

JULIA GOODFELLOW-SMITH

111

PLACES IN
SWANSEA

THAT YOU



SHOULDN'T

MISS

INCLUDING
GOWER

emojis:

1__Aberavon Whale

Having a whale of a time

Aberavon Sands is not where you would expect to see a blue whale, with penguins standing guard on icebergs nearby. While real whales and penguins are threatened by environmental pollution, noisy seas and global heating, these sculptures were once threatened by the 'need' for car parking. Local children were up in arms about the possibility of losing their park, so they started a petition and met with the council leader to protest. They succeeded in their quest to save the sculptures, which means that their children can now play on and around these models, as they once did. The children's action demonstrated how effective grassroots activism can be, as well as the importance of standing up for what you believe in, whatever your age.

Real whales do occasionally stray into Swansea Bay, although sadly, most don't seem to have survived, thanks to the usefulness of whale oil. In 1864, two whales were seen near Mumbles Head. One was killed and pulled ashore in Oystermouth, and the other made it round to the mouth of the River Tawe before being shot and attached to the shore. Once the tide retreated, the whale was stranded, providing a spectacle for local people, who paid a penny apiece to see it. Before long, it was controversially claimed by the Duke of Beaufort, cut up and rendered for oil. For all of the issues associated with the use of fossil fuels now, their discovery did at least stop us from slaughtering millions of whales for their oil.

In 1986, the International Whaling Commission banned commercial whaling. Although some countries have chosen to step away from that agreement, it has resulted in several species starting to recover from the brink of extinction. Now, the commission can focus on how to make whale-watching sustainable and reducing accidental harm such as ship strikes, entanglement in nets and ocean noise, thus ensuring the future of these magnificent beasts.



Address The Princess Margaret Way, Port Talbot, SA12 6QN | **Getting there** Train to Port Talbot Parkway, then a 40-minute walk; bus to Port Talbot Bus Station, then a 30-minute walk; on-street parking nearby | **Hours** Accessible 24 hours | **Tip** If you would like to see wild cetaceans, the Gower Peninsula is a good place to go. Boat trips are available from Oxwich Bay.

2—Aberdarcy Public Library

Only Two Can Play

Imagine Swansea a few years after World War II, a provincial town that had suffered from severe bombing and whose industry was in major decline. It did not become a city until 1969 and was nothing like the vibrant place it is today. Then imagine what a stir must have been created when Kingsley Amis arrived in 1949, fresh from gaining a first-class honours degree at Oxford, to take up a junior lecturing position at Swansea University. By all accounts, he was a colourful character at work and home, and his parties were legendary, providing a welcome distraction from the challenges of post-war reconstruction.

His first novel *Lucky Jim* was published five years after arriving, followed the next year by *That Uncertain Feeling*. Both were comedies, the first set in a provincial university, the second in a Welsh seaside town. It can only be assumed that both were inspired by his life in Swansea. *That Uncertain Feeling* was made into a film in 1962, with a title change to *Only Two Can Play*. Peter Sellers was cast into the leading role of the librarian who finds himself the subject of the attentions of a powerful predatory woman who can influence his chances of promotion. The film was nominated for a BAFTA, and Kingsley Amis became a celebrity author. Much of *Only Two Can Play* was filmed in Swansea, and the Glynn Vivian Art Gallery was transformed into Aberdarcy Public Library.

Kingsley Amis lived in Swansea for 12 years and claimed that his best work was written while here. Overall, he wrote over 20 novels, poetry, non-fiction, memoir and television and radio scripts. In 1985, he was awarded an Honorary Fellowship of Swansea University. In 1986, he won the Booker Prize for *The Old Devils*, which was also set in Swansea, although by the time he wrote it, he had been gone for a while. In 1990, he was knighted and became Sir Kingsley Amis.



Address Glynn Vivian Art Gallery, Alexandra Road, Swansea, SA1 5DZ, www.glynnvivian.co.uk | **Getting there** Bus 16 to Orchard Street; a short walk from Swansea railway station | **Hours** Viewable from the outside 24 hours; gallery Tue–Sun 10am–4.30pm | **Tip** The actual library in Swansea is in a somewhat less attractive, modern building down by the seafront.

3—Abertawe Barrage

Rising to the challenge

This barrier across the River Tawe is a late 20th-century addition, built to create a larger marina. Blocking a river can be devastating to local wildlife, as muddy banks full of inter-tidal organisms become permanently submerged and migrating fish find an insurmountable barrier between them and their spawning grounds. Since the 18th century, engineers have been working on a solution to the fish migration issue. The Abertawe Barrage uses the most popular version of a fish pass – a ‘ladder’ – between the lock and the barrage itself. A series of stepped pools allows fish to jump up from the bay to the river, one step at a time, without exhausting themselves. The trick is to make the steps just the right size, with enough water flow to attract the fish but not so much that they are exhausted before they have reached the top. The next challenge is to keep them alive in the marina.

Seawater flows over the top of the barrage at high tide. It holds less oxygen than fresh water, and because it’s also heavier, it gets trapped behind the barrier. For a while, the lack of oxygen made the river inhospitable for fish, so the marina is now aerated. This stirs up the water and raises oxygen levels. The method was so successful that the same technology was deployed for the far larger barrage across Cardiff Bay. Look out for the rings of bubbles rising to the surface.

No real solution has yet been found to the damage caused by permanently submerging mudflats.

There are, of course, also opportunities with any scheme like this. The steady flow of water from the river is used to generate hydro-power. This power is used to pump water back into the basin when required and to work the lock, which is large enough for small fishing vessels to pass through. The marina was also expanded, creating an area that is popular for waterside dining and strolling.



Address Swansea, SA1 1FZ | **Getting there** A 20-minute walk from Swansea railway station; bus 7 to Swansea Marina; nearest parking next to Marina Park at the end of Trawler Road | **Hours** Accessible 24 hours | **Tip** There is a café right next to the lock, which is next to the barrage. If you wait for a while, you might see one of the fishing fleet pass through the lock.

4 The Admiral's Tower

A bird's-eye view

When retired Admiral Algernon Walker Heneage inherited Clyne Castle from his mother's family in 1921, he added her surname to his. This resulted in a triple-barrelled surname; he became Admiral Algernon Walker-Heneage-Vivian. He was clearly a man who did not do things by halves, as evidenced by his garden as well as his name. The pleasure grounds he developed are now known as Clyne Gardens, owned by Swansea City Council, and open to the public.

The admiral planted a profusion of rhododendrons and azaleas. The gardens now house national collections of these, enkianthus and pieris. In spring, there is a riot of shape and colour as the garden bursts into flower, especially in the area nearest to the Woodman pub. The Admiral's tower is most easily found by entering the park near the pub, following a path down to the stream on the left, and then following the stream uphill.

Not content with admiring his rhododendrons from eye height, he built this five-metre-tall construction to get a close-up view of the flowers. A spiral staircase runs up the outside of the tower, and a small platform at the top snugly fits two people.

Further up the wooded valley is a garden with a pool and cascade. The Japanese bridge across the stream is a striking scarlet and white – a replica of the original the admiral installed. A superb handkerchief tree stands on the downhill side of the bridge. When in bloom, the creamy flower bracts make it look like it has hundreds of handkerchiefs draped from it. Steps rise from the far side of the bridge, and further uphill in that direction, the view opens out east across the city and Swansea Bay.

Clyne Castle is the far side of the grassy sward, flanked by some enormous Monterey Pines with branches that reach down to the ground. With the castle to the left, the entrance to the park is downhill and round to the right.



Address Mayals, Swansea, SA3 5BA, www.swansea.gov.uk/clyne | **Getting there** Buses 2, 2A, 2B, 3, 3A, 14, 14A, 37 to Woodman pub; parking next to Woodman pub | **Hours** Accessible 24 hours | **Tip** Clyne Valley Country Park adjoins Clyne Gardens and has extensive footpaths and cycleways through native woodland that has been reclaimed from an old industrial site.

5 — Amy Dillwyn's Grave

'A man of business'

(Elizabeth) Amy Dillwyn defied Victorian convention. She dressed and behaved in what was considered a masculine way, rather than conforming to the notion that women should be pretty and quiet. She wrote novels with 'tomboy' protagonists and women with fluid sexuality, which seem to have drawn on her own experience of life. She wrote about issues of social justice from the perspective of the working class and railed against the upper class to which she belonged.

This was already pretty revolutionary in Victorian Britain, but when her father died in 1892, Amy, by then in her late 40s, really came into her own. Born into a wealthy industrial and political family, she grew up and lived in her family mansion and ran the house and estate. Inheritance laws at the time were skewed in favour of men, so she did not inherit her home when her father died. What she did inherit, though, were her father's loss-making spelter works (a type of cheap alloy) and £100,000 of debt, the equivalent of around £8 million today. She could have declared bankruptcy. Instead, she rented cheap lodgings and ran the business herself. Within 10 years, she managed to make a profit, pay off the creditors and buy herself a house in Mumbles, where she lived until she died. During this period, she called herself 'a man of business', highlighting that she was the equal of men despite being desperately discriminated against for being a woman.

In the early 20th century, Amy Dillwyn was also an early and ardent member of the women's suffrage movement, supporting the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies and helping striking women to gain improved working conditions. She was not to be trifled with and blazed a path for women's emancipation.

E. Amy Dillwyn lived until she was 90. Her ashes are buried under this gravestone in St Paul's and Holy Trinity Church, Sketty.



Address De-la-Beche Road, Sketty, Swansea, SA2 9AR | **Getting there** Various buses to Sketty Cross; on-street parking nearby | **Hours** Accessible 24 hours | **Tip** There are two blue plaques dedicated to Amy Dillwyn in Swansea – one on her former home in Mumbles and one on the waterfront at Blackpill.

6 Arthur's Stone

David vs. Goliath?

Although the King Arthur Hotel in nearby Reynoldston displays a sword in its reception, Arthur's Stone (known as 'Maen Ceti' in Welsh – 'Ceti's stone') has no known association with the mythological king. The name, thought to have been in everyday use for over 300 years, refers instead to Arthur from Llanelli, a giant who threw a pebble from his shoe in irritation. It landed on Cefn Bryn, the ridge that runs along the Gower Peninsula. That pebble is, in fact, a conglomerate boulder of some size, composed of smaller rocks and pebbles that have been cemented together over millions of years. It is thought to weigh over 30 tonnes and was most likely dropped by a retreating glacier.

It now balances rather precariously above ground, with a double chamber beneath. In the distant past, our ancestors dug under the boulder and propped it up with other rocks. It is likely to have been a tomb. In such a position, with views across the Loughor estuary and north across Wales, and with such effort having gone into creating it, it must have provided a final resting place for someone of high status. The sides of the tomb are now open but were probably filled in with stones and possibly turf when it was created. The entire structure forms a circle that is 23 metres across.

Arthur's Stone was once much larger than it is now, as some of it has split off and sits on the ground. In around 1800, the historian and promoter of the Eisteddfod, Iolo Morganwg, wrote that this was the work of St David. He claims that the saint struck the stone with his sword to crack it and thus prove that the site was not sacred, then commanded water to spring from under the tomb. Although the ground often does hold water, Iolo is believed to have embellished the story to promote Welsh culture, as he was known to mix historical facts with romantic stories for the greater good.



Address North of the road between Reynoldston and Cillibion | **Getting there** Parking available 700 metres east of Reynoldston | **Hours** Accessible 24 hours | **Tip** There are also two significant burial chambers on the east side of Rhossili Down (Sweyne's Howes), although neither is as large as Arthur's Stone.

7 Battle of Gower

When the land ran red

The history of the Battle of Gower can be traced back to the Norman Invasion in 1066. After winning the Battle of Hastings, it only took a few years for the Normans to seize control of the whole of England, but their expansion into Wales proved to be much more challenging. Although they quickly took the south coast of Wales, the local Welsh rulers were not too happy about this and kept an eye out for opportunities to regain control over their country.

Back in England, things became rather hairy after the death of King Henry I. His only legitimate son pre-deceased him, and he was keen for his daughter, Empress Matilda, to succeed to the throne. When Henry I died on 2 December, 1135, a power struggle ensued between Matilda and her cousin Stephen. This proved to be a big distraction for the Norman invaders and provided just the opportunity that the ousted local rulers had sought. Only one month after the king's death, Welsh rebels attacked the Anglo-Norman army at the Battle of Gower, also known as the Battle of Llŵchwr.

Much to the Anglo-Normans' surprise, they suffered heavy losses and were defeated. The battlefield was on Carn Goch Common, *goch* meaning 'red' in Welsh; this is where the land turned red with the blood of the vanquished. According to a contemporary account, 516 men lost their lives. Their bodies were 'horribly scattered among the fields and eaten up by wolves'.

This victory boosted the Welsh rebels' confidence and inspired a series of challenges to Norman rule. Ultimately, it was another 150 years before the whole of Wales was conquered. Luckily, there are no marauding wolves or soldiers left on the battlefield site. Instead, a stone memorial stands in honour of the fallen and the important place this battle holds in the history of Wales. A signpost from the road indicates the sometimes-boggy route across the common to the memorial stone.



Address Hospital Road, Loughor | **Getting there** Bus 111 to Hospital Road; the field entrance is on Hospital Road between the B 4560 and the A 484 | **Hours** Unrestricted | **Tip** If you are interested in the history of the Swansea area, the staff at Swansea Central Library have a wealth of information at their fingertips (Oystermouth Road, SA1 3SN).

8__ Beach House Restaurant

From coal to cuisine

Despite its name, Beach House has never been a beach house. Built around 1800, it was the coal house for the Penrice Estate, used to store fuel for heating. After World War II ended, tourism started to grow on Gower, and the estate saw the potential for an alternative use. The coal was removed, and the building was converted into a café and then a watersports centre. The watersports centre closed, and the structure sat unused and slowly decaying, creating an eyesore at one end of Oxwich Bay.

In 2016, this somewhat sad-looking building was reimagined into the high-end restaurant it is today. It retains its industrial vibe, but the use could not be any further removed from that it was built for. Now, it is light and airy, with windows that look out over the bay. Diners on the terrace are treated to stunning views. To the east, the sandy beach stretches over two miles to the dramatic limestone peaks of Three Cliffs Bay and beyond. To the west, trees cling to the cliffs that are occasionally subject to rock falls, and the ancient sanctuary of St Illtyd's Church looks benevolently across the sands. Beach House is the only Michelin-starred restaurant in the area and specialises in using locally sourced, seasonal ingredients. Locals fish for lobster and seabass, and walk straight up the beach into the kitchen with their catch – the carbon footprint can be measured in food steps rather than food miles. The restaurant even tells you which boat to look out for, bringing the catch in. Other notable ingredients include Gower Salt Marsh Lamb, laverbread (a dish made from seaweed) and Brefu Bach cheese.

Although not lifeguarded, the bay is also a popular place for swimming and watersports, with a soft sandy beach backed by rolling dunes and hills. It is also popular with dog walkers, as dogs are allowed on the beach year-round and the Wales Coast Path wends through the dunes.



Address Oxwich Beach, Gower, Swansea, SA3 1LS, www.beachhouseoxwich.co.uk, reservations@beachhouseoxwich.co.uk | **Getting there** Bus 117 to Oxwich Cross; parking adjacent to beach | **Hours** See website for details | **Tip** The café with tables on the sand a little further along the beach offers a dining experience that is more financially accessible for many.

9 — The Big Apple

A cider a day keeps the doctor away

These days, people joke about a glass of wine being one of their ‘five a day’ fruit and vegetable portions because it is made from grapes. It seems this joke has been around for the best part of a century. Back in the 1930s, Cidatone had ‘Drink your apple a day’ painted on the side of their distinctive apple-shaped kiosk between Bracelet Bay and Mumbles Pier. Although little is known about the company, there is an assumption that they sold cider rather than apple juice and that this was their inducement to customers to drink themselves healthy. Funnily enough, there is no mention of any possible adverse effects of drinking cider on a hot summer’s day.

The structure, made from a single sphere of pre-stressed concrete, has been a feature of Mumbles and Bracelet Bay since the early 1930s and, as the last of its kind, is now a listed building. Over the years, it has seen some changes, although the iconic shape has remained the same. In 2009, a car drove into it, creating a lot of damage. Luckily, after some head-scratching, the owner worked out how to repair it and return it to use. As you see in this photo, it is usually painted red and green, but it was once vandalised and re-painted orange. ‘The Big Pumpkin’ doesn’t have such a great ring to it, though, so it was soon returned to its usual colours.

The slogan is no longer on the side; instead, it sports a picture of an ice cream, reflecting its most recent use. The Big Apple is placed prominently in view for anyone arriving at Bracelet Bay through the cutting from Swansea. It is much loved by the people of the city who have visited the bay since childhood and bought ice cream, buckets and spades from the kiosk. It is also clearly visible from the restaurant on the far side of the bay, perhaps tempting diners to take a post-prandial walk around the cliffs. With ice cream in hand, they can then head up onto Mumbles Point to enjoy the view over the lighthouse, pier, Swansea Bay and the Bristol Channel.

Address Bracelet Bay Car Park, Mumbles Road, Mumbles, SA3 4JT | **Getting there** Bus 2A, 2B, 3A to Mumbles Pier Head Hotel; paid parking in car park | **Hours** Viewable from the outside only | **Tip** Mumbles Fine Wines (524 Mumbles Road) sells a good selection of Welsh ciders.



10 Bluepool Corner

A rock-solid day out

Bluepool Corner is best known for the deep rock pool on the beach. With its vertical sides and sandy bottom way below the level of the beach, this deep pool, surrounded by rugged, weathered rocks, is a perfect place to cool off on a hot summer day and is loved by children who throw themselves in from on high. There are several caves along the bay, and at the far end, you will see Three Chimneys Arch, an unusual triangular-shaped rock formation you can scramble through at low tide.

Just beyond the arch, human remains were found in Three Chimneys Cave (also known as Culver Hole) when it was excavated in the early 20th century. During the Beaker period of the early Bronze Age, named for the distinctive clay drinking vessels found at many burial sites, bodies were left in open graves, and the bones were either rearranged or moved later. It is thought that Three Chimneys Cave was used as an ossuary during and after this period, possibly for the community that lived on Burry Holms, the island a short distance to the south west of this point. Local people continued to use the cave for rituals up to a century ago, perhaps drawn by a sense of wonder at the power of nature and the insignificance of people in comparison.

On a lighter note, the bay in front of the beach is part of a Special Protection Area, as it is one of the most important sites in the British Isles for overwintering common scoters. Keep an eye out for flocks of a black (male) or dark brown (female) duck smaller than a mallard, with a pointed tail. They dive with a small forward jump and often rise up on their tails to exercise their wings. The shallow waters of the bay also attract flocks of black and white oystercatchers parading along the edge of the shore and teal, and if you're lucky in winter, you might see the ghostly swaying of a murmuration of starlings.



Address On the coast near Llangennith | **Getting there** Park at Broughton Farm Caravan Park, SA3 1JL, and walk left along the cliffs | **Hours** Accessible 24 hours, although there's no beach at high tide | **Tip** There is another natural arch on Worm's Head. Travel to Rhossili and it's an adventurous walk across to the island at low tide.



Julia Goodfellow-Smith loved her life in the Midlands, but it was missing one important thing; the sea. On arriving in Llanelli, she and her husband started exploring – and found unexpected treasures. In this book, she shares her love of the area and some of the best things she found.

The information in this book was accurate at the time of publication, but it can change at any time. Please confirm the details for the places you're planning to visit before you head out on your adventures.