

15 March 2012
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A world heritage site, Caernarfon is rightly famous for its castle, but there's a lot more to the history of the town, from Roman times to recent years. Take a look round.

Start point:	Galeri, Victoria Dock
Distance:	Under two miles
Time:	One hour
Advice:	There are several car parks close to the start. The route is all hard-surfaced and has one short, steepish hill.
Extra info: To see what the symbols mean, please visit the key	



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Victoria Dock

Last updated: 06 May 2008

The 19th century dock now provides a berth for yachts, while many buildings around the area are enjoying a new lease of life.

NB. Since this walk was compiled there has been a considerable amount of new development at Victoria Dock.



More on Victoria Dock

The Victoria Dock was built at the instigation of forward-thinking mayor Llewelyn Turner in the 1870s when the thriving slate industry also led to a flourishing shipping sector.

It later went into decline and has only in recent years benefitted from a regeneration programme. It now houses the Gwynedd Archives, the Seiont II Maritime Museum and Galeri, a newly-built arts and creative business centre which opened in Spring 2005.



You can call into the Galeri reception to pick up a special mobile phone to give you a running commentary as you follow the walk. There are also toilets and refreshments there.

Other points of interest at Victoria Dock include the

anchor from the training ship HMS Conway and the clay pipelined holes built into the walls of the chandlery building. The pipes date back to when this building was a warehouse used for drying out timber floated ashore from ships anchored in the Strait. The building was subsequently used by Breton onion sellers to store their stock. Under the footbridge is the Patent Slip, which pre-dates the dock and could haul quite large boats out of the water for repairs.



If you stand on the dock facing the sea, to your right is the turquoise-painted pier on the site of a former oil terminal. Beyond that is the start of the Lon Las Menai cyclepath, heading along the Menai Strait towards Bangor.



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A plaque outside the Maritime Museum commemorates Ellen Edwards who, unusually for a woman of that time, ran a successful navigation school in the 19th century, teaching vital skills to mariners.

To start the walk, head for the seafront near the Maritime Museum and set off along the Promenade with the sea on your right and the town walls on your left.

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The Promenade

Last updated: 31 March 2006

This broad walkway provides a pleasant stroll away from the traffic and extensive views out across the Menai Strait to Anglesey.



[More on the Romans and the Menai Strait](#)

Caernarfon was one of the most westerly points the Roman occupation reached and the ruins of their fort, Segontium, can still be visited a little way outside the town centre.

To complete their invasion of North West Wales they had to overcome the major obstacle presented by the Menai Strait to reach Anglesey.

The treacherous nature of the water and the ferocity of the forces amassed on the shore opposite Caernarfon resulted in a difficult and bloody episode. [Read more.](#)



Ferries plied their trade between the mainland and Anglesey at various points along the Strait until 1930, despite the building of the Menai Suspension Bridge by Thomas Telford at Bangor in 1826, and Stephenson's Britannia Bridge in 1850 for trains (and now road traffic,

too).

The ancient town walls are on your left (more on these later in the walk) and the green area ahead is Coed Helen Park, a reminder of Helen, the wife of Roman general Magnus Maximus, also known as Maxen (Macsen in Welsh).

Continue along the Promenade as far as the Anglesey Arms and then onto the footbridge on your right.



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Slate Quay

Last updated: 31 March 2006

Standing on the bridge, looking upstream, imagine this area bustling with industry as slate from the Snowdonia quarries was transferred to ships which packed the quay.



Slate Quay memories

The Aber Swing Bridge allows pedestrians across the River Seiont to the Aber Foreshore and opens to let boats through. It was built in the 1970s to replace the first bridge which had opened in 1900. Before that, people crossed by ferry at a halfpenny each way.

From the bridge you get an excellent view inland along the slate quay, with the Welsh Highland Railway situated at the far end.



Relatively quiet now, with tourism and leisure the chief activities, the Slate Quay had its heyday in Victorian times when this part of Wales was supplying the roofing material for Britain's rapidly expanding towns and cities, as well as to other countries.

Ships filled the river mouth and maritime businesses flourished. Some of the premises, like the De Winton engineering workshops (now a plumbing business), can still be seen today, as well as the sturdy Harbour Trust Offices built in 1840.

To continue to the next point, don't cross the bridge, but carry on along the slate quay towards the car park entrance and Harbour Trust Offices.



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Castle Hill

Last updated: 31 March 2006

Millions of TV viewers have seen this point where Prince Charles stepped out onto the castle balcony after his investiture ceremony as Prince of Wales.



 [More on the investiture](#)

Standing outside the toilets and souvenir stalls on Castle Hill, you can look across to the castle itself and see a metal balcony jutting out of the archway. Prince Charles stood here to greet the crowds on the day of his investiture as Prince of Wales, on July 1 1969, at the age of 20.

But the event was by no means universally welcomed. On the previous day two men were killed by their own bomb at Abergele. It is believed they had intended to blow up the Royal Train. And 3,000 police were in Caernarfon to prevent trouble on investiture day.



It was locally-raised Prime Minister David Lloyd George who first brought the ceremony to Caernarfon in 1911 when Edward (VIII) was invested. All previous princes had been invested in England, though the first was born in Caernarfon in 1284.

If you turn to the right at the top of Castle Hill you will see a statue of Lloyd George, who was the local MP.

To continue the walk carry on up Castle Hill onto Castle Square, crossing the road to stand on the paved market area.



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Castle Square

Last updated: 31 March 2006

The focal point of the town, Castle Square is generally known by its Welsh name, the Maes. It may be bustling with market stalls, shoppers and sightseers, so it's hard to believe there was once a hill in the middle.



More on the cholera epidemic

This was site of the weekly market from the late 13th century, as it still is today, and there was also cockfighting and bull-baiting here. The grassy hill was removed in 1817 and the earth used for building the Slate Quay.

This area was also at the centre of a cholera epidemic in 1866, which claimed many lives and finally forced the authorities to accept the need for a clean water supply.



To celebrate the completion of the water supply system a decorative fountain was built in the square. The centrepiece of this is now located at the top of Pool Street, though there have been moves to bring it back to the square.

Other features of Castle Square are the many cafes and pubs, like the Morgan Lloyd. Alcohol sales benefitted from the cholera outbreak as strong drink was thought to be preventative.



A central position is given to the statue of Sir Hugh Owen, a leading educationalist.

Once across the square, turn towards the Castle and go along Castle Ditch, the road along the landward side of the Castle, heading for the Tourist Information Office and castle entrance.



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Caernarfon Castle

Last updated: 31 March 2006

The impressive structure of Caernarfon Castle, which dominates the Seiont estuary and this part of town, is the main attraction for thousands of visitors every year.



More on Madog ap Llywelyn's uprising

King Edward I of England built Caernarfon Castle as one of a network of fortifications to consolidate his conquest of Wales. It was begun in about 1283, after the death of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, the last Welsh prince, and on the site of an earlier Norman castle.

This massive structure, which symbolised Edward's power, was built at enormous expense. The seaside location allowed for supplies to be brought in without risking treacherous overland transport, and the town walls were built to protect the English people living around the castle.



But there was still resistance and in 1293 Madog ap Llywelyn ap Maredudd, a distant relative of Llywelyn, led an uprising which started when his rebel forces captured the incomplete castle and set fire to the town on fairday. They murdered Roger de

Puleston, the king's tax collector.

They then marched east, onto Conwy and Denbigh, before the rebellion was quashed. Caernarfon Castle was back under English control some months later and building carried on until about 1330.

The Tourist Information Office is on the corner of Castle Street. To continue the walk go down Castle Street and turn right at the crossroads, going along High Street as far as the Eastgate.



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Eastgate

Last updated: 31 March 2006

The walls and gates clearly visible all around the town lend a distinctive character to Caernarfon. Eastgate - Porth Mawr in Welsh - is one of the oldest entrances.



[More on the curfew](#)

The walls were built to keep the English inhabitants safe and to shut the Welsh out at night. So by the hour of the curfew, you had to make sure you were on the right side of the walls.

Eastgate was the main access to and from the countryside beyond and had a drawbridge across the ditch. It closed from 8pm to 6am.



The design of Eastgate has changed over the years and at one time it had a clock illuminated by gaslight. This had to be stopped as the lights were confusing to shipping.

At the opposite end of High Street is another gate, Porth yr Aur or the Golden Gate, which houses the Royal Welsh Yacht Club. It is suggested its name comes from the sight of the setting sun through the archway.

To continue to the final part of the walk, retrace your steps a little way down High Street and turn right into Northgate Street (look out for the signs to the Black Boy).



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Northgate Street

Last updated: 12 April 2006

Northgate Street is home to one of Caernarfon's best known pubs. Both the street and the pub have interesting stories behind their names.



[More on The Black Boy](#)

This was the disreputable end of town - the heart of the red light district when Caernarfon was a thriving port. The Welsh name for the street is Stryd Pedwar a Chwech (Four and Six Street) and it is suggested that four shillings and sixpence was the price for a bottle of stong liquor, a woman and a bed for the night.

The Black Boy pub, formerly the King's Head and the Fleur de Lys, is situated here now and there are least three theories to explain its name.



One relates to a black boy brought into the country on a ship; another suggests it's a navigational buoy; the third refers to the nickname given to Charles II by his mother and the fact that Royalists met here secretly at that time.

The Northgate was not one of the original points of access through the town walls. It was added in the 19th century to improve traffic flow.

To return to the starting point continue along Northgate Street, through the archway. Cross the road and carry straight on until you reach Galeri.



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