

## Penarth Notes

### Town and Station

Penarth is here because of coal. Penarth Marina – the old Victorian Dock that was built to compete with Cardiff Docks.

Two possible derivations of the town's name. The most probable is Pen meaning head and (g)arth meaning ridge i.e. in Welsh – Head of the Ridge. But locals would have you believe that it also translates to the Bear's Head Pen = Head and Arth meaning Bear. (see pub on main street and on the town's crest).

**Untruth: In 1872 a circus came to town and two of the three bears escaped and caused havoc. To this day none of the town's hotels serve porridge for breakfast.**

The old part of Penarth is on the headland. Here springs were able to supply water to the inhabitants, mainly farmers.

There are / were goats on the cliffs of the headland.

In 1857 a Parliamentary Bill authorized the building of Penarth Docks (which was to be a competitor to Cardiff Docks). It was the Taff Vale Railway that would serve Penarth Docks – again as a competitor to the railway that served Cardiff. This resulted in the wealthy town of Penarth being built up in Victorian times.

1851 population = 273, 1861 = 1,500, 1891 = 13,000

In 1878 the railway which went to Penarth Dock where the coal was exported was extended to Penarth town. It was later extended again to Cosmeston (where there was a cement works) Lavernock, Sully and Barry – but that branch closed in 1968. We will walk back along part of this route. Some of the old bridges remain but much of it is now a cycle way. The station used to have two platforms but one was removed when the railway to Barry was closed.

Baroness Windsor of St Fagotts & Peas owned much of the land in Penarth and married the grandson of Clive of India.

### Paget Rooms

A theatre built in 1906, now a listed building.

**Untruth: Derives its name from a Pagent, meaning mystery plays performed on a revolving stage.**

The Paget rooms, named after Alberta Paget, who married Lord Windsor in 1883.

The Paget Rooms has storied history, acting as a theatre and dance hall up until 1949 when it became a privately owned cinema. When it returned to public ownership under Penarth Town Council in 1977, the property became used for a variety of activities, acting as the town hall and being used by a number of different community groups.

Tom Jones performed here in the 1960s. But that's not unusual.

In recent times, The Paget Rooms has returned to its performance roots, hosting many shows as well as being used for filming by the likes of Netflix for its hit show, Sex Education.

## **Library**

Library: Inscription – 'The best weapon is the weapon of learning'. A Carnegie Library.

Ask Margaret if she can give me back the book I gave to her at Christmas as its due back in the library on Saturday.

Untruth: Paid for in effect by William Carnegie of Penarth who was in the habit of not returning books so he ended up paying so much in fines it paid for the library.

The Library was partly paid for by the Carnegie Foundation set up by Andrew Carnegie, the Scotsman, who made his fortune in the American Steel industry. The NB on the plaque stands for North Britain. The building was designed by the Penarth architect Harry Snell.

On the opposite side of the Road is the Washington Building. An interesting architectural mix. Originally two private houses, then joined to become the Tutorial Colledge, then a military hospital in WWI, then the Washington Hotel in 1922. The art deco Washington Cinema to the right was built in 1938 by the Wilmore Brothers. Later, to the left, a single story row of houses was added, later extended upwards to give something of a nautical appearance.

## **Alexandra Gardens**

Paul Woodland memorial. His name could not be added to the cenotaph as he died in a training exercise rather than in a recognised conflict, so money was raided to erect this separate memorial in 2019 at the top end of the park at the cost of £17,000. Mr Woodland died in a training exercise with the elite Special Boat Service (SBS) in October 2012.

Untruth: Alexandra Gardens are named after Alexandra the Great of Greece who is known to have visited Penarth in the year 325 BC.

Named in 1902 after the wife of King Edward VII (Bertie). She was Princess Alexandra of Denmark daughter of the King of Denmark and therefore a relative of Queen Margrethe II of Denmark who had just announced her abdication. Preincess Alexandra married in 1863. She was Princess of Wales for longer than anyone else has been. Became Queen Consort in 1901 till her husband died in 1910. She

was born in Copenhagen. Alexandra was Princess of Wales from 1863 to 1901, the longest anyone has ever held that title, and became generally popular; her style of dress and bearing were copied by fashion-conscious women. Largely excluded from wielding any political power, she unsuccessfully attempted to sway the opinion of British ministers and her husband's family to favour Greek and Danish interests. Died at Sandringham in 1925.

This field was given to the town by Lord Windsor, and its development complemented the work already carried out by the Windsor Estate in establishing Windsor Gardens, the Dingle Path and the Esplanade.

The original park gates at the Rectory Road entrance were restored in 2007 following a donation from the Earl of Plymouth

The aviary occupies the position of the original bandstand and is believed to have been built partly from a shelter which was taken from Belle Vue Park.

When it was proposed in 1971 to create an aviary in Alexandra Park the Penarth Caged Bird Club offered assistance with the project. In February 1972 the Parks Superintendent submitted a proposed scheme and reported that a sum had been included in the estimates for 1972-73. The proposal together with expenditure of £194.50 was approved by the Parks Committee at its October meeting. It was still open in 2019.

The Cenotaph is a granite obelisk designed by Sir William Goscombe John. Unveiled on Armistice Day, November 11th 1924. John was born in the Canton area of Cardiff. He worked on the restoration of Cardiff Castle. Lots of other sculptures in Cardiff by Goscombe John including John Cory outside the museum and some in the Museum

## Eagle

Council minutes for 24th April 1911 recorded that the Council had received a gift of an eagle for the Park from Captain Courtenay.[1] On the other hand a report in the Penarth Times of April 22nd 1911 stated that the previous week Mr. Alec Grant of Paget Terrace, Penarth had presented to the Council an eagle said to have been caught at Manila, and which would probably be housed in a suitable enclosure to be erected in Alexandra Park.

A letter to the Penarth Times published on May 20th 1911 expressed concern about the conditions in which the eagle was being kept in the Park which were described as a "low and dark" tool house.

In June 1911 the Council decided to offer the eagle to the Zoological Gardens at Bristol. This gift was acknowledged in a letter from the Secretary of the Bristol Zoological Society read at the July meeting of the Council.

## **Kymin House.**

Built in the late 1700s. By the 17th century the site was a farm known as Kimmin (still referred to as 'Kimming' on the 1847 Tithe map). The original domestic house was apparently first built between 1790

and 1810 and was certainly occupied by a retired Irish army captain (38th Regiment) John Minchin and his wife Charlotte between 1841 and 1853 (when John died). The house was rebuilt in the 1870s and the tenancy was taken over by James Sidney Batchelor J. P., a timber merchant/commission agent from Newport, Monmouthshire (one of the 6 Batchelor brothers), who resided there up to at least 1901. In the 20th Century the property was acquired by the Council after World War 2. The house fell into disrepair but was renovated before being taken over by Penarth Town Council in 1982.

## People of Penarth

### [Alfred Sisley](#)

The French Impressionist painter famously stayed in Penarth at 4 Clive Place in 1897. During his time there he married his long-term companion Eugénie Lescouzec in Cardiff Register Office. Sisley created six landscape paintings of the cliffs and coast at Penarth, before making further paintings on the Gower Peninsula.

### [David Sullivan](#)

(born 1 February 1949) – the notorious "Private shops" pornography baron, newspaper proprietor and was part owner of Birmingham City FC, He is the chairman and largest single shareholder of Premier League football team West Ham United F.C., was born and educated in Penarth. He graduated in Economics from Queen Mary College, University of London. Since 1986 he has been the owner of the Daily Sport and Sunday Sport.

**Louis Rees-Zammit** the current speedy Welsh ruby international winger was born in Penarth, Vale of Glamorgan in Wales. He attended The Cathedral School, Llandaff and played rugby for the school. His surname comes from Maltese ancestry (paternal grandfather). Played for Cardiff team as a youth, now Gloucester, Wales and the British Lions.

**Dr Joseph Parry**, one of the most famous of all Welsh composers, is buried in the churchyard at St. Augustine's. He became the first Professor of Music at the University College of Wales (Aberystwyth), later establishing a private school of music in Swansea and finally becoming a lecturer in music at the University College of South Wales and Monmouthshire in Cardiff. His compositions found much favour in his lifetime both in Britain and the USA. Two of his most famous compositions are the part-song "Myfanwy" for male voices and the hymn tune "Aberystwyth". He also wrote chamber and orchestral music but most of his work is choral or dramatic. His opera "Blodwen" is believed to be the first Welsh opera. He lived in his later years at Cartref in Victoria Road. (looks like it is a bit off our route this time)

## **Esplanade**

By the 1880s, it wasn't just Penarth dock owners that lived in Penarth, it also attracted lots of other wealthy business owners from Cardiff. There were more ship owners living in Penarth per capita than anywhere else in the world in 1900 in Marine Parade and Park Road.

The promenade was constructed in 1884 as the pebble beach proved troublesome to walk on. The promenade was widened in 1927.

Beach Cliffe shops is a recent reconstruction as the original row of five shops became structurally unsound. The original tower designs at the end of the row have been maintained.

The Esplanade Hotel near the pier was destroyed by fire in the 1970s. It was demolished to make way for Alexandra Court, next to the Seabank Flats.

## **Penarth Baths**

Built of local blue lias stone. The concept of public swimming baths was much discussed in Penarth in the 1870s, and took its first step to become a reality in October 1881 when the local Board of Health made the decision to proceed. Initial ideas for an open-air pool developed into something much more grand so that, when the Public Baths were opened to the public in 1884, the extensive facilities were housed within the rather magnificent building.

The exterior is designed in the Renaissance style, the elevation being decidedly handsome. The structure is composed of blue lias stone, with Bath stone and white brick dressings. From the south-west corner rises a rather imposing octagonal tower, surmounted by a cupola. This tower is in reality nothing more than a glorified chimney stack, for its sole use is to carry away the smoke ascending from the boiler fires. The architects are to be congratulated on the success of their expedient for preserving the ornate appearance of the building, which would have been sadly marred by such an unsightly object as an ordinary chimney stack.

Now replaced by Cogan Leisure Centre

The plug was finally pulled on Penarth's old Public Baths in the 1980s when a modern leisure centre, with swimming pool, was built in neighboring Cogan. For a few years, the old baths became a pub and restaurant, the nattily named 'Inn at the Deep End' but, when that closed, the building fell gradually into disrepair until it was converted into four separate apartments sometime in the early 21st century. Fortunately, many of the original interior features were retained during the conversion, in March 2013.

## Penarth Pier

The pier was built in 1894 and then strengthened in 1929 when the pavilion was added.

Visiting pleasure steamers used to dock at Penarth Pier.

The Port Royal Park crashes into the pier in 1947, prompting two years of repair work

In 1927, 21-year-old Kathleen Thomas becomes the first person to swim across the Bristol Channel. A plaque still exists on the pier to commemorate her achievement in completing the 18-mile journey from Penarth to Weston-super-Mare.

The dramatic fire of 1931... but repairs were swift

The ugly concrete car park on Penarth pier lasted from 1968 to 2002

The Pavilion on the pier has had many uses over the years. In 1995 the Pavilion became the home of Penarth Gymnastics Club. The pier pavilion reopened in 2014 as an art gallery and cafe last year after a multi-million pound refurbishment. It had been unused for decades.

No one knows how it started, but here is how it ended:

A 27-year-old Pier charred and in tatters; a pavilion destroyed; 800 miraculous survivors.

On 3 August 1931, a fire broke out on Penarth Pier. It was a blissful summer's evening of dancing and frivolity, until it very suddenly wasn't.

The sound emanating from the Pier that night must have been received as a confusing juxtaposition to passersby on the Esplanade.

In the newly built, art deco Pier Pavilion, a band played show tunes and music hall numbers. This clashing with the sound of a foxtrot from the old 'Bijou Pavilion' at the end of the Pier was a sign of the changing times.

Eight hundred people laughing and enjoying the sea breeze in a perfect setting.

The Bijou Pavilion was built just over a decade after the Pier first opened in 1894. Between then and that August night, it sheltered countless pre-War Penarthians as they attended and participated in regular concerts and dances.

They say 200 foxtrotted in the Bijou that night when the fire began. Some think a discarded cigarette ignited a heap of rubbish; others speculate foul play. All we know for certain is that it started at the far end of the Pier, placing the 200 in immediate danger.

"Fire! Fire," shouted two youngsters who had spotted the blaze.

Piermaster Leonard and his assistant sprang into action, grabbing their fire extinguishers and dashing towards the licking flames.

Almost immediately upon their arrival at the scene, licking became roaring and a large part of the deck was engulfed in an inferno.

The dancing 200 were alerted and proceeded to hurry towards the safety of the Esplanade. Policemen present linked arms with some of the more composed citizens and helped ferry the crowd shoreward.

But the panic must have been immense. According to legend, revellers in the new Pier Pavilion were saved by the initiative of Mr Leonard Zanoni.

Musical director of the Moonbeams Company then playing in the new Pavilion, Mr Zanoni spotted the fire, ran back into the Pavilion and told the orchestra to play I'm Happy When I'm Hiking.

Everyone marched calmly away from danger to the tune - stampede averted.

Firefighters launched a heroic but ultimately futile attempt to save the Bijou Pavilion end of the iconic Pier.

At just after 10pm, the Bijou Pavilion succumbed, crumbling in a sad hot heap onto the deck.

An hour later, the entire central portion of the pier collapsed into the sea.

Thankfully, all that was lost was heritage and public money. But the financial hit was far from negligible.

The rebuild cost £3,157 (a then-monumental expense) and took several years, but the Pier was eventually restored to its former glory.

Well, not quite. Whether for financial or design reasons, the Bijou Pavilion was never resurrected. Now, in its place, stands a small hut - home to the Penarth Sea Angling Club.

When you next walk down there, cast your mind back to this sad but ultimately fortunate night in 1931

### **Flatholm island**

Occupied by the Vikings – Holm meaning an island in the river.

In the Middle Ages Bristol was the second largest port in the country and Flatholm provided a good base for pirates to moor their flat bottomed boats. Sully Island similarly possible had an association with Pirates.

The lighthouse dates back to 1737.

It has been used as a cholera isolation hospital in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

There are army barracks there in WWII

Marconi to Kemp sent the first ever wireless message over the sea from Flat Holm to Lavernock by morse code stated 'Are you ready?' in 1897.

**Yacht Club**

Now the oldest building on the prom dating back to 1883. Spiralled pillars and cast iron veranda balustrade.

Windsor Gardens-Visitors used to have to pay a charge to get into the gardens till 1931 when they were donated by the Earl of Plymouth to Penarth.