

Llandaff Notes

Roald Dahl (1916-1990)

Roald Dahl was born in this house on 13 September 1916. The Dahl family had lived there from 1907 to 1917. The house was known then as "Villa Marie". **Untruth: Keep your eyes peeled for the giant peach tree in the garden as we walk past.**

Harald Dahl, his father, had moved to the UK in 1900, importing timber in the form of pit props from Norway and exporting coal. They worshiped in the Norwegian church (before it moved to its present location).

He served in the RAF during the Second World War. He became a fighter pilot and subsequently an intelligence officer, rising to the rank of acting wing commander.

Dahl became one of the world's best-selling authors. His works for children include: James and the Giant Peach, Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, Matilda, The Witches, Fantastic Mr Fox, The BFG, The Twits, The Giraffe and the Pelly and Me and George's Marvellous Medicine.

Mrs Pratchett's former sweet shop in Llandaff, Cardiff, has a blue plaque dedicated to Dahl. His autobiography *Boy: Tales of Childhood* recalls the prank he and his friends played on her using a jar of gobstoppers in which they put a dead mouse. Gobstoppers later featured in his fictional *Everlasting Gobstopper* which was featured in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AsxTR09_iWE

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cSB9AmDxeTk>

<https://cathayscemetery.coffeecup.com/mariedahl.html>

Ronald Dahl's father, Harald, had a first wife Marie Dahl who died in childbirth in 1907 (she is buried in Cathays Cemetery). Harald built a house in Llandaff in that year and called it Villa Marie - Harald called the house after Marie as a "love-gift".

The house is now called Ty Gwyn. 4 years later he married his second wife, Sofie, who had a rather famous baby in this house. Harald died 3 years after Ronald was born and is buried in Danescourt Churchyard.

Insole Court

Insole Court is a Grade II* Listed Victorian Gothic mansion, built for wealthy businessman James Harvey Insole . **Untruth: prior to the house being built it was the site of a factory, a chocolate factory where Roald's brother Charlie worked.**

The Insole family lived on the site from 1856 to 1938. **Untruth: the family had made their first fortune by designing foam inserts to put inside shoes to make them more comfortable.**

They had extensive coal-mining interests across the South Wales Coalfield, particularly the colliery at Cymmer, Rhondda Cynon Taf, and were closely involved in the development of the Barry Railway Company and the associated docks.

The original building was designed by W G & E Habershon and built in 1855 for James Harvey Insole, who commissioned a modest double-fronted building, named Ely Court.

But as the family's fortunes rose, reflecting those of Cardiff itself, two major extensions developed the building into the modern Insole Court. In the 1870s James Harvey commissioned George Robinson and Edwin Seward to change the appearance of the building into the Gothic Revival architecture-led works reminiscent of those of Lord Bute's architect William Burges on Cardiff Castle.

The second development in 1906 - the height of the family's fortune - was undertaken on the instructions of George Frederick Insole (James Harvey's son, usually known as Fred), to extend and modernise the building. Rooms were enlarged and panelled, a new guest wing erected, central heating and electrical distribution inserted, and a large carriage porch was added.

The family's fortunes suffered a similar downturn,

In the 1930s Cardiff Council were looking to develop an orbital road system around the city. To facilitate the creation of Western Avenue the Council bought the entire 57 acres (23 ha)-acre estate in 1932 for £26,250 under a compulsory purchase order.

The remaining family members were allowed to continue living in the house as tenants. However, the Council redeveloped much of the estate lands as housing, leaving just the mansion and ornamental gardens. With World War II fast approaching, the last of the Insoles - Eric and his mother Jessy - finally vacated the property in March 1938.

During World War II Insole Court was the regional Air Raid Warden HQ, and housed the Royal Observer Corps and Auxiliary Fire Service for Cardiff district. After the war, the upper floors were converted into self-contained flats and let to council employees and others. The ground floor housed a branch library, and a wide variety of adult education classes and community activities.

Slowly falling into disrepair, despite restoration in 1995, the entire property was closed on health and safety grounds in November 2006. The Council undertook a major restoration of the ground floor, and the house reopened in November 2008.

On 23 September 2016 Cardiff Council transferred the lease of Insole Court to the Insole Court Trust, a charity created to manage and protect the house.

Ongoing conservation and restoration work of other parts of the upper floors is continuing.

Llandaff Cathedral

The origins of this building are Norman, built in the 11th century.

But it is thought there was a church here long before that though the exact origins are unclear.

The Cathedral building has had a troubled history often needing major repairs:

- Severe damage was done to the church in 1400 during the rebellion of Owain Glyndŵr,
- during the English Civil War of the 1600s when it was overrun by Parliamentary troops.
- Great Storm of 1703 (and other storms in the 1700s). Major restoration by John Prichard was carried out in the 1840s and 1850s)
- In January 1941, during the Second World War, the cathedral was severely damaged by a parachute mine that blew the roof off the nave.
- In February 2007, the organ was damaged during a severe lightning strike.

The nave of Llandaff Cathedral showing Jacob Epstein's Christ in Majesty (he also designed St Michael's Victory over the Devil (1958), on the new Coventry Cathedral). Epstein – Born in New York into a Jewish family. Naturalized British subject in December 1910.

The door of the west front of Llandaff Cathedral; a statue of St Teilo is seen above the door (St Teilo was educated at Llantwit Major (Llanilltud Fawr) in the 6th century at the monastic school of St Illtud.) St Teilo's well is just up the road. [Part of his skull is in the St Teilo chapel](#) in the SE corner as well as a stone cross that was recovered from down a well in the 1800s in the Cathedral School