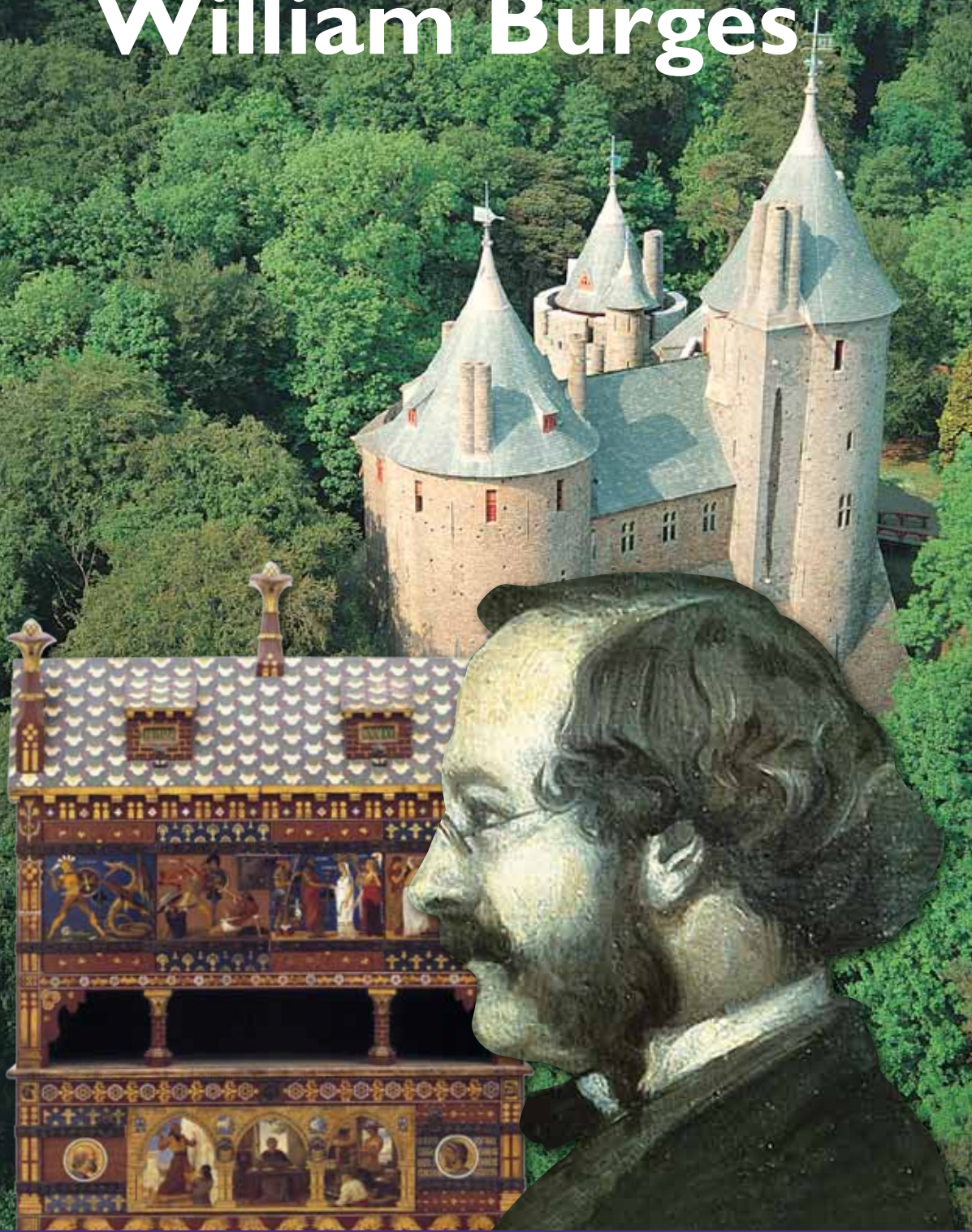


FOLLOW THE FOOTSTEPS

# Heroes and Heroines of Wales

## William Burges



 Cadw



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Our story is set in the 1800s, when Gothic (medieval) architecture was again the height of fashion. Inspired by visions of chivalry and romance, wealthy families built houses with turrets, pointed arches, battlements, stained-glass windows and heraldry.

# William Burges

'Ugly Burges, who designs lovely things...'



The ceiling of the drawing room at Castell Coch is decorated with a cascade of stars, butterflies and birds



A photograph of Lord Bute in 1872, taken two years after his character had been thinly disguised as the hero in Benjamin Disraeli's novel, Lothair

Source: Cardiff Castle Collections, Cardiff Council

William Burges was said to be the most gifted and well-loved architect and designer of his time. His looks were such that his friends fondly called him 'Ugly Burges'. He also had very poor eyesight. Despite this, he went on to design the most beautiful, romantic places, including the fairy-tale palace of Castell Coch in south Wales.

**B**urges came from a wealthy family, so he was able to spend time travelling in Europe. He studied architecture, and picked up ideas which he used for the rest of his career.

Burges worked on cathedrals, universities and stately homes. Two of his most famous works were the Welsh castles which he restored for John Patrick Crichton-Stuart, 3rd marquess of Bute.

## Clashing characters but perfect partners

Burges met Lord Bute in 1865. The two men couldn't have been more different. Burges was loud and sociable, known for his witty conversation and sense of humour. Lord Bute was quiet, serious and loved being on his own. But both men had a passion for bringing back Gothic-style architecture. Lord Bute, said to be the richest man in Britain, became Burges's patron.

## Cardiff Castle — the commission of a lifetime

Burges's first job for Lord Bute was to redesign Cardiff Castle. Lord Bute disliked the way the castle had been restored over the years and wanted it transformed into a medieval palace. It was a massive project, involving building towers and a chapel, and decorating the rooms throughout in lavish style.

While Burges was still working on the project, Lord Bute asked him to look at rebuilding Castell Coch nearby. It was much smaller than Cardiff Castle, but in complete ruins.

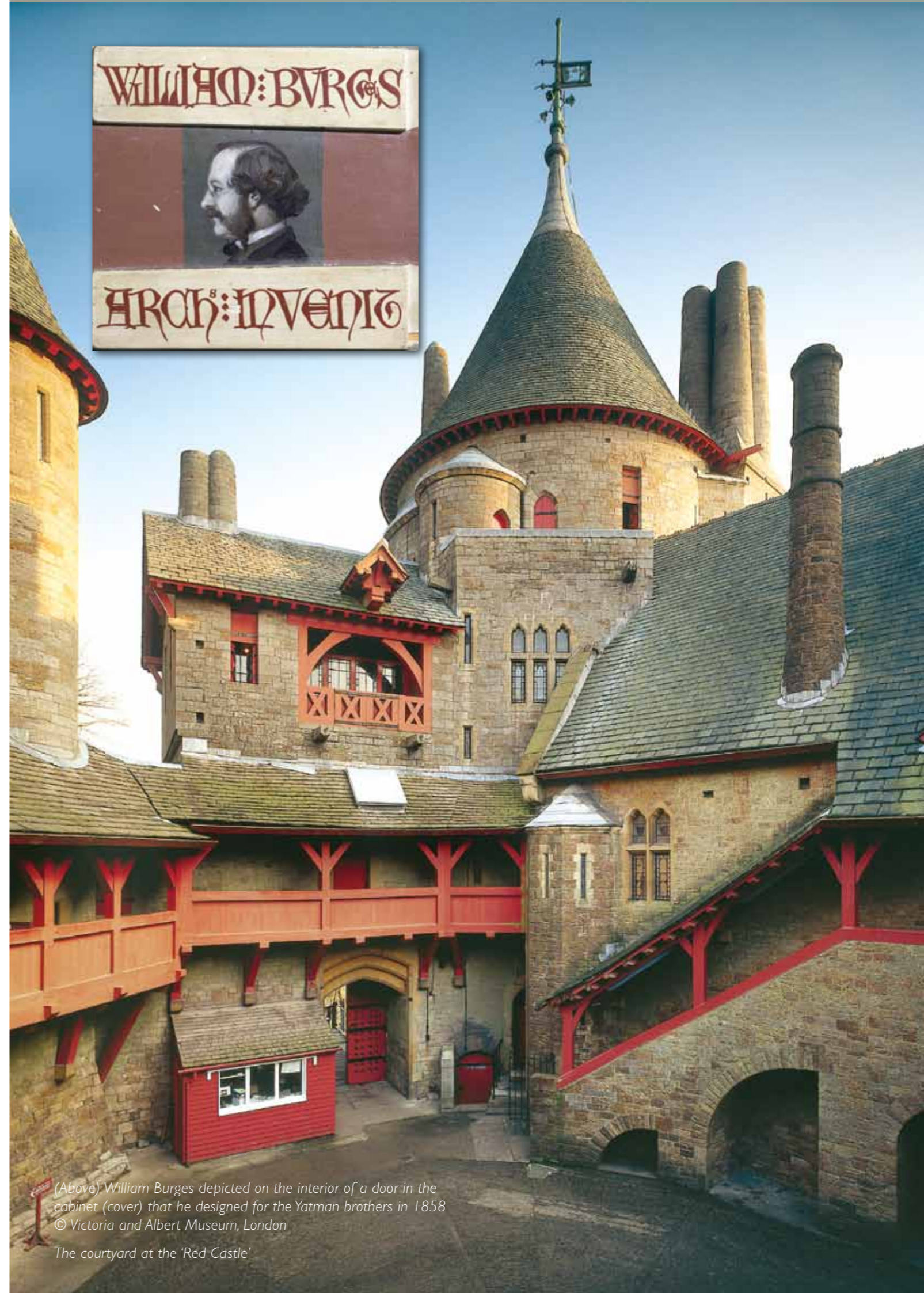
## Castell Coch — from ruined fort to romantic folly

Burges rose to the challenge. He transformed Castell Coch into a magnificent fairy-tale castle with three towers. In each tower were apartments, decorated in luxurious fashion. Although a medieval fantasy, the castle had all the mod cons of the day — a large kitchen, flushing toilets and central heating.

Cover image: The Yatman Cabinet © Victoria and Albert Museum, London



The beautiful ceiling inside Castell Coch



(Above) William Burges depicted on the interior of a door in the cabinet (cover) that he designed for the Yatman brothers in 1858 © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

The courtyard at the 'Red Castle'



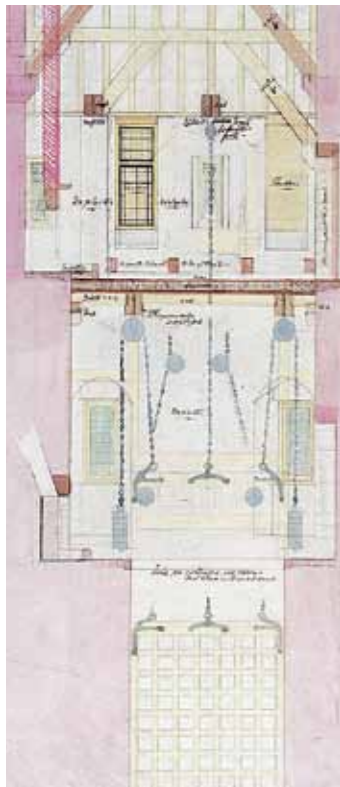
The three towers of Castell Coch

Source: Skyscan Balloon Photography for Cadw



An engraving taken from a photograph of Gwendolen Fitzalan-Howard on the day of her marriage to the third marquess of Bute in 1872

Source: National Museum of Wales



The working drawings for Castell Coch

Source: Cardiff Castle Collections, Cardiff Council



The Drawing Room in Castell Coch

### Last visit leads to tragedy

While visiting Cardiff in 1881, Burges took a long ride in a horse-drawn carriage. He caught a chill, which left him paralysed. Three weeks later he died, aged only 53.

Burges was a lifelong bachelor, so left no family. But his friends and colleagues were devastated. John Starling Chapple, Burges's faithful assistant for more than 20 years, wrote 'I have hardly got to realize my lonely position yet. He was almost all the world to me.'

Lady Bute, wife of his patron, wrote, 'Dear Burges, ugly Burges, who designs lovely things...'

(Friends used the nickname 'Ugly Burges' to distinguish him from the painter John Bagnold Burgess who they called 'Pretty Burgess'.)

### Design lives on

Luckily Burges had been meticulous in his planning. He had prepared detailed working drawings, and written instructions for everything. This enabled craftsmen to continue the restoration of Castell Coch.

Ten years later, the Gothic-style castle was completed. It still survives today as a memorial to the eccentric genius William Burges, a man described by Lord Bute as 'soul-inspiring'.

# Follow the footsteps

You've read the story of William Burges and Lord Bute, now visit the fantasy castles they designed...

## Castell Coch

The amazing Castell Coch will take your breath away. With its conical towers rising out of the woods, it's like stepping into a fairy-tale. Inside, you'll see the lavish decorations designed by William Burges.

- Explore the Banqueting Hall, the only room that was completed before Burges died. What do you think he felt when he looked at his work?
- See the magnificent Drawing Room with its turquoise and gold ceiling decorated with a cascade of stars, butterflies and birds. Find the murals that tell the stories of Aesop's Fables.
- Discover the glorious Lady Bute's bedroom with its red and gold dome ceiling, painted with birds, animals, angels, flowers and fruits. Can you spot the monkeys playing above her bed? Lord Bute didn't approve of them!
- Act like an actor – many movies have been filmed here, as well as episodes of *Doctor Who* and *Merlin*.



One of the chairs in Lady Bute's bedroom (above), and Winged Psyche, beloved of Eros, sits on the chimneypiece in Lady Bute's bedroom. (right)



Cardiff Castle

## Cardiff Castle

Visit the place where Burges and Lord Bute first worked together. Lord Bute was incredibly rich, and Cardiff Castle was just one of his many stately homes.

- Step into an Arabian Nights' story in the Arab Room, its rich gold ceiling like honeycomb. This was the room Burges worked on during his last visit before he died.
- Unravel the stories of medieval knights and monks told in murals in the Banqueting Hall.
- Find mermaids and monsters in Lady Bute's bathroom. Mermaids were one of Burges's favourite mythical creatures.



Caerphilly Castle.

## Caerphilly Castle

On the other side of Caerphilly mountain from Castell Coch is Caerphilly Castle, the largest castle in Wales. It was restored by the 4th marquess of Bute, son of Lord Bute who restored Cardiff Castle and Castell Coch. The castle was used recently for filming episodes of the TV series, *Merlin*.

Visit [www.cadw.wales.gov.uk](http://www.cadw.wales.gov.uk) to explore the sites.