

The Road Begins

by Grahame Davies

The road begins beyond the door:
the door that opens every day.
And every day becomes the door
for those who follow in the way.
Leave all you have behind you.
Your past, your pain,
your knowledge and your name.
Or bring it all.
Your freedom will still find you.
Winter or spring, the welcome is the
same.
What more could creation say?
The earth and sky,
the darkness and the day.
The empty path.
What more could wisdom do
Than open up the door and wait for
you.?

O flaen y drws mae pen y ffordd:
y ffordd sy'n gwahodd gyda'r wawr.
A ffordd agored yw pob drws,
a drws agored yw pob awr.
Gad dy eiddo oll ar ôl:
dy hanes, dy boen,
dy enw, dy ddysg.
Neu tyrd â'r cyfan oll.
Bydd rhyddid yn dy ganfod o hyd.
Yr un fydd y croeso, hydref neu haf.

Oes angen i'r cread ddweud mwy?
Awyr a daear,
dydd a nos,
y llwybr gwag.
Beth mwy gall cariad fod
na chadw'r drws ac aros iti ddod?

The Pilgrimage

The Pilgrimage was revived by FOLT, the Friends of Our Lady of Tintern, a group of like-minded people who were moved by the discovery of a 13th Century statue of the Virgin and Child in the Cistercian Abbey at Tintern. In 2009, FOLT commissioned sculptor Philip Chatfield to recreate the statue based on the remaining original pieces which is now installed in the Abbey. The Watermark is taken from an original photograph by David Hurn of the statue.

The Pilgrimage begins at the art on the hoarding opposite Tintern Abbey. Pilgrims may also park their cars here (it being the former car park of the now defunct Abbey Hotel). This is on your left if coming from Chepstow and on your right if coming from Monmouth. Alternative parking lies behind Tintern Abbey Cottage.

In the Middle Ages, a Pilgrim's journey served as an analogy for life's journey, and it is in this spirit we walk the Marian Way. One cannot know joy without sorrow, nor sorrow without joy. We reflect on these creative opposites as we undertake our journey.



The Road Begins Pen y Ffordd

Walk the Marian Way

Retracing the medieval pilgrim route from Tintern to St Mary's Church, Penterry to the Statue of Our Lady at Tintern Abbey through a meditative symbolic landscape following the signs of the Vesica Pisces (the Ichthys).

PLEASE NOTE: The steep tricky surfaces of the Stony Way require solid walking boots and mindful treading. It is not recommended for those with mobility or major health issues.



an area of storm damaged trees we may meditate on life's vicissitudes and sorrows, on the unexpected events that can scar our lives and bring grief and pain.

The Path of Sorrows second station: a natural Sanctuary. About two-thirds of the way up the Stony Way, we arrive at a natural wide flat outcrop of hard rock that is perfect for sitting and reflecting on what we have achieved so far. The most punishing part of the walk is over and from this point on the walk will improve.

Continue straight ahead. The Pilgrim is both literally and metaphorically coming 'out of the woods'. The overhanging trees thin and the track narrows

and becomes more earthy with fields visible either side. The arduousness of the walk takes on a different complexity until we reach the stile on your right-hand side.

The Path of Sorrows third station: the Stile. We turn off right at the stile which signals a change of direction across open farmland and the promise of new horizons. Opposite the stile are the remnants of a Celtic hillfort: Gaer Hill, an Iron Age base thought to be a lookout point for the Silures, (the Celtic tribe of the region), a reminder that as the historical past is embedded in the landscape, so our personal pasts stay with us embedded in our psyches.

Continue uphill across the field, across the road into a second field and at its top right end a third field which you cross on the diagonal to St Mary's Church, Penterry.

The Turning Point fourth station: St Mary's Church Penterry. The church, situated within the lands of the nearby Abbey Grange which became part of the parish of Penterry in the 13th century, is first mentioned in a Charter dating to 955AD. Described as a secular Infirmary, it is suggestive of being a place of healing for local people. It

stands alone on a ridge with spectacular views of the surrounding countryside and is a point to pause and partake of refreshments, both physically and spiritually.

We retrace our steps back across the fields to the farm road, where we turn left and continue along the road until its end, where we turn right into a field (signposted) to pick up the Path of Joys at its bottom end.

The Path of Joys, fifth station: A walking meditation. We dip into the woods into lush landscape which in Spring is covered in wild garlic and bluebells. Replete with lattices of light and a palpable energy, these areas above Tintern Abbey were a favourite haunt with the Romantic poets, such as William Wordsworth who famously 'felt a presence' and a joy in nature's exuberance and profusion.

Crossing an open space, we effortlessly pick up the deep mediaeval path characterised by high earth walls, pilgrims took to Tintern Abbey via the ruined church of St Mary's.

The Path of Joys, sixth station: St Mary's Church, Tintern. St Mary's Church, rebuilt in 1866 and destroyed by fire in 1977, is thought to have been a former retreat for the Cistercian monks of Tintern Abbey in the Middle Ages. With its commanding views of the Wye Valley and Tintern Abbey and our destination in sight, it is a suitable stopping place to reflect on the many sorrows and joys our live paths may have taken. Having gained a new perspective and inspired by the words of a lone Pilgrim of the 4th Century on arrival in Jerusalem *Domine ivimus*: Lord we went, we are encouraged to carry on, face new challenges and go beyond.

We turn down the cobbled path, turning right at the bottom then left past St Anne's, a former mediaeval gatehouse and chapel dedicated to Anne the mother of Mary. We cross the main road to our destination, Tintern Abbey, which houses a replica of the mediaeval statue of the Virgin Mary and child whose powers of healing and restoration Pilgrims sought in the Middle Ages.

As you enter the Abbey look for the almond shaped window on the West Front and carved into the wood above the West door. The Vesica Pisces formed by the platonic design of two interlocking worlds, where the perfect world of forms intersects with the world of nature.

The Road Begins. A mural by Ceri Lloyd Davies marks the beginning of the Pilgrimage route. Painted in 2020, it depicts a procession of intergenerational, multi-faith and diverse 'pilgrims' headed by a modern-day Marian figure. This frieze pays homage to the mediaeval world and all those who in today's secular society seek solace and wellbeing in nature.

Walk to the back of the derelict Abbey Hotel and turn left where you will find the first sign. Continue straight ahead along the Path of Sorrows.

The Stony Way was first recorded in 1451 as an ancient track of mediaeval travel and transport. The Cistercian monks used this 'Way-leave, through a donor's land to access an outlying Grange and to undertake pastoral care in the now lost village of Penterry. As a road, free from toll, it was open to Pilgrims seeking charity, ecclesiastical officials, traders and other visitors throughout the ages and remains open to walkers, bikers and horses in the modern day.

The Path of Sorrows first station: Uprooted. After a first gentle incline, the path becomes increasingly difficult, steeper and with stony terrain, and we become increasingly mindful of how we must tread carefully. As we pass through