

Region, Nation, Globe: Roles, Representations and Urban Space in Cardiff, 1839-1928*

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Introduction

Images, representations, discourses are everywhere in modern academic analysis. Recent contemporary studies in sociology in Wales have considered a variety of representations, discourses and invented traditions but generally have failed to provide a map of them and to relate them to issues of power.¹ In this paper I attempt to provide such a map for one place in the past.² We need to ask a series of questions of our images. How do they fit together? How do they relate to power? How do they relate to spaces? One means of providing a focus for such concerns in an urban context is to start from an influential work in town planning. The classic work of Kevin Lynch raises several related issues which provide a means of linking representations with space. He was concerned with two central issues – the extent to which cities have unified images, the possibility of linking together the distinctive spaces within the city so as to give a unified experience and the way in which a central city might (or might not) provide a fitting image for a wider metropolitan region.³

A World City in its Region

Throughout the nineteenth century Cardiff, and the South Wales coalfield which it dominated, generated dramatic images of dynamic growth. They were founded, like any convincing image, on a dramatic reality.

* This paper is based on extensive primary research but, in the main, I have acknowledged secondary sources (including my own previous publications) rather than over burden the text with references. See my *Darker Cardiff: the Underside of the City, 1840-1960* (Cardiff, forthcoming) for further sources. Thanks to Andy Croll and Paul O'Leary for detailed comments on a draft and to Peter Borsay for some helpful discussions.

1 Ralph Fevre and Andrew Thompson (eds), *Nation, Identity and Social Theory: Perspectives from Wales* (Cardiff, 1999) is in many ways a summation of the field. See also my review of it in *Scottish Affairs*, No. 36 (Summer, 2001), pp. 44-7.

2 Huw Thomas, 'Spatial Restructuring in the Capital: Struggles to Shape Cardiff's Built Environment' in Fevre and Thompson (eds), *Nation, Identity*, is exemplary in this regard for the late twentieth century and partly inspires my paper.

3 Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge, Mass and London, 1960)

Nineteenth-century Cardiff may be described as the *Wunderkind* of British cities, as is illustrated by the growth of population.

Table 1 Population of Cardiff, 1801-1911

Date	Population
1801	1870
1851	18,351
1911	182,259

Source: M. J. Daunton, *Coal Metropolis: Cardiff, 1870-1914*, (Leicester, 1977) p. 10

This growth was the key theme of nineteenth-century discussion in the town. As a local historian summed up the situation in 1878:

[...] the commercial history dates scarcely beyond our own time, certainly not over eighty years. It now possesses all the characteristics of a comfortable, improving town, being well drained, watered and lighted; having good hotels, respectably conducted shops, banks, museum and literary institution, schools and various charitable establishments, the latter of which are supported with great liberality. This modern growth of Cardiff is chiefly due to its being the out-put of the coal and iron produce of the Merthyr and Aberdare works, combined with the tributary valleys, all of which vast result of labour is conveyed either by railway or canal to the modern magnificent docks [...] Cardiff is now, through the public spirit of the Corporation, as well as by the strong force of public interest, an important and rising town and borough. Masses of buildings are springing up like mushrooms [...]⁴

In 1782 a local customs official had observed that no coal was exported from the port and opined that none ever would be because of the difficulties of transport to the adjacent coalfield.⁵ Just over a decade later the construction of the Glamorganshire Canal to link Cardiff with the iron-working town of Merthyr Tydfil, 25 miles away laterally and 500 feet in altitude, began the process of mocking that prediction. Around a

4 Charles Martin, *Historical and Descriptive Guide to Cardiff and its Environs...* (1878).

5 Cited in R. O. Roberts, 'Industrial Expansion in South Wales' in Donald Moore (ed), *Wales in the Eighteenth Century* (Swansea, 1976) p. 114.

hundred years later the town eclipsed Newcastle in the amount of coal it exported and a visiting Newcastle businessman conceded that the old saying about taking coals to Newcastle would have to be amended in Cardiff's favour. By the eve of the First World War it was (in addition to being the premier coal exporting port in the world) second only to London in cargo cleared (by volume) and the greatest tramp shipping port in the world. In 1905 it had been created a city in recognition of its position as the largest town in Wales but it was clearly a world city with sailors and merchants drawn from many parts of Europe and the wider world.⁶ The cosmopolitan nature of its seafaring population was a matter for press comments from the 1850s and it had one of Britain's largest black populations by the Edwardian period. Its fame spread beyond its bounds. Its dockland drinking and vice dens were known from the 1890s as Tiger Bay (as were the similar areas in Wapping and Georgetown, Demerera). Its mastery of tramp shipping was known to Jules Verne who had the ship which Phineas Finn hired to cross the Atlantic in *Around the World in Eighty Days*, hail from Cardiff. Later Eugene O'Neill would write a play called *Eastward Bound for Cardiff*, while Tom Sawyer's world includes a Cardiff Hill.

A major turning point in this spectacular growth was 1839 when the West Bute Dock was opened. Its promoter was the Second Marquess of Bute who became known as, 'the founder of modern Cardiff.' In the imaginary world of the city, a founder is a key figure. Gerald Suttles stresses that American cities have heroic and morally untouchable founders.⁷ Many in Cardiff saw the Butes in this role as far as the modern development was concerned. Aristocracy provided the moral supremacy here, at least for the deferential. The Butes' dominance of local landownership and society made the town something like a *Residenzstadt*, the seat of a prince or elector, though these owners were mainly non-residential. Their agent controlled many aspects of local society in the absence of the landlords themselves.⁸ The opening of Glamorgan and Monmouth Infirmary in 1837 provided a demonstration of the hierarchical nature of the town in a procession which was led by the corporation and assigned each class to its proper place.

6 M. J. Daunton, *Coal Metropolis: Cardiff, 1870-1914* (Leicester, 1977); Neil Evans, 'The Welsh Victorian City: The Middle Class, Civic and National Consciousness in Cardiff, 1850-1914', *Welsh History Review*, Vol. 13 No 3 (June 1985).

7 Gerald D. Suttles, 'The Cumulative Texture of Local Urban Culture' *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 90, Issue 2 (September 1984), pp. 233-304.

8 John Davies, *Cardiff and the Marquesses of Bute* (Cardiff, 1981).

By the late nineteenth century the town was commonly seen as an American city in the rapidity of its growth. This was positive view, unlike German representations of Berlin in the period. Cardiff was *proud* to proclaim itself the ‘Chicago of Wales’⁹. The 2nd Marquess of Bute had said he would make it a second Liverpool, a city which was called ‘the Chicago of England’.¹⁰ By 1871 Cardiff was the biggest town in Wales and often referred to as ‘the emporium of South Wales’ and ‘the metropolis of South Wales’. Many other places in south Wales were compared with America: Merthyr Tydfil had been in 1847; Barry (as Oklahoma) was in 1889 and there were constant general references to the American nature of south Wales which were crowned by Sir Alfred Zimmern’s reference to ‘American Wales, the Wales of the coalfield and the working class’ in 1921. Cardiff and its hinterland had something in common in being referred to in this way. They shared an image. The South Wales Coalfield had a high incidence of primary urbanisation – rapid growth on green field sites. The classic case was the Rhondda Valleys, the prime steam coal producing area of south Wales, which grew from a scattered rural population of around 2,000 in 1851 to 160,000 in 1911. It became a by-word for growth in the area and new places in the coalfield were often referred to as ‘little Rhonddas’. This was a transferred American image – it was the same process of explosive growth which was being celebrated. Cardiff was an appropriate regional capital for such a society. If the basic ‘Americanness’ of the whole area unified it, Cardiff was *primus inter pares* because it was the focus for the region’s global connections.

Towering growth occasionally produced a certain nostalgia for the past which was seen as having an attractive simplicity and quietude – but it was always quickly swept aside by pride in development. The past became mainly a way of framing the superior performance of the present. It was an example of a nineteenth-century style of thought:

To master modernity by thinking *with* history[...] [which] implies the employment of the materials of the past and the configurations in which we organise and comprehend them to orientate ourselves

9 Stefan Berger, ‘Working Class Culture and the Labour Movement in the South Wales and Ruhr Coalfields, 1850-2000’, *Llafur*, Vol. 87, No 2 (2001), p. 13.

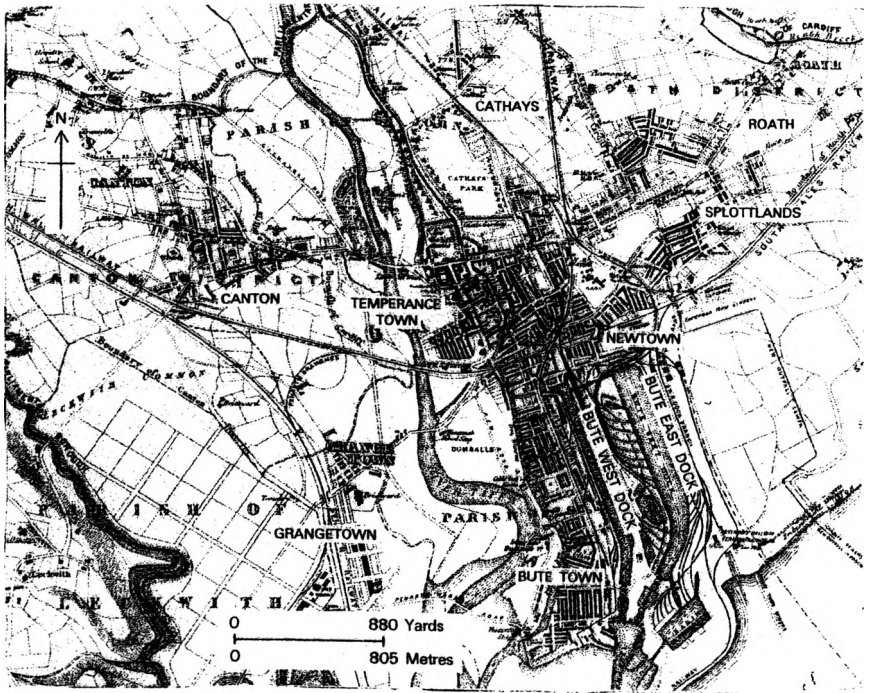
10 Cited in Tony Lane, *Liverpool: the Gateway of Empire* (London, 1987).

in the living present [...] history is dynamic, linking or dissolving static elements in a narrative pattern of change.¹¹

It was change which produced this commitment to the past – Clio was at its pre-eminent height in the mid nineteenth century amongst disciplines, according to Schorske.

But as Gerald Suttles stresses, towns and cities often have dual representations – positive and negative at once.¹² In Cardiff the obverse was ‘Darker Cardiff’ or ‘Tiger Bay’, the unwelcome side of its rapid growth. Drinking, prostitution, crimping and violent crime found their home here. In American terms it was a Whitmanesque world of life and activity, though local observers rarely had the American poet’s enthusiasm for vivacity and sexual experimentation and thought the area was a threat to moral survival. In Cardiff the bustling world of urban growth could be seen as an epic story – but only if it ushered in civic refinement; unlike the American poet it could not celebrate the mixture and casual encounters of the streets.¹³

Physically ‘Darker Cardiff’ lay between the old centre around the castle and the new one in docks.



Map of Cardiff in 1869

The medieval centre of Cardiff was close to the castle; post 1839 development clustered around the docks to the south. Bute Street runs parallel to the Taff Vale Railway line. Note how the castle and the various parks forced Cardiff into a Y-shaped development.

The new thoroughfare leading from the docks towards the old centre was Bute Street ('a mile of temptations') and it soon became the focus of the sailor town. Even worse were the dives of Whitmore Lane which had to be negotiated on the perilous journey from docks to the castle. This was the negative side of cosmopolitanism and Americanism. This too connected it with its region. Merthyr's 'China' had once been the vice centre of south Wales and the whole region was viewed with some distaste by religious leaders and moralists. Pontypridd had its vice dens and drunks too.¹⁴ In 1904 a revivalist stood on the ancient monument, the Rocking Stone, on Pontypridd Common and looked back at the Rhondda Valleys which had been his recent field of endeavours. He described it as looking back into Egypt.¹⁵ This was not the only highly coloured image of the region. 'Darker Cardiff' owed more to the imagination than to observation. It was not so much a real place as one constructed from Biblical language:

[...] the drunken brawl, alas, is still heard in our streets – the curse of liquor still fills our workhouse, infirmary and asylums. From our hospital beds the moan of the crushed victims of this cruel monster and relentless tyrant yet ascends – "the bitter cry of outcast Cardiff" is a cry for which drink is chiefly responsible [...] The ocean of intemperance still surges at our feet, the masses are still drifting away on its dark waters – some dashing against the hard cruel rocks – others foundering in mid ocean¹⁶

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- 11 Carl E Schorske, *Thinking with History: Explorations in the Passage to Modernism* (Princeton, 1998), pp. 3-5 (order of quotation reversed).
 - 12 Suttles, 'Cumulative Texture...', pp. 291f.
 - 13 Peter Conrad, *The Art of the City: Views and Versions of New York* (New York, 1984).
 - 14 Deborah James, "'Drunk and Riotous in Pontypridd": Women, the Police Courts and the Press in South Wales Coalfield Society, 1899-1914', *Llafur*, Vol. 8 No 3 (2002).
 - 15 National Library of Wales, Calvinistic Methodist Archives, CMA/17916 Diary of Seth Joshua, 23 February 1904.
 - 16 Cardiff Temperance and Prohibition Association Annual Report 1886.

*Representations, Spaces and Power, 1840-1886*¹⁷

How did this growth and its representation impinge on the spaces of the city? In the early nineteenth century the Butes dominated the symbolic landscape of Cardiff:

[...] what principally engages the attention of a traveller is, its ancient castle, which is a large, strong, stately, edifice [...] The constable of it is always the first magistrate of the town, by whom the bailiffs and serjeant at mace are sworn into office. This town has been the residence of princes, the seat of government and judicature, and the scene of many remarkable actions and events.¹⁸

The castle was not just the most imposing building but it and its adjacent parks dominated the townscape and blocked development to north.

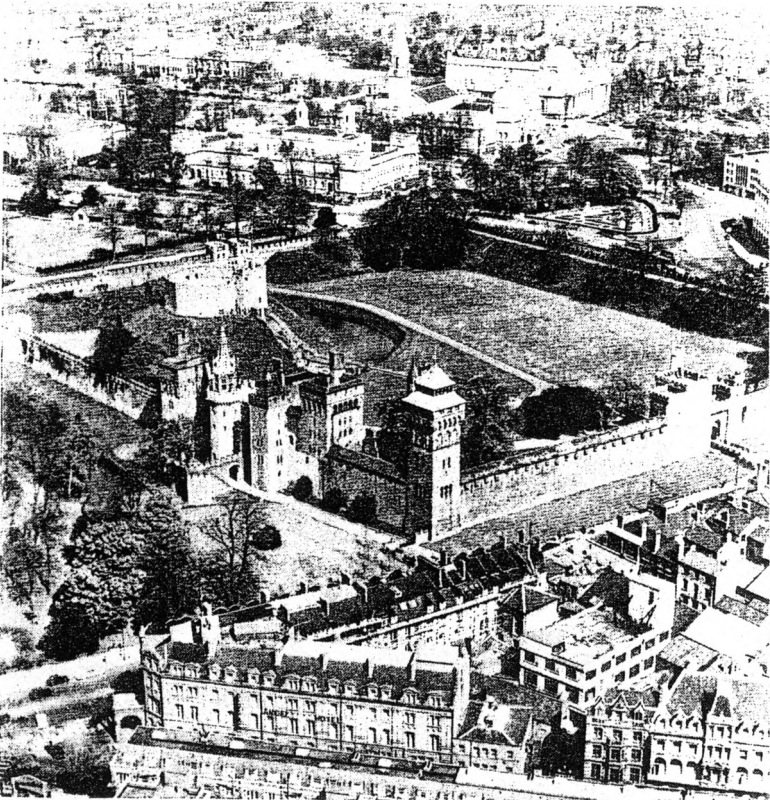


PLATE XLVI

CARDIFF—OLD AND NEW

From the Print Collection, Cardiff City Library

Cardiff Castle with Burges' work in the cluster of towers in the left middle. Cathays Park in the background, with Law Court, City Hall and National Museum of Wales in the top center.

It served to give dignity to 'American Wales', making it older than Chicago – a 'time-notched British oak'. The castle represented the distribution of power in a place which was not quite a pocket borough but was under the sway of the Butes. It was highly symbolic political space. As Liberal shipping and mercantile interests began to challenge the power of the Butes in the early 1850s they were mortified by the exclusion on political grounds of the newly-elected Liberal mayor, John Batchelor, from a function in the castle in 1853.

By then the Butes' power was already on the slide. The 2nd Marquess had died in 1848, leaving a minor heir. This was a power vacuum which the Liberals far from abhorred. The trustees of the estate used symbolism to try to fill it. The 2nd Marquess lived on as a statue erected in 1852 in St Mary St, outside the town hall. It was meant to perpetuate Bute influence during the minority – figuratively to keep an eye on the actions of the council and to remind them of landlord power. But the real power of Butes was effectively challenged by the Liberals who won the parliamentary seat in 1852, having defeated the estate over the crucial issue of public health in 1848-9.¹⁹

When the 3rd Marquess came of age in 1868 there were attempts to re-assert Bute power. The statue of his father was the focus for celebrations of the majority. Politically there was a concerted attempt to regain the parliamentary seat for Tories. But the politics of mute stones was more to the taste of the romantic Marquess who had converted to Catholicism at the time of his majority, and who later confessed that: 'Athens and Assisi have spoiled me for anything else'. He attempted to reinforce the image of the castle by rebuilding, employing the major gothic revival architect William Burges – 'Ugly Burges who designs lovely things' – as the Marchioness put it. His scheme was for preserving the past, restoring some of what was lost but most importantly by providing an announcement that it was a seat of a nobleman. This symbolically seized the town's skyline. It created a bristling city of towers – a gothic Gotham

17 For the social geography of the mid-Victorian town see C. Roy Lewis, 'A Stage in the Development of the Industrial Town: A Case Study of Cardiff, 1845-75', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, New Series, Vol. 4 No 2 (1979), pp. 129-52.

18 John Bird, *A Complete Directory and Guide to the Town and Castle of Cardiff...* (Cardiff, 1796), p. 6.

19 John Wilson, *Memorialising History: Public Sculpture in Industrial South Wales*, (Aberystwyth, 1996).

– to overtop all the others. Burges' biographer calls it a 'skyscraper amongst palaces.' It was both feudal and municipal in inspiration and very much a part of the 'medievalising subculture' of Victorian Britain.²⁰ It added to the weight of the past – literally in the bulk of Burges's building. It is Neuschwanstein without the Bavarian Alps for rivalry:

The Bavarian castles are mountain fantasies. Cardiff is an urban dream implanted in a city [...] Conceived as a neo-feudal vision, it now performs a municipal function: its silhouette has become the skyline of the capital of Wales.²¹

In a town divided by religious and political sub-cultures there would have to be a symbolic Liberal reply in stone. This focused on the Free Library (opened in 1883) and a statue of Batchelor erected outside it two years later. The 1874 municipal election had been dominated by the free library issue: the Bute estate was against it and the Liberals claimed that the Marquess thought that the highest art required an ignorant population. The issue nicely encapsulated a clash of values. On the one hand the Butes offered instruction from on high in social position. On the other the Liberals presented knowledge which was available to all, and equally, through the mechanism of the rates. The new free library building was originally to have had a tower to rival that on the castle. For financial reasons the Free Library was more modest and symbolised the idea of capital and culture advancing together. But it needed a figurehead and Batchelor who died in the year it opened was perfect. The sculptor Milo Griffith was paid £1,000 for Batchelor's statue from a fund raised in memory of the archetypal figure of the Liberal bourgeoisie. In death Batchelor stood on the main road from the centre to the docks and was seen by Tories as an impertinent rival to the Bute statue on a parallel street. The intense rivalry of the political factions meant that the corporation had to protect both statues from sectional vandalism.²² As in American cities a founder had been supplemented by a bourgeois hero. In Leeds and Newcastle, the statues of John Forster and Joseph Cowen respectively provide similar entries in the pantheon.

20 Schorske, *Thinking with History*, p. 72.

21 J. Mordaunt Crook, *William Burges and the High Victorian Dream* (London, 1981) esp. ch 7; see also Crook (ed), *The Strange Genius of William Burges 'Art Architect', 1827-1881* (Cardiff, 1981).

22 Wilson, *Memorialising History*.

The Uses of Urban Space

But such civic imagery still had to contend with threats from the depths. Cardiff's vice district was frighteningly footloose. Though it focused on the docklands it was capable of moving to evade too close supervision from the police. The term 'Darker Cardiff' captured some of this quality – it was opaque and amorphous. In the 1890s this term co-existed with another 'Tiger Bay' which had a more circumscribed location – the area behind Bute Street where the worst of the vice concentrated. Eventually the term 'Tiger Bay' became the predominant one, amongst other things reflecting a sense of having confined the wildness to a cage. The multi-faceted problems of vice, crimping, crime and violence came to be subsumed under the umbrella of race in the years before the First World War. This made it a restricted social issue which confined it – at least as an object of moral panic – to the black ghetto which was emerging around Loudon Square. When the chief constable launched an attack on vice in 1929 the press used the headline 'Coloured Pests' – the issue was by then seen as a confined and racially distinct problem, though certainly as a potential threat to the whole city.²³

A less threatening sense of the problems of vice rested on a feeling that the streets were now safer for those who walked them without immediate financial gain in mind. Those who supported the Sunday closing of pubs held that the passing of the Welsh Sunday Closing Act in 1881 had made the streets safe for women.²⁴ Opponents of the act held that this change was merely cosmetic, but in a sense it hardly mattered. Even if this were the case it still engendered some complacency about moral issues, though they were still capable of erupting into an issue which could briefly dominate the press and public discussion. Yet, by late 1890s the worst spots, like Whitmore Lane, had gone. Robbery from the person, the scourge of the mid-Victorian period had nose-dived. Vigorous action against street walking was rejected as it would restrict all women's liberty to walk around at night. Here again Cardiff felt itself superior to Chicago. D.T. Phillips, the American Consul, caused a furore by saying that Cardiff was worse than Chicago and had deteriorated over a period of 20 years. The price paid in Chicago, it was replied, was an unacceptable restriction of women's freedom of movement. It is clear that women

23 Neil Evans, 'Regulating the Reserve Army: Arabs, Blacks and the Local State in Cardiff, 1919-1945', in Kenneth Lunn (ed.), *Race and Labour in Twentieth-Century Britain* (London, 1985).

24 *Parliamentary Papers*, 1890, Report of the Royal Commission on the Operation of the Sunday Closing (Wales) Act, 1881.

freely used the streets of Cardiff and were sometimes targeted by the unscrupulous. In 1899 'toughs' verbally and physically abused women on the streets and the women were obliged to pay them to desist.

Parallel with the process by which Cardiff's depths were contained was the liberation of much of the population from them and their entry into the sunshine of achievement. In the late nineteenth century, workers began to emerge from the morass that was 'Darker Cardiff' and acquire respectability. Some of this was achieved – or at least marked – by the public display of achievement and sobriety. The Irish had started the process with the demonstrations of the Hibernian Society in 1850s, which had forced even hostile press critics to concede that not all the Irish were lazy, drunken criminals. From 1872 this was reinforced by the annual Corpus Christi Parades. The Catholic children of the city occupied the streets garbed in a symbolic white gathering strength each time they passed a Catholic school (signs of striving and achievement which dotted 'darker Cardiff') like stations of the cross. It ended with a celebration of the mass in the grounds of Cardiff Castle, at the symbolic heart of the local establishment. Perhaps this prevented it from encountering serious Protestant opposition: in one of the few protests against it, opponents conceded that it was only this celebration on private ground that made it legal.²⁵ The working-class movement adopted a similar pathway to respectability during the growth of new unionism from 1888. Parades of workers organised with the symbols of their trades and with banners impressed their strength, respectability, skill and determination into the consciousness of onlookers. All of these movements were paralleling and imitating the approach of Nonconformity which had long demonstrated its hegemony in Wales by means of Whit Walks – and in temperance demonstrations which became large annual events from the 1880s.

All that was lacking was a sense of urban discipline. At the turn of the century there were many complaints of the lack of a rule of the road – and of the pavement – which hindered the flows of daily vehicular and pedestrian traffic. But by-laws began to be introduced – though it is hard to believe that urban discipline was such that it was possible in Cardiff, as it was claimed for London, to walk long distances on the city streets reading a newspaper.

Representations, Space and Power, 1886-1928

An increasingly respectable Cardiff, with its rough spots hidden away could benefit from new American visions: Various Cardiffians went on

25 I have benefited here from hearing a seminar paper by Paul O'Leary on Corpus Christi in Cardiff.

visits to North America in the late nineteenth century and discovered that America had beautiful cities as well as rapidly growing ones. Their reports home came to influence perceptions in Cardiff. In the 1880s the architect and prominent Liberal, Peter Price, was impressed by new government buildings at Ottawa, the municipal buildings of Philadelphia and the government buildings of Washington. Lascelles Carr, bohemian editor of the Tory *Western Mail*, was also inspired by buildings of Philadelphia and Washington almost a decade later in 1893. He was keen to develop the Bute's private Cathays Park for this role. The first feelers to the Butes went out from Peter Price in 1892 and others subsequently took up cause and it was discussed widely. Carr, however, sensing a ripe property speculation in the centre of the town as an alternative, dropped out and became an opponent of the scheme.²⁶

The ambitious Cathays Park scheme was opposed by much of the old elite of the town—shopkeepers with interests in the central areas around the old town hall in St. Mary Street. These overlapped with organised ratepayers who were also vocal and led by the estate agent Sam Hern.²⁷ They had a vested interest in keeping the municipal centre near the castle. This favoured rebuilding on the old site – or on the cleared slum (and vice district) Temperance Town, opposite the main line railway station.²⁸ The victory of the Cathays Park scheme was a product of the long Liberal dominance on the council from 1888 to 1904. A new breed of Liberals had emerged in 1890s who were less economy-minded than their Gladstonian forerunners. Civic pride united many groups. Liberals could create some architectural splendour to check the Butes, even if they couldn't hope to checkmate them. The Conservatives offered their own version in the quest for city status which came to fruition in 1905. Welsh intellectuals like Cochfarf (Edward Thomas) and John Austin Jenkins stressed the links between civic pride and national identity. They wanted to create a capital city for a resurgent Welsh identity. It was an alliance of those with new and forward-looking visions rather than the arrival of rich dock interests on the city council. E. P. Hennock has argued that civic pride was the creation of the affluent who were less concerned with

26 John Wilson, "'The Chicago of Wales': Cardiff in the Nineteenth Century', *Planet*, No. 115 (February-March 1996), pp. 14-25.

27 For the divisions in the elite see M.J. Daunton, *Coal Metropolis: Cardiff 1870-1914* (Leicester, 1977).

28 Aspects of this are discussed in Evans, 'Welsh Victorian City'

keeping down the rates.²⁹ Cardiff contradicts such a view: few of the very wealthy bothered with a council which had no control over the docks and with a town to which they lacked a deep and long-lasting commitment. Those docksmen who joined the council were not usually the richest of the breed. The creation of the civic centre was the result of a split in an enlarged town elite rather than the arrival of a new dock elite into municipal power.

29 E.P. Hennock, *Fit and Proper Persons: Ideal and Reality in Nineteenth-century Urban Government* (London, 1973).

Table 2: Social Composition of Cardiff Town Council, 1870-1914

Group	Maximum	Minimum
Shipowners / coal exporters	27.5%	12.5%
Drink, building, traders, financial	60%	50%
Law and Medicine	20%	10%
Trade Unionist	10%	0

Source, M. J. Daunton, 'Aspects of the Economic and Social Development of Cardiff, 1870-1914' (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Kent, 1974) p. 316.

The Bute estate sold the park to the corporation under restrictive covenants which preserved its shape and restricted development to public buildings. As soon as it became public property but before building commenced, the council opened it to the public – an exclusive set of walls came tumbling down. Everyone got a little closer to the Bute inner sanctum. Yet this was in no way a total rout of landlord power. The Bute family was part of scheme. The third marquess had been Mayor in 1890. The sculptor, Goscombe John, who had worked on the Castle in his youth, was responsible for much of the statuary in the park. But now it commemorated more than the Butes. Viscount Tredegar (a hero of the charge of the Light Brigade), Judge Gwilym Williams, Lord Aberdare and the philanthropist John Cory. Later additions were Lord Ninian Stuart (war hero, MP and son of 4th Marquess), and in 1960, David Lloyd George.

Carl Schorske's analysis of Vienna's *Ringstrasse* offers a means of situating the contest in Cardiff. He sees it as a compromise between the neo-absolutism of the Empire and the representative government and liberalism of the Vienna elite. Mediation was through museums and culture which occupied the (literal) middle ground between them. In Cardiff the rebuilding of the Castle had been not neo-absolutism, but rather an attempt to reconstruct absolutism. Cathays Park, however, can be seen as a kind of neo-absolutism, a compromise between the Butes and the city elite. The latter was allowed its head: the tower on City Hall was a challenge to that on castle. But there was common ground in beautification and in the interest in history, culture and learning that was represented in the location of the National Museum, possibly the National Library (though in the event it went to Aberystwyth) and a dignified

home for the university to which Bute had given a good deal of his money to in the 1880s.³⁰

It created a landscape splendid enough to draw the attention of the planner, Patrick Geddes, in 1915:

One [civic awakening], as yet little realised, [...] the rise of Cardiff, from the mere export centre of the South Wales coalfield which London still thinks it, to deliberate design as a regional metropolis; in fact, as the fourth national capital of the British Isles; and one determined to be even more complete than Edinburgh or Dublin. This ambition is being expressed in the creation of a civic centre far surpassing that of any other British City; in fact, in some respects more comprehensively (though not as largely or subtly) planned as one well known to every town planner, that of Nancy, when the southern capital of King Augustus of Poland, in his capacity as Duke of Lorraine.³¹

Yet such splendour involved a distancing both from the region – as much as it had from Cardiff’s wild side. Geddes discussed Cardiff as a modern city of commerce, health and culture, comfort, pleasure and recreation. Unlike the mining valleys it was not Coketown. Geddes’ enthusiasm was for what he called a neo-technic cities rather than for the older paleo-technic examples. Serious efforts were made to increase this sense of distance between Cardiff and its coalfield. Boosters deplored the common idea that Cardiff was on the coalfield. Cathays Park was used as a contrast with the Valleys. In a promotional film made for the Development Committee in the 1920s it could be summed up visually by aerial photography of Cathays Park, with the caption, ‘Spot the coal mine!’ Pictures, of course, are worth a thousand words so it took that assiduous booster, John Austin Jenkins, a paragraph to make the same point:

The outsider, who has heard that Glamorgan is a great coalmining centre, has a strange idea of Cardiff and its surroundings. Cardiff is to him a dirty, coal-begrimed town, where the throb of the colliery engines is never silent. The country around he looks upon as a dreary land where no vegetation exists, and the only adornments are the ‘Tips’ from the Collieries and the Iron Works. How far is this from the truth. It is true that away in those mountain valleys to

30 Schorske, *Thinking with History*, ch 7.

31 Patrick Geddes, *Cities in Evolution: An Introduction to the Town Planning Movement and the Study of Civics* (London, 1915), p. 275.

the north man has defiled nature with his industries, but in the lowland between the mountains and the sea there still lingers a good and pleasant land, where nature smiles her sweetest.³²

So Cardiff was not only distinguished from the Valleys by its buildings but by the *cordon sanitaire* which surrounded it. Elsewhere in the same work the same point is made with more graphic reference to the valleys themselves. It is, of course, a descent into Hell:

We start by train from Cardiff when the day's work is over and travel some distance through the fertile country before we see any signs of coal. Before long we pass through a large town, and find ourselves travelling through a valley with barren and treeless hills on either side. We pass a colliery with its smoking chimneys and flaming coal ovens. At last we arrive at our destination, and alight from the train at a typical colliery village. It is dark and dreary as we walk along badly lighted roads between rows of stone built houses few of them showing any light from their windows. After a short walk we arrive at the colliery [...] The mine is like an underground town with its main streets and less important roads.³³

This issue is the one which Lynch identifies as problematic in the post-war world: the success with which central city images could represent the whole metropolitan region. Cardiff's image makers did not have an answer to it, but Lynch indicates just how problematic the whole thing is. Few cities could pull off the trick. In Cardiff more attention was given to trying to win a Welsh (rather than a south Wales industrial region) image. This had, at best, mixed results. Many of Cardiff's boosters tried to woo the Welsh nation: many of its self-appointed spokespeople slapped them in the face. If such people liked towns at all they turned to Swansea rather than Cardiff.³⁴

As part of the attempt to orientate Cardiff towards Welsh national aspirations, from the turn of century there were discussions of the desirability of a Welsh National Valhalla in Cathays Park. The original suggestion was to employ Alexandra Park, in the centre of Cathays Park, as part of a scheme to commemorate Edward VII. He was seen as being identified with Wales, through his long tenure of the position of Prince of Wales and his support for the national revival which began in his reign.

32 A University Graduate (ed) *The Book of Cardiff*, (Cardiff, n.d. [1912]) p. 126.

33 Ibid., pp. 89-91.

34 See Neil Evans, "'A Nation in a Nutshell': The Swansea Welsh Liberal National Convention of 1912 and the Political Culture of Edwardian Wales" (forthcoming).

Ultimately the required statues were provided by the coalowner, D. A. Thomas, at a cost of £15,000, and placed inside the City Hall. They were unveiled in 1916, displaying ten heroes (and one heroine) of Welsh history who had been selected by experts (T. Marchant Williams, Stipendiary Magistrate for Merthyr; Prof. Thomas Powell of the University and Llewelyn Williams, Recorder of Cardiff) from a list which owed something to popular choice: 364 entries and 250 nominations produced by a press competition. But democracy was not deferential enough: the experts excluded Llywelyn Fawr, the rebellious thirteenth century prince, and Griffith Jones, the founder of popular literacy in Wales, in favour of Henry VII and the hero of Waterloo, General Picton. Queen Boudicea was added at a late stage, presumably in deference to Thomas's daughter, Lady Mackworth, a militant suffragette. Where the popular will was over-riden it was in conservative interests. No one alive in Victoria's reign was allowed.³⁵ This screened out the political conflicts of the present – modern heroes like Henry Richard or Tom Ellis were dead but still the objects of party conflict – and tried to create a consensus by doing so.³⁶ Each statue was meant to represent particular virtues and qualities. In thanking Thomas, the City Council recognised that the statues would benefit the city hall and: '[...] greatly enhance its local interest and dignify it with the national importance worthy of the Principality [...] The imposing statues [...] will ever bear tribute to the part which Wales has borne in the civilising and elevating influences of the Empire.'³⁷ They provided the corporation with a reason other than the dragon which topped the dome on city hall to claim an affinity with Welsh cultural values. The statues were meant as an inspiration to children who had a guide to the heroes produced for them.³⁸

35 Angela Gaffney, 'A National Valhalla for Wales: D.A. Thomas and the Welsh National Sculptures Scheme, 1910-1916', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, New series., Vol. 5 (1999), pp. 131-44.

36 Barry Schwartz, 'The Social Context of Commemoration: A Study in Collective Memory', *Social Forces*, Vol. 61 Issue 2 (December 1982), pp. 374-402, notes the avoidance of recent history in commemoration in the American Congress in the antebellum period.

37 City of Cardiff, 'Ceremonies of the Admission to the Honorary Freedom of...Lord Rhondda [...] 27th October 1916' and *Illustrated Catalogue of the Welsh Historical Sculpture* [...] (Cardiff, 1916).

38 'Artium Magister' (i.e. John Austin Jenkins, Registrar of UCSWM) *A Nation's Heroes*, (Cardiff, 1916). My copy is inscribed from Lady Mackworth, D. A. Thomas's daughter.

Yet Cardiff didn't succeed entirely as national capital. When the offices of the Welsh National Memorial Association were removed from Newtown, in mid-Wales to Cardiff in 1913 there was outrage in the press through the rest of the country. The local newspaper in Newtown branded the Welsh city, 'Chinatown'. In 1925 a Welsh nationalist argued Cardiff would be a more suitable capital for China than for Wales. Shortly afterwards it failed in its efforts to be the location for the Welsh National Memorial for war dead. Cardiff Corporation had tried to gather support in Wales for a national memorial and in 1919 letters had been sent to 200 public bodies in Wales inviting them to a conference to discuss it. Only 61 replied and of these only 21 sent representatives – and some of these did so just to protect their local interests. The case made against Cardiff was often that it wasn't Welsh – i.e. Welsh speaking. Money was raised for a memorial but most of it was from local sources. The city's civic pride played a role here – but the war was commemorated in essentially local ways throughout Wales. When the memorial was unveiled in 1928 it ignored the fact that there was one claiming to be the North Wales Memorial in Bangor.³⁹

Conclusion

By the 1920s streets around the castle had been cleared to provide better visibility of it. From one corner of the castle there was a vista of the new civic centre which was developed as a national symbol and one which was also a focus of civic responsibility and reconciliation. It was much wider than the old Bute focus of the castle, though it still included it.

The problems discussed here were, of course, common ones in nineteenth century cities:

From the 1850s onwards, urban pride and identity were celebrated in an increasingly assertive series of public buildings, squares and statues as well as in a widening variety of cultural expressions. Leeds [...] acquired a massive town hall in 1853-4, a society devoted to the study of Leeds history in 1889 and a laid out city square ready for a statue of the Black Prince in 1896. So successful were these town halls that their images are still used by modern visual media to introduce items on local government and urban activity. George Square in Glasgow and the Municipal Buildings created in 1883 became a symbol of that city, so much so that by the need of the century every labour and trades union leader knew

39 Angela Gaffney, *Aftermath: Remembering the Great War in Wales* (Cardiff, 1998) ch III.

that to hold a demonstration in George Square was to lay symbolic claim to power within the city. In 1919 it was rumoured that the tanks in the nearby tram depot were there to prevent this process going too far.⁴⁰

In Cardiff this symbolic association of the new civic centre with a wider civic framework was a fairly clear success. The city-wide general strike of 1911 was an intense local crisis. But it was resolved by long and complex negotiations conducted by the Mayor. Afterwards his role as a civic conciliator was widely recognised. Recognition of union rights through collective bargaining was the more practical component of the civic ideology which issued from those buildings.⁴¹ In the interwar period Cathays Park was a regular venue for political meetings in Cardiff – it was an appropriate place to air grievances and to press for action.

Yet the overall success in creating a city image which was related to its spaces was relative. We need to begin to think in terms of comparisons in order to try to understand some of the generalities of the process. Merthyr Tydfil is the classic ‘urban’ community in Wales, and perhaps doomed to failure in any comparison with ‘civic’ Cardiff. Its own civic projects in the period had an air of desperation about them – an attempt to shake off the image of a Mumfordian manheap, hindered by a hardly buoyant economy. It had to sell itself as ‘the old metropolis of Wales’, not being able to finesse its displacement by Cardiff. Perhaps this accounts for the greater role which choral music played in definitions of the civic there, as compared with Cardiff. It was civic celebration in a different key (as it were) from the alabaster palaces of Cardiff. The popular dimension of Cardiff’s civic pride was mainly expressed in football, with Cardiff City being formed as a direct response to the winning of city status in 1905. It took the glory of the city’s name into the First Division and the F. A. Cup Final in the 1920s. In Merthyr all civic projects were threatened by the conflict between the town itself and the largely independent communities which were yoked with it in the borough. None would allow the centre to steal a march on them and this conflict held up civic progress. Cardiff, by

40 R.J. Morris and Richard Rodger, ‘An Introduction to British Urban History, 1820-1914’ in Morris and Rodger (eds), *The Victorian City: A Reader in British Urban History* (London, Longmans, 1993) pp. 8f.

41 Neil Evans, “‘A Tidal Wave of Impatience’: The Cardiff General Strike of 1911’, in Geraint H. Jenkins and J. Beverley Smith (eds), *Politics and Society in Wales, 1840-1922: Essays in Honour of Ieuan Gwynedd Jones* (Cardiff, 1988).

contrast, had very little conflict with its suburbs. The over-riding civic history and its integration ensured that this was the case.⁴²

Glasgow was a far more successful case of the civic project than was Cardiff – but then this point could be made in comparing Glasgow with just about any city in the western world at the time. It had more parks and open spaces than any city in Europe in proportion to size, and ever since its Whig corporation had turned to municipal reform in the aftermath of the European revolutions of 1848 it had become the exemplar of municipal enterprise, with a wide trans-Atlantic reach to its influence. It outstripped Chamberlain's Birmingham and celebrated its wider role in international exhibitions in 1888 and 1901.⁴³ The ancient university acquired a splendid new site at Kelvingrove in the 1870s and it nurtured artistic talents in the form of the Glasgow boys and Charles Rennie Mackintosh. The People's Palace opened on Glasgow Green in 1898 indicated the inclusiveness of the civic tradition. Its deep educational traditions allowed a synthesis of science and liberal education. In Cardiff, by contrast, science always had a difficult time. Yet in one sense, in the creation of a city image, it was perhaps less successful than was Cardiff. Glasgow's growth drew its focus away from the old centre near the cathedral and concentrated its Victorian building in the grid plan reminiscent of an American city. The comparison was often made, of course. The old centre was effectively abandoned – and was dominated by a necropolis which must have its own symbolism.⁴⁴

In Cardiff, the Bute intervention kept the city plugged into the spaces of its ancient past. The castle was renewed as a focal point and Cathays Park, which was adjacent to its old centre, created a Victorian encounter with the past via dignified baroque-style buildings. In Lynch's terms this was the difference between a legible centre (where the succession of stages of historical development is laid bare) and an illegible one. The cost was the divorce between this area and the new commercial centre in the docks. To some extent the freer movement on regulated streets helped

42 Ieuan Gwynedd Jones, *Communities: Essays in the Social History of Victorian Wales* (Llandysul, 1987); Andy Croll, *Civilising the Urban: Popular Culture and Public Space in Merthyr, c. 1870-1914* (Cardiff, 2000).

43 See for example Elfie Rembold, *Negotiating Scottish Identity: The Glasgow History Exhibition 1911*, *National Identities* 1.3 (1999), pp. 265-85.

44 Allan Massie, *Glasgow: Portraits of a City* (London, 1989); Geoffrey Best, 'The Scottish Victorian City', *Victorian Studies*, Vol. XI No 3 (March 1968), pp. 329-358; Peter Reed (ed.), *Glasgow: The Forming of the City* (Edinburgh University Press, 2nd edn 1999), pp. 1-3.

heal this wound by the late nineteenth century. But the divide remains and has been perpetuated by the Cardiff Bay Development Corporation. Even the potential to admit the multi-ethnic community in Butetown to the family of the city is being denied by the construction of Lloyd George Boulevard, which turns Bute Street into a side street and ensures that the limos moving between the Victorian centre and the new developments encounter nothing of ‘independent tropical Wales.’⁴⁵

Glasgow benefited, in general, not simply from its heroic present but from the depth of Scottish traditions of civic virtue. But in the respect of physical connection with its past Cardiff won out, largely because of the Bute role in the place. Even Cardiff’s duality might be defended in terms similar to the contrast between Glasgow and Edinburgh. In the latter the medieval town and the enlightenment one are adjacent and form an implicit comparison and progression. It produced a legible city. In Cardiff the dignified and historical centre is apart from the modern and commercial one. But it is possible to bring the two places into the same focus and in doing so to tell the story of its development.

Gerald Suttles’s seminal work on city images provides a three stage model of civic culture for American cities which may be adapted for Cardiff:

Founders provide a key image. In Cardiff this revolved around the Butes as aristocratic representatives of its ancient past and as modern creators in their role as dock developers.

Founders are later supplements by bourgeois heroes. In Cardiff this was represented by the militant liberalism of John Batchelor and the later (1906) statue of John Cory, which celebrated philanthropy rather than politics – but Cory had challenged Bute hegemony in this sphere as surely as Batchelor had in the political field.

Popular representations of the city are necessary for the greater success of the images. In Cardiff this was mainly achieved through football in the 1920s.

Cardiff’s conflict of roles presented problems in its representations. The civic conception of Cardiff rather distanced it from the Valleys – though football did form a popular bond between the city and its hinterland. Yet the grandeur of the city did not win it the allegiance of rural Wales, which had been one of the intentions of the civic project. This was mainly because of its image as a cosmopolitan world city – it was racially too

45 Thomas, ‘Spatial Restructuring in the Capital...’. The phrase ‘independent tropical Wales’ was graffiti on the long embankment wall of the Taff Vale Railway in Bute Street, observed in August 1999. It referred to the separate identity of Cardiff’s black population.

mixed to win the allegiance of a society which did not take easily to multi-culturalism. Representations are elements in the contest for power and have to be related to politics in the broad sense. The contest in Cardiff was about the recognition which part of the elite demanded for its role in developing the town. It refused to accept Bute hegemony. The castle had represented this in 1870s. Cathays Park allowed the celebration of civic virtues on ground provided and laid out by the major landlord. It was not *his* ground and *his* glorification but a combination of his vision with the efforts of the town elite. *All* the elite were now seen as having made the city. In an important sense Cathays Park was a recognition of that. Yet Cathays Park was at best a partial success as an integrating factor. Its symbolism depended upon excluding the economic activities of the port and its region from view, with representations of the area stressing this fact – on the creation of distance between the negative images of the docks and the coalfield and Cardiff's civic pride.