

4 June 2012
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Cardiff Bay Walk

Once the largest coal port in the world, Cardiff has experienced the highs and lows of industry, regeneration and immigration due to its coastal location. Take a look around.

The area also features prominently in the BBC sci-fi TV series **Doctor Who** and **Torchwood**.

- See some aerial views of Cardiff
- Betty Campbell interview
- Welsh language walking notes



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Cardiff Bay walk - where to start

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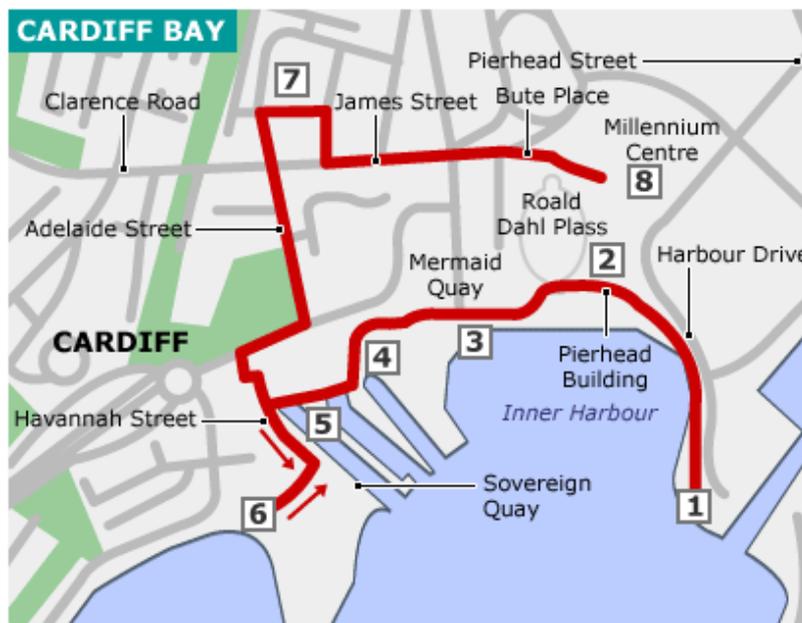
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Start point:	Norwegian Church
Distance:	1.5 miles
Time:	1 hour
Advice:	Most of the walk route is paved; some areas have wooden decking. There are stone stairs with alternative ramps for wheelchairs.
Extra info: To see what the symbols mean, please visit the key	



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1. Norwegian Church

Start your walk from the Norwegian Church next to the visitor centre, a building known locally as the tube because of its design.



 **Hear more about this location**
(Need help with RealPlayer?)

The Norwegian Church was built in 1869 on land donated by the Marquess of Bute. It was a place of worship for the large number of Scandinavian sailors and seamen who sailed into the port, many of whom made Cardiff their home.

The distinctive building was constructed from materials carried by sea from Norway and originally erected to the south-west of West Bute Dock.

The Church was first and foremost a seamen's mission, but it was also a home-from-home for sailors, where they could read newspapers and magazines from home, write letters to their loved-ones, relax and chat with their friends. The family of writer Roald Dahl attended the church and he himself was baptised there in 1916.

During the second world war the church doubled up as a bank, a place where seamen could store their valuables while at sea. At one time it was decided to paint it green so that it wouldn't be so obvious to the enemy.

As Cardiff Docks declined, so did the congregation and visitors to the church. The church was finally deconsecrated and closed in 1970, falling into disrepair through lack of maintenance and vandalism.

In the mid 1980s Dahl led efforts to set up the Norwegian Church Preservation Trust to rescue the derelict building and to raise funds to dismantle and relocate it at the heart of Cardiff's historical docklands.

The church was dismantled in 1987 and moved to a new location adjoining the Roath Basin. Roald Dahl was the trust's first president but died on 23 November 1990, before the reconstruction was completed.

The church was re-opened by Princess Martha Louise of Norway on 8th April 1992. Though the re-built church has not been consecrated, the present day uses of the building confirm and recreate the tranquil, relaxed and welcoming character of the church.

The Norwegian Church now has a tea room and is used as a venue for small scale musical recitals and concerts, exhibitions and wedding receptions.



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As you leave the church make your way along the waterside. You will see inscriptions engraved in the low wall outside. These are sea shanties written in many different languages representing the cosmopolitan nature of Cardiff Bay.

your comments

Kate from Bridgend

The Norwegian Church consists of a small cafe, as well as the main area of the church. It looks out onto the Bay, although is comparatively small against larger buildings surrounding the Bay, such as the Welsh Assembly building. I thought that the church was an attractive landmark, emphasising Cardiff's diverse heritage.

elliott from monmouth

it is used as a cafe and for art. It is nice to look at. There was no reference to Roald Dahl at the site.

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2. Pierhead Building

As you approach the terracotta Pierhead building you will come across a stone staircase. Go up the steps to see it more clearly.



 **Hear more about this location**
(Need help with RealPlayer?)

This Grade One listed building was built in 1897 and designed by William Frame. His mentor William Burges was the architect of Castell Coch and the newer elements of Cardiff Castle. It was a replacement for the headquarters of the Bute Dock Company which burnt down in 1892.

The firm was renamed Cardiff Railway Company in 1897. A coat of arms on the building's façade bears the company's motto "*wrth ddwr a than*" (by fire and water) encapsulating the elements creating the steam power which transformed Wales.

Incorporating a French-Gothic Renaissance theme, the Pierhead boasts details such as hexagonal chimneys, carved friezes, gargoyles, and a highly ornamental and distinctive clock tower. Its exterior is finished in glazed terracotta blocks.

These features, along with the Pierhead's role in the development of the docks, Cardiff and industrial Wales earned it the status of a Grade One listed building.

The Pierhead became the administrative office for the Port of Cardiff in 1947 and is now the Visitor and Education Centre for the National Assembly for Wales.

The exhibition provides visitors with a unique opportunity to access the most up-to-date information on who's who, what's happening and how the Assembly works.

The Pierhead is now home to another landmark building, the Senedd, which opened on St David's Day 2006.



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your comments

Allan Lee from Hitchin, formerly Canton

I'm so pleased to see it still there, reminding me of boarding a Campbell's paddle steamer at the pierhead for a romantic evening sail to Clevedon with my wife-to-be 60 years ago. How hugely the rest of that area has changed since then. Hurrah for the building saved.

Yvette Anderton from Cardiff

I think the Pierhead building is very nice and since my dad

used to work there I like it more.

Sophie Melhuish, Ely, Cardiff

I reckon the Pierhead building is absolutely amazing - I have never seen anything like it.

Mark Nethercott, Barry

Beautiful as it is as a building with historic significance the Pierhead Building should now become an Icon of a forward looking Wales and Capital City. With the forthcoming closure of the Coal Exchange, serious consideration should be given to its future use for our creative youth and their art forms. Museums abound in the City. The Millenium Centre has its focus clearly tilted towards the so-called 'High Arts' with their restricted, subsidised appeal. Isn't it about time those in positions to make things happen recognise that the Bay needs to 'come alive' - which means attracting the under 25s. Not a small sop - real commitment...and what better than putting such a prominent building to such use? In no way is this meant to imply a need to take away from the external beauty of the building, but to signify the need for the Bay to appeal to all.

Paul from Cardiff

I love this building, it looks amazing and stands out even from the modern buildings on the skyline of Cardiff Bay.

Sophie, Zoe, and Charlene, Mary Immaculate High School

We have lived in Cardiff all our life. We visited the pier head building the other day and we took some people from Germany. The thought it is so lush they wanted to move to Cardiff - they said were definitely coming back to Cardiff to book a hotel somewere near the pier head building.

Charlene Payne

I think the building is very extraordinary. It looks absolutely beautiful in the night.

Kevin Martin, Solihull (born in Cardiff)

I visited the Pierhead Building on the weekend and was astounded to see the coat of arms of Cardiff Railway Company had been lovingly restored by a tiler clearly highly trained in geometrics. It was a wonderful restoration and must have taken many months of painstaking work. Furthermore, I would hazard a guess it cost a great deal of money from the £1m refurbishment budget. Why then has some fool come along and plonked a security scanner right in the middle of it? The tiler that restored it must be either laughing or be in tears. Here is another example of a complete waste of money.

kelly marie

I love the site it has loads of infomation its amazing I love the pictures too.

Megan from monmouth

I thought it was really beautiful

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3. Mermaid Quay

Go over the bridge to the left of the Pierhead building towards Mermaid Quay, a recently redeveloped part of the waterfront now populated by bars and restaurants.



 **Hear more about this location**
(Need help with RealPlayer?)

On the waterfront you'll see this bronze sculpture of a young local couple with their dog created by John Clinch in 1993. It celebrates the people who lived and worked locally in Cardiff Bay.

Cardiff Bay, Butetown or Tiger Bay as it is also known is very different to how it used to be.

As a result of growth in Butetown during the 19th and early 20th centuries the surrounding dockland area grew into a cosmopolitan community with seafarers from all around the world making Cardiff their home. It is estimated that people from at least 50 nationalities settled in this area.

This kaleidoscope of settlers helped to build the docks, worked aboard the ships and helped to service this industrial and maritime city.

Singer Shirley Bassey, one of the area's most famous people, is a good example of the intermarriage and multicultural mix of the area. Her English working-class mother Eliza and father Henry, a Nigerian sailor, lived in the ethnically mixed area which became known as Tiger Bay.

There have been many versions of how Tiger Bay got its name. One theory is that seafaring men entering the Bristol Channel to come into Cardiff referred to the very rough water as looking like raging tigers.

The area was a magnet for people who were really into their music - visiting places like the Casablanca, the Quebec, the Big Windsor, the Westgate, the Bute, the Ship and Pilot and many more. There were over a hundred pubs in Tiger Bay, many of which have disappeared now.

As well as the young Shirley Bassey, the musicians who'd keep the locals entertained included guitarists Victor Parker, Joe and Frank Deniz.

The area was a haven for black American servicemen who were shunned by communities near their bases in England.
[Read former GI Johnny Lassiter's memories.](#)



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- [G.I. Johnny](#)
- [Butetown memories](#)
- [Watch Tamed and Shabby Tiger](#)
- [Watch Victor Parker's jazz funeral](#)

Sarah Burnell from Pencoed

A wonderful place to spend the day, free parking on a Sunday and Harry Ramsdens makes it an affordable outing for the kids. Great walks, street markets and atmosphere - nothing not to like and the shops are fabulous too!

Cath Haywood from Porthcawl

What a fabulous place. On a sunny day you feel like you are somewhere abroad what with all the cafe/bars etc. We had a wonderful day here on Sunday 22 June 2008.

Allan Lee, formerly from Canton

So different from my memory of working as an apprentice on the docks in 1942, when that area was the Mount Stuart dry docks. Is the Packet pub still there in Bute Street? They served a great hot rum and peppermint there in the big freeze of 1947! (and at a price even I could afford).

(Editor's Note: Yes, the Packet is still there in Bute Street - one of the few local pubs to survive successive waves of redevelopment)

seren from somewhere only we know

went there the other day. its cool. but much too expensive. but all together it was a good day!

Flip from Vlissingen, Netherlands

I've visited the place last summer, enjoyed it a lot, took a picture and added it to my weblog at <http://tinyurl.com/aqz6e> Thanks for the information!

John Leonard from Ystra Gwlch.

I can remember going there with my gramps. We saw the big ships and it was the first time I had fish and chips. Great.

maria, caerphilly

Come on Cardiff Bay, lets make the waterfront for all to enjoy besides those willing to spend a fortune on food and drink.

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4. Pilotage Building

From Mermaid Quay go straight ahead towards Stuart Street until you get to Woods Brasserie, the former Pilotage Building.



 **Hear more about this location**
(Need help with RealPlayer?)

The pilotage house was an administrative building for the river pilots who operated in the Bristol channel. It was from here the local pilots would pick up their roster and their pay.

The pilots' job was vital in helping ships negotiate the treacherous waters. They were employed for their local knowledge to guide the large ships into the dock through narrow and shallow straits.

They knew where the rocks and sandbanks were, which side of the buoys to pass, they were familiar with weather conditions and the rise and fall of the tide - the Bristol Channel has the second highest in the world.

The building wasn't purpose built and its origins are steeped in mystery. No one really knows why it was built, but it could be the oldest building in the Bay. Its thick stone walls make it so distinct from the other buildings close by.

Local historian Professor Neil Sinclair suggests that it may have built by the second Marquis of Bute to stable the large work horses that pulled barges down the Glamorganshire Canal.

Around the back of the building there used to be large arched stable doors which might verify this. If you look up you can still see the arch but today the doors have been removed and replaced by a glass extension.

The building may well have been built before then and may have had an earlier connection with the Glamorganshire Canal which was built in 1790. There is no documentation to prove it. All we do know is that it was there in 1880 on a survey map.

One of the most distinctive things about the building is the weather vane. It is connected to the clock below and gives the direction of the wind in quarter points. The mechanism still works but the weather vane itself was replaced in the 1970s.

Turn left on passing the old Pilotage Building and then right just before you get to Harry Ramsden.



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5. Dry Docks

When you get back to the waterside you will see Mountstuart dry docks, Techniquet and a large crane in front of you.



 **Hear more about this location**
(Need help with RealPlayer?)

Local historian Neil Sinclair takes us through what used to happen in the dry docks.

"The whole area would have been full of ships. They would have to pick their time to dock very carefully. Ships in need of repair could only sail into the dock when the tide was in because the whole area would be mud flats if the tide was out.

"Once the ships were in, the lock gates would close and once the tide went out the pump house would go into action and drain the dock of water. You can see the red brick building at the opening of the dock.

"If a ship had severe engine problems it would be lifted out by crane and moved to the engineering shed.

"The Techniquet building, home to an interactive science museum, may look like a modern building but it is built on the foundations and walls of the giant repair shed that stood there when the docks were still in use.

"The authorities couldn't demolish the shed because the shell of the engineering works was listed. So they decided to build on top of the original structure which is why it has such a unique shape."

During the First World War from 1914 to 1918 the docks were extensively used for the maintenance of the British shipping fleet.

From here bear left and turn right directly before the old pump house.



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[Techniquet panoramic](#)

your comments

Brian Lloyd, Barry

I worked for Mountstuart Dry Docks from 1953 to 1961 - when the docks were closed down. The St Patrick would have been in No 3 Dock. Each Christmas time a British Rail car ferry would be docked for repair and refitting. No 1 dock was the favorite for Admiralty vessels frigates and destroyers - I recall HMS Tuscan and HMS Teazer. No 2 dock

was quite frequently oil or molasses tankers. Mr Sinclair could be wrong about pumping out the docks once the tide had gone out. Most tides were of the order of 40ft....The dock gates were closed as soon as possible once the ships were in the dock and they were all built to be closed tighter by the pressure of the sea on the outside - a shallow V shape pointing out from the docks. Joss Haywood was the dockmaster in charge of that operation.

Jon Morgan, Cardiff

Served my time as a fitter/turner with Bristol Channel Ship Repairers in the old Channel & Bute dry docks. The last ever ship to sail out of the Mount Stuart dry docks? King George V...

John Rees, Pender Harbour, Canada

Very interested in Mr Griffith's comments. My Dad, Ted Rees and brother Ed both worked for Cambell & Isherwood, possibly just before that period. Ed emigrated to Canada in 1957 and I followed in 1958. Dad has since passed away but brother Ed lives here in British Columbia. We both made careers in the electrical industry learnt in Cardiff, around the docks.

Michael Griffiths Cambusbarron Stirling

I started my electrical apprenticeship with Campbell & Isherwood who were the electrical contractors to Mountstuart Dry Dock ship repairers in January 1961 and worked on the RMS St. Patrick a British Railways passenger ferry. The St. Patrick had all her 2nd. & 3rd. class areas stripped out and replaced with a new tourist class. She was removed from the Ireland run to the Channel Islands because of her easy manoeuvrability. The dry docks had quite a lot of work in the early 60's and it was a great place to work as an apprentice. Landing craft L4061 also refitted at Mountstuart and after the refit she ran stores to the rocket range at Benbecula and to the tracking station on St. Kilda, along with her sister ship L4062.

Roy Pearce

I worked for Bristol Channel Ship Repairers after leaving school, as did my father and brothers, mainly at Barry, but worked when needed at Swansea, Cardiff, Newport - best job ever.

Roger James Nelson

I am looking for information on the manufacture of the original dock gates between 1850-1900 ie company names, and dates. Can anyone suggest some avenues of investigation I could follow?

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6. Wetlands and the barrage

Walk along the footpath through the St David's Hotel car park until you get to a large bronze sculpture of a rope knot. From here you can carry on into the wetlands.



 **Hear more about this location**
(Need help with RealPlayer?)

The building of the barrage to create a 'freshwater lake' was a key element in the plans to redevelop Cardiff Bay. The barrage serves to dam the mouth of the rivers Taff and Ely resulting in a 200 hectare freshwater lake and providing 13km of waterfront.

Although very attractive there was a lot of resistance to the plans from householders who feared the barrage would raise the natural level of water in Cardiff and result in flooded homes.

It took five separate Bills until Parliament finally passed the Act that would pave the way for the redevelopment.

Before the flooding of the Bay in 1999, the area was mainly mudflats and salt marshes and the River Taff was tidal right up to Blackweir, just north of the city centre.

The exclusion of sea water from the Bay has changed the habitats available for flora and fauna to thrive.

Previously the area was home to a large waterfowl and wading bird population; sea-going shoals of grey mullet were still known to make their way upstream as far as the Bute Park revetments.

Waterfowl and wading bird populations have relocated to newly protected areas including the nearby Gwent Levels Reserve just outside Newport.

Some species such as sea plantain, sea arrow grass and spartina have survived the change but the constant water level has removed the inter-tidal zone, which would have supported many species.

There has been a scheme to encourage salmon, sewin and sea trout back into the Taff to breed, including a fishpass - the largest in Europe - in the barrage itself.

Retrace your steps back to to the dry dock. When you get to Techniquet turn left through a gap in the wall and bear right until you get to Stuart Street.



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Rob Morgan

There never was a decent view of the seafront! Just mudflats or water. If you want a seafront you have to go a few miles along the coast to Penarth which can now be reached from Cardiff Bay by walking along the barrage.

Mary from Oxford

I think it's silly! they have blocked the view of the seafront! Outrageous!!!

Wendy from Pontypridd

It's a fantastic afternoon out!

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7. Coal Exchange and Mountstuart Square

Last updated: 04 November 2009

With Technquest behind you cross the road and walk down Adelaide Street. Cross again into Mountstuart Square.



 **Hear more about this location**
(Need help with RealPlayer?)

Before the Coal Exchange was built in Mountstuart Square it was a residential square with a central garden. It was taken over by commerce as the city grew in prosperity which is why it no longer looks like a square.

Coal merchants used to chalk up the changing prices of coal on slates outside their offices or struck deals in the local public houses.

As Cardiff became the biggest coal port in the world it was thought necessary to have a building to do this so to the designs of Edwin Seward the Coal Exchange was built between 1883 and 1886.

Following its opening, coal owners, ship owners and their agents met daily on the floor of the trading hall where agreements were made by word of mouth and where the novelty, the telephone was available.

During the peak trading hour of midday to one o'clock the floor might have as many as 200 men gesticulating and shouting. It was thought that up to 10,000 people would go in and out of the building each day.

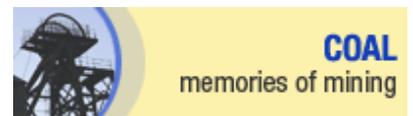
There was much excitement in 1907 when the world's first million pound deal was struck at the Exchange. At one time the price of the world's coal was determined here.

Several more opulent banks and offices opened around the square - Baltic House, Ocean Building, Cory's Buildings, Cambrian Buildings, many still standing and featuring fascinating maritime motifs.



But with Cardiff so overwhelmingly concerned with a single product its reliance on coal made the Bute docks highly vulnerable to any downturn in the demand for it, a fact which became painfully apparent in the inter-war years.

With the end of the war the docks went into further decline. The Coal exchange closed in 1958 and coal exports came to an end in 1964.



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Still a magnificent building, the Coal Exchange was earmarked in 1979 as a future home of the proposed Welsh Assembly, but that plan for devolution was rejected by the Welsh people in a referendum.

The building has most recently been run as a venue for concerts, conferences, festivals and functions.

It was closed in autumn 2007 for redevelopment, but due to the economic downturn the project has been postponed.

As a result, the building was reopened in November 2009 for use as a venue.

your comments

Francesca Carpanini

If it is tastefully redeveloped and maintains its fabulous history and features, then it will become a superb building to add to the regeneration. If the developers forget the history and destroy the architecture for modern contemporary minimalism, it will be a great shame and the grade listings authority should get involved, so that developers can't take away original aspects of such a prominent building in Welsh history.

Jason Keogh, Gilfach Goch

It's a beautiful building and it will be a shame to let it go.

Richard Bazley

The appalling history of what should have been a centrepiece of the bay continues. Finally after having been bought by the Development Corporation from the hands of "private" developers who wanted to develop the building in keeping with its past, left to moulder and disintegrate for 10 years whilst they created the waterfront - sold to a private developer who allowed even further disintegration of the fabric and then, lo! a planning permission to dismember the finest Victorian commercial building in Wales and beyond. Shame on the City Council, the dead hand of Welsh bureaucracy and the lack of imagination by our elected representatives on the planning committee.

Alan Trevers, Cardiff

It is in this building that the first £1,000,000 cheque was written.

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8. Roald Dahl Plass

From the Coal Exchange turn right into James Street. Go towards the grand Wales Millennium Centre situated in Roald Dahl Plass.



 **Hear more about this location**
(Need help with RealPlayer?)

Roald Dahl Plass or the Oval Basin as it was formerly known was the seaward entrance to the West Bute Dock, once the biggest masonry dock in the world. If you look around the amphitheatre style construction you might still see the stone outline of the former dock.

The dock was opened on 8 October 1839 and is said by many to be the day that the Cardiff that became the world's greatest coal port was born.

The second Marquis of Bute was persuaded to finance the £350,000 construction as he already owned most of the land in the area. It was a huge amount even for the Marquis.

It took four years to transform the 18 acres of muddy swamp into the dock that was 1400 yards in length, 200 feet wide with room for 300 vessels.

The day of the opening was a grand affair with thousands of people cramming into the town and all the inns overflowing.

An early morning parade started from the Castle grounds to the trumpet blasts of the Glamorganshire Band and the bells of St John's - masons, labourers, the town's gentlemen and tradesmen made their way to the dockside.

The arrival of the giant ship Manalaus to the new dock which came all the way from Quebec was proof that Cardiff had arrived.

Further docks were built to serve the rapidly increasing iron and coal trade including East Bute Dock (1855), Roath Basin (1874) and the Roath Dock (1887). The last of Cardiff's five docks, the Queen Alexandra Dock, opened in 1907 by which time the city was the greatest coal exporting port in the world.

After the Second World War however, demand for coal slumped and international markets were lost as other countries developed their own steel industries.

By the early 1980s Cardiff Bay had become a neglected wasteland of derelict docks and mudflats.

As part of the area's regeneration, the Oval Basin



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- [Roald Dahl - Hall of Fame](#)
- [Wales Millennium Centre](#)

was filled in to create a public space which has hosted open-air musical events, food festivals and more. It was renamed Roald Dahl Plass in honour of the Cardiff-born writer.



A 70ft high stainless steel water tower was erected at the north end of the basin in 2000.

But the most significant addition to the area has been the landmark arts venue, the Wales Millennium Centre or the Armadillo as it is sometimes referred to, which opened in November 2004.

your comments

Alan Spiller - Dinas Powys

Why on the commemorative nameplate is there an 's' after Dahl? It should either be without the 's' or be shown with an apostrophe; but preferably just spelt correctly!

Frank Clark from Michigan USA

Just trying to find out why there is a large water tower on one side, and what appears to be a large hole on the other... was it meant that there should be two water towers, and one has not been completed?

Chris Age 9

I love it at Roald Dahl Plass. I always go skateboarding there its great fun.

Alex Hall from Middlesbrough (aged 9)

Just been to the area and loved it standing where Doctor Who's TARDIS landed. Felt like I was really the Doctor!!!

Jeremy from Lake Arrowhead, California, USA

Are they planning to build another water tower to balance it out?

James Gale, Basingstoke

I absolutely LOVE the Bay and the Plass, like the above poster said it is absolutely beautiful. I'm going there for my birthday!

Jennice G, Jacksonville, Florida, USA

The re-imaging of the bay should be an example for other towns and countries to take note of what they can do for their areas. Roald Dahl Plass is a beautiful use of space.

Robert Price from Jacksonville Florida

This is perhaps the best insight into this moment in time for this location that could have been done. Excellent job.

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