

Tidenham Chase, Hewelsfield, and Offa's Dyke

Views of both the Wye and Severn, Hewelsfield Church, Tintern Abbey view, and Offa's Dyke. A hilly walk along a variety of field and woodland paths, tracks, and lanes; 10 stiles.

Tidenham Chase car park (signposted for Offa's Dyke) on B4228 Chepstow to Coleford road, about 3 miles north of Tutshill: GR ST 558992. **Refreshments:** none on walk route, but pub and café (in village shop) in Brockweir.



START BY WALKING AWAY from the main road, past a barrier and along a gravel track. There are good views to the left across the heathland of Tidenham Chase (1) to the Severn and beyond. After about 300 yards, at a junction, take the track immediately to the right of a survey pillar (712 ft) and go through a kissing gate. Continue past numerous boulders of Drybrook Sandstone through another kissing gate onto a concrete lane. In a dip to the left, immediately before the lane, is a manhole cover – the entrance to an extensive cave system (2). Turn right along the lane (Miss Graces Lane, named after sisters of W.G. Grace, the famous cricketer, who lived in Chase House in the early 20th century). Note the old limekilns (3) in the woods on the left, some 250 yds along the lane. Where the concrete lane turns left, keep ahead on a dirt track, eventually passing to the right of Beeches Farm. In the caravan site to your right are some undulations, which are all that remain of a former settlement near the present Madgetts Farm (4).

Bear left at the end of the farm buildings and go right of a waymarked post. Continue across a field, bearing slightly left as you start to descend to reach a stile in the bottom left-hand corner. Cross the right-hand stile and follow the left-hand edge of the next field to cross another stile. Turn right onto the Offa's Dyke Path (see 11). Go left after 100 yds at a marker post and descend diagonally across a field (which can be very slippery in wet conditions) to the bottom right-hand corner. There are good views from here of the River Wye and Brockweir (5) to the left, and St Briavels and Hewelsfield Commons (6) in front. Cross a stile and bear right to follow the upper edge of the next field, just below woodland, leaving the Offa's Dyke Path here. Continue below the woods through four separate gates and then an adjacent pair, before continuing uphill to yet another gate at the end of the woodland ahead. Cross the middle of the next field to a gate in the far hedge and then maintain the same direction to another gate a little above the far left-hand field corner. Keep right of

some large trees in the next field to a gate in the field corner, which leads to an enclosed track. This comes out onto a main road. Cross this with care and take "Church Lane" ahead. Just before a house on the right is a stile and a public footpath sign where the route continues. However, it is worth going a further 100 yds along the lane first to see Hewelsfield Church (7).

Return to the stile, and follow the path across the field between a large tree and a tree-lined depression (a sinkhole, 8). Bear slightly right beyond the latter to a stile in the far right-hand corner of the field. Turn right on the tarmac lane, from which there are good views of Alvington, Woolaston, the River Severn, Oldbury Power Station (see Walk 4), the Severn Bridges (Walk 2), and the Cotswold Hills. Follow the lane until it descends to a sharp left-hand bend, where you turn right onto a stony track (part of the Gloucestershire Way (GW), a 100-mile long-distance footpath from Chepstow to Tewkesbury). The track bends right and reaches a junction, where you turn sharp left and descend past old lime kilns (the Lower Dolomite crops out here) to a tarmac lane. After 30 yds, fork right onto another stony track (signed GW and Slade Farm). Pass through a metal kissing gate on the left just before the farm, and continue along the field below the farm buildings, through a metal gate, and then bearing right in the valley bottom to go through another gate. Continue to a gateway in the fence ahead, but do not go through. Instead, follow the hedge uphill to the left to a kissing gate. Turn right on the dirt track for 120 yds, then turn left through a waymarked metal gate (the left one of three), following a path through trees to a stile. Follow the right-hand field edge beyond, then, where this bends right, continue in the same direction to the right-hand of two gateways. Now keep a fence on your left, coming to a kissing gate on the edge of woodland. A narrow waymarked path through the trees leads to a kissing gate and then a tarmac lane.

Turn left for 200 yds, then sharp right at a GW sign, to go past a wooden barrier and onto another woodland path. There are more ruined lime kilns on the right, nearby quarries having worked the Drybrook Limestone. Cross over a track (going through barriers on each side) and continue out of the woods to another dirt track. Turn left and almost immediately right through a metal gate and follow the left-hand edge of a field onto a footpath through the trees ahead. The path soon emerges onto a tarmac lane, which is followed ahead, ignoring side tracks, past Ridley Bottom Nature Reserve, to a T-junction. Continue ahead through a kissing gate onto a footpath. Bear slightly left at a junction onto a wider track, then left at a fork, which leads to Queen Victoria's Jubilee Monument (9). Turn right in front of the monument, leaving the Gloucestershire Way here, and follow the generally muddy track straight out onto a main road. Turn left, passing Miss Graces Lane on the right. *For a shortcut, follow this lane to just beyond point 2 and turn right back to the car park.* Turn right after about 250 yds onto a tarmac lane just beyond a house.

Follow the lane to a gate, just before which you bear right past a barrier onto a gravel track, another section of the Offa's Dyke Path. (The gated road leads to the disused Tintern Quarry (10), but this is presently closed to the public so please do not enter.) The track passes outcrops of limestone on a right-hand bend, then bends left before reaching a waymarked footpath where you turn right. The path climbs steeply at first, curves left, and then doglegs up onto Offa's Dyke (11) itself. It follows the Dyke for about ¼ mile, initially with glimpses of the Bristol Channel back to the left. The path bends sharply right above Plumweir Cliff and continues to the Devil's Pulpit, a rock pillar, where you are rewarded by a superb view of the Wye Valley, with Tintern Abbey (12) and the Wireworks Bridge (13) prominent. Continue along the path, which bends right here, and after about 100 yds go through a kissing gate on the right. Follow the left-hand field edge to a stile, bear half right across the next field to a stile, and then maintain the same direction to a stile by a gate. Bear left to follow the field edge to another stile and onto a concrete lane. Turn left for 10 yds and then right to reverse your outward path past the survey pillar back to the car park.

Tidenham Chase (1)

Its name suggests that Tidenham Chase was once a hunting preserve, but for centuries the tenants of Tidenham Manor had rights of common there (and elsewhere) and were allowed to gather firewood and take timber for repairing their houses. However, enclosure proceeded steadily in the south of the parish during the 17th and 18th centuries, and by 1810 Tidenham Chase was virtually confined to the high northern plateau and covered about 1000 acres. Enclosure was finally completed in 1815, not without opposition. An area of 107 acres (Poor's Allotment, across the main road from the car park) was awarded in trust for the poor of the parishes of Lancut and Tidenham. Most of this was to be used as animal pasture, but 30 acres were for a potato garden for those occupying property with a rateable value of £10 or less. At the time of the enclosure this category included 26 parishioners, each of whom was allowed to put a horse, a cow, and six sheep on the pasture. Most of this area has remained as rough grazing land, covered with bracken and gorse and a reminder of the former appearance of much of Tidenham Chase. Other allotments went to the various tithe owners, by far the largest being 104 acres (Parson's Allotment) awarded to the vicar.

Large sections of the Chase, including Parson's Allotment, are now forestry plantations, both conifers and broad-leaved trees. Most of the remainder is farmland (predominantly pasture). Tidenham Chase is underlain by rocks of the Carboniferous Limestone Series, mostly

the Lower Drybrook Sandstone and Drybrook Limestone. Areas of the former include The Park (where you are now) and most of Poor's Allotment (now a Site of Special Scientific Interest, SSSI), which support important acid grassland and lowland heath habitats. Together they are the largest heathland site in Gloucestershire. Notable bird species include the nightjar, stonechat, hobby, woodcock, yellowhammer, linnet, snipe, and reed bunting. Characteristic plant species here include common bent, sheep's fescue, creeping fescue, western gorse, ling, bell heather, cross-leaved heath, bilberry, sheep's sorrel, and heath bed-straw. Vegetation associated with calcareous soils over Drybrook Limestone is dominated by fescue species with a wide range of herbs including rock rose, thyme, stemless thistle, salad burnet, and bird's-foot trefoil. Associated semi-natural woodland habitat in the eastern part of the site is unusual in having dominant oak and holly, together with yew, field maple, and whitebeam. Attempts are being made to restore these habitats, with control of bracken being an ongoing task. They are managed by spring and summer grazing by rare breeds, such as Hebridean sheep, and Gloucester and White Park cattle, and Exmoor ponies have recently been introduced.

Miss Graces Lane Cave (2)

Appearances can be deceptive, because this unimpressive manhole leads to an extensive cave system. The Royal Forest of Dean Caving Club began digging a shaft in the depression in 1994, but it was not until December 1997 that the shaft, which was being lined with concrete, broke through into Autumn Frenzy Chamber at a depth of about 93 ft. After nearly two more years of digging from here, a rift nearly 100 ft below the entrance chamber was reached. A complex series of passages and rifts (called Winter Storm) on four different levels was eventually reached after still more digging. Since then further digging has allowed access into many more passages and chambers (Spring Fever and Canyon Series), and the total known horizontal cave length is now 2.5 miles, second in the Forest only to Slaughter Stream Cave, near Symonds Yat (*see Walk 1*). Not so long ago the Forest was thought to be devoid of major cave systems, but the efforts of cavers have shown this to be wrong. Probably the most exciting underground discovery in the area was that of Otter Hole, below Chepstow Racecourse, in the mid-1970s. This contains some of the country's finest cave formations, but exploration is not for the faint hearted! The cave entrance is in the bank of the Wye and only accessible near low tide, when the entrance series is not flooded. Moreover, the caver has to negotiate some particularly sticky mud and a couple of boulder chokes before the formations begin. For these reasons, entry is restricted to experienced cavers belonging to bona fide caving clubs.

Limekilns (3)

There are several old quarries on this part of Tidenham Chase, although most of them are in the Lower Drybrook Sandstone. The presence of limekilns here suggests that the underlying Whitehead Limestone was also being worked, as it is only just below the sandstone at this location (*see also Walk 9*). Two other sets of lime kilns can be seen on this walk.

Madgett (4)

A cluster of small rectangular enclosures is visible as very slight earthworks. Not much seems to have been published on the site, but it thought to have been the location of a medieval settlement known as Madgett or Modiete. Its proximity to Offa's Dyke may be significant. Miss Graces Lane (originally Madgett Road) is thought to be part of a prehistoric track which linked the Severn near Stroat with the Wye at Brockweir. There is also an ancient hollow way near the site of the ferry from Tintern which leads up the hillside towards Offa's Dyke

and Madgett. The monks of Tintern Abbey established a grange, which included a chapel, at Modesgate in the 12th century. A little way down the hill near the bottom of the field you cross a more substantial earthwork, which extends westwards to the Dyke, which is only about 200 yds away in the woods on your left.



The trow Goodhope at Brockweir in 1904. Brockweir Local History Group/Hallam Collection.



Brockweir wharf and bridge today.

constructed in medieval times to catch salmon, but hindered free passage up and down the river. It was not until 1662 that the Wye Navigation Act attempted to resolve these problems, and develop the river's potential. Cargoes included coal, iron, timber, and stone; Herefordshire cider and other articles were exported. Bark for tanning, which was mainly taken down river to Chepstow, was a major industry. Vast quantities of timber were used to make ships, barrels and other articles, and charcoal. For example, construction of a 150 ton ship required 3000 wagonloads of timber. The woodlands were carefully managed to produce mature trees for

Brockweir (5)

Tradition has it that in 584 King Meuric of Gwent defeated the Saxons under Caewlin at the Battle of Tintern Ford near Brockweir. He was joined by his father, Tewdrig (Theoderic), who left his monk's cell to aid his son and was killed in the battle. The River Wye has been used for transport for millennia, and although it was once a grange of Tintern Abbey, Brockweir developed largely to serve this traffic. It became an important boat-building centre and port for sailing vessels, which worked to the Bristol Channel ports and elsewhere. Being near the tidal limit of the River Wye, it was also a place where goods were transferred between sea-going and smaller up-river craft. The famous trow (rhymes with 'crow') was a flat-bottomed sailing barge used on both the Severn and the Wye. There were various types, but the shallow draft was essential for craft working upriver as far as Hereford or even, when the river was high enough, to places like Hay and up the River Lugg to Leominster. The craft were man-hauled over the various rapids and weirs, although horses had been introduced by the early 19th century. The weirs had been

keels and masts, and by coppicing and harvesting wood for charcoal on an 8–12 year cycle. The village had a thriving ship building, fitting-out, and repair industry. 13 ships were launched at Brockweir in 1824, and the barque Constantine (509 tons and 121 feet long) was the last large boat built, in 1847. However, once the Wye Valley Railway was opened in 1876 (*see Walk 13*), the up-river trade went into a terminal decline. Another distinctive river craft was the Wye coracle, or truckle, used extensively for salmon netting and angling until the 1900s. Made of interwoven willow twigs covered in horse-hide, or, later, pitched canvas, these one-man vessels were similar to those used by the Celts in pre-Roman times.

In the early 19th century Brockweir was said to be one of the most lawless places in the country, with about 16 public houses to cater for the stevedores who loaded and unloaded vessels at the quayside. At that time there was no church and "The Lord's Day was kept as a day of unhallowed revelling and desecrated by cock-fighting, gambling and quarrelling". In 1831 a Tintern doctor, worried about the spiritual state of the villagers as well as their physical health, wrote about the situation to the Moravian Minister in Bristol. The result was that the Moravian Church was built, reportedly on the site of the cock-pit, in 1833. It continues in use to this day. Brockweir village is situated on the English side of the Wye, whereas the Monmouth–Chepstow toll road (opened in 1828, now the A466) and Wye Valley Railway (opened in 1876, closed in 1964) were on the opposite bank and accessible only by ferry. Hence, in 1893 a petition ('memorial'), signed by 236 local villagers seeking permission and finance for a bridge, was presented to the Gloucestershire and Monmouthshire County Councils. However, there were many financial and legal problems, including claims for compensation from the ferryman (Edwin Dibden) and the Great Western Railway, and disputes with property owners in Brockweir (which accounts for the odd alignment of the bridge at the village end) to be overcome before work began in August 1905. The bridge was constructed in Chepstow by Edward Finch & Co. and the spans were floated up the river on barges. It has three lattice-girder spans supported by two pairs of cylindrical iron columns and masonry abutments. By July 1906 locals were using the bridge, although it was not yet complete! During World War 2, the bridge had a narrow escape when a Wellington bomber, returning from a mission over France, crashed just upstream after its crew had safely baled out. Today Brockweir is an attractive riverside village, with just one pub (the Brockweir Country Inn, probably 16th century) and a new eco-friendly shop (½ mile up the road towards Hewelsfield). Other interesting buildings include the 16th century Manor House (which stands facing the bridge), the 16th/17th century Glen-Wye (formerly an inn, part of which had to be demolished when the bridge was built), the 15th/16th century Malt House (although parts may date to the 1300s), Phoenix House (also possibly 14th century in part), and Spring Cottage (1700 or earlier). The Malt House is thought to have been part of the Tintern Abbey grange, and was only used as a malt house from about 1750 until 1876. The stone quay is still visible, and in front of Quay House is the screw from 'La Belle Marie', Brockweir's best-known trading vessel, which carried goods to and from Bristol. Flora Klickman (1867–1958), authoress and editor of *The Girls Own Paper*, wrote many stories about her cottage (Sylvan View) in Brockweir. Her most famous, *The Flower Patch among the Hills*, was published in 1916 and her last, *Weeding the Flower Patch*, in 1948. She is buried in the Moravian Churchyard.

St Briavels and Hewelsfield Commons (6)

These were originally part of the woodland of the Hudnalls, which belonged to the Royal Manor of St Briavels, and hence was extraparochial, until 1842, when most was incorporated into St Briavels Parish, the rest going to Hewelsfield (*see Walk 6*). In medieval times, most of the flatter land of the present Commons (which is now a misnomer, since they are no longer

used as such) seems to have been relatively open woodland, with grassy clearings used as pasture. Much of this was settled and enclosed by squatters between about 1750 and 1810, leaving only the steeper slopes above the Wye as woodland. If the squatter was able to keep the chimney of his new cottage smoking from sunset to sunrise, his claim was thought to become legitimate. Land clearance would have been hard work in view of the many large boulders lying around, and the result was a landscape of small fields, isolated cottages, and small patches of woodland, separated by narrow winding lanes and footpaths, with numerous hedgerows and thick stone walls, incorporating many older trees. Indeed the Common must have one of the densest networks of drystone walls, which served both as boundaries and 'stone dumps', in the country. In the mid-19th century about half the Common was under crops and half grassland (pasture), although the proportion under crops has gradually declined. In more recent times many wealthier people have moved in, enlarging houses and building new ones. The area now consists mainly of pastures, horse paddocks, and the remaining small-holdings. In 2001 local residents set up the Parish Grassland Project to raise interest in the landscape and help restore their fields as flower-rich grassland. The area already supports a wide variety of grasses, herbs, rushes, flowers, and fungi (some of them rare). There are also many species of mammals (including deer, lesser horseshoe bats, and badgers), birds (including buzzards, kestrels, sparrowhawks, and goshawks), snakes, frogs, toads, newts, and invertebrates (butterflies, moths, etc.). There is a good view of this unusual landscape from here, with St Briavels Common opposite and Hewelsfield Common on the hillside further to the right. The highest point is at Hart Hill, 817 ft above sea level. In contrast to the Carboniferous Limestone of Tidenham Chase, the Commons are underlain by Old Red Sandstone rocks, which has led to more intensive cultivation over the centuries. However, much of the area was originally covered by abundant blocks of sandstone and, in particular, quartz conglomerate, so that clearing fields would have been an onerous task.



Hewelsfield Church (7)

Hewelsfield comprises a small group of dwellings around the imposing Church of St Mary Magdalene. This is situated within a circular churchyard (with a yew tree said to be 1300 years old). The long tiled roof extends from the ridge of the Norman (12th century) nave, over the north aisle and the southern porch and vestry to within a few feet of the ground. The squat tower, with pyramid roof and 6 bells, chancel, porch, and north transept date from the 13th century, and the north vestry was added in the 16th. There is

a hermit's room, priest's door, and primitive sundial. The 13th century font has an octagonal scalloped bowl on a round pedestal. The house on the opposite side of the churchyard from the lych gate has a date stone of 1706. Throughout the 19th century it was the Parrot Inn. Hewelsfield Court was owned by the Gough family until it was rebuilt in the late 18th or early 19th century; two nearby stone barns date from the 17th and 18th centuries.

Sinkhole (8)

A sinkhole is a generally more-or-less circular, funnel-shaped depression in limestone areas, which is formed either by solution of the limestone at the surface, or by the collapse of underlying caves. Most are dry, but some have a stream disappearing underground, when they are called swallow holes. This sinkhole is in Lower Limestone Shale, the lowest part of the Carboniferous Limestone Series, and has unfortunately been used as a rubbish dump. Sinkholes do not appear to be particularly common in the limestone around here, although there are a couple of small ones in Hewelsfield churchyard! Some limestone plateaux, like Mynydd Llangatock near Crickhowell in South Wales, are a mass of sinkholes. Such features, together with caves and underground drainage, are characteristic of the topography developed on limestone (termed 'karst'), which is due to the relatively high solubility of limestone in water (particularly if it is slightly acidic).

Queen Victoria's Jubilee Stone (9)

We are back on Tidenham Chase here, in the area known as Parson's Allotment, as it was awarded to the vicar when the Chase was enclosed in 1815 (*see 1 above*). It is now a mixed plantation managed by the Forestry Commission. The tall and narrow stone (inscribed VR 1837–97) was hauled up from the bank of the Severn and erected to commemorate the Queen Victoria's Jubilee of 1897. At one time there was a row of much older stones, which extended from Stroat to Madgetts, possibly defining an ancient boundary. Only a few remain and their age is unknown, although they may have marked an ancient route from the Severn to the Wye at Brockweir. The Broadstone is a large standing stone near the Severn, about 2 miles southeast of here, which probably dates from the Neolithic (Late Stone Age) or Bronze Age. There are other standing stones at Staunton (the Longstone) and below Huntsham Hill, near Symonds Yat (the Queen Stone), and there used to be another Longstone near St Briavels. Excavation of a Bronze Age round barrow on Tidenham Chase has yielded a copper knife or dagger and a bronze awl. Together with other sites nearby, marked as "Hut Circles" on OS maps, they indicate that the area was being settled at this time.

Tintern Quarry (10)

Tintern Quarry worked the massive Drybrook Limestone and the overlying Crease and Whitehead Limestones, part of the Carboniferous Limestone Series. Quarrying appears to have begun here around 1930, mainly for road metal or aggregate. A siding connection with the Great Western Railway's Wye Valley line was brought into use in 1931, but after the line closed in 1964, the section from Wye Valley Junction, near Chepstow, was operated as a private siding. The quarry was owned by W.G. Turrif Ltd, and the last train ran in December 1981.

Offa's Dyke (11)

Offa's Dyke is thought to have been built by Offa, the Saxon King of Mercia from 757–96. His



kingdom covered the area between the Trent and Mersey rivers in the north and the Thames Valley in the south, and from the Welsh border in the west to the Fens in the east. At the height of his power, he also controlled Kent, East Anglia, and Lindsey (Lincoln), and had alliances with Northumbria and Wessex, sealed by the marriage of two of his daughters to their Kings, Ethelred and Beorhtric, respectively. Hence, Offa was the first man to call himself “King of the English” and to mint national coins: silver pennies and gold dinars. Although he had some success in fighting the Welsh, Offa was unable to conquer them, and it was probably in the 780s that he negotiated a border between the Welsh and the English and began construction of the Dyke. This was therefore most likely to have been designed as a boundary marker, rather than a defensive structure. It may also have been designed to impress potential enemies with Offa’s power: the amount of labour needed to build it is proof that Mercia possessed a high degree of cohesion. Offa’s Dyke is a linear earthwork which roughly follows the Welsh–English border, from Sedbury Cliffs, on the Severn Estuary, to Treuddyn, near Mold in North Wales. However, there are large gaps, particularly between Monmouth and Kington, and, of the total distance of about 140 miles, only about 80 miles are actual earthwork. This consists of a ditch and rampart, mostly constructed with the ditch on the Welsh-facing side, and appears to have been carefully aligned to present an open view into Wales. As originally constructed, it must have been about 70–80 ft wide and as much as 25 ft from the ditch bottom to the bank top. It has been suggested that this southern section above the Lower Wye Valley is not part of Offa’s Dyke at all, but the evidence is far from compelling and there is little doubt that it is more-or-less contemporary with the main (64 mile long) section further north. Wat’s Dyke, which lies just east of Offa’s and extends from near Oswestry almost to the North Wales coast, is probably only a little younger, probably dating from the 820s during the reigns of Coenwulf and Ceolwulf. The section of Offa’s Dyke between here and the Devil’s Pulpit is particularly impressive, with its commanding position overlooking the Wye. The Offa’s Dyke Path (of which this is a part) was opened in the summer of 1971 and links Sedbury, on the Severn Estuary, with Prestatyn, on the coast of North Wales. In its 177-mile length, the path passes through eight different counties and crosses the border between England and Wales over 20 times. It includes parts of the Brecon Beacons National Park and three Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty — the Wye Valley, the Shropshire Hills, and the Clwydian Hills.



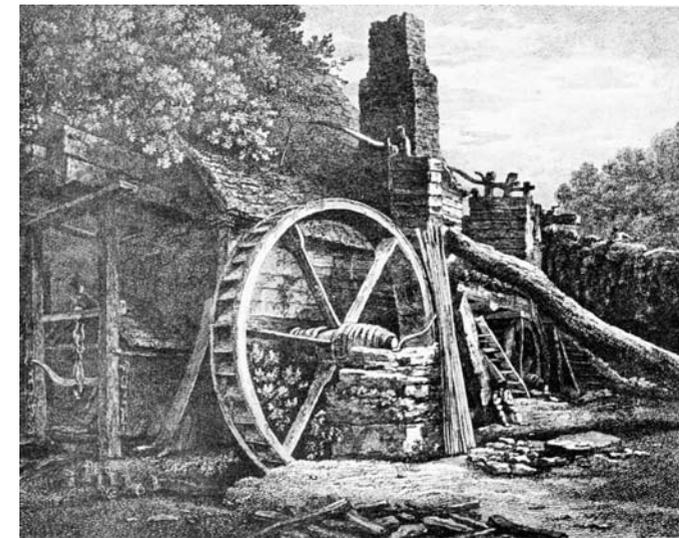
Tintern Abbey (12)

The Cistercian Abbey of Tintern is one of the greatest monastic ruins of Wales. It was only the second Cistercian foundation in Britain and the first in Wales, and was founded on 9 May 1131 by Walter de Clare, Lord of Chepstow. It soon prospered, thanks to endowments of land in Gwent and Gloucestershire, and by 1139 had sufficient numbers to set up a colony in [Kingswood, Glos.](#) In 1189 William Marshal became Lord of Chepstow and patron of Tintern, and in 1201–3 the Abbey of Tintern Parva (Little Tintern) was established

on his lands in Ireland. During the 13th century the abbey was more or less completely rebuilt, starting in about 1220 with the cloisters and the domestic ranges around them. Roger Bigod III, Lord of Chepstow from 1270–1306, took a keen interest in the abbey, and is remembered as the builder of the abbey church, completed in about 1301. This is still Tintern’s crowning glory, albeit roofless and without window glass or internal divisions. By the late 13th century the monks at Tintern were farming well over 3000 acres of arable land on the Welsh side of the Wye and kept some 3264 sheep on their pasture lands. The lands of the Abbey were divided into agricultural units or granges. In 1326 King Edward II visited Tintern and spent two nights there. After the Black Death swept the country in 1348–9 it became impossible to attract new recruits for the lay brotherhood. Changes to the way the granges were tenanted out, rather than worked by lay brothers, show the difficulties Tintern was experiencing. The Dissolution of the Monasteries under Henry VIII in 1536–40 brought monastic life in England and Wales to an abrupt end. Tintern Abbey was surrendered to the Earl of Worcester in 1536, the roofs were stripped of lead, and the abbey fell into decay. The ruins became one of the highlights of the Wye Tour in the late 18th and 19th centuries (*see Walk 1*). Tintern remains popular with tourists, and the ruins, now under the protection of CADW, are open to the public. Did a piece of lead sheet found near the Devil’s Pulpit by one of the authors come from Tintern Abbey?

With its monastic history at an end, Tintern soon became an industrial centre, hard as this may be to envisage today. The river provided transport for the raw materials and finished products of iron production, and its tributaries provided water power for mills and furnaces.

The first brass made in Britain was founded at Tintern in 1566. Wire-making quickly followed, and employed some 100 men in Tintern alone. More than 5000 people throughout the county were making goods from the wire: hooks, eyes, needles, wire combs, farthingales (frameworks to support ladies’ skirts), bird cages, etc. For the next 300 years the wire works and forges along the Angiddy valley dominated the village and surrounding communities, and the managers even paid for preachers and schoolmasters. The ruins of the Angiddy Ironworks, which can still be seen today, operated from the early 17th to the early 19th century. There was another



Forge at Tintern.

at Coed Ithel, near the banks of the Wye towards Llandogo, and Whitebrook, two miles north of Llandogo, was famous for paper milling, as well as wire making. Most of the industries had closed by the end of the 19th century (*see 13*), and the Wye Valley Railway came and went in less than a century (*see Walk 13*). Today, Tintern has a number of hotels, guest houses, pubs, cafes, and shops. Abbey Mill was originally a corn mill, then a woollen mill, and now houses craft shops and a restaurant. The Anchor Hotel was originally the abbey cider mill, and a ferry once operated from there. Other pubs are the Cherry Tree, Moon and Sixpence, Rose and Crown, and Royal George.

Wireworks Bridge (13)

The proposed route of the Wye Valley Railway from Chepstow to Monmouth (*see Walk 13*) bypassed the village of Tintern, which is on the opposite (western) bank of the River Wye. Hence, an agreement was signed on 22 November 1872 between the Wye Valley Railway Co. and the Duke of Beaufort (the landowner) that the former would construct a branch (the Wireworks Branch or Tintern Railway) across the river to serve the Abbey Wireworks. Work commenced on 5 June 1874, the contractors being Messrs Reed Bros. & Co. of London, and the branch was completed by August 1875, 14 months before the main WVR line. It was just over half a mile long and included the Wireworks Bridge over the Wye. This has three truss-girder spans of 66 ft, with masonry piers and abutments, the latter pierced by flood arches. The length between abutments is about 213 ft. The bridge was designed by S.H. Yockney of Westminster and constructed by the Isca Foundry Co. of Newport. Unfortunately, the Abbey Wireworks closed in August 1875, and the branch was dormant until the Abbey Wire and Tinplate Co. re-opened in the early 1880s, only to close for good by 1901. The branch was then used by Messrs J. Jones & Son, who owned a sawmill and turnery at Tintern, to carry goods in horse-drawn wagons. The line never made money for the WVR, which was not even allowed to charge tolls for its use. By 1935, the track had become unusable, and it was lifted in 1941. Ownership eventually passed to the Gwent and Gloucestershire County Councils, and the bridge and trackbed now provides public access from Tintern to the woods on the Gloucestershire side.