its main cradle might have been elsewhere.

### Littledean (12)

Littledean stood at the centre of a network of tracks, notably the Roman road which led up from the ford and ferry at Newnham. It is one of the ancient villages of Dean, although the woodland was cleared early. By 1086 a motte and bailey castle, later known as the Old Castle of Dene, had been built in a commanding position on a hill

to the east. Nearby outcrops of Carboniferous limestone, with associated iron-ore deposits, provided the basis for quarrying and mining industries for centuries. However, the local Old Red Sandstone provided stone for most of the older buildings in the village. The Church of St Ethlebert was built in the late 12th century, but little remains of this Norman structure. The present nave and chancel are 13th, the tower is 14th, and the north aisle and Brayne Chapel are 15th century. The tower originally had a spire, but this was destroyed in a severe gale in 1894 and never rebuilt. There are some fine buildings in Church Street, including the early 18th century Frogmore and Church Farmhouse; Old Victoria Inn dates back to the 15th century. Dean Croft, in Broad Street, is 17th century. Brayne Court, behind the Littledean House Hotel, is partly 16th century, albeit with 17th century additions and much 19th century remodelling. It may well date back to the 1580s when Thomas Brayne created a deer park west of the village. Of the many inns in Littledean, only the Belfry (formerly the George), King's Head, and Littledean House are still open today. Northeast of the village is Littledean Gaol, designed by William Blackburn and one of four built in the county for Sir George Onesiphorus Paul in 1791. It incorporated a two-storey building, with a central block containing an office, committee room, chapel, infirmaries, and accommodation for keeper and turnkey, and east and west wings containing the cells. Around the building were four courtyards and the whole was surrounded by a perimeter wall with a gatehouse on the south side. From 1854 the building was used as a police station and remand prison and in 1874 the east wing was remodelled as a petty sessional court. During the Second World War the cells were used as a store by the County Record Office and Gloucester Cathedral. The police station was closed in 1972 and the building, which continued to house archives until 1979, was purchased by an insurance company in 1985. It is now an interesting museum.

The most historically important building in Littledean is undoubtedly Dean Hall, just south of the village on Dean Hill. Originally there was an open hall of Saxon type here, perhaps occupied by the first Lords of Dene (or by earlier Saxon thanes) and this was later converted to a Norman hall, comprising first floor and undercroft. Gradually extended over three centuries, the Norman hall had developed into a substantial medieval manor house by the time it was largely replaced with the present Jacobean house after 1612. In that year it was bought from the Brayne family by Charles Bridgeman, who completely rebuilt it. Two Royalist were killed here during a Civil war skirmish. The



Littledean Jail.

house passed to the Pyrke family in 1664 and they made further major alterations: a formal front in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century and a 'Jacobean' façade in 1852. In the cellar are substantial remains of the original Saxon or early Norman (possibly 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> century) hall, and there is good reason to suppose that a Roman settlement had previously occupied the site, as fragments of Roman masonry can be found in the surviving part of the Saxon dwelling. There is thus some justification for the claim that Dean Hall is "England's oldest inhabited house". More evidence of Roman occupation are the remains of a Roman temple near the house. Sited at a spring on the edge of the escarpment overlooking the river, it is thought that the temple was dedicated to the deity of the River Severn (Sabrina). Unfortunately, Dean Hall is no longer open to the public.

### May Hill (13)

The rounded top of May Hill, with its distinctive clump of trees, is a conspicuous feature from far and wide, being visible from the Malvern Hills, much of the Cotswold Escarpment, the Black Mountains, and even the hills of mid-Wales. Although it is commonly said that the cluster of trees was planted in 1887 to mark Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee, much earlier accounts refer to a plantation on the summit. The 1887 plantings presumably replaced some of the older trees which had died or been used as fuel in a beacon to guide ships navigating the River Severn. The origin of the name May Hill is uncertain. It has been suggested it was derived from Magesoetan, an Anglo-Saxon tribe which lived in the area, and that the syllable *mag* evolved to become *may*. However, it is widely believed that the name originated from the May Day games, when young people from the district would gather on top of the hill to have a mock battle. May Hill was once also known as Yartleton Hill, but it is unclear whether that was the original name. Geologically, May Hill consists of some of the oldest rocks in the area: Silurian sandstones, limestones, and shales, about 420–440 million years old. They form an 'inlier', in which the strata were folded into an anticline (or dome), the older rocks in the core then being exposed by erosion. The rocks of May Hill form a continuation of the Malvern Hills line of faulting and folding (*see Walk 11*).

### Newnham Station (14)

Opened in 1851 or 1852, Newnham Station on the South Wales Railway (*see 7* above) had two platforms, connected by a footbridge, and a goods siding serving a large stone goods shed. The main station building was on the down platform and there was a signal box on the up side. A bay platform was later built to accommodate passenger services on the Forest of Dean Branch (*see 9*) to Steam Mills (soon extended to Drybrook), which began on 3 August 1907; Cinderford was served from April 1908. In 1953 there were three services a day to Cinderford (with more on Saturdays) and about 12 to and from Gloucester, the down trains continuing to Cardiff, Swansea, or Cinderford. Passenger services to Drybrook ended on 7 July 1930, and to Cinderford on 1 November 1958, and Newnham Station finally closed on 2 November 1964. No trace of the station remains today.

