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June Howell enjoys a ramble alongside the Western Cleddau where history and wildlife more than compensate for the mud

A riverside walk to the workhouse

Llangwm to Haverfordwest

A linear "Aqua-Ramble" beside the Western Cleddau.

Approx. six miles. Return by 308 bus.

Free parking by river front at Black Tar (OS998094), or roadside parking in Llangwm opposite old school. The latter is nearer the bus stop for your return from Haverfordwest.

Please check the tide table and only go on low tide. Beware – some prolonged stretches of very muddy foreshore!

Not suitable for children.

This month's walk is the continuation of the walk described in January's Pembrokeshire Life (Burton – Llangwm).

Getting Started

FROM Black Tar walk up the lane for about a mile, turning right at the junction for Sprinkle Farm. If you are starting from the old school in 'The Gail' continue up the hill, out of the village, for about a mile to Sprinkle Farm.

Go through the farmyard and left through the gate into a tunnel of trees for a quarter mile, then right, and immediately right again at the next footpath junction.

Continue along the right hand edge of next three fields (with stream on your right) until reaching the stile at the bottom of the last, lowest and somewhat water-logged field.



Low tide at Little Milford.



A bridge over troublesome waters.

You will see, with some relief, that this leads directly to a bridge over the stream and out on to a tarmac lane. You are now on the outskirts of Hook.

A short way along here, the lane veers to the left, but we are going to bear right, following the way-markers over the little bridge, and up the stony lane left of the reed beds.

When the track climbs upwards into woods, look out for the information board on your right.

The damp has attacked it unfortunately, but it will tell you about Hook Colliery, if your eyesight is good enough to read the faded print.

The forestry around here replaced the mining industry when the pits closed in the 1930s

Continue another five minutes until you reach East Hook Farm and tarmac lane. Then follow the bridleway sign on your right, (five minutes) down the rough path to the foreshore. Turn left and walk along in front of the houses.

There follows half an hour of foreshore walking – extremely muddy! Keep an eye out for bird life, especially waders – red or green shanks, shelduck, perhaps an egret.

Canada geese were introduced from Slimbridge in the 1950s, by the owner of Boulston Manor on the opposite side of river. Notice, as you skirt round it, the old loading jetty, once busy with coal barges; a permissive path takes you through private gardens where there would have been coal heaps in years gone by.

Soon after this you reach Little Milford, and the cluster of houses now owned by the National Trust. Turn inland at Little Milford Farmhouse, then, as you pass in front of Little Milford Lodge, bear right for a few yards until emerging on the lane by Little Milford House, once home to the owner of Hook Colliery.

You are now in sight of a footpath sign pointing you across the ford. Don't worry if it looks too deep to tackle, there is another path further up the lane which boasts a footbridge.

Follow the FP signs down to the foreshore (unless an exceptionally high tide forces you on to the higher bridleway). Continue 15 minutes to the next inlet, thankfully with wooden bridge.

Now with water on your right, and rhododendrons on your left, enjoy this aqua-ramble for five minutes before a sign by a field gate veers you inland again. Keeping to the bottom edge of this field, look out for another gate leading to the foreshore, (100 yards. approx), but, be warned, there follows another large perimeter field edge to be negotiated before re-joining the foreshore proper, where the river takes a sharp bend to the left.

Now hop over the stile and pop into another field and out again (via stile), and enjoy elevated river views as the path climbs high above its banks. From here you can catch sight of St Thomas' Church, in Haverfordwest, but not for long.

Soon a stile and a flight of steps take you back to the foreshore, where the wooden bridge, boats and (if you're lucky), oyster-catchers, are worthy of an artist's canvas. Who would think the county town was a mere two miles distant?

More yellow arrows direct you over yet another stile, and up steps to a narrow wooded belt between river and field. Surprise – another stile brings you out on a wide stony track, descending river-wards again.

Five minutes down here, where the track veers right, forsake the yellow arrow route to the foreshore for the path straight ahead; go through the gate and head for the farm and Haroldston St. Issell's Church, dating back to the 13th century.

I like to think that the great Sir John Perrott, who lived nearby, was a regular Sunday worshipper here, but according to the Pembroke historian, Sir George Owen, it was in ruins by 1594, which was only two years after Sir John's death.

Perhaps Sir John was more interested in using the churchyard to rendezvous with pirates and smugglers. Who knows? Let your imagination soar, and if you like old churches, this one will not disappoint.



Hardoldston St Issell's Church in its idyllic setting.

What's more, it's been fully renovated since 1594. Sadly, you won't find it open during the week, but it is in the most idyllic setting, and Sunday services are still held here.

Yellow markers direct you down beside the church towards the river, and along what must surely be an ancient raised pathway below the farm.

When this opens out (in 10 minutes) into a sloping meadow you are obliged to cross a reed bed, but a network of duckboards and bridges will get you through dry shod, (if by any remote chance your feet are still dry!).

Continued



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FOOTPATH FOCUS

A riverside walk to the workhouse

It's up hill now, between bramble bushes, until you enter one last field before the cluster of cottages on Clay Lane come into view. On exiting the field, an ominous flood gauge reminds you that the bridge you are about to cross is occasionally crossed by water itself, but hopefully not today....

Now, all that remains is a gentle pull, (ten minutes) up the hill and over two bridges carrying you, respectively, above railway and by-pass, and affording fine views of Haverfordwest Priory ruins to your right.

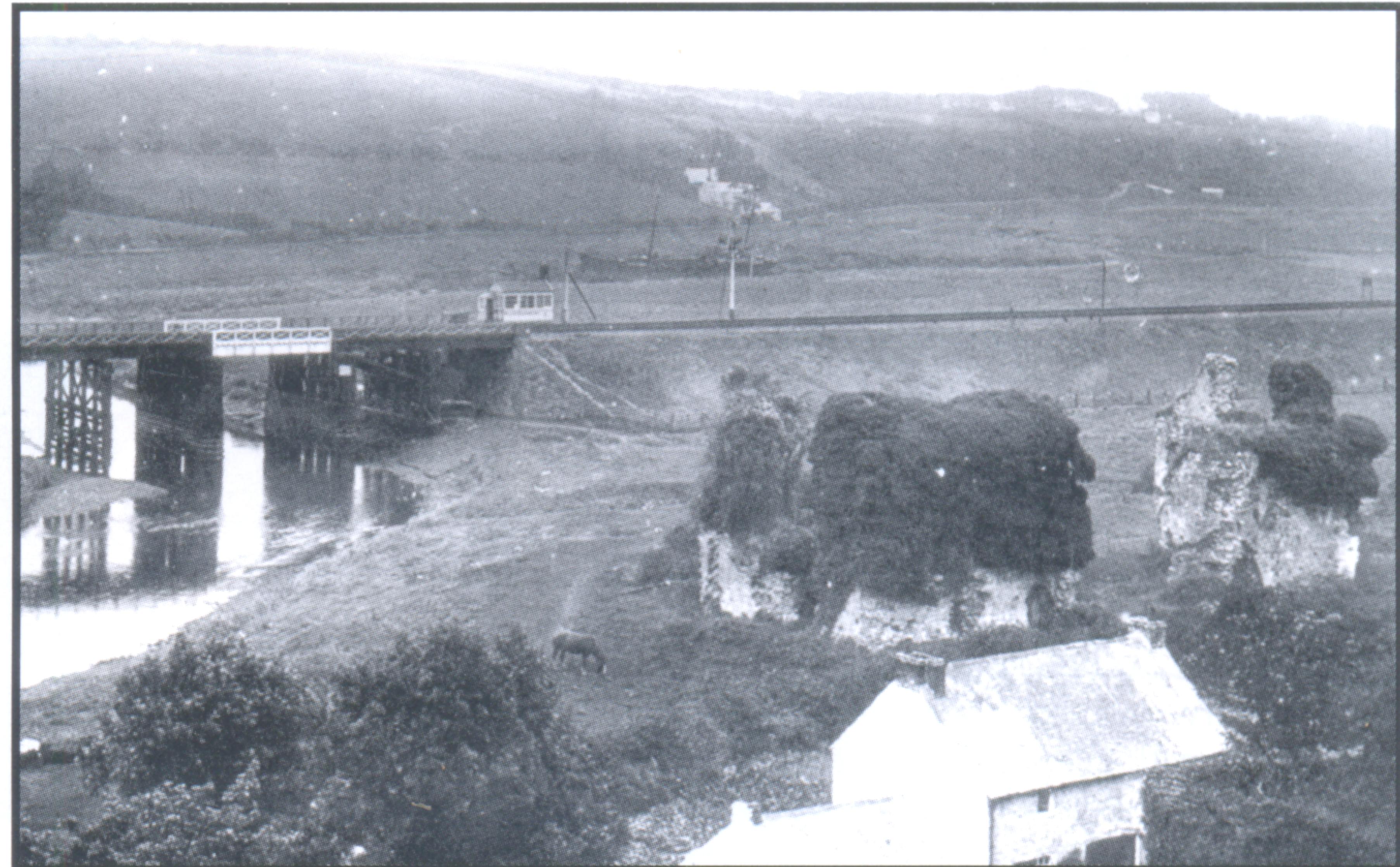
At the top of the hill you are confronted with an impressive retaining wall belonging to the town workhouse, built in 1837.

Fifty years on it received a damning report describing appalling conditions suffered by the inmates, but, despite this, it stayed open until the 1930s, run, we hope, under a more humane regime.

At the outbreak of war, it morphed into St Thomas' Hospital, and then in the 1980s, was converted into the residential flats as seen today.

Bear right, downhill to the (free admission) 12th century Priory – smallish gates easily missed between two cottages. Linger a while and enjoy the tranquil atmosphere and the excellent info boards before making your way to the town centre and the bus station.

Quickest route is to continue down the hill from the Priory into Quay Street. Alternatively, if time and energy allow, climb the steps opposite the Priory gates, bear right past the



An early postcard view of the Priory ruins. Note the steamer high and dry in the river, just behind the railway signal.

bowling green, and then follow the railings by St. Thomas' Church until you arrive at the top of Upper Market Street. Now turn right, and right again into High Street as you face St. Mary's Church.

Five minutes' walk down the hill brings you to the bridge and the Riverside shopping centre, where the bus station is situated.

The 308 bus to Llangwm leaves the bus station at 13.10, 16.10 and 17.40, daily except Sundays.

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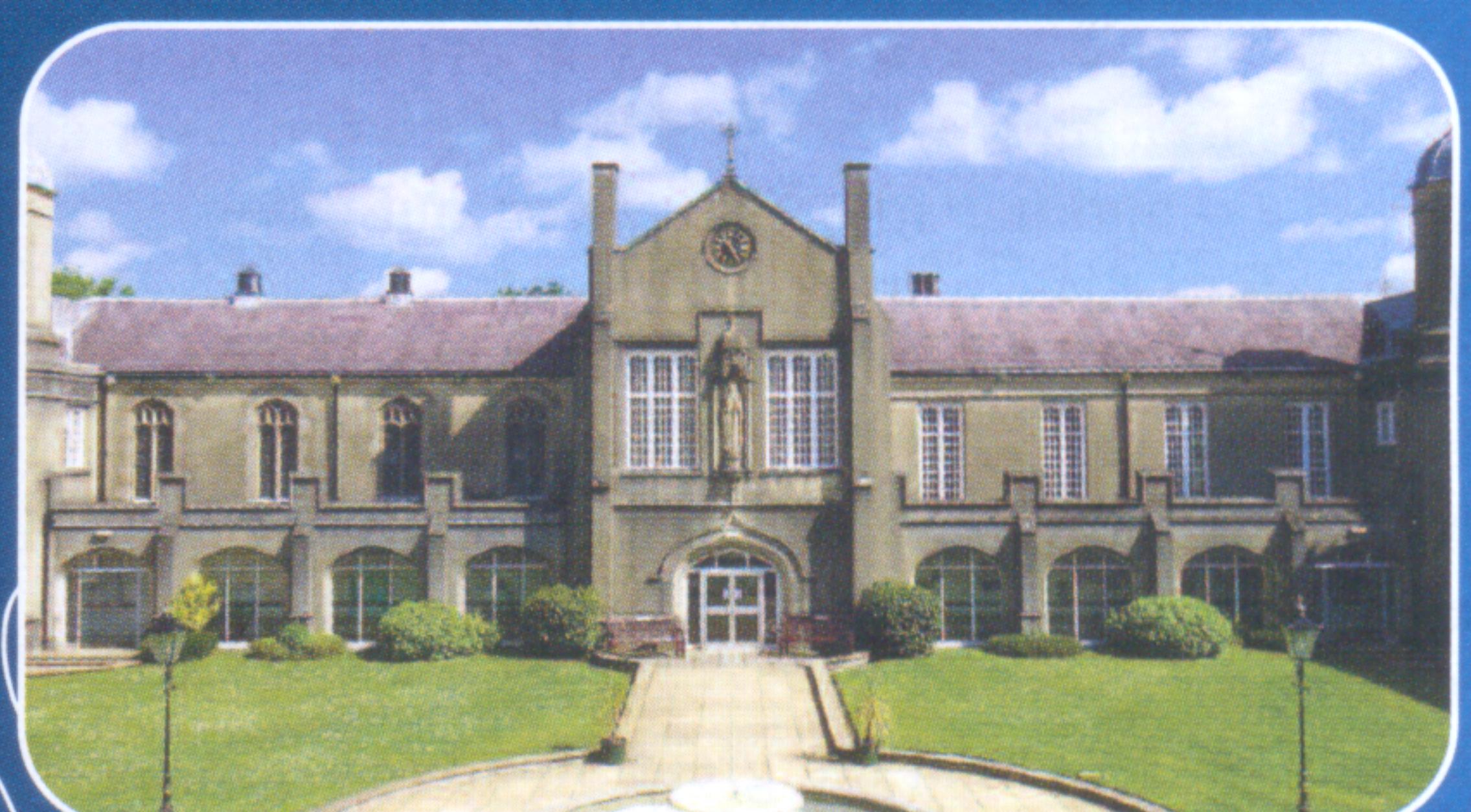
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