

u3a Holiday June 2026 - Newport, Cardiff and the Royal Mint

Day 1

On 15 June we set off on our annual jolly, this time to Newport due to its closeness to Cardiff. We were all on time and by 9am were on our way.

After a comfort stop, we set off to Gloucester to visit the cathedral where we had a tour booked. Unfortunately we arrived late which meant that our tour was shortened but it was still highly informative with a look at the tomb of King Edward II.

There was time to get some lunch before we set off for our final destination, the Holiday Inn in Newport arriving in time for some quiet time before dinner.

Pam Simpson

Day 2

On our second day of the holiday we made the short journey to Cardiff - the capital of Wales. Stephen, our tour guide for the morning joined us on board our coach. He proved to be full of information and good humour providing an excellent and entertaining backdrop to start our day.

Examples of this could well be a Mr Thomas who had his leg buried in one churchyard and his body in another! Scott who launched his fated expedition from here as Cardiff had funded much of the exploration. The boat being returned to the harbour at the end of this time.

Cardiff did not gain city status until 1905. The wealth of the city was amassed from the coal industry during the industrial time of the mid 1800 to 1900s. The coal is of high quality and back then there was plenty of it. A railway and harbour aided distribution. It was boom time and many moved here for employment attracting miners and dockworkers from around the world. On our tour of the docks Stephen pointed out a Norwegian Church built on the dock obviously for migrant workers - sparkling white it was indeed a lovely sight.

Famous names like Roald Dahl and Shirley Bassey have their heritage here! We were to learn more about the life of the miners later in the week - a stark contrast to the wealth exhibited in Cardiff at that time. Many industrialists invested in the area and subsequently made a lot of money. On our tour there were several buildings that reflected this wealth as in the Post Office, City Hall and the Museum and Gallery. The most prestigious family at that time were the Butes. They put much energy into demonstrating their wealth with many lavish buildings. Stephen explained that we would see this for ourselves in the afternoon at the castle.

The closure of the mines led to a depressed dock and harbour and in 1987 the Cardiff Bay Project set about regenerating the area this included hotels, offices, homes and impressive commercial and leisure facilities.

Amongst these were the Welsh Government offices – the Senedd and the Welsh Millenium Centre. We had a short break at the latter to look at this highly unusual building. Made of Welsh hardwood, steel and slate it was an impressive theatre and cultural centre. Stephen reminded us of the high-profile TV programmes and filming that goes on here as in Torchwood, Dr Who and Casualty. Inside the auditorium areas looked fabulous. The tour continued with a drive through Penarth where the first morse code message was transmitted in 1897. The views were spectacular and we learnt of the ingenious Tidal Barrage. This was completed in 1990s transferring the tidal estuary into a freshwater lake!

Our time with Stephen ended at the Castle where we spent the rest of the day. The castle in the middle of the town has two distinct parts to it. The “old” castle consists of a Motte and Bailey type structure. It is a Norman fortress of 11th Century built on a Roman Fort. Many climbed up to the stone keep and walked the battlements and tunnels the latter used as air raid shelters during the war. The “new” castle was built by the Bute family to be used as a home in a truly exotic Victorian Gothic style. The architect was the famously eccentric William Burgess. It has been said that his work was fuelled by his bohemian lifestyle and an affinity to opium! It was very different and quite extraordinary.

Outside the castle there were very smart Victorian and Edwardian arcades and markets to explore and the usual retail opportunity. Some of the group used the time to visit the Art Gallery others to Bute Park. The city was very busy - it was hosting a Take That concert in the Cardiff Stadium that night! There was time to sample Welsh Cakes cooked before us - the best way to eat them while still warm. Some of us continued the Welsh theme with lunch of Welsh Rarebit!

Cardiff gave us a full and enjoyable day. It proved to be a city that maybe one should return to for a closer look at those wonderful buildings.

Pam Simpson

Day 3 - Along River Wye and The Forest of Dean Railway

Day three started on a high note: no rain and reasonably warm. We arrived at Symond's Yat to experience a voyage down the River Wye. Our captain, Richard was also the proprietor of a chalet selling ice cream. Richard explained that the Wye is the fifth longest river in the country, flowing from Mount Llyn in South Wales, forming the border between Wales and England before entering the Severn Estuary. During the Industrial Revolution it became badly polluted, but now is clean enough to support salmon, with the largest weighing 48lb caught in 1967. We enjoyed a tranquil trip along the river seeing the latest broods of ducklings and goslings.



Back on the coach we continued the Wye theme going to the lovely town of Monmouth for lunch. Monmouth can trace its history back to the Romans; the famous chronicler Geoffrey of Monmouth was educated at the Priory and Henry V was born here. Unfortunately, we didn't have time to visit the Castle, but we did walk across the Monnow Bridge, the last surviving medieval fortified bridge.

Somewhat reluctantly we left lovely Monmouth behind and went on to the Dean Forest Railway. The Forest of Dean, Gloucestershire, was an important resource for the Romans, who used the coal for heating and iron smelting, as well as hunting. It became an important hunting area for the Normans and is now an attractive leisure area. The railway has five stations and we journeyed from Norchard to Parkend and back again. A lively shop at Norchard encouraged some of us to buy railway sets for grandchildren.

After a busy day, we set off in the rain that had been threatening all day to our hotel for a convivial dinner and evening.

Penny Forsdyke

DAY 4 – Rhondda Valley and the Royal Mint

It was an earlier start as we boarded the coach and headed for the Rhondda Valley.

Our first stop was the Royal Mint at Llantrisant. Here, in the heart of Welsh Wales, we were met by our guide who had a commanding voice and a distinctive Irish accent! He took us through display and exhibition areas, explaining the history of the Royal Mint and also the procedures from blank metal to finished coin. We were led into the very noisy factory area where an average of 4 to 5 million coins are made each day, including those for other countries around the world. Some members enjoyed taking the opportunity to strike a commemorative 200 Years of Wildlife £2 coin, as a gift for grandchildren or a keepsake for themselves.

We thanked our guide who had supplied us with so much interesting and enlightening information during the 45 minute tour. After a browse in the shop and a drink in the café, we were back on the road again.

Our visit to Rhondda Heritage Park began for most of us with a leisurely “pit stop” lunch at the site’s Caffè Bracchi. The Park has various exhibition areas full of artefacts relating to the coal mining industry and displays of the miners’ clothes and homes. There is also a new digital and interactive exhibition, where history comes to life. However, the Underground Guided Tour, led by a former Rhonda Valley coal miner, was certainly an unforgettable experience. Sharing his knowledge, sense of humour and hard hats, he took us underground in a cage and back in time, bringing us to the surface again on a simulated runaway dram. It was a thrilling end to a unique underground tour. There was still time for another visit to the café and a wander round the park, before returning for our last night at Newport.

Jenny Porter

Day 5 – Homeward Bound

On our way home; we made a stop in Worcester. Some of the group chose to visit the Cathedral, whilst others had a relaxing coffee in the very pretty shopping centre.

As a single person I have recently joined U3A. On the morning of the holiday I was very nervous, but within minutes of joining the coach I was made to feel very welcome. All aspects of the holiday were enjoyable; it’s difficult to select a favourite destination. The holiday was well organised from the moment of stepping on to the coach to leaving upon our return to Lincoln. I am looking forward to the next holiday along with the other adventures that U3A offers.

Ann Thompson