

# Cardiff

## From the Industrial Revolution to Yemeni Mosques

Birmingham-Karen Dabrowska

Britain's contact with the Middle East brought an Arab flavour to two of the major tourist attractions in Wales: Cardiff Castle and Cardiff Bay (formerly Tiger Bay).



Wales had several stands at the British Travel Trade Fair 2005 held at Birmingham's National Exhibition Centre (NEC) in March. Four hundred exhibitors promoting tourist attractions in England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales took part in the fair.

Last year statisticians estimated the UK would attract 26.3 million overseas visitors by the year end and 27.1 million by the end of 2005.

Cardiff Castle is one of Wales leading tourist attractions. Situated in the very heart of the capital, alongside the city centre shopping area and the magnificent Bute Park, the castle's enchanting fairytale towers conceal an elaborate and splendid interior.

The castle dates back to the coming of the Romans to Britain in the first century AD. It fell into the possession of many noble families until, in 1766, it passed by marriage to the Bute family. The 2nd Marquess of Bute was responsible for turning Cardiff into the world's greatest coal exporting port which attracted Yemeni workers – Britain's first Arab immigrants who built the first mosques.

From 1866 the 3rd Marquess employed the genius architect William Burges to transform the castle lodgings. Within gothic towers he created lavish and opulent interiors, rich murals, stained glass, marble, gilding and elaborate wood carvings. Each breathtaking room has its own special theme, including Mediterranean gardens inspired by the marquess visits to Morocco. The most fascinating room in the castle is the Arab room with a pure, 24 carat gold ceiling.

Cardiff owes much of its history to the Industrial Revolution of the 1790s, which stimulated mining in the valleys of South Wales. The rapidly increasing iron and coal trade was the catalyst for the construction of a number of docks during the 1830s. During this time, Butetown and the surrounding dockland area grew into a cosmopolitan community with seafarers from all round the world including Yemen, making Cardiff their home.

After the Second World War the demand for coal slumped and by the 1960s coal exports virtually ceased. By the early 1980s Cardiff Bay

had become a neglected wasteland of derelict docks and mudflats.

The regeneration started in 1987 when the Cardiff Bay Development Corporation decided to give the dock area a new lease of life. Priority was given to involving all the communities which had made Cardiff Bay their home: Greeks, Somalis, Chinese, West Africans, Yemenis, Poles, Norwegians, Dutch etc.

"Fifty languages were spoken in the area and all the communities integrated and worked together when the bay was developed", said Jane Sullivan of the Cardiff Harbour Authority. "When the rebuilding began, jobs and training was first offered to the locals. The re-development included the building of the Atlantic Wharf Leisure Village and turning Mermaid Quay into a cultural area with restaurants and cafes serving food from around the world."

Cardiff is now an international city in Wales: the minarets of the two largest mosques are the most visible signs of the Yemeni community. The Butetown History and Arts Centre and the Cardiff Bay Visitors Centre highlights the community's activities in the bay and in Wales. Since the re-development, Cardiff Bay has attracted a lot of interest from residents of the Gulf states who are eager to buy property. ■