

The Wye Tour Riverside Walk at Ross (2 miles)
Visiting sites associated with Gilpin (1724-1804), the Wye Tour and Nelson
**Guided by Heather Hurley the party of twenty set off from the
Market House on Weds 9th June 2021 to enjoy the walk organised by
the Ross & District Civic Society**

Intro in Churchyard: By the mid C18th Ross was benefiting from the public-mindedness of JK who before his death in 1724 beautified the town before such enhancements became fashionable. From 1750 John Egerton, the Rector of Ross, began to entertain his wealthy and influential friends with a boat trip down the Wye, which attracted writers, poets, artists and those seeking the picturesque. The trip became known as the Wye Tour made by Revd William Gilpin in 1770 an event that heralded the birth of British tourism. He published a book, 'Observations on the River Wye' in 1782. Gilpin, a vicar and artist, was a pioneer in the appreciation of the landscape in Britain and his ideas led, much later, to the designation of protected landscapes, such as AONBs including the Wye Valley. 2020 was the 250th anniversary of Gilpin's Wye Tour which was to be celebrated throughout the year.

Origins of the Wye Tour (at Riverside): From 1745 to 1771 the Rev John Egerton served as Rector of Ross with a salary of £600 a year. He was the son of the Bishop of Hereford, married well and had wealthy connections. To entertain his guests a boat was built to sail from Ross to explore the local sights, and as the tour became more popular the journey was extended to Monmouth, Tintern and Chepstow. The untamed beauty of the Wye with its romantic scenery, hanging woods, lofty rocks and rapid water attracted the attention of those seeking the Picturesque. By 1760 the boatmen and innkeepers at Ross were offering boats to hire and the Wye Tour became commercialised offering a leisurely journey with time to write, sketch, picnic and explore the delights of the Wye Valley.

Gilpin's Tour (Ross Dock) Gilpin wrote 'At Ross we planned our voyage down the Wye to Monmouth; providing a covered-boat, navigated by three men. Less strength would have carried us down; but the labour is rowing back'. His comments on Ross were 'Ross stands high, and commands many distant views; but that from the church-yard is the most admired; and is indeed very amusing. It consists of an easy sweep of the Wye; and an extensive country beyond it. But it is not picturesque'. He added 'the first part of the river from Ross is tame. The banks are low; and there is scarce an object worth attention, except the ruins of Wilton-castle'

Walter Hill (at riverside): In the late 18th century Walter Hill was a lawyer who owned extensive property in Ross. He owned the Ricks Meadow, the Rope Walk and appeared to have owned the whole of the Hill Bank where he established a Shrubbery or Pleasure ground after moving the ruinous and inconveniently placed Pye's Almshouses to its present site in 1792. In the grounds there was a Gothic Summer House, a terrace offering views of the Wye, and six acres of shrubbery where paths curved down to the meadow and riverside below. After the death of Walter Hill in 1806 the Shrubbery, Garden, Meadow and Pleasure Ground 'suitable for the purpose of erecting an Ornamental Cottage or Residence' was sold to William Hooper, solicitor.

Nelson's Visit (below Merton House): In 1802 Lord Nelson with Lord and Lady Hamilton and their guests arrived at Ross while touring South Wales, a journey of 250 miles costing £481. Nelson was at Ross on 25th July and at Rudhall the following month. After breakfasting at the Swan and Falcon on a warm summer day in July 1802, Lord Nelson, the Hamiltons and their guests decided to take the boat to Monmouth instead of the carriage. Followed by the excited townsfolk the important party walked through the town and descended through the pleasure grounds of Walter Hill to continue their journey by boat to Monmouth. The boat had been decorated with laurel leaves and fitted with padded seats under a colourful awning ready for the twenty mile sail to Monmouth.

Edde Cross Street - Merton House: In 1808 William Powell purchased the garden, pleasure ground, shrubbery and meadow formerly belonging to Walter Hill. On this piece of land he built a mansion named Merton House because of the garden's link with Nelson who lived at Merton Place in Surrey. Inside Merton House two of the rooms have ceilings divided into panels by small moulded strings. In one of the rooms there are heraldic shields at the joints. These are said to have been brought from Surrey.

High Street - Swan & Falcon: recorded from the mid C18th when Philip Hodges kept the large and prominent coaching inn. Under the tenancy of Daniel Pearce in 1787 the Hon John Byng stayed at the Swan & Falcon and wrote in his Torrington Diaries that he admired the Prospect, had slept well in a good bed and enquired about a boat to continue his journey of South Wales. In 1793 the inn was purchased by James Yearley, a former butler to Hungerford Hoskyns at Harewood. With his former experience he was very capable of attending to the needs of Lord Nelson and his guests when they breakfasted at the Swan & Falcon in July 1802 before continuing on their journey.