

The poet in the park

Let me take you on a guided tour of our Swansea Parks in search of the poet. Beginning in the West where the Gower gives up its moors, rattles over the cattle grid and dives into the magic of Clyne Castle gardens. The park nestles in a sheltered cwm with its collection of Giant conifers, rhododendrons, and handkerchief tree. Springing from the Japanese water garden a maze of paths criss-cross the chuckling stream down its high arched vale, loud with the adventures of generations of children both young and old. And then to come across, always for the first time, the fairy tale tower wrapped in its iron steps. In my childhoods fancy it reached high above the canopy where with my two fist telescope I could gaze pirate eyed out over the glorious bay and town to where the distant chimneys of Port Talbot puffed their perfect white plumes against the dark shadow of the purple hills. What children's dreams have sailed from there? Whilst below in the hide and seek paradise of fern and giant hogweed the crouched children of the hunt and hunted seek out the lions dens and cathedral halls hung with gaudy candelabras of blossom and bathed in ever shifting pools of light.

Moving East around the bay we come to Singleton park rolling stately down to the bay with its noble trees and ample grassy acres for rounders, cricket or Frisbee throwing. Near the North entrance of the park you will discover the botanic gardens situated in an old walled garden. Exotic and rare plants are on display all year round but for the most spectacular and dizzying of shows visit in August. Not only are the gardens enjoyed throughout the year but over generations. My 99 year old relation on hearing that my mother delights in the garden, remembered how her mother also used to walk there from the Hafod in the 1920s to enjoy the flowers. "How wonderful", she said. "How wonderful"! But Singleton has something for young and old with its playground and boating lake where the pedalos are gracious swans or fierce Welsh dragons and are veered and steered by upright dads to the hoots and embarrassment of their flock of protesting children, whilst orderly processions of ducklings steer a sober line behind their mum and make for the safety of the shore.

A little further into town we come to Brynmill Park. A child sized park by comparison whose known railed and gaited boundary contains a world within itself. Upon its lake, which as a child I deemed a sea I sailed my paper boats. I fished for sticklebacks with cupped hands and whipped them into jam jars from which they gazed unblinking at an unfamiliar and circular world. I gazed back triumphant at my puny spiny prey. In my youth the park contained a miniature zoo of monkeys and parakeets whose antics entertained us with their gymnastic cheek and raucous tomfoolery but now is replaced with a nature discovery centre with more educational aims in mind. Yet still within its bounds this world has room for floral displays and shrubberies in which one could dream oneself a desert island or tropical forest where the comforting clack of the bowling green is the call of a giant frog.

A little further up the hill there is the poets inspiration of Cwmdonkin Park, a Victorian gem lacking now only its bandstand and reservoir but with its restored drinking fountain from which so many ships have sailed. Much of the poets haunt lives on within its Iron gates the tennis courts still echoing to the sound of ball and racket on weekend afternoons, and the shrubberies still rustle with the sounds of rummaging blackbirds and the ghosts of school mitching, fag puffing children. And on the benches at the top of the path one may still find the outsider with his carrier bag of cheap drink, eking out the day watching the old ladies, the pram pushers, the outcast stick crazed dogs, the dreamers and those who seek an oasis in the day. And if one asks him has he heard of Dylan Thomas he will tell you, "Not personal like. He lived down by there" And without looking up he will wave a dirty cuff towards the West of the park where in an upstairs window the poet wrote "The ball I threw whilst playing in the park has not yet reached the ground".

In Parks we are unmade and made again in our true selves. Discover your poet in the park.

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