

Brecon, Wales, UK

BRECON TOWN

The visit that Anne and I paid to Brecon was an overnight stay taking in a concert at Theatre Brycheiniog. Normally this traditional market town set in the mountains of the Brecon Beacons National Park is not a place that has detained us long, but on this occasion we took the opportunity to explore and found plenty there to entertain and interest visitors with a love of history.

Theatre Brycheiniog is an impressive modern building overlooking a canal basin that marks the terminus of the Monmouth & Brecon canal. Built in 1797 this waterway was originally used to convey coal and iron produce from the Usk Valley down to docks at Newport, but now only about 37 miles remain open to navigation. Nonetheless it is widely reckoned to be one of Britain's most beautiful inland waterways and plans have recently been announced to extend it by re-opening some of the abandoned lower sections perhaps as far as a terminus on the outskirts of Newport itself.



Not the least attractive feature of the basin at Brecon is the little row of cottages across from the theatre which one of the occupants told us have been converted into flats for the elderly. The hanging-baskets and flower-containers clustered in the small bailey fronting their homes made a brave and colourful show that sunny morning as we sipped coffee on the forecourt of the theatre café watching the antics of the ducks and a flotilla of canoeists setting off on a journey downstream.

Former canal cruisers ourselves we took the opportunity of a chauffer-driven version in a cruiser that makes regular trips from the basin in summer, and on our return enjoyed a walk around the town centre. A pleasant experience this, as Brecon is thankfully one of those places that still retains much of its own individual market-town character with many attractive and interesting buildings.



The following day the weather was not good, but Brecon nevertheless still had plenty to offer. Saving the Brecknock Museum for a future visit we chose instead the Museum of the South Wales Borderers with its memorabilia relating to the stand by 140 men of that regiment against over 4,000 Zulu warriors at Rorke's Drift. Prominently and proudly displayed were the 11 Victoria Crosses won on that day in 1871, and the background to the action was fully explained with maps and models.

This was not all that there was to see at this museum however which, although small took time to explore properly, containing as it does a wealth of information for anyone interested in the military history of the British Army.

When we emerged rain was still falling so we made our way to the Cathedral and a lunch at its heritage centre. This church's elevation to its present status is of comparatively recent origin for in medieval times it was the centre of worship at a monastic priory, described in the 14th century as "Half church of God and half castle against the Welsh"!



Our meal, the visitor centre and the Cathedral church kept us occupied for the rest of the day whilst the rain continued to fall outside. Pretty in the sun, Brecon also has something for the visitor if the weather is wet, and of course there is also the Brecon Beacons National Park right on its doorstep making it an ideal location for just a visit or a longer stay.

