

ST FLORENCE



*Naws am Le
Sense of Place*

Situation

St. Florence lies some three miles west of Tenby, in the valley of the Ritec, at the foot of the northern slopes of the Ridgeway; the southern part of the village straddles the river. It is served only by narrow, minor roads, with the Tenby/Sageston B4318 to the north and the ancient Ridgeway road to the south.

Name

The name of the village is from the saint to whom the Church is dedicated: highly probably St. Florent who is commemorated at the Abbey of St. Florent in Saumur in the Loire Valley, an area with which the de Valence Earls had connections.

Early Inhabitants

Some evidence still survives: a round barrow, probably of the Bronze Age, at Park Wall farm; fields named 'Longstone' (suggesting a Bronze Age standing stone); and earthworks which may represent Iron Age hill forts at Carn Rock and New Inn farms. The element 'castle' found in some field names probably indicates a defended site at some early period, and likewise the earthwork known as Park Wall Dyke.

Early Medieval Period

There was almost certainly a settlement at the head of the Ritec tidal creek before the Normans came around 1100AD. Some believe it was then called Tregoyr but it is shown fairly conclusively in Henry Owen's edition of Owen's 'Pembrokeshire' that this name - Tregoyr or Tregaer - related to a manor in Monmouthshire. The former name of St. Florence is not known.

From Norman to Tudors

The place names and language are almost exclusively English, stemming from a two-fold process in the early 12th century. Firstly, the Normans possessed the land and encouraged English followers; secondly, Henry I is said to have sent the Flemings, to colonise South Pembrokeshire.

A return of lands owned by Walter Marshal, Earl of Pembroke, in 1248/9 included the 'Lordship of Sanctus Florencius', which later passed to the next Earl, William de Valence. When William's son, Aymer de Valence, died in 1324 the manor of St. Florence was valued at £33-14s-0d.

In the 12th century, the population of the village could have comprised a mix of Scandinavians, Irish, Normans and Flemings, all being 'anglicised', together with Anglo-Saxons and some of Welsh origin. Of 60 tenants in 1324, there were only 5 or 6 with Welsh names (B. G. Charles).

Footbridge over The Ritec



There was at one time a walled deer park, owned by the Earls of Pembroke, on the northern slopes of the Ridgeway: in his travels (1538-1544) Leland observed, 'the church of St. Florence and Tounlet is in a botom by the parke'. By 1600 this park had largely been enclosed for farming. Park Wall farm remains today.

The Manor of St. Florence

St. Florence, one of the demesne manors of the Earldom of Pembroke, passed to the Crown in Elizabethan times.

Brian Howells says that in Tudor days there were 50 households in the manor.

William Williams of Ivy Tower bought the manor of St.

Florence from the Crown in 1803 for the sum of £756-8s-6d.

Historic Buildings

Where the lower road to Penally crosses the Ritec, are the preserved remains of the old corn mill. In 1609

described as 'one overshot mill with the banckes and watercourses thereunto belonging', it was held by Thomas Bowen at an annual rental of 26s-10d.

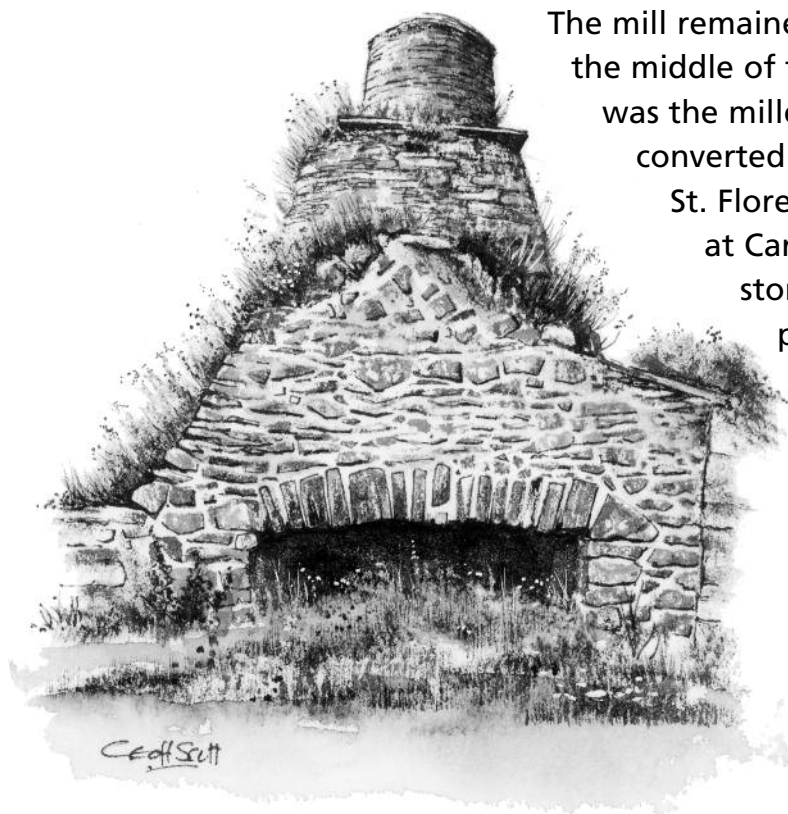
The mill remained important to the community until the middle of the 19th century. In 1841 William Athoe was the miller. Cheap imports of grain saw it converted to a dwelling.

St. Florence has six listed buildings and nearby, at Carswell and West Tarr, there are medieval stone vaulted yeoman houses of a type peculiar to South Pembrokeshire.

The 'Flemish' chimneys found in the village, are not Flemish in origin but simply a feature of the local architectural style: in many cases the chimneys were a later addition to the larger houses.



Old Mill



'Flemish' chimney

Floral Village

Since 1964 the village has gained numerous awards in the Wales in Bloom, Britain in Bloom and Best Kept Village categories. In 1989 it won the prestigious Floral Village of Britain prize in the Britain in Bloom competition; and in 1988 the Prix d'Honneur in the European 'Entente Florale' awards. This has been achieved by community action, stemming from the Friends of St. Florence Committee formed in 1958, and by the St. Florence Floral Committee.

Tidal Creek

The Ritec - Rhydeg or 'fair ford' - flows to the sea at Tenby. Before the embankment was thrown across its mouth at Tenby in 1820, to reclaim land, the estuary was wide enough for small ships to sail to a point probably somewhere below the mill. A large stone set in the ground by the 'Ark', is said to be where the ships secured. It is unlikely that this stone was used for that purpose in its present position, except perhaps for small boats. There is an old saying that, 'until you put your finger in the hole in the top of the stone you haven't been to St. Florence'.

The Village

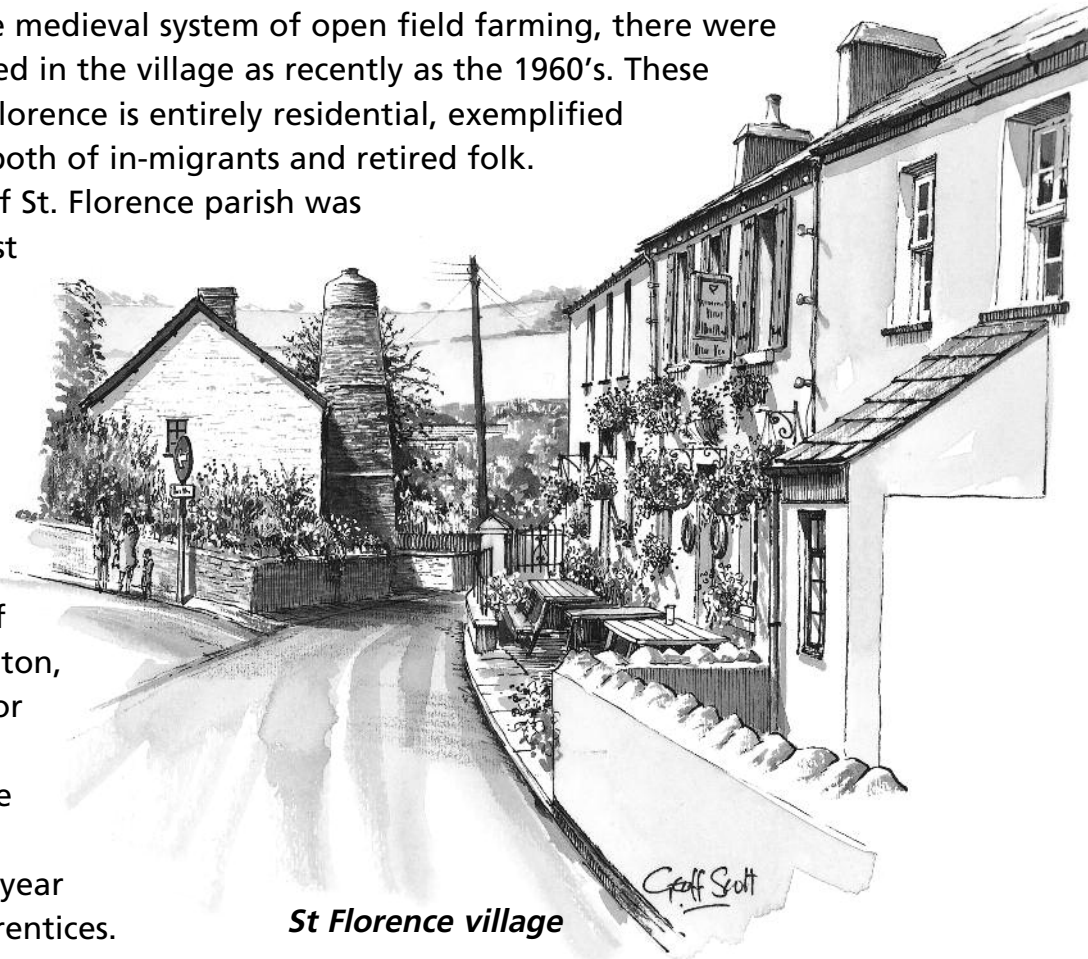
In 1652, Haverfordwest market was closed by pestilence and St. Florence, amongst others, was granted permission to hold a weekly market on Thursdays.

In 1811 Fenton reported that he saw, '... the remains of houses and fragments of wall' which suggested that the village, '...appears to have been more populous than now... due to the overflow of manufacturers who administered to the commercial wealth of Tenby..'. Perhaps as a result of the medieval system of open field farming, there were a number of farms centred in the village as recently as the 1960's. These have now gone and St. Florence is entirely residential, exemplified by the high percentage both of in-migrants and retired folk.

In 1991 the population of St. Florence parish was just over 600 - the highest total reached since the first census was taken in 1801.

Occupations and Crafts

Amongst others have been fulling (a process of cloth making) at Flemington, quarrying of limestone for building and agriculture, and marble cutting; there were 4 marble masons in 1841. The census of that year reveals 2 shipwright apprentices.



St Florence village

Other crafts of the period were represented and there were surprisingly large numbers of shoemakers: 5 masters, 1 journeyman and 3 apprentices. In the second half of the 19th century, a basket maker joined the local community. There were then 3 public houses: the New Inn, the Sun and the Ball.

The Land

Minerton, West Jordanston, New Inn and Flemington can be traced from the Middle Ages, Flemington possibly having been a small community. Today diversification proceeds apace. Ivy Tower opened as Manor House Wildlife and Leisure Park in 1975 and Heatherton Farm recently opened a Country Sports Park; in 1994 a Dinosaur Park opened at Great Wedlock; all are on the B4318 a mile north of the village.

School

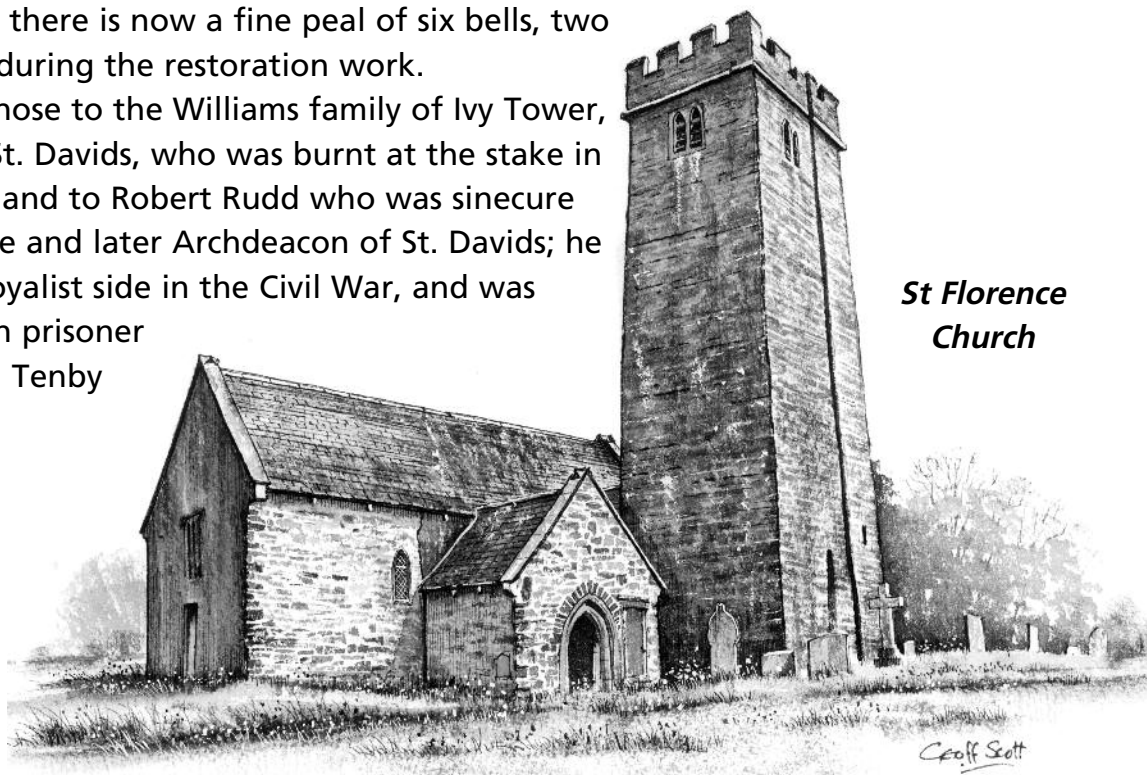
St. Florence National School was opened in 1861 built on land donated by John Leach of Ivy Tower. Prior to this, some form of education, 'supported by dissenters', was given in a room in the village, which afterwards became the village Reading Room. This has now been incorporated into Rock House.

A new school was built in 1973 adjacent to the old one which, since 1975, has been used as a unit for children with special needs. Until the Village Hall was available, in the 1970's, the school was the centre of community activity.

St. Florence Church

Originally this 12th century church had only a nave and chancel, about two-thirds the length of the present building. The font and a pillar stoup survive from this period. Enlarged in the 13th century, the tower was added in the 1500's. In 1870 it was restored extensively. The floor was raised by three feet (hence the low squint) and the pulpit and organ were installed. The driving force was G. W. Birkett, who was vicar for 48 years. When he came to St. Florence, '...there were cocks and hens roosting in the Church and a horse was kept in the porch...'. In 1963 the tower and bells were renovated and there is now a fine peal of six bells, two having been added during the restoration work.

Memorials include those to the Williams family of Ivy Tower, to Bishop Ferrar of St. Davids, who was burnt at the stake in Carmarthen in 1555 and to Robert Rudd who was sinecure Rector of St. Florence and later Archdeacon of St. Davids; he was active on the Royalist side in the Civil War, and was amongst those taken prisoner in March 1644 when Tenby fell to the local Parliamentary forces. In the churchyard is a preaching cross and also the village War Memorial.



St Florence Church

In 1923 the vicarage of Redberth was united with St. Florence.

In 1985, St. Florence and Redberth were grouped with Manorbier and Jameston.

An Old Custom

Amongst some old customs, villagers used to, '...process to the Pin Well in Verwell field on Easter Day and throw a crooked pin into the well to 'throw Lent away'.

Bethel Chapel

This Congregational Chapel was built in 1858. A former Chapel built near the mill in 1804, was subsequently used as a Sunday School, and is now a private dwelling. In 1972 the Chapel joined the United Reformed Church (an amalgamation of Congregationalists and English Presbyterians) and in 1979 was grouped with four other local chapels. It closed in 1988.



Bethel Chapel

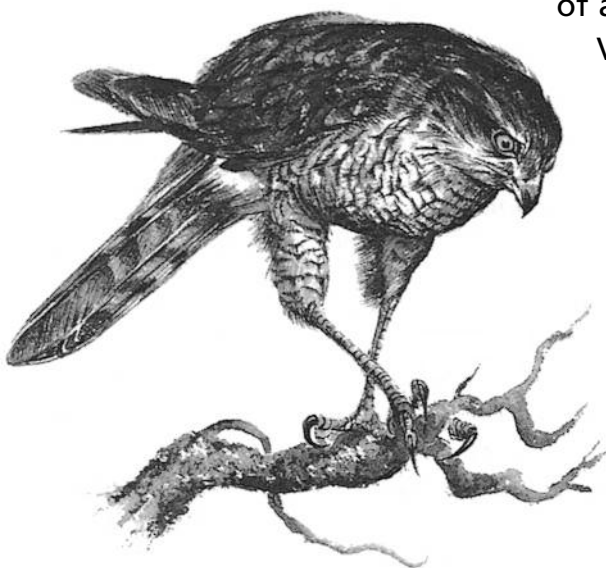
Walks and Wildlife

Some circular walks make use of the Ridgeway. Care should be taken as this road can be busy in summer.

The footpath to Gumfreston is not recommended as part of a 'circular' route, as the road through Gumfreston Village is very busy.

The hedgerows abound with wild flowers throughout the year.

Hedgerow birds are abundant, preyed on by an occasional Sparrow Hawk. Buzzards may be seen, and along the Ritec Valley, Herons.



Sparrowhawk

Country Code

Respect • Protect • Enjoy

- Be safe - plan ahead and follow any signs.
- Leave gates and property as you find them.
- Protect plants and animals, and take your litter home.
- Keep dogs under close control.
- Consider other people.

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