

JULIA GOODFELLOW-SMITH

111

PLACES IN
CARDIFF
THAT YOU
SHOULDN'T
MISS

emons:

Diolch i bobl Cymru am eich croeso cynnes.

Bibliographical information of the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographical data are available on the internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.



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Cäcilienstraße 48, 50667 Köln
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ch. 5, 15, 33, 57, 88, 94, 96: Michael Goodfellow-Smith;

ch. 22: CIWW; ch. 45: Will Barker; ch. 50: Hard Lines Café

© Cover icon: AdobeStock/Анна О

Layout: Editorial Design & Art Direction, Conny Laue,
by Lübbecke | Naumann | Thoben

Maps: altancicek.design, www.altancicek.de

Basic cartographical information from Openstreetmap,

© OpenStreetMap-Mitwirkende, OdbL

Edited by: Tania Taylor

Printing and binding: Grafisches Centrum Cuno, Calbe

Printed in Germany 2025

ISBN 978-3-7408-2465-5

First edition

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Foreword

Cardiff has a gruesome and spectacular past, an awesome present and an exciting future unfolding every day.

People have lived here for thousands of years, leaving layers of history behind: Prehistoric people constructed hill forts; the Romans built a fort at the river crossing and started to drain and farm marshland along the Bristol Channel; the Normans built a castle on the site of the fort. The town grew, but the population was still small until the coal boom of the Industrial Revolution. At that point, Cardiff expanded rapidly, attracting migrants from across the world. Since then, it has become a city, a capital city and, more recently, a seat of government.

Over the last 200 years, Cardiff has changed beyond recognition. It is now a vibrant, multicultural city with a civic quarter that would rival that of any European capital. It has been at the forefront of scientific advances, such as Marconi's development of communication by radio, and societal changes, such as providing employment for those with disabilities. In this book, I convey some of this history through visits to quirky and unusual places.

But Cardiff is not just a city of the past. It is a city of the present, with many places where you can learn, have fun and relax. And it is a city of the future, with continued development in line with becoming an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable One Planet City.

With these 111 places, I aim to surprise, inspire and delight locals who already know Cardiff well and visitors experiencing it for the first time. I had swum around in Cardiff's waters a little before starting this book, and knew I would love writing it. Full immersion in those waters to research these 111 places has been fascinating and such fun! I hope you enjoy your exploration of Wales' capital city through the places and stories in this book as much as I have enjoyed unearthing them.

2—Animal Wall

Cardiff's concrete jungle

The 3rd Marquess of Bute used the money his family had made from coal and shipping to renovate Cardiff Castle. He and his architect, William Burges, shared a love of animals, which is evident in the fantastical, naturalistic decoration of the castle that features animals in wood, glass and paintings. He even had clothes moths carved into his wardrobe!

Burges had a vision of extending the animal theme to the castle's exterior, allowing the people of Cardiff to see exotic animals that would otherwise have been unfamiliar to them. This vision was not realised until the 1890s, a few years after his death. Initially, a pair of lions holding the family shields flanked the castle entrance. They were joined by a lioness, polar bear, sea lion, wolf, a pair of apes and a hyena.

In the 1920s, the animal wall was moved to its current position to accommodate the widening of Castle Street. At the same time, the collection was enlarged to include a vulture, beaver, leopard, racoon, pelican, anteater and lynx. Although the sculptures we see now are bare stone, they were originally very different, with glass eyes and painted in realistic colours. While not as colourful as it once was, the animal wall has now been an educational visitor attraction for around a century.

Lord Bute did not only introduce decorative animals to the castle. He loved animals so much that he even had a hedgehog as a pet. He also introduced live beavers into the castle grounds, which extended into what is now Bute Park, hoping to re-establish an animal that was common when the castle was first built. Unfortunately, there are no longer beavers in Bute Park, although they have been successfully reintroduced in several rural areas of the UK. If you want to see these creatures in Cardiff now, your best bet is to head to the roof garden at the top of Bute Tower, where bronze beavers frolic around the fountain.



Address Castle Street, Cardiff, CF10 1SZ | **Getting there** Several buses to Cardiff Bridge; train to Cardiff Central | **Hours** Accessible 24 hours | **Tip** Behind the Animal Wall, Bute Park also has some animal sculptures.

38 Dinas Powis Hillfort

An internationally important post-Roman site

When you see a hillfort in the UK, it is easy to assume that it dates back to the Iron Age, as so many do. However, Dinas Powis is a little different. There is evidence that there was an earlier settlement here in the late Stone Age and early Bronze Age. Although difficult to see as a whole because of the forest that now covers the hill, there are four sets of banks and ditches protecting the site. The first of these is thought to have been constructed during the late Bronze Age or early Iron Age, when the site was still occupied. People stayed here for long enough to move from being hunter-gatherers to farmers, with agricultural land developed within the earthworks south of the fort.

By the early Roman period, the site was abandoned, but after Roman rule ended in the 5th century, an elite family occupied the fort. It is the quality and quantity of finds from the following 200 years that makes this site internationally important. Those who lived here had pottery that was imported from the Mediterranean and southern France, and Frankish glass from the area around the Rhine. They also used metals and produced ornamental metalwork. Some similar finds have been found in Tintagel Castle, suggesting a trading link, or at the very least, that this site was of equally high status. During this period, it is thought that the remaining three sets of banks and ditches were constructed, suggesting the need for a greater degree of protection.

At some point in the 7th or 8th century, the site was abandoned. This is likely to be when trees started to recolonise the promontory. We know for sure that this is an ancient woodland, which means there has been tree cover here for at least 400 years, and possibly longer. The hillfort and surrounding woodlands are now open-access land with paths enabling exploration. From these paths, the extent of the protective ringworks becomes evident.



Address Dinas Powys, Cardiff, CF64 | **Getting there** Park on Highwalls Avenue, Dinas Powys, CF64 4AQ; bus 305 to Dinas Powys Square; train to Dinas Powys (15-minute walk to Highwalls Avenue). From Highwalls Avenue, take the footpath east across the golf course then downhill. Turn left at the bottom of the valley. At the information board, follow the path uphill onto the hillfort. | **Hours** Accessible 24 hours | **Tip** The Star Inn in Dinas Powys is a popular place to dine out.

53 — Heroes of Wales

Black lives matter

Most people born after 2015 will never forget 2020. It was, of course, the year of the Coronavirus pandemic. It was also the year in which the Black Lives Matter movement catapulted into the public consciousness in the UK, and on 7 June, an angry crowd in Bristol toppled the statue of Edward Colston off its plinth and into the dock.

Cardiff City Council quickly identified the statue of Sir Thomas Picton, one of the Heroes of Wales standing in City Hall, as contentious, consulted the public and held a vote on whether to retain or remove it. The Heroes of Wales statues were initially chosen by public vote early in the 20th century and unveiled in 1916. Sir Thomas Picton was included in the shortlist because he was the highest-ranking officer killed at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815. However, even when he was alive, he was a contentious figure, and many people considered his behaviour to be unacceptable. He gained the unenviable nickname of the ‘Tyrant of Trinidad’ when he was the governor, and was tried for the torture of Louisa Calderon, a 14-year-old girl, a crime for which he was convicted in 1806.

Cardiff City Council has apologised for including Picton in the original shortlist, and councillors overwhelmingly voted for the removal of the statue. Shortly afterwards, it was boarded up, and the council was given planning permission to remove it.

There remains some debate about whether contentious statues should be removed or left in place and put into historical context. Some would like to see them replaced with statues that better represent positive aspects of our history. Others would like to see the removal of all statues of people, given that no outstanding achievements are made as an entirely solo endeavour. The debate has at least encouraged us to learn more about our history, good and bad, and to consider how to right historic wrongs.



Address Cardiff City Hall, King Edward VII Avenue, Cardiff, CF10 3ND, www.cardiffcityhall.com, cityhall@cardiff.gov.uk | **Getting there** Several buses to Greyfriars Road Stop GN, Kingsway Hilton stop GP or Law Courts Stop RJ; train to Cathays | **Hours** See website for current information on visiting | **Tip** A walk around the surrounding Civic Quarter will reveal many buildings that give an indication of the wealth generated locally during the Industrial Revolution.

76 Penarth Pier

Standing strong since 1895

The Last Night of the Proms has become an institution in Britain, but of course, there had to be a ‘first night’ sometime in the past. Until 1895, classical music was something reserved for the upper echelons of society. The Proms, which started that year, were designed to bring classical music to the masses, as they still do. In the same year, the first car journey took place in Britain – in a French car. By the end of the year, there were around 20 automobiles on the roads. The speed limit was just four miles per hour, and each car had to have a person walking in front of it, waving a flag to warn other road users.

That was the year and the society in which Penarth Pier was first opened, and it has seen some significant changes in its time. The pier is one of only two on the South Wales coast and is a little shorter than its counterpart at Mumbles, as it would otherwise have obstructed the shipping channels heading to and from Cardiff Docks.

In 1931, the pier suffered from an enormous fire that razed the pavilion on the seaward end, as well as much of the decking. The pier was repaired, but the pavilion was not rebuilt. However, the distinctive Art Deco pavilion on the landward end remains.

Keeping the pier away from the shipping channel did not save it from being struck by ships on two separate occasions. One was a steamship that operated from the pier, but it was a Canadian merchant ship that caused the most damage. The captain lost control in a gale in 1947 and mangled or broke as many as 70 of the pier’s supporting columns. It took two years for the repairs to be complete.

The pier has been extensively renovated in recent years, is free to enjoy, and is an exceptional place from which to watch the sun rise over the Bristol Channel. There are somewhat more cars on the road now, and the only flags you are likely to see are on bunting ruffling in the breeze.



Address The Esplanade, Penarth, Cardiff, CF64 3AU, +44 (0)1446 725236, pavilion@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk | **Getting there** Bus 88 or 305 to Penarth Pier; train to Penarth | **Hours** Accessible 24 hours | **Tip** When the tide is in, the slipway to the north of the pier is a popular place for swimmers to enter the water. Please be careful – the tides here are often strong.

82__ Postbox Subsumed by a Tree

Special delivery

Trees are the most amazing organisms: we spend enormous amounts of money trying to engineer methods of sequestering carbon dioxide to combat climate change, yet, it is something that trees do effortlessly, naturally and effectively, and at no cost to us. Trees supply us with timber and provide us – and many other animals on Earth – with food and shelter, playing an essential role in the web of life.

Silver birches trap particulate pollution in their leaves and drop it to the ground every autumn rather than allowing it to block our lungs. London plane trees do similar, but with their bark. Trees even communicate with each other underground and through the air.

We love gazing up through the branches of trees to glimpse a blue sky, walking in their cool shade on a hot summer's day, and kicking through their leaves in autumn. Trees release volatile organic compounds that improve our mood, and oxygen that allows us to live.

We also imagine all sorts of horrors associated with trees: trees that rebel and whomp us if we get too close and others that wind their roots around us if we stay still for too long. Both examples might be based on reality. After all, trees can destroy houses, cars and people if we get too close during a storm. And trees will subsume things that get in their way. There are several examples of a bicycle that has been propped up against a tree and left – and then found several metres in the air after the tree has grown around it and up.

This postbox is a good example – the tree continues to grow regardless of the lump of red steel placed in its way. The Royal Mail has stopped collections from it because they deem it too dangerous (do the posties really stand still for that long?), but the tree is loved, so it will stay, and the postbox is being sacrificed to its need for space.



Address Morlais Street, Cardiff, CF23 5EP | **Getting there** Bus 28 or 29 to Tydfil Place | **Hours** Accessible 24 hours | **Tip** Opposite the postbox, Roath Pleasure Gardens have a beautiful display of cherry blossom in spring.