Enchanting Ruin:
Tintern Abbey and Romantic Tourism in Wales

ESSAYS FOR AN EXHIBIT
By C. S. Matheson

Special Collections Library
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"Who has not read, heard, and dreamed of Tintern Abbey, examined prints and copied sketches, talked and listened about its beauties, till they seem to have been haunting the venerable ruin all their lives; I scarcely felt as if a spot could be unknown to memory there, even when thus approaching it for the first time."

— Catherine Sinclair

Introduction

Tintern Abbey in Monmouthshire, Wales has an iconic status within Romantic literature and art. It is also the most popular weekend destination in Britain today. *Enchanting Ruin: Tintern Abbey and Romantic Tourism in Wales* is about this continuity.

My first exposure to Tintern Abbey was through Wordsworth's well-known poem "Lines, Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye During a Tour, July 13, 1798." But the poem is a famously selective account of a spot the author sets at the heart of his emotional and artistic life. It is surprising to find that a work regarded as the epitome of a place is really more of a meditation tethered to place; the poetic equivalent, perhaps, of the tourist boats that once moored alongside the ruins on the River Wye banks. "Lines, Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey" seems less a tribute to the site than a literary tributary winding past the Abbey's quiet stone walls.

This exhibit recovers the richness and complexity of the Abbey as a place, destination, and symbol in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Wordsworth is present here as one witness among many to a site that exerted — and continues to exert — a tremendous pull on the popular imagination. I've come to see that Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" relies heavily upon a shared understanding of what the Abbey means and why it matters so much in his own era. Private speculation depends upon public consensus in this case.

Enchanting Ruin provides the viewer with a number of different lenses for examining the Abbey and its setting in the Romantic period. "Thoughts of More Deep Seclusion" treats the ruin as one component of a tour through the Wye Valley region. "Wreaths of Smoke" examines Tintern as an industrial work-place, and "Language of the Sense" as a subject for poetry. "Vagrant Dwellers" looks at the clash of expectation and experience found in travel writing, while the antiquarians and archeologists have their say in "Memory Be as a Dwelling Place." In this era the Abbey was owned by the Duke of Beaufort and the nature of his stewardship of the monument is also considered here. Tintern Abbey as a subject for visual art is illustrated throughout, but is considered particularly in an engraving by Edward Dayes, a painting by James Ward, and a remarkable series of images by contemporary artist Alex McKay, taken through a Claude mirror. "An Eye Made Quiet" explores the history and influence of this optical instrument, while McKay's The Wye Tour: Claude Mirror Images from Ross-on -Wye to Chepstow, 2001-2007 meditates upon an eighteenth-century way of seeing and its legacy.

Acute readers (that is, hard-core Wordsworthians) will have noticed that these various categories are named with phrases lifted from Wordsworth's ode. The act of filling in behind and around this seminal poem is quite deliberate. Tintern was becoming a tourist destination by the early 1770s, decades before a visit might be seen as a natural investment for an ambitious writer or artist. Why were people so drawn to this spot? What did they hope or desire to find there? What did they actually see? What were they increasingly primed to see? I was curious too about the logistics of travel in the period and the related growth of a tourist infrastructure in the village.

A most useful source in this respect has been Charles Heath's *Historic and Descriptive Accounts of the Ancient and Present State of Tintern Abbey.* A copy of the third edition (1803) was acquired by the Special Collections Library for this exhibit and is very active throughout *Enchanting Ruin.* Heath's is a forthright, local voice that provides a counterpoint to the more fleeting impressions of visitors, and his work is looked at in some detail as a starting point.

I hope that this exhibit recreates a communal sense of what Tintern Abbey signifies. I also hope it helps us recollect the importance of libraries and archives that allow us to travel in this fashion.

C .S. Matheson, University of Windsor

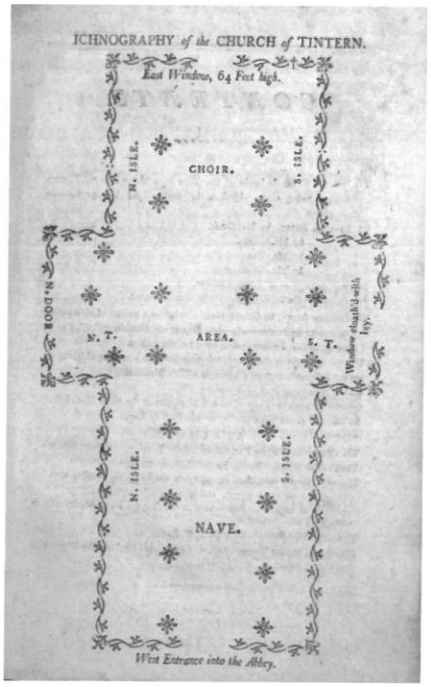
"These Gleams of Past Existence"
Charles Heath's Guide to Tintern Abbey

Charles Heath (1761-1831), author, printer, and twice mayor of Monmouth, produced a number of topographical works about the county and its monuments. His interest in Tintern Abbey began in his late twenties when, trailing round with a family party touring Hagley Park, Worcestershire, the seat of Lord Lyttleton, he was much struck by a painting of the ruins. Like so many of his contemporaries, Heath's engagement with Tintern Abbey began through a representation of the site. As he relates:

I soon availed myself of an opportunity of visiting the venerable Abbey, with which I had been before so much charmed at Hagley. In common with every other traveler I entered this venerable pile with a mingled portion of awe and admiration, — and not having before seen any monastic edifice ... I fancied myself transported into the regions of ancient fable. I surveyed again and again every part of the fabric with the most insatiable curiosity; but not having read any part of its history, I wanted some intelligent guide to impart innumerable circumstances, which the contemplation of such a scene naturally excited in the mind of every curious and observant traveler. I returned to Ragland highly gratified in having accomplished my wishes, — but with ten-fold pleasure should have enjoyed the scene, had there then been such an account as this I have now collected. (Heath, *Tintern*, [4])

In the spring of 1791, a year after his first visit to Tintern, Heath established himself as a printer in Monmouth. His first publication on Ragland Castle (also owned by the Duke of Beaufort) was followed in 1792 by *Descriptive Accounts of Tintern Abbey* (later *Historical and Descriptive Accounts of the Ancient and Present State of Tintern Abbey*), a volume that ran to 11 editions by 1828. (Jones, 225)

Historical and Descriptive Accounts ... of Tintern Abbey is engagingly opinionated and site-specific and, as someone trying to herd Romantic tourists, Heath is obliged to be both practical and moony by turns. While full of admonitions for visitors (see "Useful Information for Travellers" elsewhere in this exhibit) it also, uniquely, communicates a sense of the village's own relationship to the monument. The anecdotes supplied to Heath by 95-year old resident Christopher Llewellyn are particularly evocative. Llewellyn reminisces to Heath that "when he was a young man, the Abbey was the village Fives Court – a game [similar to handball] much in vogue in this part of the kingdom – and the body of the Church the place for playing Coits [similar to horseshoes]. Before it was removed to its new situation, the effigy of the knight was placed across the nave, and that it served as a stop to the Coits when they pitched them." (*Tintern*, [65])



Heath's work is not just a field-guide, benefitting from considerable reconnaissance work by Heath himself (some measurements of the Abbey's dimensions are given in units of "my steppes or paces"), but a modest anthology of historical narrative and poetical extracts. Sold by Gethen, steward of the Abbey, at the Beaufort Arms hotel in Tintern and at other county inns, the guide has a direct relationship to spectatorship at the site. Its successive editions span 36 years, providing a detailed and entertaining picture of the evolving tourist infrastructure of the region.

"Thoughts of More Deep Seclusion" The Wye Tour

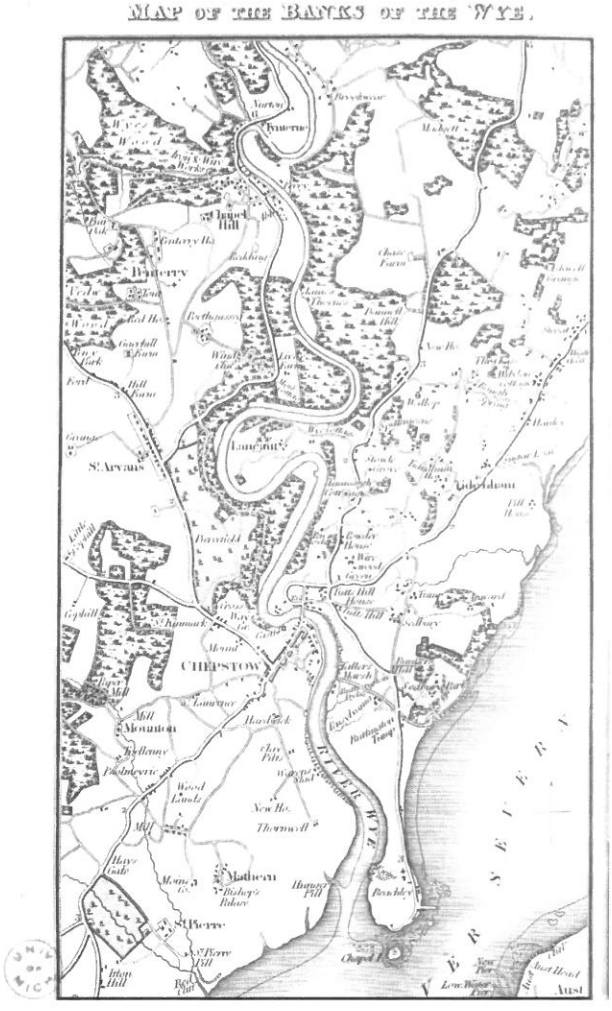
> *"The very principal light and capital feature of my journey was the river Wye, which I descended in a boat for near forty miles from Ross to Chepstow. Its banks are a succession of nameless beauties."*
>
> — Thomas Gray, letter to Dr. Wharton, May 24, *1771*

The River Wye rises high in the Plynlinnon Hills and works its way over 150 miles to join the Severn estuary at Chepstow. It traverses mid-Wales and the Marches (an English term for the area along the border between England and Wales), shaping the old counties of Herefordshire, Monmouthshire, and Gloucestershire. For part of its course the Wye inscribes a rich, sinuous line between two nations.

Border territories have a distinctive and complex character. Their natural state of fluidity — heightened if the border is literally a river — is usually at odds with a desire for clear demarcation. The last (or first) 40 miles of the Wye is punctuated by the ruins of serious fortifications: Goodrich Castle, Raglan Castle, Monmouth Castle, and Chepstow Castle. But the little hamlets of English Bicknor (Gloucestershire) and Welsh Bicknor (Monmouthshire) regard each other across the Wye with equanimity. Perhaps the echoes of past conflict make the shades seem greener.

The Wye Valley has been called the "birthplace of British tourism." A number of factors converge in this cultural phenomenon. Its "discovery" in the late eighteenth century parallels the rise of the cult of the picturesque. Theorists such as William Gilpin and Uvedale Price taught a new appreciation for scenery that was wild, various, and uncultivated. Their treatises and guidebooks inspired travel to regions where untamed landscapes could be found, interestingly, at a time when many wild corners of Britain — heaths, moors, fens, commons — were disappearing under the rationalizing schemes of Enclosure. Added to this was a growing interest in antiquities (see Case 14) and histories of the "ancient Britons." Some historians feel the search for Britain's ancient past was prompted by nostalgia in the wake of the Industrial Revolution. Others see it as part of a patriotic invention of tradition. In the late 1790s excursions within Britain also increased as a result of England's war with France, as many potential "grand tourists" to the Continent became tourists of Wales or the Lake District or Scotland instead.

The Wye Valley became a tremendously popular destination. It offered English tourists a taste of a foreign country, but without the danger, uncertainty, and expense associated with traveling to wilder North Wales. Another attraction was the great variety of scenery in the Wye Valley, ranging



In 1796 the charge for a trip from Ross-on-Wye down to Chepstow at the mouth of the Severn was three guineas, plus provisioning for the boatmen; from Ross to Monmouth the fee was one and a half guineas. (Heath, *Excursion*, [28]) One could also rent a boat at Chepstow to go upriver to Tintern, which seems to have been popular for moonlit excursions to the Abbey.

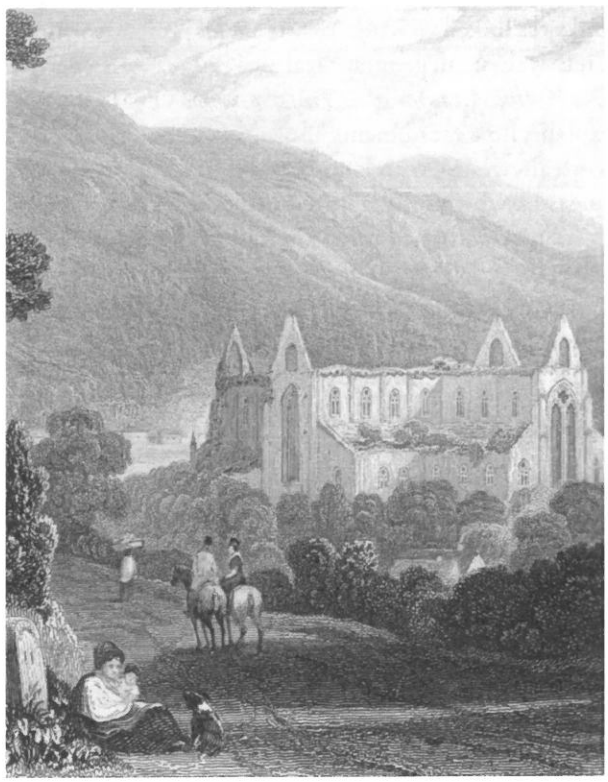
It is easy to see signs of the increasing commercialization and competition within this seasonable industry. Until the end of the eighteenth century the boats appear to have been quite simple — "small, but filled up with no less convenience than neatness," (Cooper, 6) or "a good covered boat, well stored with provisions" (Skrine, 9) are typical descriptions. By the late 1830s, however, the vessels had become like "a small floating parlour," made commodious with sunshades, cushioned seats, and a table. (Roscoe, 114)

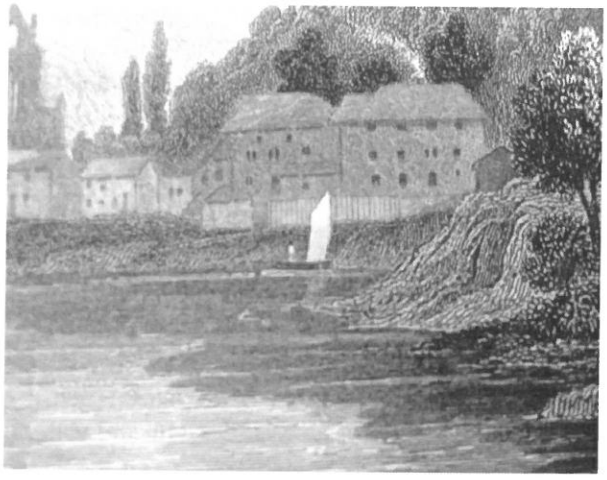
At Ross "the Wye is a good little river, without vices or virtues," as one traveler described. (Simond, 206-207) After engaging a boat, tourists would descend past Goodrich Castle situated on the English, or Herefordshire, side. Later, in the gorge near Coldwell Rocks, it was common to halt for a climb to take in the view from Symonds Yat, while the rowers brought the boat the long way round. This is the one section of the river that has commercial tour boats still operating.

Afterwards, the current moving more quickly now, travelers would pass Raglan Castle, destroyed in the English Civil War, and land at the substantial market town of Monmouth. On the edge of Monmouth is a panoramic look-out from the Kymin, a Georgian, mock-gothic banqueting house. Roughly ten miles further downriver from Monmouth is Tintern, where the Wye is tidal and its character more capricious. Twice a day, Tennyson reflects in In Memoriam, "the salt sea water passes by, / And hushes half the babbling Wye, /And makes a silence in the hills."

Charles Heath warns in his guide that "the Boat being obliged to descend with the Tide to Chepstow, two hours is the utmost time possible that can be allowed the company for visiting the Abbey." (Heath, *Tintern*, [25]) Two hours is scant time for a tour of the interior and a census of famous viewpoints, including the Abbey from the Gloucestershire side of the Wye and from the Devil's Pulpit, a rocky outcrop roughly three miles away. Between Tintern and Chepstow the river widens and quickens again in its run towards the Severn. The rich farmland of the Lancaut peninsula, with its little dreaming ruined chapel, contrasts with the precipitous rocks and hanging forests at Wyndcliff. The Upper and Lower Wyndcliff viewpoints were once part of the grounds of the Piercefield estate, owned by Valentine Morris. Past Wyndcliff, the sterner limestone cliffs foreshadow the fortifications of Chepstow Castle. These scenic stations are also explored in the digital slidewho of Alex McKay's work.

"Such ruins! such rocks! such banks! such trees!" enthused Catherine Sinclair in Hill and Valley. "It seemed, while we sat still in the boat, as if some skilful scene-shifter were perpetually drawing his invisible wires, and producing a fresh effect." (Sinclair, 239) *Enchanting Ruin* traces just this translation of place into spectacle.





from rich farmland and orchards to limestone gorges and sheltered valleys. Complementing this was a full palette of historical association: Norman castles, iron-age fortifications, burial mounds, Cistercian abbeys, Druidic stones, Roman settlements, holy wells, and sites linked to King Arthur are all present within a relatively small geographical area. In *Historic and Descriptive Accounts of... Tintern Abbey* Charles Heath explains how monuments and archeological sites work alternately with landscape upon the viewer: the "pleasure which results from historic reflection ... the thinking faculties, aroused and called into action will ... be relieved, by these pastoral scenes, which are so peculiarly calculated to attune or compose the mind." (Heath, *Tintern*, [6]) In other words, the Wye tour offers a blend of mental activity and repose that makes for a perfect vacation.

In the lower Wye Valley the river is at once rambling and determined, like the conversation of an old philosopher. The forty miles of scenery between Ross and Chepstow anthologizes much of what is most lovely in the area. In 1771 the poet Thomas Gray described his river journey a year earlier as a "succession of nameless beauties." (Gray, *Poems*, 223) What was "nameless" for an English audience in the 1770s would give way to a common language of appreciation in a little more than a decade.

Getting to a spot like Tintern Abbey, one of the highlights of the Wye tour, required considerable effort in the period. Although (only) 23 miles from the city of Bristol and 40 from the resort of Bath — the 147 miles from London was another matter — the journey could be challenging. The Severn estuary has its own broody relationship with the weather and the environs of Tintern are rugged. Even today the roads seem to translate contour and grade straight through the body. Although the dross from local iron manufacture was used in repairing the roads tourists claim to have ridden over them in fear.

If the road to Tintern from Chepstow was poor, the approach from Monmouth was worse. It was not suitable for carriages and seems to have been challenging even on horseback. The "good" turnpike road from Monmouth to Lower Redbrook (a stretch of approximately four miles) petered out about seven and a half miles from Tintern, leaving travelers to cobble together a route for the remaining distance. Directions in guidebooks often include the specific point at which travelers should ask the locals for directions. Voluntary pedestrians — what Anne Wallace in *Walking, Literature, and English Culture* calls "excursionary" walkers — approaching from the north arguably had the happiest lot. "The distance [from Monmouth] to Tintern, which is only ten miles, divests it of toil," Charles Heath robustly observes, "while the path (to use a poetical expression), presents a carpet of Nature's velvet nearly the whole of the way." (Heath, *Tintern*, [13]) William and Dorothy Wordsworth walked this velvety path twice in July 1798.

A water journey to Tintern Abbey was less taxing for passengers than land travel, although not free entirely from danger or discomfort. Recreational excursions on the Wye were taking place by the 1740s, instituted by the hospitable Rev. Dr. John Egerton of Ross (later Bishop of Durham), the so-called "father of the Wye voyage." In 1745 Egerton "caused a pleasure boat to be built to enable his guests to enjoy excursions by water amid scenery which could not fail to delight and surprise." (Waters, 16) The rental and provisioning of manned boats effectively became one of the earliest organized tourist industries in the area. William Gilpin traveled in this manner during the fortnight-long 1770 tour that resulted in his influential Observations on the River Wye. Thomas Gray ranked his descent of the Wye from Ross to Chepstow as the "very principal light, and capital feature of my journey." (Gray, *Poems*, 223-224) By the end of the century, tourist directories advise that these boats, "lightly constructed, which are used with or without sail, and navigated by three men," were kept in "constant readiness" for tourists at Ross-on-Wye. (Heath, *Excursion*, [27-28])

"The Picture of the Mind"
Artist I: Edward Dayes. *The View of Tintern Abbey on the River Wye*

The View of Tintern Abbey on the River Wye (1799) is one of sixteen large aquatints by Dayes engraved and published by Francis Jukes for a series called *Views on the River Wye*. The original watercolor drawing, dated 1794, is in the Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester.

Dayes's vantage point is on the Gloucestershire or English side of the River Wye, near the ferry passage and landing jetty where tourist boats decanted in the period. He dwells upon the wildness and isolation of this border setting, evoking the drama of a traveler about to cross over into an unfamiliar land. Dayes's choice of view may also be intended to communicate something of his reverence for the monument. In an account of another ruin, Fountains Abbey in Yorkshire, Dayes abjures his readers: "Retire to a respectful distance, ye dull and phlegmatic worldings; this spot is sacred to the arts, prophane [sic] it not with unhallowed feet .... Here is ample scope for the moralist: let him behold here the perishable labours of man." (Dayes, 127-128) Perhaps the far side of the Wye is the "respectful distance that will allow the tourist to turn moralist.

Dayes catalogues the features and qualities that made Tintern Abbey such a popular destination, and therefore popular subject for art in the era. The scenic landscape is punctuated by the melancholy beauty of the Abbey ruins, so overgrown that the works of nature and the work of man are becoming indistinguishable. Here is that "pleasing intermixture of wildness and culture" that contemporary travelers like William Coxe found so compelling. (Cox, v. 2, 127) Dayes seems to allow the elements themselves to dictate the composition of the scene. The calm water of the River Wye in the foreground, the slopes and steeps of the earthy middle ground, and airy drama of a very characteristic sky, divide the view roughly into thirds, wholly in accordance with contemporary theories of the picturesque. Human occupation on the opposite shore is reduced to a few graceful figures; all signs of poverty are expunged, and the local industrial sites are concentrated into a plume of smoke at the upper right, barely visible against the limestone rocks behind. The original watercolor drawing contains a tall smokestack that is camouflaged in the final print. Tintern Abbey rises, as Dayes says of another ruin, "in solemn majesty ... with the stately port of a giant." (Dayes, 127)

"Wreaths of Smoke" Industrial Tintern

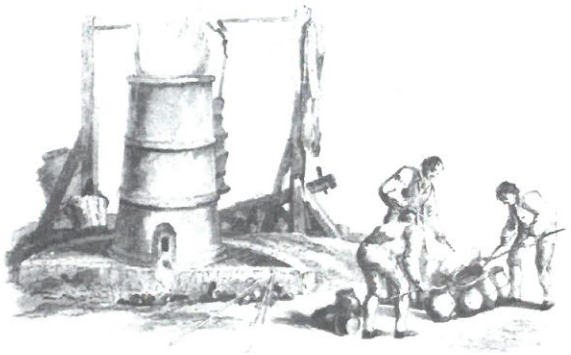
"Here, now no bell calls Monks to morning prayer,
Daws only chaunt their early matins here;
Black forges smoke, and noisy hammers beat"
— S. Davis, "Poetical Description of Tintern"

Wordsworth may imagine in "Lines, Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey" that the smoke rising with "uncertain notice" from the trees signals the presence of gypsies or a hermit, but in fact Tintern was the site of a substantial iron foundry, the location of Great Britain's first industrial blast furnace, and home to a long-established wire works.

The region was shaped economically and environmentally by the presence of iron ore and coal in the hills, a ready source of charcoal in the adjacent Forest of Dean, and the transportation route created by the river. The vicinity of Tintern was also pocked with ancient and working limestone quarries. Coleridge narrowly escaped riding his borrowed horse into a quarry in 1795 when he and his companions lost their way to Tintern in the dark.

Travelers descending the ten mile stretch of the River Wye between Goodrich Castle and New Weir would see hills dotted with lime-kilns, stone quarries, an iron works known as Bishop's Wood Furnace, and "a very plentiful mine" called the Lidbrooke Colliery. (Heath, *Excursion*, 41) At New Weir, the natural chasm and cascade (delightfully categorized under the heading "Rocks Characterised by Terror" in Whateley's *Observations on Modern Gardening*) was juxtaposed with a lock and "an Iron Forge, covered with a black cloud of smoak, and surrounded with half-burned ore, with coal, and with cinders. The fuel for it is brought down a path worn into steps, narrow and steep, and winding among precipices; and near it is an open space of barren moor, about which are scattered the huts of workmen." (Whateley, 109)

The bucolic ten-mile stretch of the river between Monmouth and Tintern, the last segment of the Wye before the Abbey, was punctuated by the Redbrook iron and tin works, the Whitebrook paper mills, and busy Brockweir, "a commodious little port," where one might see "several sloops and schooners from 30 to 80 tons ... discharging and taking in their cargoes." (*Penny Magazine*, 342) One Bristol shipping firm even had a Wye trow (a strong, flat-bottomed boat for inland navigation) named "Abbey Tintern." (Mathew, 100)



It was common for tourists to visit the natural, industrial, and archeological sites of Tintern in sequence. The industrial sublime thus qualified the architectural sublime of the Abbey and the picturesque features of its setting. Tintern's industrial patrimony (reaching back, in fact, to ancient iron works in the hills around the village) is a crucial element in the valuation and experience of the Abbey in the period. To Romantic viewers, the contrast between the frantic activity and clamor of the foundries, and the old silences of the Abbey was just the touch needed to push poignancy into better-grade melancholy.

"Vagrant Dwellers" Tours and Excursions

"In such a county as this ... every foot of which is rendered interesting by History, the time allotted by Writers of Travels for its investigation, can only excite the smile of the native. What can be expected from the information obtained in a pleasure boat, or the casual stopping at an inn, without any acquaintance in the place whose history they presume to illustrate?"

— Charles Heath

"Vagrant Dwellers" presents a selection of journeys undertaken between the 1770s and early 1830s. These tourists, predominantly English, travel to Tintern by horseback, carriage, on foot, or by boat. Rail travel is not an option in the region until the 1870s. Sometimes they alternate between different modes of travel. George Manby walked from Monmouth to Tintern, but gladly accepted a seat afterwards in a boat chartered by a party of female tourists. Gladly, that is, until he realized that while flirting he missed key sights going downriver to Chepstow.

The priorities and experiences of travelers change greatly over the course of six decades. The earliest Romantic tourists, such as Thomas Gray and William Gilpin (Case 2), Francis Grose and Thomas Whateley (Case 14), were guided by antiquarian itineraries, indeed often following in the footsteps of 17th-century historians like William Camden and William Dugdale. Before tours of the region became fashionable, early travelers needed to be resilient and adaptable, especially where practical things like lodgings or meals were concerned. The rise of picturesque tourism in the 1780s increased summer traffic in the region exponentially, and the organization of a "service industry" increased in turn. Individual resourcefulness in a traveler seemed a little less necessary when his moves were anticipated or needs scripted in advance.

Just as the Wye Valley tour becomes more structured and self-contained, travel narratives of the region become increasingly self-referential. Earlier accounts seem to contain more of the information or knowledge required to navigate the region, while later accounts emphasize sensation and experience. Post-1800 tours give a greater sense of being written within an existing and familiar narrative. Their business is amendment and refinement, rather than discovery and invention.

"An Eye Made Quiet"
The Claude Mirror and the Picturesque

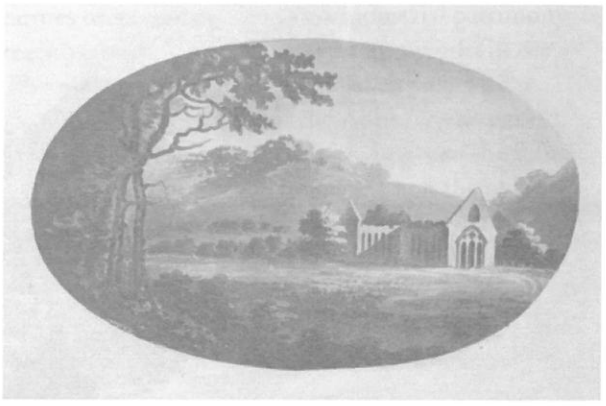
> *"A succession of high-coloured pictures are continually gliding before the eye. They are like the visions of the imagination, or the brilliant landscapes of a dream."*
>
> — William Gilpin, *Remarks on Forest Scenery*

The Claude mirror (named after its ability to create an image reminiscent of the paintings of 17th-century French artist Claude Lorrain) is a small black, convex mirror. It was used widely in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries for examining and sketching landscape. The Wye Valley featured a number of celebrated viewing stations — not the least Tintern Abbey — where the mirror could be employed to great effect.

Thomas Gray popularized the use of the Claude mirror in his 1769 *Journal in the Lakes,* a pioneering account of tourism in the Lake District of the north of England. Sometimes the device is also referred to as a "Gray glass" in the period. Thomas West continued Gray's project and use of the mirror in his influential *Guide to the Lakes* (1778). He advises travelers to carry two mirrors of differing convexity: one to manage reflections of great and near objects and a flatter glass for distant and small objects. (West, 16) The best- known advocate of the mirror is undoubtedly the Rev. William Gilpin, traveler, author, artist, and drawing-master. Gilpin even mounted a mirror in his carriage, the better to enjoy "a succession of high-coloured pictures ... continually gliding before the eye," which he likened to "the visions of the imagination; or the brilliant landscapes of a dream." (Gilpin, *Remarks*, 233) Many of his sketches and paintings bear traces of his use of a mirror, such as the aquatint of Tintern Abbey reproduced here.

To use the Claude mirror, one turns one's back to the scene or object of interest, and holds the instrument about shoulder height to view the reflected scene. The slightly convex surface of the mirror pushes the background of a scene into the far distance, widens the view, and makes the foreground and vista pleasing to the eye. Distances between the background and foreground seem diminished while the focus is sharpened. The black glass dramatically changes the tonal values and intensifies the register of the scene, at once simplifying and unifying the palette. The Claude mirror is a powerful tool for discovering and contemplating landscape views and in turn a useful compositional aid for artists.

Claude mirrors were popular for the better part of a century in Britain, Europe, and North America. Drawing manuals, such as the 1820 text by Valenciennes shown here, discussed their utility and tourists carried them in their hunt for the picturesque. Mirrors could be purchased from philosophical or scientific instrument-makers, opticians (such as Benjamin Pike of New York), shops selling artists's supplies, and sometimes in tourist establishments themselves.



web-based audience. Mr. Andy Roberts, Producer at the BBC South East Wales, which hosted the site, has said that the web installation brings Tintern Abbey to a whole new constituency of viewer. Richard Turner of the Welsh heritage organization Cadw, whose enviable title is "Inspector of Ancient Monuments," is currently assisting with plans to move the installation onto Cadw property.

McKay's Claude-mirror images record thirteen of the scenic stations between Ross-on-Wye and Chepstow. This 41-mile stretch of river was the most popular segment of the Wye tour, especially after the publication of Gilpin's illustrated *Observations on the River Wye*. McKay's images, arranged as they would "successively occur" during a descent of the Wye, show not just the places, but a way of seeing and meditating upon place that is still ideologically present. What it reflects seems familiar even if the landscape is not.

McKay's tour of the Wye stations is followed by a visual chapter revisiting Tintern Abbey. He logged many weeks with the mirror over successive years to create his portfolio of the Wye tour. He selected his images of Tintern Abbey from hundreds of hours and tens of thousands of images recorded with the webcam since 2006. Like Charles Heath, McKay can say "it has been ... [a] pleasure to have viewed [Tintern Abbey] under every variation and change of the season, as well as times of the day." (Heath, *Tintern*, [78]) Further information about Alex McKay's work and the Claude mirror may be found at the website www.claudemirror.com.

"The Language of the Sense" Poetical Tintern

> *"Descriptions of Tintern Abbey should be written on ivy leaves, and with a poet's pen, for no other do justice to the air of solemn grandeur and religious melancholy reigning within its delicate cloisters."*
>
> — Catherine Sinclair, *Hill and Valley*, 1838

Tintern Abbey was as much a magnet for poets as for professional and amateur visual artists in the period. The most famous literary work associated with the site is William Wordsworth's "Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey." But it is interesting to note that there was a large body of verse on the subject of the Abbey and topographical poems on the region well before the end of the 18th century. The selection of authors and verses gathered on display represents a tiny fraction of the surviving poetical descriptions, effusions, and reflections inspired by the ruins.

"The Picture of the Mind"
Artist II: Alex McKay. "The Wye Tour: Claude Mirror Images from Ross-on-Wye to Chepstow, 2001-2007"

"It has been the writer's pleasure to have viewed [Tintern Abbey] under every variation and change of the season, as well as times of the day, but the still hour of evening has always been preferred for the most agreeable enjoyment of the scene"

— Charles Heath

Alex McKay is a Canadian, multi-disciplinary artist who has long investigated issues of exploration, landscape, and identity. His present work on the Claude mirror was inspired by an unpublished eighteenth-century manuscript at the Yale Center for British Art documenting a boat tour down the Lower Wye. This manuscript contains elliptical watercolor illustrations that reminded McKay of a Claude mirror he had seen at the Victoria and Albert Museum. He contemplated a similar voyage down the Wye; but unable at the time to purchase a rare period mirror, McKay began the research that would allow him to manufacture his own in a variety of shapes and extraordinary sizes.

Claude mirrors make a "raw" view look uncannily like an eighteenth-century landscape painting. There are many correspondences between McKay's photographs and the prints and illustrations throughout the exhibit. Not only do Claude mirrors provide assistance for those composing pictures and sketching scenery, but they express a great deal about the priorities of viewers in the period. The Claude mirror helps picturesque tourists discover what they long to see.

What was intended to be one canoe trip down the Wye evolved into a sustained project, resulting in the creation of Claude mirror images taken from many locations in North America and Britain, complex installations, and various research fellowships. Over the course of seven years, guided by historical images and travel narratives, Ordnance Survey maps and locals acting as guides, McKay has re-traced the steps of many Romantic tourists and artists in the Lower Wye. Although McKay's work involves finding and responding to canonical views and their historical representations, his work reaches well beyond simple reproduction.

After many epiphanic moments with the device, McKay took a different approach, coupling the mirror with 21st-century web-based technology. He installed a 42" Claude mirror-variant on the grounds of the Abbey Hotel, Tintern (formerly the Beaufort Arms) to reflect the south-west façade of the ruin. This vantage point has been favored by generations of artists. A high resolution webcam streams the view onto the Web. McKay has paired an instrument of Romantic transcription with an instrument of modern-day surveillance.

The Tintern installation has greatly increased our understanding of the mirror's effects: how it transforms perspective, depth perception, and scale; and how it responds to variable weather conditions and the hourly, daily, seasonal qualities of light in this region. We have been allowed to witness over time what no individual could endure – thousands of hours standing in the same spot with a mirror in hand. It has offered insight into the theoretical formulation of the gaze in the eighteenth century, and the influence of earlier visual practices on our own 21st-century way of seeing. The installation has also created a stir within a global,

Wordsworth's Poem

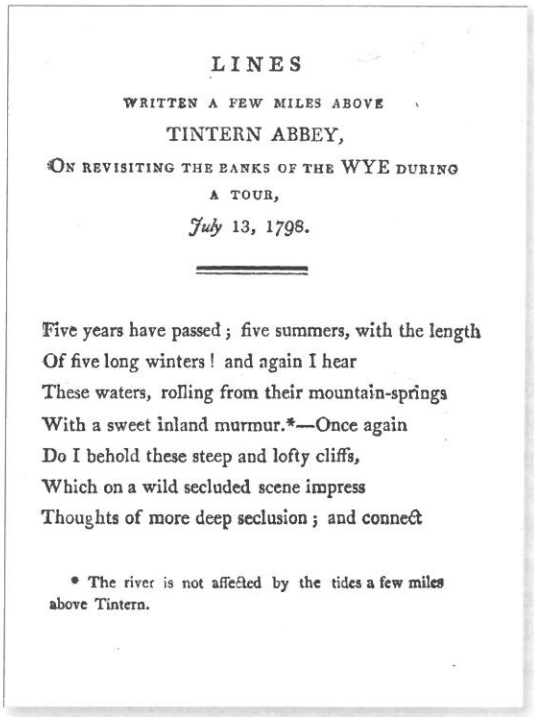
"Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey, on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye During a Tour, July 13, 1798" was written in July 1798, and published as the concluding piece in Wordsworth's and Coleridge's seminal *Lyrical Ballads, With a Few Other Poems.* The word "Written" in the title was altered to "Composed" in 1815. (Butler and Greene, 16)

"No poem of mine was composed under circumstances more pleasant for me to remember than this," Wordsworth later mused; "I begun it upon leaving Tintern, after crossing the Wye, and concluded it just as I was entering Bristol in the evening, after a ramble of four or five days with my notes. Not a line of it was altered, not any part of it written down till I reached Bristol." (De Selincourt, *Poetical Works*, v. 2, 517)

This ramble with his notes — and incidentally with his sister Dorothy — took the pair on their first day from Bristol (where they had stayed with Joseph Cottle) to Chepstow. On the second day they traveled from Chepstow north on foot, along the Monmouthshire side of the Wye as far as Tintern. The following day they crossed to the Gloucestershire side of the Wye and walked as high as Goodrich. It was at Goodrich Castle in 1793 that Wordsworth had the encounter with a child that formed the basis of his poem "We are Seven." On July 12th William and Dorothy walked all of the way back to Chepstow, but immediately took a boat upriver to return to Tintern. (Bentley-Taylor, 3)

Wordsworth's "present pleasure" in this excursion was intensified by his memories of a solitary tour in 1793, alluded to in the opening lines of the poem. His faith in the recuperative powers of landscape and memory seems borne out in his sister's experience too. An invalid in later life, Dorothy Wordsworth recalled the excursion in an1831 poem "Thoughts on my Sick Bed":

> No prisoner in this lonely room,
> I saw the green Banks of the Wye,
> Recalling thy prophetic words,
> Bard, Brother, Friend from infancy!
> (De Selincourt, *Dorothy Wordsworth*, 387-388)



LINES

WRITTEN A FEW MILES ABOVE

TINTERN ABBEY,

ON REVISITING THE BANKS OF THE WYE DURING A TOUR,

July 13, 1798.

Five years have passed; five summers, with the length
Of five long winters! and again I hear
These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs
With a sweet inland murmur.*—Once again
Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,
Which on a wild secluded scene impress
Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect

* The river is not affected by the tides a few miles above Tintern.

In early June 1812 Mary Wordsworth, the poet's wife, visited the Wye Valley for the first time, in the company of her brother and sister-in-law, Tom and Joanna Hutchinson. A letter to William written after a long day that included an excursion to Tintern, is filled with her delight in the novelty of the tour and the beauty of a region that had inspired her husband nearly two decades before: "O William what enchanting scenes have we passed through — but you know it all — only I must say longings to have you by my side have this day been painful to me beyond expression." At the Abbey she "sate a long time alone in a deep nich[e] & I would have given the World to have thee by my side." (Darlington, 218-222) A sense of the layered nature of recollection seems to have been a shared family trait.

It is very poignant to know that while Mary was reveling in these new sights, she was unaware that her small daughter Catharine was gravely ill at home in Grasmere. Mary returned to her brother's house in Radnorshire to be met by a letter announcing Catharine's death. William's attempt to reach Mary himself ahead of this communication was unsuccessful. Mary's letter to William recounting her outing to Tintern Abbey, now preserved in the Wordsworth Trust in Grasmere, bears a stark, retrospective pencil notation in her hand: "two days before Catharine died."

"Memory Be as a Dwelling Place" Romanticism and Ruins

> *"A very inchanting piece of ruin. Nature has now made it her own. Time has worn off all traces of the rule: it has blunted the sharp edges of the chisel; and broken the regularity of opposing parts."*
>
> — William Gilpin, *Observations on the River Wye*, 1792

Tintern Abbey, one of the earliest communities of Cistercian or "white monks" in Wales, was founded by Walter fitz Richard de Clare in 1131. Following its suppression by Henry VIII in 1536, the Abbey passed into the possession of Henry Somerset, second Earl of Worcester. Lead from its roof and other building materials were salvaged (or scavenged) and tenements leased out around and within the monastic buildings. (Robinson, 283) Over the course of two centuries the Abbey was allowed to fall into ruin.

When "rediscovered" in the late 18th century it was prized, paradoxically, for its degree of preservation. Although now roofless, the walls had remained entire. Some of the windows, like the great, seven-light west window, had retained their delicate gothic tracery. Thomas Whateley in *Observations on Modern Gardening* notes "In the ruins of Tintern Abbey, the original construction of the church is perfectly marked; and is principally from this circumstance that they are celebrated as a subject of curiosity and contemplation." (Whateley, 133) The pleasurable melancholy brought on by contemplation of the Abbey's past glory, combined with the effect of its picturesque setting, proved a heady emotional combination for Romantic tourists.

Tintern Abbey was excavated in 1756 at the behest of its owner, Henry Somerset, the fifth Duke of Beaufort, shortly after his succession to the title. Beaufort was lauded in the period for his advanced notions of architectural conservation. Continuing work begun by his father, he ordered the site cleared, a turf floor planted throughout, and the relics piled in heaps; the perimeter was fenced and gated and a local steward (Mr. Gethen or Gething, landlord of the nearby Beaufort Arms hotel) appointed to superintend visitors.

Some of the methods employed in the excavation of the Abbey are rather hair-raising by modern standards. Under a team headed by William Knowles, a builder from Chepstow, the floor of the Abbey was taken down to the original level of the pavement. Heath notes that "useful" material was salvaged and "rubble" from this excavation was tipped into the River Wye. He also admits that the occasional artifact was sold to passing tourists. A Mr. Sanders of Chepstow reportedly acquired some lovely sculptures for his garden in this manner. Decades later Samuel Ireland, artist and author of *Picturesque Views on the River Wye* (1797), bought an ancient coin from the daughter of a stone mason involved in the original clearing work. (Heath, *Tintern*, [75]) Many travelers in the period note that specimens of the Abbey floor tile could be found in village houses. The local doctor, W.H. Thomas, complained in the 1830s that he saw remnants of an Abbey wall recycled into a pigsty. (Thomas, 20)

The depredations of nature herself were a more serious matter. One much-praised feature of the ruins was the mass of ivy and other vegetation clinging to the Abbey walls. William Gilpin describes these "ornaments of time" approvingly and admired how their tints contrasted with the tones of the sandstone. A rare voice of dissent comes, fittingly, from an architect named W.A. Brooks. Visiting in about 1802 with a party who viewed "the green mantling ivy covering the major part of the whole pile, as constituting Tintern's chief delight," Brooks fretted instead about "its sapping devastations carrying into the very core of each wall." (Brook, 302)

Tintern Abbey was purchased by the Crown from the 9th Duke of Beaufort in 1901 and passed to the Office of Works in 1913-14. The ivy was removed during an extension restoration scheme completed in 1928. Today the site (ivy-less) is under the care of Cadw, the Welsh heritage organization..

"The Picture of the Mind"

Artist III: James Ward. *Tintern Abbey*. Oil on canvas.

[Reproduced from the original in the University of Michigan Museum of Art]

James Ward, R.A., is a painter and engraver known primarily for his depictions of animals, rustic genre scenes, and landscapes, although he made some notable excursions into history painting as well. Ward first visited Wales in 1802 through a commission from the Board of Agriculture to paint portraits of livestock. A watercolor view of the Abbey dated 1807 may belong to this preliminary tour. (Munro, vol. 8, 49). *Tintern Abbey*, exhibited in 1838 at the British Institution with its pair *The Wire Mill at Tintern*, brings together several characteristic elements of his practice. (Graves, "Ward")

Ward depicts the Abbey's west entrance and window bathed in the light of sunset. The last segment of the day provides an evocative counterpart to the antiquity of the structure. Sunset at Tintern Parva, situated in a mountain valley and along a northerly latitude of 51 degrees, does not happen with tropical abruptness but rather gradually and lingeringly . Ward muses on different senses of duration here.

The tone of the painting is elegiac, shading into the sublime as the eye travels towards the hidden recesses of the ruin and the sweep of approaching night above. Ward balances the solemn grandeur of the Abbey with a more natural tendency to record details of the everyday – the traditional red cloaks worn by Welsh women, the little conversations brought on by evening, a giddy dog racing a fine, stable-bound horse. A viewer raised on representations of Tintern Abbey would find enough melancholy and monumentality here to satisfy their expectations. But what Ward really celebrates are the little eddies of local, humble life that swirl about the base of the brooding structure. Charles Heath would cheer.

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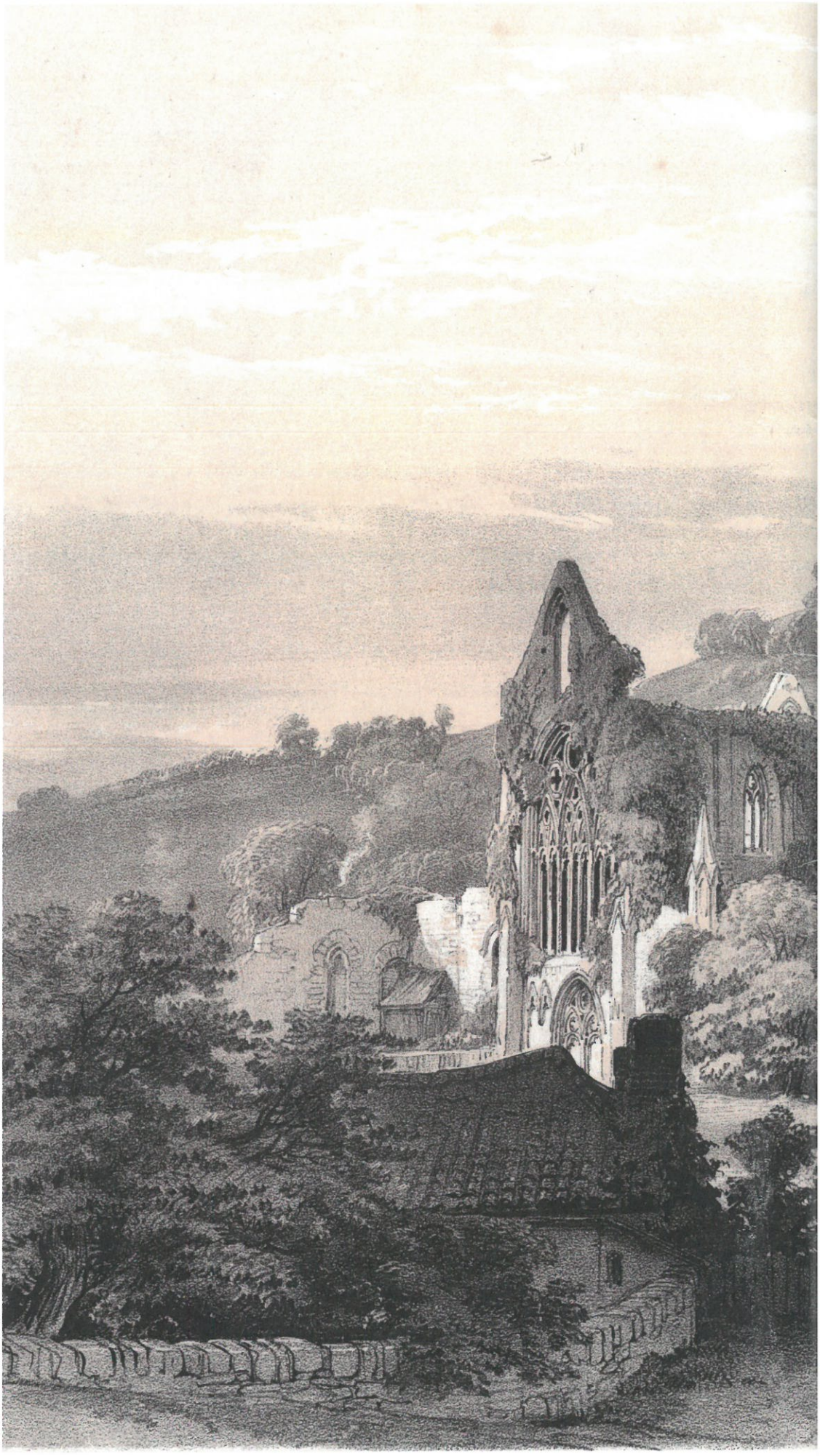

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