

## Neath Notes

### Neath

The ford on the River Neath is what led to the town being developed in Roman times. The Romans also recognised the area's strategic importance and built an Auxiliary Fort on the river's Western bank around 74 AD. The Roman fort was on the west side of the River Neath.

The town of Neath takes its Welsh name, "Castell-nedd", from the castle.

### Neath Market

Neath General Market is situated in Green Street - the heart of the Roman town of Neath. It is one of the few markets of its kind left in Wales.

The Victorian indoor market is housed in a building that dates back to 1837, the year that Queen Victoria began her reign, when it is said that the construction cost £1,650. It was renovated in 1904 for a figure of around £7,500 and again in 1999 when a new roof improved the structure along with work on the frontage to mark the Millennium



Sicillum Commune Villae De Neath

(note spelling error - should be Sigillim) meaning Common Seal of the Town of Neath.

**Untruth:** The Neath seal inspired the design of the Apollo space rockets



<https://www.neathtowncouncil.gov.uk/our-community/town-crest/>



Neath Town Council's Armorial Bearings reach back to pre-Roman times. The motto "Tu Nidum Servas" is translated into "Thou guardest Neath" with the Romans using the ancient Celtic "Nid" (a river goddess) to make their name for Neath as "Nidum,". The shield is derived from the original Seal showing the Castle and ships signifying Neath's early development as a significant fortified trading port. The closed helm, above, is associated with Robert Fitzhammon Lord of Glamorgan in the 11th Century and William, Earl of Gloucester, who granted Neath an early charter in 12th Century. The tower is a reminder of Neath's fortifications, coloured black to emphasise coal, whilst the Roman eagle (crest), with its steel collar, breathes flames, representing the heavy metal industry.

The supporters, or dragons, symbolise Neath's Welshness; their crowns, a link to the Welsh Princes and their shields from the Clare and Despenser families who granted early charters to the town

Neath's two Maces and Seal date back to 1706 when they were commissioned and produced by John Gibbon of Foster Lane, Cheapside. Made of silver to standard purity they were tested at the London Office in 1705-06

## St Thomas church

[https://www.waymarking.com/waymarks/wmG459\\_St\\_Thomas\\_Church\\_Neath\\_Wales](https://www.waymarking.com/waymarks/wmG459_St_Thomas_Church_Neath_Wales)

The Church probably stands on the site of the garrison chapel which was attached to the castle. Parts of the current building are said to date from 1298.

"Late 13th century foundation of St Thomas the Martyr, re-named St Thomas the Apostle at the

Reformation, it has an aisled nave with a west tower of c1340. The tower height was raised in 1691. The nave was largely rebuilt and aisles added 1730, and there was a general restoration in 1874." Text Source.

"Building alterations have included :The Tower was raised to its present height in 1691 using the white Sutton stone from the Neath Abbey and shortly afterwards the first clock was installed; a North facing porch was removed in about 1730; the Tower was restored in 1873."

Sometime earlier than 1298, a garrison Chapel stood on or near the site of the present church, which with a chaplain, served the needs of the Norman retainers of the nearby castle.

In 1170, Thomas a Becket was murdered in Canterbury Cathedral by four of Henry 11's knights. Many churches were dedicated to his name after pilgrims began reports of miracle cures at his grave. Of four such churches in this area it is certain that by 1298 a St. Thomas' Church existed on the present site. When Henry VIII broke from Rome in 1533/34 this church, was rededicated to St. Thomas the Apostle.

"The base of the tower, circa 1340, is the oldest part of the church. In 1691 the tower height was increased by the addition of twenty loads of Sutton stone taken from the ruins of the nearby Neath Abbey. The stone can be easily seen today."

The medieval clock tower was built in 1340 and raised in 1691 to its current height & the first clock was installed shortly afterward. The Tower was restored in 1873 & I suspect the current clock fitted. Located in Neath, South Wales.

### **Concrete Relief Sculptures**

Can't find anything out about these. We had concrete relief art in Cwmbran and Gloucester and now Neath. One seems to contain the name Kim Featherstone.



## **Alfred Russell Wallace (8 January 1823 – 7 November 1913)**

Known for the co-discovery of natural selection

His time in Neath was a turning point in his life.

Wallace was one of the institution's earliest members and gave physics lectures there. He was born in Usk in 1823 and lived in Neath from 1841 to 1848. During this time his interest in biology became a passion, and his first published scientific paper (1847) related to a type of beetle living in the Vale of Neath. In 1848 he left to explore distant continents, where he formed his theory of evolution.

Alfred Russel Wallace was an English naturalist, explorer, geographer, anthropologist, biologist and illustrator. He independently conceived the theory of evolution through natural selection; his 1858 paper on the subject was published that year alongside extracts from Charles Darwin's earlier writings on the topic. It spurred Darwin to set aside the "big species book" he was drafting and to quickly write an abstract of it, which was published in 1859 as *On the Origin of Species*.

He was born in Llandadoc, just outside Usk. Wallace then moved to London to board with his older brother John, a 19-year-old apprentice builder. This was a stopgap measure until William, his oldest brother, was ready to take him on as an apprentice surveyor.

When Wallace's brother William died in March 1845, Wallace left his teaching position in Leicester to assume control of his brother's firm in Neath, but his brother John and he were unable to make the business work. After a few months, he found work as a civil engineer for a nearby firm that was working on a survey for a proposed railway in the Vale of Neath. Wallace's work on the survey was largely outdoors in the countryside, allowing him to indulge his new passion for collecting insects. Wallace persuaded his brother John to join him in starting another architecture and civil engineering firm. It carried out projects including the design of a building for the Neath Mechanics' Institute, founded in 1843. During this period, he exchanged letters with Bates about books. By the end of 1845, Wallace was convinced by Robert Chambers's anonymously published treatise on progressive development, *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*, but he found Bates was more critical. Wallace re-read Darwin's *Journal*, and on 11 April 1846 wrote "As the *Journal* of a scientific traveler, it is second only to Humboldt's 'Personal Narrative'—as a work of general interest, perhaps superior to it."

After reading *A Voyage up the River Amazon* by William Henry Edwards, Wallace and Bates estimated that by collecting and selling natural history specimens such as birds and insects they could meet their costs, with the prospect of good profits. They therefore engaged as their agent Samuel Stevens who would advertise and arrange sales to institutions and private collectors, for a commission of 20% on sales plus 5% on despatching freight and remittances of money.

In 1848, Wallace and Bates left for Brazil aboard the *Mischief*. They intended to collect insects and other animal specimens in the Amazon Rainforest for their private collections, selling the duplicates to museums and collectors back in Britain to fund the trip. Wallace hoped to gather evidence of

the transmutation of species. Bates and he spent most of their first year collecting near Belém, then explored inland separately, occasionally meeting to discuss their findings. In 1849, they were briefly joined by another young explorer, the botanist Richard Spruce, along with Wallace's younger brother Herbert. Herbert soon left (dying two years later from yellow fever), but Spruce, like Bates, would spend over ten years collecting in South America. Wallace spent four years charting the Rio Negro, collecting specimens and making notes on the peoples and languages he encountered as well as the geography, flora, and fauna.

On 12 July 1852, Wallace embarked for the UK on the brig Helen. After 25 days at sea, the ship's cargo caught fire, and the crew was forced to abandon ship. All the specimens Wallace had on the ship, mostly collected during the last, and most interesting, two years of his trip, were lost. He managed to save a few notes and pencil sketches, but little else. Wallace and the crew spent ten days in an open boat before being picked up by the brig Jordeson, which was sailing from Cuba to London. The Jordeson's provisions were strained by the unexpected passengers, but after a difficult passage on short rations, the ship reached its destination on 1 October 1852.

The lost collection had been insured for £200 by Stevens. After his return to Britain, Wallace spent 18 months in London living on the insurance payment, and selling a few specimens that had been shipped home. During this period, despite having lost almost all the notes from his South American expedition, he wrote six academic papers (including "On the Monkeys of the Amazon") and two books, *Palm Trees of the Amazon and Their Uses* and *Travels on the Amazon*. At the same time, he made connections with several other British naturalists.

## **Neath Castle**

Norman Neath Castle, the English kings Henry II, John, and Edward I visited.

The first castle in Neath was located west of the river near the Roman fort of Nidum, and was a timber fortification in a motte and bailey structure. When Richard de Grenville founded Neath Abbey close by, he abandoned this original castle, and it may have been used by the monks as a source of building material.

A second castle on the opposite bank of the river, in what is now the centre of the town, is first documented in 1183; shortly afterwards, William de Cogan, son of Miles de Cogan, was appointed constable. This second castle was built by Gilbert de Clare, 5th Earl of Gloucester. During the 13th century, being a Norman stronghold, it was subject to attack by the Welsh, notably by Llywelyn the Great, who captured it in 1231 with help from a local Welsh lord, Morgan Gam. Following this, it was substantially rebuilt by Richard de Clare, 6th Earl of Gloucester, Gilbert's son.

It was taken again, and this time destroyed, by Humphrey de Bohun, 4th Earl of Hereford, in 1321, during the rebellion against King Edward II of England. Its owner, Hugh Despenser the Younger (who had gained the lordship through his marriage to the heiress Eleanor de Clare), rebuilt it, possibly with the



addition of a gatehouse. In 1376, one Roger Kyngot was the constable, and the castle was rebuilt in stone in 1377; that is probably when the great gatehouse was built, which is the main surviving feature. The castle was in use until the 17th century, and has been a recreational area for the town since the 18th century.

### **Lower Lodge, Gnoll Estate**

A lodge house of the Gnoll estate. Now unused, latterly used as an office for the Gnoll Grounds. An imposing castellated stone archway with a simple iron gate was located on Gnoll Avenue. This archway was built in the 1790s, after the industrial installations below the Great Pond.

Gnoll Castle – demolished 1957

Herbert Mackworth (7 September 1687 – 20 August 1765) was a Welsh landowner, coal owner and Tory politician who sat in the House of Commons from 1739 to 1765 as MP for Cardiff. On his father's death in 1727 he inherited the Gnoll estate and substantial coal mining and copper smelting interests in the Neath valley.



The Hollow Tree is located near to the visitor centre and the fishpond.

### **Howel Gwyn statue**

Howel Gwyn (24 June 1806 – 25 January 1888) of Dyffryn, Neath, was a British Conservative politician, who represented Penryn and Falmouth (1847–57) and Brecon (1866–68). He died at his home in 1888. The radical Welsh language newspaper, Tarian y Gweithiwr, recalled him as an old-fashioned Conservative who was a staunch defender of the Church of England. Gwyn played a prominent role in the public life of the Borough of Neath and contributed land towards the building of a hall, known as the Gwyn Hall.

### **The David Protheroe**

This pub is a former police station. It bears the name of Neath's first policeman, appointed in 1836. A map of Neath, of 1877, shows that the 'County Police Court and Station' stood opposite the railway station in Windsor Road, where it was rebuilt in 1937. It remained in use as the town's police station until January 1996 and is now this Wetherspoon pub.

### **References**

The information used in these notes is obtained from various sources including Wikipedia.