Humanist Heritage

CARDIFF TOUR

This walk introduces some of the key freethinkers and reformers who have shaped, and been shaped by, Cardiff. These include famous names like Aneurin Bevan, the architect of the NHS, and lesser known figures like Millicent Mackenzie, a pioneer for women's rights and secular education. The route highlights significant milestones in social progress, from the growth of ethical societies and organised humanism to the disestablishment of the Church in Wales, and beyond.

1 PARC MACKENZIE

Parc Mackenzie is named for Millicent Mackenzie, a university professor and campaigner for women's rights. Appointed Associate Professor of Education at the University College of South Wales and Monmouthshire (now Cardiff University) in 1904, in 1910 she became the first woman in Wales to achieve full professorial status. She was also, in 1918, the first woman in Wales to stand for election to Parliament.

Mackenzie was one of Humanists UK's earliest Vice Presidents (when it was still called the Union of Ethical Societies). With her husband, John, she was a dedicated promoter of moral education, rather than religious instruction, in schools. This focused on teaching children how to be good citizens, using reasons that could be understood by all, whether they were brought up with a religious background or not.

2 NATIONAL MUSEUM CARDIFF

The National Museum collections contain many busts and portraits of notable Welsh humanists, including Leo and Dannie Abse, and Aneurin Bevan. Leo Abse was a lawyer and MP, whose parliamentary efforts helped to decriminalise homosexuality, liberalise divorce laws, and support the abolition of capital punishment. His brother, Dannie Abse, was a doctor, poet, and writer, who said: 'I like to think I'm a poet and Medicine my serious hobby.' He saw poetry as 'a kind of singing', which helped to make life more beautiful.

3 GORSEDD GARDENS

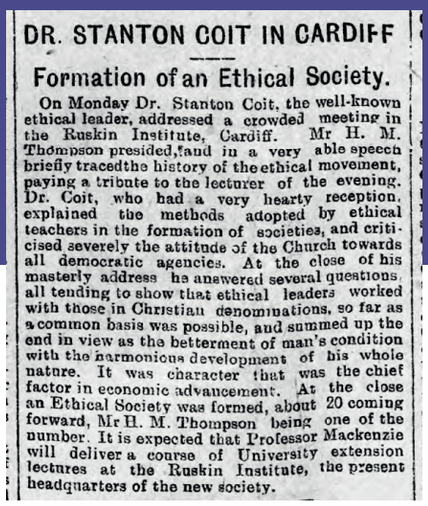
These gardens were named for the Gorsedd Circle of standing stones, originally placed in Cathays Park for the 1899 National Eisteddfod, and moved to their present location in 1905. In its early years this space was referred to as the Druidical Gardens but the name Gorsedd Gardens was later adopted.

The Gardens are home to 'Girl' by sculptor Robert Thomas (1926–1999). Thomas was the creator of the statue of Nye Bevan which we'll pass later, and also made a bust of Welsh writer Gwyn Thomas, which was stolen from the foyer of the Sherman Theatre, and later recast. Like Bevan, Gwyn Thomas was a freethinker, whose autobiography *A Few Selected Exits* (1968) featured sections including 'And ten more dogmas bit the dust' and 'See one miracle and you've seen the lot'.

Also here, unveiled in 1960, is a bronze statue of David Lloyd George, a Member of Parliament for Caernavon for 55 years, and Prime Minister from 1916 to 1922. As Prime Minister, Lloyd George oversaw the disestablishment of the Church in Wales in 1920 – something he and many others had long campaigned for.

4 LEONARDO HOTEL

The Leonardo Hotel was formerly Park Hall, and the location of radical journalist and prominent secularist G.W. Foote's lectures in Cardiff in March 1890. *The Cardiff Times* reported that 'On Sunday morning at 11 o'clock, Mr Foote had for his theme, "Death—what after?" The gist of his contention was a recommendation to make the best of this world as there was no certainty of another'. Although today secularism typically refers more strictly to the separation of Church and State, during the 19th century, its emphasis – like Foote's – was on making the best of this world.



DR. STANTON COIT IN CARDIFF

Formation of an Ethical Society.

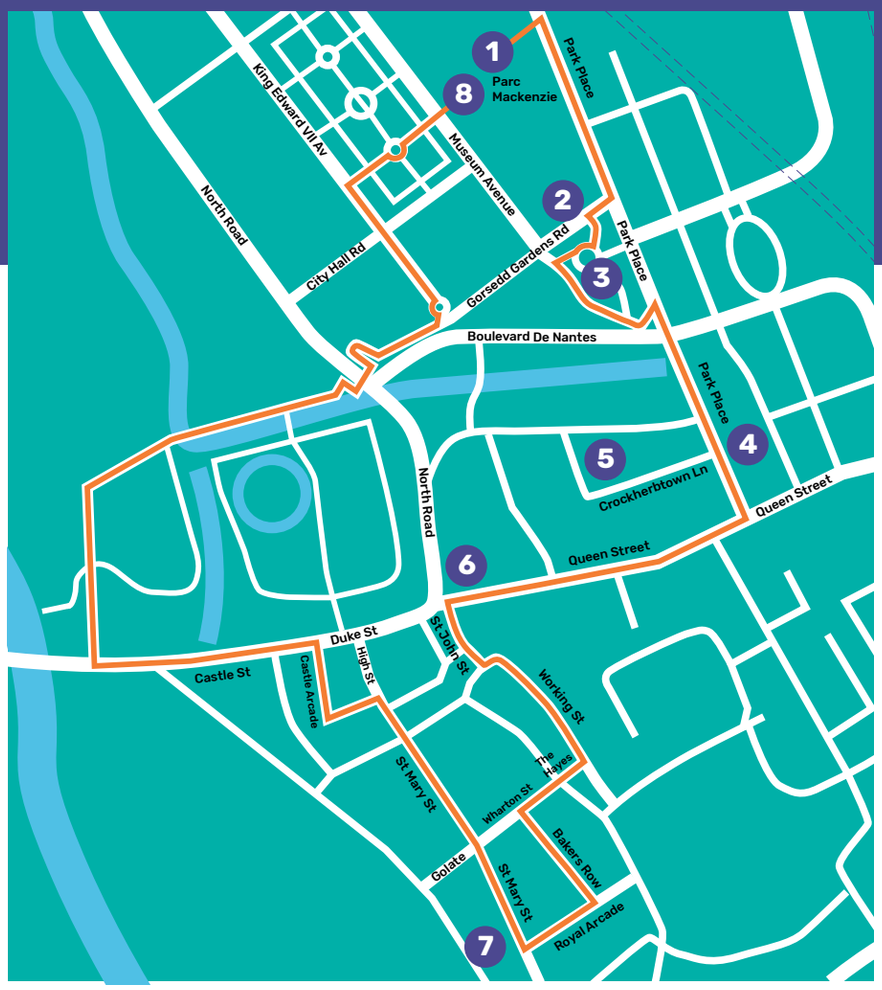
On Monday Dr. Stanton Coit, the well-known ethical leader, addressed a crowded meeting in the Ruskin Institute, Cardiff. Mr H. M. Thompson presided, and in a very able speech briefly traced the history of the ethical movement, paying a tribute to the lecturer of the evening. Dr. Coit, who had a very hearty reception, explained the methods adopted by ethical teachers in the formation of societies, and criticised severely the attitude of the Church towards all democratic agencies. At the close of his masterly address he answered several questions, all tending to show that ethical leaders worked with those in Christian denominations, so far as a common basis was possible, and summed up the end in view as the betterment of man's condition with the harmonious development of his whole nature. It was character that was the chief factor in economic advancement. At the close an Ethical Society was formed, about 20 coming forward, Mr H. M. Thompson being one of the number. It is expected that Professor Mackenzie will deliver a course of University extension lectures at the Ruskin Institute, the present headquarters of the new society.

5 CROCKHERBTOWN LANE

Off the south side of Crockherbtown Lane once lay Paradise Place, home to the Ruskin Institute, where the Cardiff Ethical Society held their meetings. The Society was inaugurated in January 1904 with a lecture by Stanton Coit, a leader of the Ethical (later humanist) movement. Ethical Societies emerged in the late 19th century as groups aiming to bring people together on the basis of shared values, without reference to supernatural ideas. They sought to separate morals from religion, providing a space for socialising and education, as well the opportunity for good works in the wider community.

6 ANEURIN BEVAN

This statue of Aneurin Bevan was created by Welsh sculptor Robert Thomas, and unveiled in 1987. Thomas himself was described by obituarist Meic Stephens as 'staunchly humanist' and 'attracted as a sculptor to subjects whom he revered for their humanitarian ideals'. This statue commemorates one of Wales' most famous humanists: Aneurin 'Nye' Bevan.



As Minister of Health following the ravages of the Second World War, Bevan was a driving force in the creation of the National Health Service and the realisation of the welfare state. Jennie Lee, politician, humanist, and Bevan's wife, wrote of Nye: 'He was not a cold-blooded rationalist. He was no calculating machine. He was a great humanist whose religion lay in loving his fellow-men and trying to serve them'.

7 ROYAL HOTEL

The Royal Hotel was the site of the last public banquet of explorer Captain Robert Falcon Scott 1868-1912 and fellow members of the ill-fated Antarctic expedition. They departed from Cardiff aboard the Terra Nova on 15 June 1910, beginning their journey to the South Pole. The party of five would die on their return from the Pole in early 1912.

Louis Bernacchi, one of Scott's Discovery expedition team, wrote: 'Truth and right and justice were his gods, and these did not come from any religious sense. They were something within himself. He led a decent human life because he was a decent human being.'

8 CARDIFF UNIVERSITY

Many humanists have been associated with Cardiff University, as students and as staff. Mary Adams, the first woman television producer at the BBC, gained a first class degree in botany here in 1921. It was Adams who gave a young David Attenborough his start in broadcasting. Other humanist alumni include former Humanists UK President (and current Vice President) Professor Alice Roberts.