

Swansea Notes

People:

Peter Ham

A blue plaque honouring The Iveys and Badfinger singer songwriter Pete Ham was unveiled at Swansea High Street train station in 2013. The Badfinger hit Without You was penned by Pete Ham and Tom Evans and Paul McCartney described it as “the killer song of all time”. It was made world-famous by the likes of Harry Nilsson and Mariah Carey. Tragically, Pete Ham committed suicide in 1974 aged 27 over money worries.

Emily Phipps – Blue Plaque in nearby Orchard Street

Emily Phipps moved to the city in 1895 to take charge at Swansea Municipal Secondary Girls' School which reputedly became one of the best in Wales. In 1908 she joined the Women's Freedom League after being outraged by David Lloyd George's anti-suffrage behaviour at a meeting in Swansea. On Census night in 1911, she was involved in a suffrage boycott, avoiding completing the survey by sleeping overnight with friends in a cave on the Gower coast. (Her story has similarities to Miss Mary Collin, Headteacher at Cardiff Intermediate School for Girls in The Parade)

Gary Sobers – West Indian cricketer.

Hit six sixes in an over at St Helen's ground on 31 August 1968. Bowler Malcolm Nash.

Swansea

The name Swansea is derived from the Old Norse name of the original Viking trading post that was founded by King Sweyn Forkbeard (c. 960–1014), King of England for five weeks from December 1013. In the mid-980s, Sweyn revolted against his father, Harald Bluetooth, and seized the throne. The man who gave his name to modern wireless communication.

Abertawe, translates as "mouth/estuary of the Tawe"

Second largest city in Wales

During the 19th-century industrial heyday, Swansea was the key centre of the copper-smelting industry, earning the nickname Copperopolis. And nickel smelting using the Mond process.

Swansea Castle

Though what little remains of Swansea Castle is now hemmed in by the modern-day city centre, this was once a fortress of great strategic importance. Nowadays, it's difficult to envisage its original location on a clifftop above where the River Tawe used to flow, controlling a harbour and important east–west route along southern Wales.

Though there has been a castle here since at least the early 12th century, the remains that stand today date from the late 13th and early 14th centuries. The most striking feature is the distinctive arcaded parapet on the south block, remarkably similar that of the bishops' palaces at St Davids and Lamphey.

Local lad Dylan Thomas worked as a young reporter at newspaper offices (now demolished) on the castle site.

Henry de Beaumont was granted the Lordship of Gower in 1106 and he began to solidify the control of the Normans in the area. A timber castle existed in Swansea in 1116, when it was recorded as being attacked by Welsh forces who destroyed the outer defences.

The original castle seems to have been a sub-rectangular/oval enclosure overlooking the River Tawe on the east, surrounded on the north, west and south sides by a larger sub-rectangular outer bailey. The inner bailey probably contained a motte but the other view is that it was a ring work. The motte (or ring work) was 52 metres (171 ft) in diameter (only second in size to Cardiff Castle) and survived to the early 20th century.

The castle was besieged and captured in 1192 by Rhys ap Gruffydd, Prince of Deheubarth. Despite 10 weeks of starvation the castle was saved.

After various other unsuccessful attacks the castle fell in 1217 but was restored to the English in 1220 as part of the settlement between Llywelyn ap Iorwerth and Henry III of England.

The castle was rebuilt in stone, probably between 1221 and 1284 (described now as the "New Castle"), firstly the inner castle with at least one tower, finally the large outer bailey.

The only visible remains today, two sides of the rectangular South East corner of the "new castle's outer bailey, were built in the late 13th or early 14th century. The south face (which ends in a tall garderobe tower) is capped with an elegant series of arcades at the wall-head, which are similar to structures at the Bishop of Saint David's palaces at Lamphey and St David's.

14th to 19th centuries

By the 14th century the castle was losing its military importance. Alina de Mowbray ruled the Gower until 1331 when her son John de Mowbray took over as Lord of Gower. He was probably responsible for adding the arcaded parapet walk to the castle.

Despite the Welsh rebellion led by Owain Glyndŵr, which saw a number of English castles attacked in the early years of the 1400s, it is not known whether Swansea fell to these forces. Swansea Castle's account books only record that two men were sent north to gather intelligence on Glyndŵr's activities.

The castle owners were subsequently absentee landlords. By 1650 the castle was described as "a decayed Buildinge". By the 1670s the square tower was being used as a bottle factory and, in 1700, a town hall was built in the castle courtyard. By the mid 1700s the Great Hall had become Swansea's workhouse. The town hall was replaced by a post office in the 1800s and, by 1850, a military Drill Room had replaced the workhouse. The River Tawe, which had flowed near to the castle, was straightened and diverted during the 1840s.

Part of the interior of the castle, in particular the large motte, was demolished 1909–1913 for the construction of a newspaper office. In the very early 1930s, poet Dylan Thomas worked for the South Wales Daily Post at the castle site. The newspaper offices were removed in 1976 and the remains of the castle were later consolidated and opened up to view from the street.

Castle Cinema

Opened December 14, 1913, by Castle and Central Cinemas Ltd. It was modernised in 1967, and new owner, Welmore Cinema Co. Ltd, took over in the 1970s. It was closed in 1983, and took on new life the same year as Film Centa. It then closed on October 31, 1991, and is now in use as Laserzone.

Kardomah Café

The Kardomah Gang, Kardomah Boys, or Kardomah Group was a group of bohemian friends – artists, musicians, poets and writers which included Dylan Thomas, who, in the 1930s, frequented the Kardomah Café in Castle Street, Swansea, Wales. There is still a Kardomah Café in Swansea today – more towards the market.

Leaf Boat - Amber Hiscott

Glass and steel structure. Amber Hiscott, who studied architectural glass at Swansea College of Art in the 1970s. Inscription on the side of sculpture:

'We sail a boat upon the path , paddle with leaves, down an ecstatic line of light.' Dylan Thomas

Line from the poem 'Rain cuts the place we tread' by Dylan Thomas

Wind Street

Wind St was already a stand-out street of the city anyway prior to the blitz of February 1941. The street was one of the first to develop beyond the castle's grounds during medieval times, and was always associated with businesses, trade and ale houses.

Despite all of that, The Adelphi is still distinctive (nor The Bucket List), due to its stepped gable architecture, which makes it seem like something that should be sitting next to an Amsterdam canal. The date of its creation is not specifically known, but it was known to house a tea-dealer and grocer in 1854. It was granted a public house license though, in 1865, and underwent a heavy refurbishment by 1971 ahead of a marketing push.

The bar is also famous for a story involving former undefeated World Heavyweight Champion Rocky Marciano. The American boxer spent time in Swansea as a GI during the Second World War and he got involved in an argument at The Adelphi. Supposedly an Australian taunted him for drinking milk rather than alcohol and Rocky responded by knocking him out! He took up boxing only after the war, before becoming one of the most well known athletes in the world

Salubrious Passage

This alley off Wind Street leads to a street which has been known as Salubrious Place for centuries. "Salubrious" means pleasant or luxurious, but here it may have been used ironically to describe a feature with the opposite qualities!

Colonel William Llewelyn Morgan (a Swansea historian of the late 19th century and early 20th) suggested that the town ditch outside the medieval walls passed through this vicinity. He suggested that the ditch, originally part of the defences, eventually became a convenient tip for waste. However, not all historians agree.

An alternative explanation of the name relates to the proximity of Swansea's beach, which was only 200 yards (c.200 metres) from Salubrious Passage according to an 1804 advertisement for rooms in the building that stands over the passage's entrance. After leaving the bustle and grime of Wind Street, bathers and strollers heading for the dunes might have found this thoroughfare salubrious.

Salubrious Place and Passage were narrow, almost straight and flanked continuously by buildings in the 19th century. Arches through buildings marked both ends. The old drawing shows the passage c.1919.

In the 1950s, Dylan Thomas paid homage to Salubrious Passage in a short story which mentions a "Paradise Alley".

If you've just scanned the QR codes in the window of the Lighthouse Clinic, look up to see the building's whimsical sculptures. They were installed by bookseller Jeff Towns when his Dylan's Bookstore traded here from the mid-1970s to 2000.

The shop began in little more than a hut. Mr Towns commissioned local architect Brendan Minney to design a larger building with a corner tower, which is topped with a cherub. Made by artist Rob Conybeare, the cherub holds a pen and quill. Steel ribbons connect it to book sculptures, on which are inscribed the opening words of Dylan Thomas' poem Fern Hill. A monumental mason supplied the book sculptures, which were originally intended to depict Bibles at graves!

At no. 56 the No Sign Bar, mentioned in a 1690 document, can claim to be Swansea's oldest pub, disguised in a Dylan Thomas short story "The Followers" as the wine vaults.

Coach House

It had a cellar for live music and was notorious for the 'vegetal fragrances' that emanated from its doors. I used to go and watch the band Trembling Knees there.

It was one of the places that recently appeared on our list of 10 of the most notorious Swansea pubs that ever existed.

Dylan Thomas Facts:

It is likely that it was Dylan's father, DJ, who decided on both his first and middle name. DJ was anglicised but he was still a very proud Welshman and picked a name that originates from a collection of mythical Welsh tales called the Mabinogion

Dylan's first job after leaving Swansea Grammar School in 1931 was a short-lived career as a junior reporter for the South Wales Daily Post. Dylan's short story Old Garbo takes an affectionate look at his days as a newsman.

Dylan married Caitlin McNamara at Penzance Register Office, Cornwall, in 1937. He only broke the news to his parents by letter after the event.

11 Dylan and Charlie Chaplin

On his first American tour in 1950 Dylan had dinner at Charlie Chaplin's house in Los Angeles. The dinner was also attended by actress Shelley Winters and writer Christopher Isherwood. At Dylan's request Chaplin cabled Caitlin in Laugharne so that she'd believe he'd met him.

21 With Richard Burton to the grave

No actor has been more associated with Dylan's work than Richard Burton, and his masterly performance in the 1954 BBC production of Under Milk Wood has arguably done much to boost Dylan's international popularity. When Burton died in 1984 he was buried with a copy of Dylan's Collected Poems.

Under Milk Wood

Under Milk Wood was the last of Dylan's works, but, in many ways, the culmination of them. It was written for radio and is told through narration and a host of eccentric characters. You watch them 'through the eyes' of blind Captain Cat, witness the daily activities of the small Welsh town Llareggub (spell that backwards!) and end up loving them, despite their flaws. Yet, also remember, as Dylan said, 'Love the words, love the words'.

Captain Cat – The old blind sea captain who dreams of his deceased shipmates and lost lover Rosie Probert. He is one of the play's most important characters as he often acts as a narrator. He comments on the goings-on in the village from his window.

Rev Eli Jenkins (inspired by William Thomas)

Dylan's middle name celebrates the Welsh poet, preacher and radical, William Thomas, the brother of Dylan's paternal grandfather. Dylan's older sister, Nancy, had the same middle name, however, hers was spelt 'Marles' while Dylan is 'Marlais'. William Thomas chose the bardic name Gwilym Marles from a small river in north Carmarthenshire where he grew up.

[The evening before we went to Swansea I discovered I had a family connection Rev William Thomas.](#)

Reverend Eli Jenkins is Llareggub's reverend, preacher, and poet. He addresses the town in the poetic daily sermons he delivers from his doorway, and he is constantly writing, thinking about, reciting, and praising poetry. He dreams of "Eisteddfodau," which is a Welsh village festival of poets and bards. Jenkins loves Llareggub, though he knows that there are places more magnificent and exciting than the small village. He's in the process of writing a book the town called the White Book of Llareggub. Though Jenkins knows Llareggub's citizens "are not wholly bad or good," he thinks that God will judge them on their goodness and forgive them their sins, and he sees Milk Wood as a symbol of "the innocence of men."

Copr Bay bridge

"Steelwork was chosen primarily because of its structural properties and ability to span large distances. It gave the design flexibility to work with an interesting structural solution."

Weighing 140 tons, the single span bridge is 12 metres wide and 7.5 metres high.

Designed by local artist Marc Rees, the 2,756 laser-cut origami-inspired shapes dispersed across the bridge's panels create silhouettes of swans. Mr Rees said: "It has been the thrill of a lifetime to be involved in such an iconic part of the regeneration of my hometown.

"Dylan Thomas famously described Swansea as an 'ugly, lovely town'. Whatever the merits of that when he said it, Swansea's aspiration to change, grow and flourish is more than apparent now."

St Mary's – a rebuild after being destroyed in the blitz,

Laverbread (is a food product made from laver, an edible seaweed (littoral alga) consumed mainly in Wales as part of local traditional cuisine. Laver seaweed has a high content of dietary minerals, particularly iodine and iron

John Henry Vivian FRS (9 August 1785 – 10 February 1855) was a Welsh industrialist and politician of Cornish extraction. He was a member of the Vivian family.

Vivian was the son of John Vivian (1750–1826), of Truro, Cornwall, and his wife Betsey, daughter of the Reverend Richard Cranch, and the brother of Hussey Vivian, 1st Baron Vivian. He owned copper mining, copper smelting and trading businesses in Swansea (Vivian & Sons), Liverpool, Birmingham and London. Between 1832 and 1855 he sat as Member of Parliament for Swansea District. He was a fellow of the Royal Society, a major in the Royal Stannary Artillery, a justice of the peace and a deputy lieutenant.