

# Better Bristol

The Bristol Civic Society magazine - Issue 17 Autumn/Winter 2020

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an independent force for a **better Bristol**







**Front Cover:** Banksy's take on Vermeer (Hanover Place, Spike Island) receives a face mask. Photo: Mike Manson.

## Bristol Civic Society: Who's Who

### General Enquiries

**Membership Secretary:** David Giles  
0117 9621592

[membership@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:membership@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk)

**General Enquiries:** Alan Morris  
[enquiries@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk)

### Organisation

**Chair:** Simon Birch  
[chair@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:chair@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk)

**Secretary:** Mike Bates  
[secretary@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:secretary@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk)

**Treasurer:** John Jones  
[treasurer@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:treasurer@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk)

### Communications and Events

**Events:** Nic Billane  
[events@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:events@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk)

**Better Bristol Editor:** Mike Manson  
[mageditor@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:mageditor@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk)

**Webmaster:** David Demery  
[webmaster@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:webmaster@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk)

**Web and E-Mail Bulletin Editor:** Alan Morris  
[webeditor@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:webeditor@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk)

**Building Awards Scheme:** Simon Birch  
[awards@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:awards@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk)

**Blue Plaques:** Gordon Young  
[plaques@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:plaques@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk)

### Campaigning

**Major Sites Group:** Simon Birch  
[msg@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:msg@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk)

**Public Spaces, Transport and Planning:** Alan Morris  
[alan@morrisfastmail.fm](mailto:alan@morrisfastmail.fm)

**Planning Applications Group:** John Payne  
[johnpayne997@btinternet.com](mailto:johnpayne997@btinternet.com)

### Links with Other Bristol Groups

**Heritage Forum:** Steve Davis  
[Steve@noma-uk.com](mailto:Steve@noma-uk.com)

**Planning Network:**  
[networkadministrator@bristolnbn.net](mailto:networkadministrator@bristolnbn.net)

**Bristol Walking Alliance:** Alan Morris  
[enquiries@bristolwalkingalliance.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@bristolwalkingalliance.org.uk)

**Conservation Advisory Panel:** Stephen Wickham  
[stephen\\_wickham@btinternet.com](mailto:stephen_wickham@btinternet.com)

**Historic England:** Simon Birch  
[simon.birch7@gmail.com](mailto:simon.birch7@gmail.com)

BRISTOL CIVIC SOCIETY

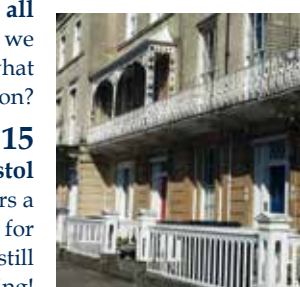
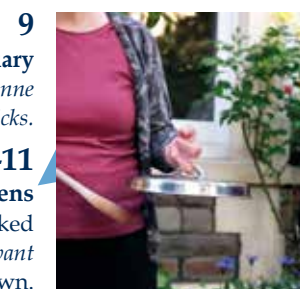
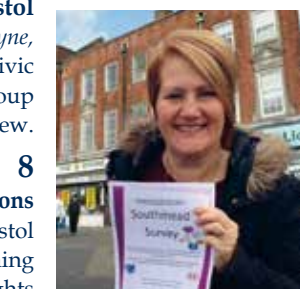
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**EDITOR**  
Mike Manson  
[mageditor@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:mageditor@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk)

**DESIGNER**  
Tracey Feltham  
[info@quierecreative.co.uk](mailto:info@quierecreative.co.uk)

**ADVISORY PANEL**  
Alan Morris, Eugene Byrne, Nic Billane, Simon Birch.

**DISTRIBUTION TEAM**  
Led by John Payne.

**PRINTERS**  
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## The chairman writes What strange and challenging times!, writes *Simon Birch*.

Who could have foreseen the events of the past few months and the impact on our lives and on communities and businesses throughout Bristol?

The activities of the Civic Society have been inevitably impacted with no indoor events being possible since mid-March and no design awards possible this year. Our AGM was due in early June and was planned for the renovated St Michael's Church on St Michael's Hill. We have now decided to replace that with an online event in early September. I was delighted to see that work on St Michael's is going very well although slightly behind the original programme.

Despite the pandemic our Planning Applications and Major Sites Groups have been very busy as you will see reported elsewhere in this magazine. Development activity never seems to diminish in Bristol!

There are major schemes in the offing. At Waterfront Place – site of the proposed Harbourside Centre for the Performing Arts nearly 25 years ago, a spectacular design by Behnisch Architekten – a rather more prosaic development is proposed for offices and hotel and with no concert hall in sight! Please look at the plans <http://waterfrontplacebristol.co.uk/> and ask yourself – are these good enough for such an important site?

We also hear rumours that new proposals are emerging at long last for those buildings on the edge of Castle Park, on the corner of High Street and Wine Street, and including the former Bank of England. Will the Dutch House

be part of the new designs? Definitely one for you to watch out for.

During lockdown my regular walks enabled me to watch the emergence of Castle Park View (on the former ambulance site) rising on the far side of Castle Park, very tall, initially slender but increasingly bulky as floors are added. Controversial but providing much needed homes and definitely homes with a view! And work has continued on another major scheme – Redcliff Quarter – which will have an equally significant impact on the skyline once completed.

Towards Bristol Temple Meads, construction of the major office development on Temple Way is progressing rapidly as are the several projects along the increasingly "canyon like" Avon Street. Please go and see for yourselves just how fast Bristol is changing in that part of the City.

Of course, all this change and

development means that it is absolutely vital for Bristol Civic Society to continue to be active and vigilant. We are very glad of all your support and are delighted that our efforts are recognised as membership of the Society continues to rise.

The Civic Society has a long and well established pedigree and has always campaigned to promote good quality new development and to stop unsuitable projects. We were saddened therefore to learn of the passing of Anne Hicks (see p.9.), for many years a vigorous campaigner for Bristol together with her husband Jerry, both of them long standing members of the Civic Society. Anne, your contribution was hugely appreciated and you'll be much missed.

**Simon Birch**

Chair, Bristol Civic Society  
[chair@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:chair@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk)

Castle Park View (on the former ambulance site). Controversial but providing much needed homes and definitely homes with a view!



**Not already a member? Why not join TODAY!**

See page 27 for more details...



# So, what next?

Eugene Byrne takes a glimpse at an uncertain future.

**T**he future is strange and uncertain, with all manner of social and economic changes heading toward us.

These are not just consequences of the Coronavirus. Other factors are also starting to alter Bristol dramatically - climate change, the evolving age and ethnic profile of the city, plus Brexit and the politics of the wider world.

Here are a few things which are (probably!) going to change in and about Bristol in the years to come ...

## Fewer offices

Lockdown introduced workers and company accountants alike to the joys of working from home (WFH), and many public and private sector organisations and their staff want more in future, with staff only going into the office a few days a week, or even less, saving themselves the commute and saving the firm on expensive office space.

Estate agents and property developers are already in on the act, with blurb about how the homes they are marketing are ideally suited to WFH with "flexible spaces" and built-in online infrastructure (pipes and holes for your wires, basically).

Speaking to *Better Bristol* in July, Cllr Paul Smith, the Council Cabinet member responsible for housing, and the man tasked with building thousands of new homes, said that as yet, many developers were still "bullish" about building new offices.

"But I do wonder what the future is for other ones, I can't see people wanting to sit in commuter traffic every day of the week if they have been able to work effectively from home.

"However I can't see people wanting to be entirely at home as we need human contact."

## The slums of tomorrow?

Over the last 20 years Bristol has seen a huge migration of residents back into the central parts of the city, with the development of apartment blocks and older industrial buildings, warehouses and even churches being turned into flats, too. While office buildings can be re-purposed for residential use, expect conflict between the Council and developers over space and quality standards.



Fewer cars on the road but people will be reluctant to use buses.

## Fewer cars

Recent months have seen numerous changes to our streets, with more cycle lanes, pedestrianisation, wider pavements and the closure of Bristol Bridge to private vehicles. Some changes are a result of the Covid crisis, while others have long been in the pipeline; closing most of the Old City area to cars, for instance.

The trend towards more people of all ages riding bicycles has been turbocharged with families and individuals taking to two wheels in lockdown, while e-scooters (initially only for hire rather than sale) are likely to appear on the streets in growing numbers when a local trial begins.

For more on local transport developments, see article on page 16-17 of this edition.

## Rising unemployment

Many have already lost their jobs, and there is more unemployment to come. A report by the South West TUC in July reckoned that almost a third of the workforce in the region needed support from the government's job retention and self-employed support schemes, and that these were the same people whose jobs were most at risk.

The Covid crisis has accelerated the trend towards online shopping and



Expect conflict between the Council and developers over space and quality standards.

away from traditional shops. Economic uncertainties have also made many people unwilling to make big spending decisions before they know what their own employment position is. While the big supermarkets will be OK, there's a question mark over the future of Broadmead (particularly the Galleries), Cabot Circus and The Mall.

Many businesses in the leisure and hospitality industries will go under, and increased working from home means that many retailers and food/drink outlets dependent on office workers may go out of business.

Bristol's aerospace industry already faced an anxious future because of Brexit but the massive hit that the aviation industry has taken from Coronavirus has made things worse. Airbus, Rolls Royce and GKN Aerospace have all made staff redundant this summer.

## Entertainment will go online and outdoors

Most local cinemas, galleries, museums and theatres were closed through the spring and summer, as were live music venues and nightclubs. Plans to re-open in the autumn could still be scuppered if the infection rate rises.

One local cinema expert *Better Bristol* spoke to said, "Longer term, the multiplexes are better placed as they can handle social distancing more easily. They normally operate at well below full capacity averaged over the week anyway."

Given the vast amount of entertainment most of us have consumed on TV or online in 2020, he adds, "There's the question mark over whether audiences will ever go back, and whether the industry even needs cinemas."

Few people buy music on CD anymore, most live music acts, from orchestras through to smelly garage bands, rely on live performances to make a living. Most have now given up on 2020, praying that things get better next year, and perhaps with more drive-in gigs, though drive-in events scheduled at Filton airfield this summer were cancelled because people didn't fancy paying high ticket prices to watch bands in their cars.

Parks have enjoyed a renaissance in 2020 and it's been suggested that dilapidated bandstands could be refurbished for live outdoor performances (of all kinds, not just brass bands) where audiences can watch in socially distanced comfort. As long as it doesn't rain.



Lockdown introduced workers and company accountants alike to the joys of working from home.



Entertainment will go online and outdoors.

## The digital economy will be even more important

Until an artificial intelligence can create a blockbuster movie (and the best-selling novel it's based on), there will be more opportunities in the creative industries, supplying entertainment to a population with more leisure time. These are already a major export earner for Britain, particularly TV, film and computer games.

Bristol is well-placed, with celebrity firms like Aardman only the apex of a booming digital economy and there's more to come. At the end of June, for instance, it was announced that Bristol University is to lead a £46m initiative to develop "new digital formats and technologies across fiction, documentary, games, and live performance" and which also includes the other local universities, plus BT, Aardman, the BBC and the Old Vic. It's claimed this could generate more than 700 jobs and boost the region's economy by over £200m.

## Fewer Chinese students on the streets?

In recent years, the huge numbers of students attracted from China have been a hugely lucrative earner for both Bristol University and UWE. They have been a common sight on the streets of central Bristol and Clifton for many years, but the virus leaves a huge question mark over the numbers coming this autumn. Growing political tensions over the crackdown on democracy in Hong Kong and the abuses of human rights in Xinjiang may also be a factor.

## Bristol free port?

One of the government's proposals for post-Brexit trade is to create a number of low-tax, low-regulation "free ports", and Bristol is a strong contender to become one of them. Contrary to rumour, these already exist in numbers in the EU, but there's likely to be a European crackdown on them as they tend to attract business from money-launderers and smugglers. A report in the *Financial Times* in August suggested that the financial and job-creation advantages of free ports is overstated, but in hard economic times who knows what might happen?

## Age apartheid?

As the 1950s/60s "baby boomer" generation reaches retirement age, the UK has a growing number of pensioners to support. Many can look

forward to comfortable retirement, but many can't. As travel into central Bristol by car becomes more difficult, and as travel by bus will be avoided by many for as long as the virus is around, the city will have a growing number of "invisible" pensioners in poverty. The social care crisis which existed before the virus struck is likely to be worse before it gets better without a massive injection of taxpayers' money.

## It's not all bad news economically

Down the road, the Hinkley Point 'C' project continues, with hundreds of new jobs in the offing. A survey in July revealed that Bristol spawned more new online companies during lockdown than any other UK city outside London. These included delivery services, personal training firms, cleaning companies and more.

There is clear evidence of a Brexit-induced "brain drain", with many of the brightest and best Britons opting to move overseas. Already the number of Brits opting to move to EU countries since the referendum has risen by 30%. It may be that mistrust in the government and its handling of the Covid crisis to date will accelerate this trend. This, however, will hurt poorer parts of the country far more than Bristol, which successive surveys over the years reveal is one of the few UK cities outside London which attracts graduates.



# Major Developments in Bristol

Simon Birch, John Payne, Alan Morris of Bristol Civic Society's Major Sites Group give an overview.



Waterfront Place offices from Arnolfini.

## Waterfront Place

This prominent site is located on the Harbour at the end of the former warehouses (next to the former Bordeaux Quay) towards the Lloyds Building. It's owned by the City Council which has invited developers to bid for the site. The winning scheme comprises two buildings – an office block next to the Harbour and an adjacent hotel fronting onto Millennium Square.

The Society is critical of the Council's process and would have preferred that a design brief had been prepared for the site, with public involvement, prior to any marketing. The Society would also prefer a more "civic" function in this prominent location or at very least a much greater component of publicly accessible development. The development is considered to be too tall, masking important views of the cathedral and other historic sights, and being out of context with the much lower warehouses along St Augustine's Reach. The development is also

considered too bulky especially with the office part of the scheme. Finally, the design of the hotel is considered to be of disappointing design quality where it fronts onto Millennium Square.

## Caravan Club site, Cumberland Road

The site is currently the location of the Baltic Wharf Caravan Club and stands between the Baltic Wharf estate and the Cottage Inn; it reaches from the Cumberland Road to the Harbour. Goram Homes (the developer) is a housing company founded by Bristol

City Council. The proposal would deliver 165 flats in blocks that range in height from 3 storeys on the Baltic Wharf boundary, to 7 floors in the centre of the site.

Broadly, the Society supports the development but is concerned that the tall harbour-facing elevations could harm the character of the waterfront. Lower harbour-facing buildings would shield the step-up to taller buildings in the centre of the site and would lessen the impact on the locally listed Cottage Inn and the boat shed. The neighbouring buildings contribute to the character of the Harbour Conservation Area, an important heritage and leisure asset and a popular visitor attraction.

## Old rail depot, Clanage Road

Vistry Partnerships (formerly Galliford Try) propose to redevelop a former railway maintenance depot to build 253 new homes. The site is bounded by the elevated Brunel Way, the Paxton Drive development built in 2010, the Festival Way walk/cycle route to Ashton Court, and allotments.

This development is on a sensitive site with a distinctive character to protect, it will be prominent in a viewing arc from Cliftonwood through to Bower Ashton. The development will form the boundary to the city's built-up area, which is an unsuitable site for a landmark, contextual tall building of 9-floors above ground. The traffic noise and pollution from the elevated Brunel Way will blight the north end of the site which is the area with the highest population density.



Caravan Club - harbour frontage at dusk.



Little Paradise.

The principal objection is the 7-9-storey buildings at the northern end of the site. The Society could support a development that did not exceed the height of the Paxton Drive estate which should be treated as the benchmark.

## Bedminster Green - Little Paradise

The revised proposal for this site to the north of Dalby Avenue comprises new buildings from three to sixteen storeys in height. It would be mainly residential – 295 build to rent apartments and 21 affordable units – a gym and various public realm schemes. The Society commented at length in February when the proposal was first submitted. In June it responded to a revised scheme.

The Society welcomes a number of the amendments particularly the removal of the east west pedestrian street, the revised entrance to the underground car park and the Stafford Street elevation. We continue to support:

- The principle of residential development on the site.
- The improvements to Little Paradise and Stafford Street.

However, our principal reason for being unable to support the earlier scheme remains, namely:

- Our concerns about the harm that the proposed height would cause to place-making in Dalby Avenue and Bedminster Green and the impact of the development on the buildings to the north, among other matters.

## Bedminster Green - Clarke Street

The site lies within the Bedminster Green Framework (see Better Bristol 14, Spring 2019), a place-making document that establishes guiding principles and parameters (heights and mass) for new development on five plots that Council policy has identified for redevelopment. The Society opposed the schemes of the first four developers whose proposals exceeded the Framework's recommendations.

The Society supports this fifth scheme by Sydney Freed (Holdings) that adopts the Framework's recommendations. This scheme would erect two buildings comprising 700 student beds and 600m2 of flexible workspace on a triangular site bounded by Whitehouse Lane, Dalby Avenue, and Windmill Hill City Farm. Student accommodation in Bedminster would avoid the further concentration of students in the city centre. The land is split into two parts with Clarke Street and the River Malago running north/south through the middle. The developer proposes to upgrade the course of the Malago to make a linear park through the development. The Society's full response suggests some improvements to the scheme.

## 27-31 North Street, Bedminster

We were pleased to hear that this development proposal was refused planning permission by the Planning Authority on 22 July. The scheme involved the demolition of numbers 27-31 North Street in their entirety despite the fact that they are a recognised group buildings within the designated Bedminster Conservation Area. The replacement proposals were not of sufficient quality to justify such a level of demolition.

## East Street Vision

The Society has submitted consultation comments on the 'East Street vision' commissioned by Bedminster Business Improvement District, which will evolve into a masterplan.

East Street contains a number of significant shops and outlets, but it has not adapted to the fundamental change caused by the departure of Wills tobacco factories to Hartcliffe in the early 1970s. There are some attractive individual buildings and groups of buildings, but the street exudes some neglect. The Bedminster Green developments will, if built, bring in a massive influx of nearby residents.

We do not expect a large investment in a fundamental transformation of the area, rather we think the area will



Silverthorne Lane, a rich industrial heritage.

change organically, over a period of time, as small developers get involved and do things piecemeal. Architecturally it is mixed – some buildings have real character, which is recognised by East Street being in the Bedminster Conservation Area. Conservation quality maintenance and repair of many of the building frontages should be carried out. The presence of buses compromises the feel of the street for the pedestrian. It is important to do something to improve the experience for those on foot.

## Silverthorne Lane Proposed Conservation Area character appraisal

We organised two study walks to consider an early draft document regarding a possible Conservation Area in and around Silverthorne Lane in St Philip's. The area is subject to intense development pressure for a variety of uses – secondary school, university activities, housing and student accommodation. However, the area has a rich industrial heritage which is an important part of Bristol's history and there are significant remains of buildings, walls and other structures. The Society was impressed by the character appraisal which captured the spirit of the area and which highlighted those important elements to be considered in future redevelopment. We will continue to keep a close watch on developments in this fascinating city suburb.

These are the edited highlights of some of the city's development activity. It is critical for the Society to meet developers of large projects early in the design process. MSG tends to concentrate on city centre developments which affect the greatest number of residents and where local representation is weakest. The Society supports development and modern architecture. Items on the Society's website have links to the Society's full responses. The MSG meets every six weeks. The Group needs new members. Please contact [simon.birch7@gmail.com](mailto:simon.birch7@gmail.com).





Land at junction of Church Road and Chalks Road, St George.

# Planning Applications

**John Payne, from Bristol Civic Society's Planning Applications Group highlights some recent applications.**

## 2 Myrtle Road BS2 - 20/01334/F.

Issues arising from the pressure to convert single dwellings to Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) were discussed at length in the Spring 2020 *Better Bristol*. The pressure for HMOs continues. The Planning Applications Group (PAG) has objected to most of those we have considered but many have been granted planning permission. However, the application for converting 2 Myrtle Road was refused. PAG drew attention to the concentration of HMOs already in the area and the importance of retaining single occupancy family dwellings. We also raised over-looking, disturbance and on-street parking issues. City planners judged that there were indeed many HMOs in the area and another would lead to an unacceptable concentration.

## Land at junction of Church Road and Chalks Road, St George - 20/01651/F.

This is a vacant site in need of development but the proposal for a four storey building with nine flats above a ground floor café/bar was just not appropriate for the site. The neighbouring buildings are predominantly two storey. The height of the proposed building was

accentuated by rising ground in Chalks Road and while a slightly taller building at a street corner can often contribute positively to the street scene, this proposal was badly out of kilter with its neighbours. The mix of uses is appropriate but PAG considered nine flats on the three floors above was an over-development of the site. This proposal was refused by the Council picking up, in particular, on the failure of the building to respond to the street scene and contribute positively to it.



## Land adjacent to 275 Hotwell Road BS8 - 19/06100/F

This is a sensitive site opposite the south east corner of Dowry Square. It is located in the Clifton Conservation Area and is adjacent to a Grade II Listed Building. It is a site that would benefit from a sensitive development but the proposal for eight flats showed no sympathy at all for its neighbours. While a well thought through contemporary building might have contributed positively to Dowry Square and the wider Conservation Area, this proposal would have clashed horribly with its neighbours. Through PAG, the Society objected strongly to its form and materials which would have rendered the building particularly harmful to this location and to the setting of the Listed Building. The application was subsequently withdrawn.

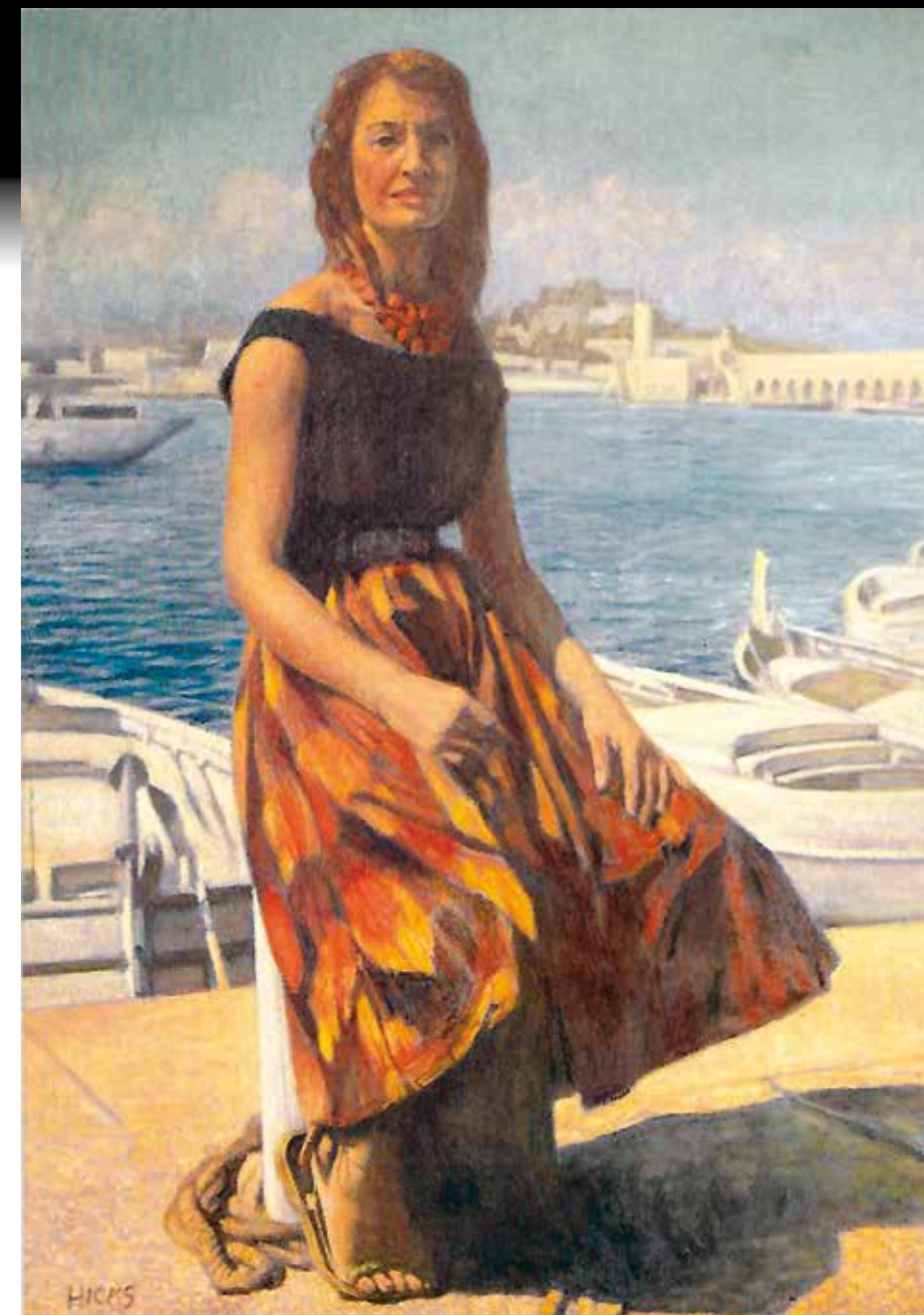
## Police dog and horse training centre, Clanage Road, BS3 - 20/01930/F.

The Society has supported this application to use the site for 62 touring caravans with associated support buildings. PAG considered the proposal, which would replace the existing facility at Baltic Wharf, was respectfully designed in relation to its surroundings including Ashton Court, the River Avon and the wooded slope leading to the suspension bridge. The support building was a single storey structure with a pitched roof and proposals for lighting the sight sought to reduce its external impact. In order to discourage vehicle use after caravanners arrived at the site, PAG urged the applicants to strongly encourage the use of public transport, cycling and walking to access the city. The application has not yet been decided.

Land adjacent to 275 Hotwell Road. The application was subsequently withdrawn.

## Obituary

# Anne Hicks



Anne and Jerry Hicks were the classic couple and I make no apologies for talking about them both because they were inseparable; strong and handsome; interested in judo; very fit and always a powerful, positive and friendly presence.

They met while training at The Slade

School of Art. Both painted, from life and sometimes from photographs, in a realist style quite out of fashion when they began, but loved by their many patrons. Anne was artist, wife and mother, whilst Jerry was head of art at Cotham School for 30 years. They were much involved with the Royal West of England Academy, exhibiting regularly, indeed Anne had a large oil painting entitled 'Summer Deluge' in last year's RWA Autumn Exhibition. Her work, with its delightful impressionistic style, often involved painting children, or wild animals camouflaged in dappled

shade, challenging to the eye at first, but rewarding the observer when with a little concentration, the image becomes clear.

They brought up their two children, Kim and Simon, in their unique and comfortable house, Goldrush, designed for them in a tucked away corner at the back of Great George Street, above the centre of the city. The proposed redevelopment of Brunel House, which formed part of their view, was one of the things that first interested them in the future of the city they loved and with which they both became increasingly involved.

Bristol was being redeveloped very fast, and they thought like many of the rest of us, very badly. Jerry was active in BCS, taking his turn as Chair for some years, his notes in capital letters (because he knew his handwriting was too difficult to read) were always arresting and meetings concerned with redevelopment and planning were often held at their house. Jerry's sketches were powerful (one of the

Anne drew delightful pointillist sketches of possible futures for interesting Bristol buildings at risk.

proposed GPO tower at the back of King Street comes to mind). Anne drew delightful pointillist sketches of possible futures for interesting Bristol buildings at risk, many of these were printed in the newspapers (her sketch of Watershed - then known as E Shed - did much to encourage its retention). Both were concerned with many important campaigns and projects, including: the Avon Gorge hotel; the fight to save the City Docks; the halting of the fearful Outer Circuit road; the conversion of The Bristol Arts Centre into Watershed, the first media centre in the country; the proposed ball at Ashton Court mansion - for which they spent 6 months designing decorations and the cancellation of which led to its partial restoration. They also contributed together to BCS's famous book 'The Fight for Bristol' of 1980.

Jerry died in 2014. Anne remained living in Goldrush with the support of her daughter Kim (a well known Bristol actor) and her family, who were with Anne at home when she died on the 26th June aged 92.

They were both great Bristolians whose activist style was one of the key factors in getting the views of BCS and others noticed, but most of all they were lovely people. We shall miss them and their huge contribution to the artistic and community life of Bristol.

P.F.

www.bristolcivicsociety.org.uk



# Lockdown through documentary eyes



While Covid 19 plunged the country into lockdown documentary photographer *Paul Bullivant* focused his lens on his Bristol neighbourhood.



Police advise on social distancing.

As a documentary photographer, I recognised immediately that 'life under lockdown', even within the geographical limitations of my north Bristol neighbourhood, was an essential subject for my attention. I reckoned that, walking briskly, I could legitimately claim to be complying with Government instructions – which became less onerous once Mr. Gove had insisted that we walk for longer than we drive!

Enjoyment of exploration on foot is essential for any documentary photographer. So I spent much of the four months of lockdown exploring the streets and parks of north and central Bristol, and then further afield, seeking a range of images that might represent the sometimes melancholy atmosphere but that would also reflect

the liberated mood of the later stages of this memorable period. Walks into the city, especially in the early weeks of lockdown, were eerie – major roads were empty and silent with a few cyclists and roller bladers reclaiming the smooth surfaces of the centre near

Colston's statue (then still standing). We will all remember those early weeks of lockdown for the silence, without sirens; the empty skies; the cleaner air; and the pedestrians and cyclists slowly reclaiming the streets. But we will also remember the sudden shock of change



Thursday support for NHS and care workers.



Major roads were empty and silent.



We learnt to keep our distance.

and isolation which, for many people, brought a loneliness as well as stress which will live with them, and perhaps with all of us, for some time, maybe for ever?

The quieter residential streets in my neighbourhood were, in late March and early April, generally devoid of neighbours and I often found myself waving to mildly disapproving friends through misted windows, friends who

were otherwise only 'embraced' via the occasional Zoom encounter.

I am fortunate to live by one of Bristol's most popular parks. This emptied rapidly under lockdown, helped by the firm hand of the police. Further out, on the open spaces of Purdown, or on The Downs, people eventually started moving more freely and it was great to see such places discovered, perhaps for the first time, by local families as the



Isolation brought loneliness.

need for space and escape became more intense when that warm spring weather became sensually irresistible.

Let's hope that the rediscovery and appreciation of our open spaces and the sense of community that the shared threat has engendered, are positive outcomes from this surreal time.

Visit [www.paulbullivant.co.uk](http://www.paulbullivant.co.uk) for more information about Paul and his publications.



The parks rapidly emptied.



Let's hope there are positive outcomes from this surreal time.



# A landscape for all

On Sunday 7 June 2020, during a Black Lives Matters demonstration, the Victorian statue of Edward Colston was pulled down and thrown into the harbour. It was an action that was to reverberate way beyond Bristol. Opinions are divided. *Better Bristol* asks how we memorialise the past and what should happen next to Colston?



An action that was to reverberate way beyond Bristol.

## Gordon Young

### 'Bristolian, born and bred.'

Can a statue speak eloquently about the values of our ancestors, both good and bad? In 1964 I was a teenage apprentice-compositor with a jobbing printer at the foot of Christmas Steps. One summer lunchtime, I sat on the steps of the Cenotaph eating sandwiches. A policeman

approached and gently rebuked me for disrespecting a war memorial. A salutary lesson.

Fast-forward to 2018. Edward Colston's statue still tells us only that he was 'wise and virtuous' and the Council rightly decides that the plinth should bear an additional plaque. It will proclaim his involvement in the slave trade, a revelation first published in 1920, twenty-five years after

the erection of the statue. The first draft of the plaque's proposed text accompanies the planning application. It is exclusively condemnatory, bizarrely leaving any visitor to our city wondering why such a handsome statue should commemorate such a monstrous individual.

I now got involved in the planning process, together with other members of the public, and I made

recommendations about the wording, the typeface and ways to improve the text's layout. The final text was agreed after much discussion on the Council's planning portal, open to all. The alloy was poured, the plaque was cast and these are its words:

*Edward Colston (1636-1721), MP for Bristol (1710-1713), was one of this city's greatest benefactors. He supported and endowed schools, almshouses, hospitals and churches in Bristol, London and elsewhere. Many of his charitable foundations continue. This statue was erected in 1895 to commemorate his philanthropy.*

*A significant proportion of Colston's wealth came from investments in slave trading, sugar and other slave-produced goods. As an official of the Royal African Company from 1680 to 1692, he was also involved in the transportation of approximately 84,000 enslaved African men, women and young children, of whom 19,000 died on voyages from West Africa to the Caribbean and the Americas.*

At the last moment, in March 2019, a spokesperson for the Mayor's Office claimed that the wording was 'unacceptable' and that the inscription would be reconsidered as part of a review of how the city marks its slave trade and abolitionist history.

We should be asking ourselves: would the statue have been pulled down fifteen months later if a plaque bearing the above inscription had been installed on the plinth.

Close by, there is a statue of Edmund Burke, erected just a year earlier. Burke said 'Rage and frenzy will pull down more in half an hour than prudence, deliberation, and foresight can build up in a hundred years.' Ponder on 'rage and frenzy': when the statue fell, did we witness a signalling to the world of Bristol's considered, mature view of its history or was it indeed rage and frenzy, a crowd brazenly breaking the law, jumping gleefully on the pulled-down statue while the police looked on? Valid, considered protest, or mere coronavirus-lockdown hysteria?

So many questions . . . The city is divided - a polarising topic with strong emotions on both sides. How do we reconcile things?

Well, we openly and honestly tell the full story of Colston, of Bristol's involvement in the transatlantic slave trade, and of the abolitionists: Thomas Clarkson, the Quakers and Alexander Falconbridge who assisted him; Hannah More and Anne Yearsley. The landlord of the *Seven Stars* pub in St Thomas Street aided Clarkson in his investigation into the trade when he lodged there. Opposite the pub is



The Victorian statue of Edward Colston was pulled down and thrown into the harbour.

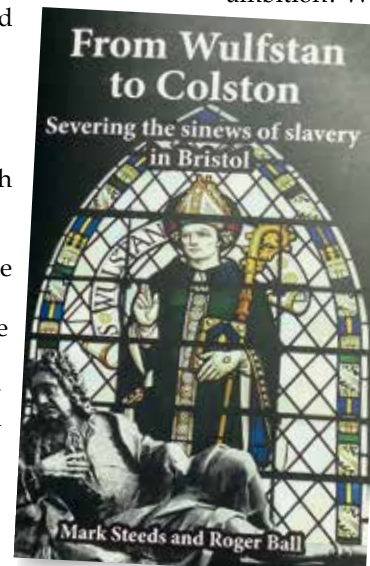
a redundant church, St Thomas the Martyr. Where better to have a museum to tell the full story, than there?

## Dr Edson Burton

### Writer, historian and city guide.

The sombre statue was not as I recall the first focal point of public ire. An outsider to Bristol, I was late to the party but in the first year of my arrival in 1994 I was made aware of the furore around the omission of the transatlantic slave trade from the chest-beating Festival of the Sea. Merchant's Quarter v Cabot Circus was another flash-point. But the flashpoints were becoming more consistent and sustained - Bristol's slave past was not going to go away. The city would not be able to tough it out until a storm dissipated. Paul Stephenson was joined and to some extent succeeded by Cleo Lake and Marvin Rees who either directly or indirectly addressed the questions of history and civic memory.

Reforming Bristol's narrative coalesced around *Countering Colston*. Historians such as Madge Dresser had drawn attention to his slaving past prior to the group's existence but *Countering Colston* gave that focus a particular edge with its headline-grabbing identification and direct action against the public spaces and rituals in which Colston was memorialized.



With the toppling of Colston's statue decades of struggle to embed Bristol's slaving past within its heritage story was seemingly finally victorious. In the media storm that followed there has been a persistent simplification of the journey that led to Colston's fall. If the media narrative is to be believed Bristol was divided between the simple choice of remove or not.

I take groups from Bristol and elsewhere on walking tours around central Bristol pointing out how the influence of slavery is enscribed on various sites in the city. 'Farr Lane' 'Cave Street' 'Tailor's Court', 'Guinea Street' 'Queen Square' - one does not have to go far to encounter the name of someone who made their fortunes from the ecology of slavery, or find some architectural feature which boldly signals Bristol's relationship to slave produced sugar.

My audiences, diverse and intergenerational, are moved, informed, some angry, most reflective - most have no idea how intimately the landscape in which they live and work is so bound up with the transatlantic story.

Every story needs a theatrical ending and so I conclude my walk at Colston's statue. The comments on the statue are complex, nuanced and varied. 'Take it down' 'Put a plaque next to it' explaining who he was.' 'Leave him here so my kids understand what this city was built on.' This variety of sentiment is readily shared with me in my journey across the city by the black Bristolians I meet.

My own feelings have evolved over the years but have also followed a consistent train. Why concentrate on one figure? The site of the old Custom House in Queen Square is a reminder too that slavery was a legal, taxable venture which paid its lot into the local and national public purse. Spectacular as it may seem, might then the rightful 'outing' of Colston actually lack ambition? What if the goal instead was

understanding how private and public were united in the legal sanction of a 400 year atrocity which left its victims impoverished and Britain and her elites all the wealthier?

Amputating unsavoury memories is what got us here in the first place. Anti-slavery zeal was followed by fatigue in the years following the abolition of the slave trade. Britain had done its bit - had made right a terrible wrong and so

*Continued on page 14*





Could this be the site of the 'Abolition Shed' interpretation centre on Welsh Back?

Continued from page 13

lost interest in the news story. Structural inequality in the former slave colonies persisted after abolition but it wasn't as interesting to the British public. I fear new memorials could serve as a sticking plaster over a still festering wound.

My tentative thoughts are based on what I would like to see, as opposed to what I think will occur. What if, as a city, we chose to make visible the invisible?

Beginning with the black contribution, expanding to climate change, animal rights and trade justice, we enscribe across the landscape a programme of public art that captures our present and future ethical trajectory.

In my dotage I will see this bolder bright work surpass, in every sense, the toxic art of a toxic past. Such a landscape charts the evolution of a city. It is the map of who we were, who we are, who we wish to become.

## Mark Steeds

**Co-author, with Roger Ball, of *From Wulfstan to Colston* (Bristol Radical History Group, 2020).**

Why did these demonstrators take this risky action upon themselves? The answer, it seems, is that campaigns like *Countering Colston* have for years

simply not been listened to. Vested interests and out-of-touch politicians have failed to tackle modern issues and sensitivities. Since the Festival of the Sea in 1996, when it became apparent that this aspect of Bristol's past had to be addressed, the can has constantly been kicked down the road.

Opportunities to deal with this issue since have also been missed, from the brilliant *Respectable Trade* exhibition of 1999, to the less satisfactory *Abolition 200* commemoration of 2007. Other chances have also been wasted. This inaction led directly to people taking matters into their own hands, pulling down Colston's statue in frustration. Going forward, they'll have a criminal record for life.

Bristol's present memorial landscape is dominated by just three people, Colston, Cabot and Brunel. This has to change. Barring Britain's merry monarchs and pedastalled politicians, there is hardly any other representation. Where are Bristol's wonderful women? Mary Carpenter, Elizabeth Blackwell, Mary Estlin and Ada Vachell. Where are Bristol's famous literary stars? Long John Silver and Robinson Crusoe.

The dominant issue of slavery is like a festering sore on Bristol's past and ultimately has to be recognised. A great first step would be a prominent memorial

to the victims of enslavement, located where the history actually happened.

A couple of years ago there was a golden opportunity to create just such a memorial, along with an 'Abolition Shed' interpretation centre on Welsh Back; next to the culpable merchants' houses in Queen Square and adjacent to the river Avon – the evil trade's conduit. Despite the misgivings of some – mostly to the term 'abolition' – it would help bring communities together and lead to much better understanding.

Following the Black Lives Matter protests in June 2020, Mayor Marvin Rees announced:

*'We have set out a process to manage our journey. We have established a history commission which will help us tell our full city history. As we learn this fuller history including the part played by black people, women, the working class, trade unions, and children among others, we will be in a better position to understand who we are, how we got here and who we wish to honour. Crucial to our heritage has been the harbour and the docks, manufacturing and industry, research and innovation, transport, slum clearances, housing, modern gentrification and faith. As the commission shares this information, the city will decide on city memorials and the future of the plinth.'*

# Ideas for Bristol

**Eugene Byrne ponders a number of fanciful ideas for Bristol. Some of them still worth considering!**

Bristol has never been short of people with interesting ideas for making the city better.

As the city faces up to a new challenges, we take a look at just a few from recent decades:

## 20 Ideas for Bristol

A group of young professionals mounted two exhibitions at the City Museum & Art Gallery in 1975 and 1976 called *20 Ideas for Bristol*.

These "ideas for improving a city's life and environment" ranged from the practical to the fun, and many ended up being implemented – Bristol's first City Farm, saving some of the cranes in the City Docks, cycle paths, 'home zones' and more.

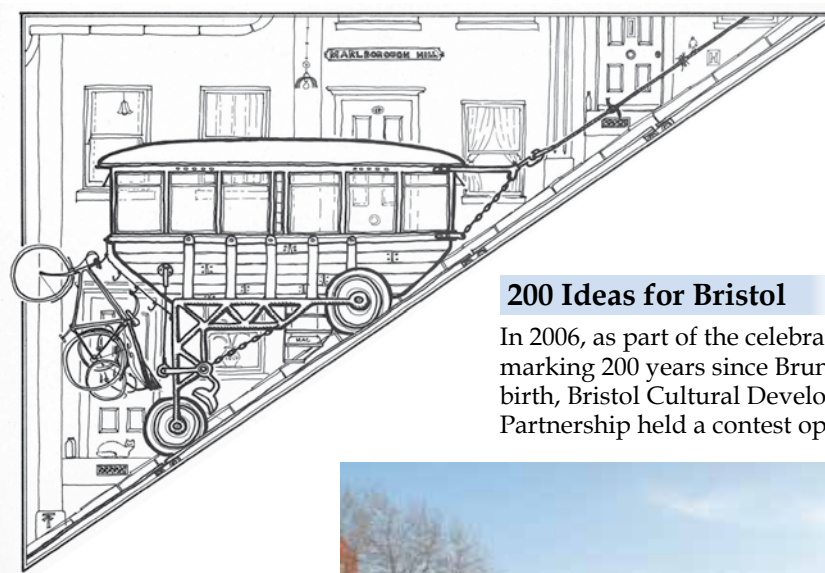
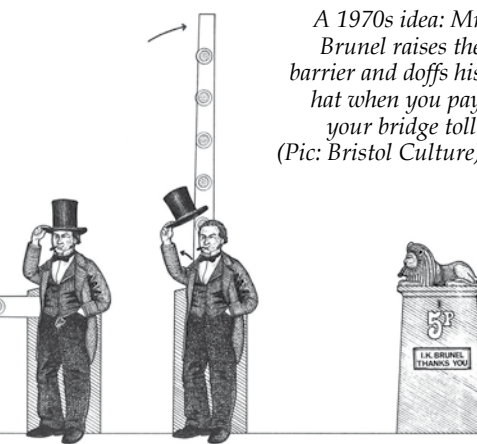
Easily the most memorable was a ticket barrier on the Suspension Bridge

featuring a statue of Brunel, who'd mechanically raise his hat as you inserted your coins and he let you through.

Another proposal was a funicular railway up Marlborough Hill, a quick and painless way of getting from the city centre to Cotham. The design included racking for bikes and prams.

Someone in the 1975 exhibition suggested that the railway line between Bristol and Portishead should be revived. Some good ideas never go away.

A 1970s idea: Mr Brunel raises the barrier and doffs his hat when you pay your bridge toll. (Pic: Bristol Culture)



## 200 Ideas for Bristol

In 2006, as part of the celebrations marking 200 years since Brunel's birth, Bristol Cultural Development Partnership held a contest open to all

Above, Another 1970s suggestion, 'The Kingsdown Vernacular Funicular' would take you, and your bike or pram, up and down the very steep Marlborough Hill.

Right, Cable cars! (Pic: Clifton Cable Company)



Bristolians seeking both practical and daft suggestions.

These included decorations on the Clifton Suspension Bridge at Christmas, a slide from the top of Cabot Tower to the SS Great Britain, a hot air balloon museum at Ashton Court mansion, a 'Bristol Time Tunnel' museum in the Redcliffe rail tunnel and a giant Mount Rushmore-style carved head of Brunel in the Avon Gorge.

## Bristol underground railway

This one is still in play – for now. Mayor Marvin Rees is a keen supporter of a plan most people consider insane, and the last published estimate of a three-line system taking in Bristol Airport and Cribbs Causeway costed it at £4bn. But once you consider how it would use some of Bristol's existing rail infrastructure – which is already under ground – and that some would be at, or just below, ground level, it doesn't seem quite so mad. Whether the commuter demand and funding will be there in the future is another question.

## Cable cars

Going underground is a bad idea, you say? OK, let's go up in the air. A Bristol firm is proposing to run cable cars from Temple Meads station to the Suspension Bridge as the first part of a possible wider network.

The Clifton Cable Company's partners, architect David Rhodes and transport consultant Richard White say their scheme is clean and green. Architect Mr Rhodes said: "What's really exciting about this is it's fun. It does a practical thing, but it does it in a delightful way."

Transport consultant Mr White said: "Cable cars have mainly been the domain of Alpine resorts, but it's a quirk of fate that we seem to go below the ground for everything."

The cost of the first phase, which could be completed in a couple of years, is estimated at £40-£50m.

The Clifton Cable Company is also proposing a system to enable cyclists to get up Park Street more easily. Cycle-lifts on Park Street were first proposed for the '200 Ideas' contest in 2006 – and possibly sooner.

*Eugene Byrne is the author of 'Unbuilt Bristol – The city that might have been 1750-205' published by Redcliffe.*



# Could COVID-19 be good for city transport policy?

The COVID pandemic has had dire consequences, but it may transform transport policy, writes *Alan Morris*.

Let's consider its impact in three parts: during lockdown, emergence from lockdown, and the longer term.

## Lockdown

During lockdown, many commuting journeys ceased, and movement was restricted to local walks. Many people rejoiced in the quieter streets and noticeable reduction in air pollution. While we missed the freedom to travel more widely and meet up with others, it was (except for those shielding) an opportunity to rediscover our local neighbourhoods and connect with our neighbours. There was an increase in home deliveries, and working from home. Many discovered the world of online meetings and webinars, and keeping in contact with family and friends by video calls.



The question now is how to capture some of the benefit of lower traffic levels. Photo: Paul Bullivant.

## Emergence from lockdown

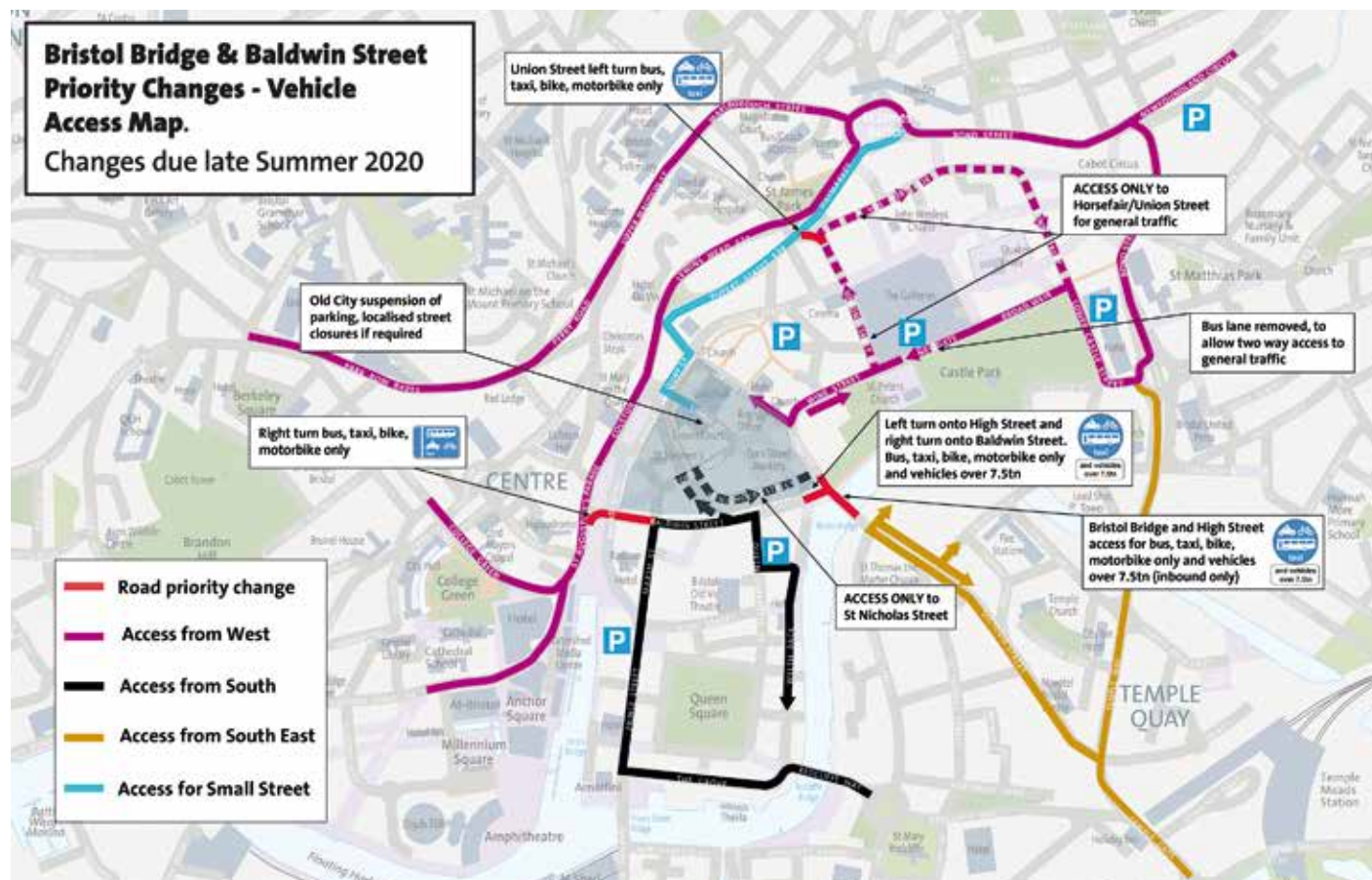
The question now is how to capture some of the benefit of lower traffic levels. Many people do not want things to go back to the way they were. Now is a good time to try alternative approaches.

As the lockdown restrictions were eased, transport policy and behaviour had to adapt to allow for social distancing:

- pedestrians were given more space where pavements are crowded
- there was a large uptake in cycling, and some extra cycle lanes were provided

- people were actively discouraged from using public transport
- commuting journeys have remained lower than pre-COVID, as many have adapted to working from home and many did not want to take the risk of using public transport
- many journeys by public transport have been replaced by walking and cycling, but some have been replaced by private car journeys.

The government directed local authorities to make changes to streets, for example footway widening, defined areas for queuing, and even point closures and pedestrianisation. Bristol City Council made changes to many streets across Bristol. They brought forward some existing plans for pedestrianizing the Old City, and King Street was pedestrianised at the request of local businesses. They closed Baldwin Street at either end to private motor traffic, so that buses are freed up on the route across the city centre. Segregated cycle lanes are being introduced on Lewins Mead, and on the stretch from Park Row to St James



Barton roundabout, reducing queuing motor traffic and so reducing air pollution on one of the most polluted roads in Bristol.

Normally such changes take years to proceed from the initial proposal through design, consultation, and implementation. But these changes were made at an unheard-of pace of change: the COVID emergency has changed the rules for what it is possible to do.

Will the changes become permanent? Schemes that were already in council plans, like Old City and Baldwin Street, have strong rationales and political commitment behind them, which should see them through. For instance, the closure of the Bristol Bridge city centre through-route is part of a wider scheme to free up the movement of buses.

To make the changes quickly, red and white roadworks barriers have been used, which are visually unattractive. Time and money will be needed to make the changes permanent and fully designed. Some changes may have a less certain future, for instance in high streets. Some of the reallocated roadspace is not being used much. There is a risk that people do not see the point of the changes and ask for them to be removed. Some local businesses, particularly cafes and other eating places, have seen the benefit of using and caring for the space created outside their premises, and hopefully that will increase.

## Further changes

Research studies have started to emerge that link air pollution to COVID deaths. This and the experience of cleaner air during lockdown may well reinforce the drive for less traffic pollution. Luckily, the reduction in commuter traffic has reduced the rush hour congestion peaks in which stationary traffic causes the highest pollution levels, but there is further to go.

It seems likely that some of the move to working from home will persist, and

the reduction in peak hour congestion may make some more radical changes easier. Some have argued for a wider programme of point closures and pedestrianisation. Park Street and Prince Street Bridge are two examples.

The Council is committed to a programme of Liveable Neighbourhoods and School Streets, and it is hoped that post-COVID these will be accelerated. Liveable or Low Traffic neighbourhoods create a better environment for walking and cycling by closing roads to motor vehicles at carefully chosen points which enable vehicle access to all properties while eliminating through traffic and rat running. The road closure points can be combined with pocket parks, benches, and other public realm improvements to support community interaction. School Streets protect the space around schools from being dominated by cars at drop-off and pick-up times.

The Council plans a series of Bus Deal projects to free up buses on arterial routes in return for First Bus investing in more buses on those routes, and at the same time to improve those roads for walking and cycling. The impact of COVID on bus travel may change the economics of buses and might slow down this programme – it is too early to tell.

## The longer term

So it seems that the COVID pandemic has to some extent changed the climate towards a transport policy that reduces the dominance of private motor vehicles. This needed to happen: our carbon emissions target is a ticking clock that has not stopped during the pandemic. Bristol has committed to a zero emissions target in 2030. A recent report suggested that to meet that target there is a need to limit car traffic to a maximum of 20 per cent of journeys.

During lockdown we experienced traffic levels akin to those last seen in 1955. Our 2030 aspiration sees us returning to something similar to the 1980s. What the pandemic did was to rapidly wind



Red and white roadworks barriers have been used, which are visually unattractive.

back the clock on transport policy, and now the clock is being wound forward again, only to a different future.

There needs to be a change from the 'predict and provide' approach of forecasting private traffic demand and ensuring that the roads can accommodate it. Instead we should provide mobility and connectivity solutions that meet wider environmental and well-being criteria, which includes reallocating roadspace away from private motor traffic. We need to free up the buses, and make space for walking and cycling, so that these modes become the fastest, safest and most convenient options to get around. That still allows movement of private motor vehicles, especially for people who cannot use alternative modes: it just changes how we chose to allocate the available roadspace.

## Uncertainties

But we are left with some big uncertainties about how to adapt to social distancing. At the time of writing, we are still emerging from the very successful government messaging to stay at home. Many people remain scared to mix with others, but we will have to find ways of living a more normal life than we have done for so many weeks. Leisure destinations are starting to re-open, and people will at different paces slowly get used to mixing in public spaces whilst maintaining distance and using masks. A big question is whether we will over time become more relaxed again about using public transport, or whether the increase in car use will persist. People need reassurance that they can use it safely.

There are other unresolved questions, and it will take time to find out the answers:

- will a vaccine be found and will social distancing last? If so, will we revert to some of our old mobility patterns?
- how much will the increase in working from home persist, and how will this affect commuting patterns and the geography of housing?
- what will city centres be like with more people working from home and shopping online? Will they remain as such busy hubs as they have been in the past?



During lockdown, many commuting journeys ceased. Photo: Paul Bullivant.



# Southmead leads the way!

## The regeneration of Arnside and Glencoyne Square



Deana Perry with the Southmead Survey.



A design which makes your heart sing.



85% of the homes on Glencoyne square will be affordable.

**Deanna Perry, lifelong Southmead resident, writes about the Southmead Community Plan - one of the largest community-led regeneration projects in the country.**

I was born in Southmead and have lived here all of my 62 years. I was the youngest of 7 children and when my Dad died I was just 2 years old. My mother could no longer afford to live in the private house on Southmead Road, where I was born, so we moved into a council house on Pen Park Road. When I was 11 years old we exchanged our council house for another one at the end of Greystoke Avenue. I got married to my husband at 22 years old and our first home together was an ex-council house in Ullswater Road.

The point of telling you this is that I have lived all over Southmead and have never wanted to leave. We have a wonderful community with many community groups that are the backbone of Southmead. I started volunteering at Southmead Young Mums around 10 years ago and the rest is history. About 5 years ago, along with others, we door-knocked every home in Southmead asking residents to fill out the Southmead Survey.

We wanted to talk to people on their doorsteps and ask their opinions, good or bad, about where they lived. Many of them said that there was no point because the Council decided everything, but we told them that it was important to their voices. We had over 900 surveys completed and these responses formed our very own Southmead Community Plan. Our community's charity, Southmead Development Trust, who run the Greenway Centre, Southmead Youth Centre and the Southmead Adventure Playground, instigated the Plan. It was printed and launched in 2015 as a 10 year plan. We are extremely lucky to have the centres run by Southmead Development Trust and Southmead Community Association because many areas across Bristol have no community buildings.



Deana Perry. 'I was born in Southmead and have lived here all of my 62 years.'

When we door-knocked at Arnside, we were shocked at the awful state of the area - I call Arnside the 'Heart' of Southmead where you meet up with people you haven't seen for years. I have been buying my sweets there since I was 5 years old! After the launch of the Community Plan I was lucky enough to read every single comment on the surveys. Sadly, all the comments written about the Arnside area were very negative. The general feeling was that our shopping area let the whole of Southmead down. When we asked residents what they thought of Arnside, many told us that they didn't go there. When we asked about visiting the library or Aldi they replied, "Of course we go to Aldi and Library". This made us think that Arnside had no identity - it wasn't a place where people wanted to spend any time.

As a result of listening to the residents of Southmead, we formed a working group which consisted of local residents, local councillors and Southmead Development Trust. We met monthly to discuss how we could improve the Arnside area. A consultant was employed to give us an idea of what the area could look like. A 'housing needs study', which was completed a year later, showed that there were no one or two bed homes for

elderly residents to downsize to if they wanted to. However, they obviously wanted to stay in the area, close to their family and friends.

The consultant told us that to begin a regeneration project we needed three things - dissatisfaction with the 'present' (the comments on the Southmead survey), a 'vision' for the future and a plan of 'how to' achieve it (our working group). We had absolutely no money to start this project but a burning desire to make a better future for Southmead.

The project has been led by us residents the whole way - we have had the opportunity to interview and choose the Project Manager, architects and the building contractors. We've had 27 engagement events and over 400 conversations so far (including a virtual reality tour!) Visitors can't believe that local residents were even involved in the regeneration project. They told us that they felt our passion for Southmead.

Money was found from national funders *Power to Change* and *Homes England*. We worked with Bristol City Council to win £3.6 million from the Government's *Housing Infrastructure Fund*. The Council will use some of this funding to make infrastructure improvements including regenerating Arnside Road.

There will be 120 new homes built on Glencoyne Square, with a new health centre and library. Over half

of Glencoyne Square will remain as open space and we are gaining over 30 new trees throughout the Square. The Council also has plans to add new trees to Arnside Road.

Arnside will not be pedestrianised but will be more 'pedestrian friendly', with a new drainage system so rain water can pass through, meaning less chance of flooding. There will be more parking spaces for the disabled and a new cycle lane. New parking will be created by taking a little of the green space along Greystoke Avenue.

**My hope is that residents will walk to Arnside, stay for a few hours and meet up with others.**

85% of the homes on Glencoyne will be affordable. Using a 'Local Lettings Policy', priority will be given to people that work or live here and those that have family or connections in Southmead. My hope is that residents will walk to Arnside, stay for a few hours and meet up with others. At many of the community consultations and street info stalls held across Southmead in the last 5 years, I have told residents that Arnside hasn't had a facelift for sixty years and they shout at me, "No - seventy years!" Even more reason that we deserve one now!

Our group has been going for approximately five years and Bristol City Council joined us two years ago.

We still meet monthly. This project is one of the largest community-led regeneration projects in the country - Southmead is leading the way! We have listened to residents, responded and carried on with this project even when there was no money.

I am very proud to say that The Arnside and Glencoyne Square Regeneration Project came runners up in the Royal Town Planning Institute Awards in January. This was the Southwest Branch for Planning Excellence. The level of community engagement and support was highly praised. Mike Murch, from BS10 Parks & Planning (another of our amazing community groups), states that, "this award is recognition for the way the community has worked with professionals to make sure that the regeneration in Southmead is going to be how residents want it and it will benefit generations to come."

On May 13 2020, the Development Committee at Bristol City Council unanimously approved the project for planning permission. They were overwhelmingly positive about the design, sustainability, community leadership and process. "A design which makes your heart sing" - which made us really proud. We were also featured on the news, the papers and the radio! We hope to be an example of community led action which can inspire other communities out there.

I hope residents understand what we

are trying to achieve. As a 'Meader' I can't wait for it to happen!

Deana Perry - lifelong Southmead resident and secretary of Team Southmead.



Left, The level of community engagement and support was highly praised.



# Saints, Crooks and Slavers

Inspired by the TV series 'A House Through Time', Peter Cullimore explores the history of his Montpelier home.

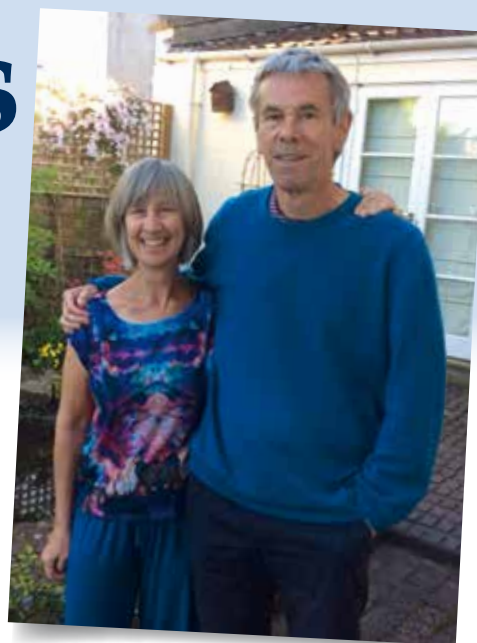
When an estate agent showed us round Spring Cottage 34 years ago, it was love at first sight. How could anyone resist this quirkily long and thin Georgian house on a hill which looks so different from the rest, even in quirky Montpelier? It's now called 60 Fairfield Road. But we prefer the old name, even if that, too, remains an enigma. We still don't know if Spring Cottage refers to the season, or to it being built above a water course.

Sue and I, despite being very amateur historians, have won praise for the quality of our research that went into our book, *Saints, Crooks and Slavers*. Yet we still can't answer the first question everyone asks – when was your house built? Not for sure, anyway. We also have trouble with the next basic question – who first lived in it? Again, that's very uncertain.

Our crumbling, but unusually complete, deeds tell us the first "tenant" or "occupier" was a man called Shurmer Bath. A Quaker from Stokes Croft and a maltster by trade, he moved in the same

social circles as Joseph Fry, Hannah More and the diarist Sarah Fox. He was the original developer for Spring Cottage and other houses nearby around Montpelier in the 1790s. But Shurmer Bath never finished building them, because a city-wide construction boom was halted by the Napoleonic Wars. He ended up bankrupt, as did so many other local property speculators at the time, especially in Clifton.

Similar doubts surround the residency of our second developer. He was a "common brewer" with an equally colourful name, Jacob Crook. According to our deeds, when he bought the land in 1812, a "ruinous cottage" already stood on the site, which was "then in the occupation of said Jacob Crook". However, in old-fashioned legal jargon, words like 'tenant' or 'occupied' could be ambiguous, perhaps even meaning that someone was active on the site rather than living there. Besides, both



Sue & Peter Cullimore.

de Beaumont), son of aristocrats guillotined in the French Revolution, and the Phippen sisters, who ran early schools for deprived girls in their own home.

A much later sale document in the deeds eventually led us to Penny Gane, an owner/occupier not long before us in the 1980s. In 2020 she remains an influential campaign leader for women's rights in the city, as chair of Bristol Women's Voice.

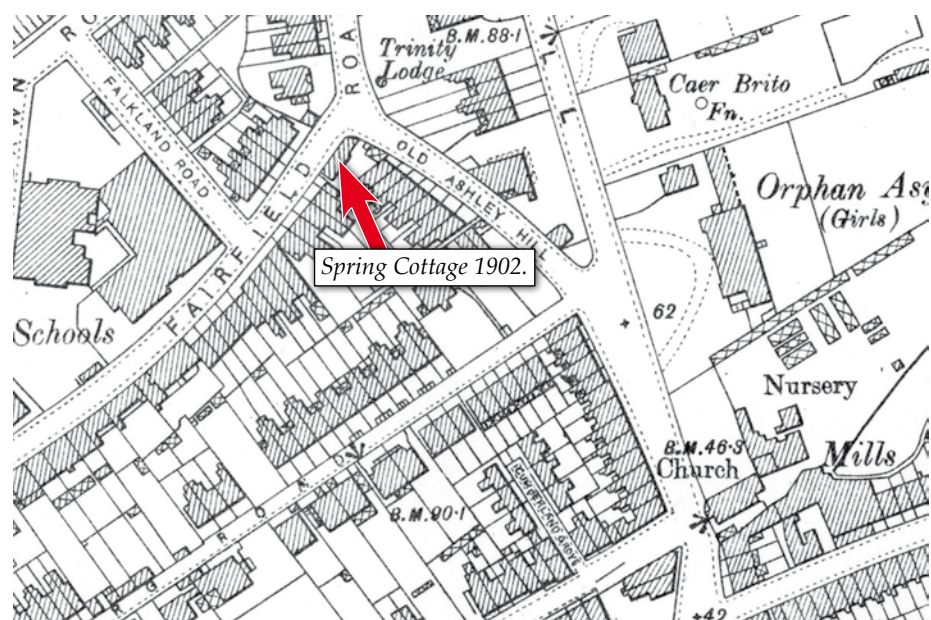
For more detailed research on past residents, we turned to other sources. The ones we found most useful were:

- Historic documents kept at Bristol Archives, where they're available for you to search.
- Online genealogy websites, for Censuses, or for birth, marriage and death records.
- Local trade directories from the mid 1700s onwards, which

you can leaf through in the Archives search room or in the reference section of Bristol Central Library.

- Local newspaper articles found online via the British Newspaper Archive.

These were the main resources which helped us re-discover, for example, the story of Charles Franklin. Just before he rented Spring Cottage with his family in 1892, Franklin's large factory making



Shurmer and Jacob kept family homes elsewhere in the city.

Despite the obtuse language, we found our deeds were a priceless launch pad towards further investigation into these characters and other occupants of Spring Cottage/60 Fairfield Road, right up to the late 20th century. It was here we first came across names like William Beaumont (originally Guillaume



Spring Cottage, Montpelier.

glass mirrors, in Rupert Street, burnt down in a dramatic fire that could be seen from miles around. We traced a vivid account in the *Bristol Mercury*.

Residents of our house listed in the 1901 Census included a 13-year-old servant, Ada Tovey. She later emigrated to Canada as an escape route from destitution. But Ada soon perished in faraway Vancouver, according to the British Columbia

Death Index. We accessed this online via the Ancestry website.

The 1939 Register, or wartime census, recorded the Fiddes family living at 60 Fairfield Road. One of them, young Ernest Fiddes, lost his life when serving on board a Royal Navy submarine, sunk by a torpedo attack in the Mediterranean in 1942. Stoker Petty Officer Fiddes was posthumously honoured for gallant action in the face of the enemy.

Neither Sue nor I are experts, so in the book we focus on the sources we used most. These weren't always the best possible option for our house history research, but they were ones that worked for us. The practical tips on how to find out about the earlier inhabitants of your own home are based on our steep learning curve. That's why *Saints, Crooks & Slavers* is deliberately written in a nuts-and-bolts style, telling you both what we discovered and how.

The message is that our way may not be perfect, but if we can do it, so can you! However, there are some public records, especially Land Tax

Left, Spring Cottage staircase. Photo: Paul Bullivant.

and Electoral Registers, that with hindsight we could have, and maybe should have, consulted more.

Our research was kick-started by Spring Cottage making the final shortlist for *A House Through Time*. In the end, 10 Guinea Street was definitely the right choice by the BBC to become that house in its Bristol series. Episode one alone featured an unbeatable mix of eye-catching period features, slave-trading sea captains, an escaping black servant and a baby left abandoned on the doorstep. But our near miss gave us a few new clues, and the inspiration to unearth a lot more information about Shurmer Bath *et al* in Montpelier.

The maltster who started building Spring Cottage, and may or may not have lived in it, had a mixed CV. On the plus side, he was a devout Quaker and a generous philanthropist who gave out free medicine to the poor and subsidised new charity schools.

On the other hand, Shurmer Bath had close links with slavery. Not as a trader like Edward Colston half a century earlier, but by marriage. His first and second wives, Mary Lewis and Alice Dury, were cousins in a Quaker slave-owning dynasty from Bristol that ran sugar plantations in Barbados. The Durys had sold up and returned to Bristol in 1762, well before Shurmer married into the family. Our source for these revelations was a wider family archive, free to download online via Google Books.

By the later 18th century, the Quaker community in Bristol, or Society of Friends, who until then had a deep involvement in slavery, were in full withdrawal mode and veering towards support for abolition. We borrowed this important contextual data from work by a Bristol historian specialising in the city's slave trade, Dr Madge Dresser. Thanks to her research, we found evidence that in later life Shurmer Bath became an abolitionist himself.

In *Saints, Crooks & Slavers*, we've tried to give a balanced portrayal of Shurmer Bath, warts and all. Our first house builder was no saint, and can't be exonerated from his slavery links. The book as a whole reinforces the new vision of history as no longer set in stone, and instead full of shifting uncertainties.

*Saints, Crooks and Slavers* (Bristol Books), £12.00 is available from local bookshops and Bristol Archives. It can also be ordered online from the publishers, Bristol Books, or directly from the author by email: [petercullimore@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:petercullimore@blueyonder.co.uk)





The RWA boasts 163 years of consistent use.

- Extend RWA's celebrated community and wellbeing programmes so more vulnerable and isolated people can find enjoyment through art and creativity
- Deliver a step-change in financial and environmental sustainability.

The designs, drawn up by appointed architects Childs + Sulzmann, have recently received Planning and Listed Building consents.

The project received Round 1 from the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) in 2019 and is now awaiting the outcome of a Round 2 application, being decided in September. In addition, funding has been secured from Arts Council England, the John James Bristol Foundation, Foyle Foundation, Garfield Weston Foundation, the Linbury Trust, Nisbet Trust, Wolfson Foundation and others. If the NLHF application is successful, there is a little under £500,000 remaining to be raised of the £3.8M budget, and a public campaign will be launched later this year.

The Light and Inspiration project has always been about our long-term sustainability. After lockdown, it is now about our very survival. We know that everyone visiting our extraordinary building finds it uplifting, and our aim is that every visitor leaves feeling better than when they came in, having been inspired and made to feel welcome. I truly believe that the RWA has all the makings of one of THE great galleries, and hope that we are able to keep bringing great art to Bristol for many generations to come."

Further information about the RWA and the Light and Inspiration project and appeal can be found at [www.rwa.org.uk](http://www.rwa.org.uk)

Inclusivity is enshrined in the RWA's values, promoting gender and social equality, and championing creativity for all since 1844. Doubtless because of Ellen Sharples's role in its foundation, Bristol's Academy is unique in having had gender equality from the outset. The RWA elected its first woman President, Janet Stancomb Wills, in 1911, decades before any of the UK's other Academies even accepted women as elected members (London's Royal Academy, by contrast, elected its first woman President, Rebecca Salter, in 2019).

Alongside this is a history continuing through multiple generations of inspiring and nurturing creative talent and teaching artistic skills for all. In recent years, the RWA has significantly developed its outreach work, and now delivers acclaimed, inspirational creative engagement both at the RWA and across Bristol, including areas of multiple deprivation, enabling a huge range of people – including those with severe mental and physical health challenges – to use art and creativity to enhance their wellbeing.

All of this work is carried out with minimal public funding. The RWA is an independent Charity (1070163) and less than 1.5% of its operating costs are covered by public subsidy: its sole core funding is a grant of £9600 p.a. from Bristol City Council. Consequently, the organisation is reliant on earned income for its survival, so closure due to Covid-19 has hit it hard.

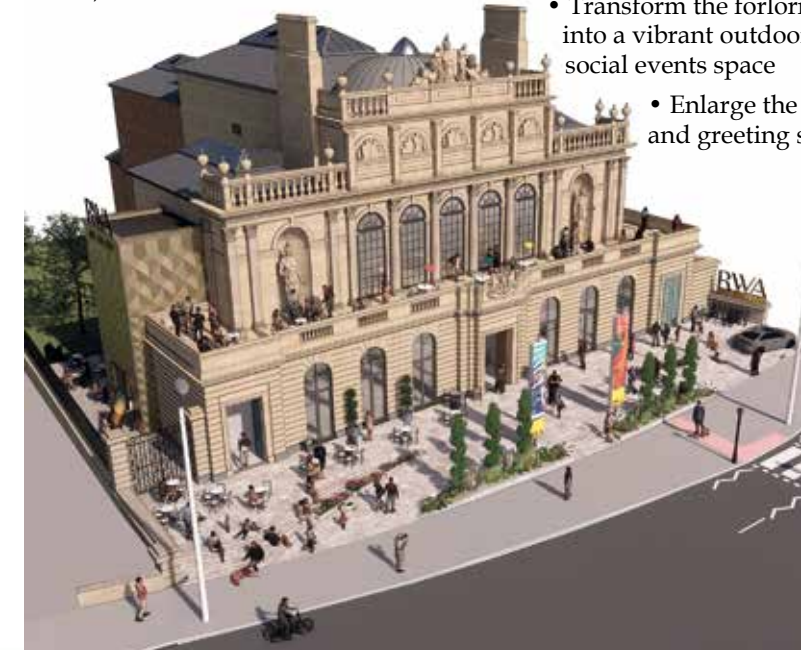
Meanwhile, the issues of an ageing building – and one designed in a very different age – had already led to the formulation of capital development aims. A 2015 Quinquennial Review identified that the huge roof lanterns (skylights) above the main gallery spaces were in need of remedial work, which, due to their

height and scale, would come at a cost well beyond the organisation's meagre means, and would necessitate lengthy closure of the galleries. Whilst these features provide the extraordinary quality of light, they also cause it to suffer enormous fluctuations in temperature, from more than 37° in summer to less than 11° in winter. Rather than undertake repairs, therefore, plans were drawn up to replace them with improved, thermally-insulated and ventilated lanterns.

Alongside this, it is equally essential to the RWA's survival for it to attract a larger number of people into the building, and deliver sustainable income. Whilst the facade is beautiful, it is also forbidding, and passers-by often think it is part of the University or a private members' club, unaware of its public function. A wider project has therefore been developed to transform the way the public are welcomed into the building.

'Light and Inspiration' is a £3.8 million project, scheduled for June to December 2021, which will:

- Replace the roof lanterns above the main galleries with new thermally-insulated skylights, enabling the world's finest artworks to be seen in Bristol's stunning, purpose-built gallery
- Mitigate extreme temperatures, from sweltering summer heat to icy cold, vastly improving the experience for visitors and volunteers
- Provide disabled people with unaided access to all galleries for the first time through the creation of a capacious new lift
- Sensitively remodel the façade, with new entrances and lighting to engage more visitors and create a truly welcoming environment
- Transform the forlorn forecourt into a vibrant outdoor creative, social events space
- Enlarge the cafe, retail and greeting spaces



A wider project has been developed to transform the way the public are welcomed into the building.

One of the most beautiful galleries in the country.

# Bursting with unexplored potential

**Exciting changes are planned for the Royal West of England Academy says its Director, Alison Bevan.**

The Royal West of England Academy (now more often referred to as the RWA) is bursting with unexplored potential that it is seeking to utilise through a capital project planned for 2021 – a project that has taken on a new urgency following the financial impact of Covid-19 on this wholly independent charity.

This outstanding, Grade II\* listed building has an extraordinary heritage. Founded in 1844 as the Bristol Academy of Fine Art. The building opened to the public in 1858, making it Bristol's first public art gallery, and one of the oldest in Britain.

Its creation was largely down to the indomitable spirit of one woman, Ellen Sharples, who, with her husband James,

made their fortune producing portraits of the founding fathers of America, including the seminal depiction of George Washington. Widowed in 1811, she returned to England, settling in Bristol where she largely devoted her energy to promoting her artist daughter, Rolinda, until she too sadly died in 1838. Ellen then turned her attention on trying to inaugurate the Academy, persuading benefactors



The creation of the RWA was largely down to one woman, Ellen Sharples.

including Prince Albert and Isambard Kingdom Brunel to support the building of the gallery and art school.

The RWA is the only one of Britain's five Royal Academies in its original, purpose-built Gallery, boasting 163 years of consistent usage. Set in a largely unchanged context, at the heart of Bristol's original cultural quarter, its National Heritage Listing describes it as "part of an outstanding group of civic buildings, and a fine example of its type" and CHIS list it as one of eight buildings that are "crucial landmarks nationally and on Bristol's landscape".

Within the building, the height, scale and outstanding quality of light of the exhibition spaces led Sir Nicholas Serota (Chair of the Arts Council) to describe the RWA as one of the most beautiful galleries in the country. Since a Heritage Lottery funded project in 2012 improved some of the spaces, the RWA have been able to bring iconic masterpieces to Bristol and the region, often for the first time, including loans from regional, national and international collections, from Constable, Turner and Wright of Derby to Chagall, Lowry and Pollock.



# 'Bristol has been wiped out!'

2020 marks the eightieth anniversary of the Bristol Blitz. Mike Manson tells the story.

On Sunday 3 September 1939 the Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, announced 'that England is at war with Germany.' Initially, the west country was not thought to be at risk from bombing. Evacuees were sent from London to Bristol, while the BBC moved several of its departments to Whiteladies Road and other nearby addresses. The number of local BBC employees shot up from 70 to 900.

Even so, with the declaration of war the blackout was enforced. Curtains were to be drawn tight, cars were forbidden to use headlights and street lights were turned off. In spite of these measures Bristol was still easily recognizable at night from the air. On a clear night the ribbon of the docks shone like silver under the moon. This didn't stop a total of 78 - it is said - people stumbling into the Floating Harbour due to the unusual darkness.

The Nazis turned out to be more determined than had been supposed. Bristol, a major port, home to British Aeroplane Company (BAC) and numerous other strategic engineering businesses, was seen as a key target. An aerial photograph taken by the Luftwaffe on 3 September identified Temple Meads Station as well as strategic bridges, lock gates and gas works.

The first air raid on 20 June 1940 was not successful. Bombs missed the city by miles, splashing harmlessly into the mud of the Severn near Portishead. Three months later the Luftwaffe returned. 58 bombers and 40 Messerschmitt fighter planes flew over Bristol in broad daylight. Their target was the BAC works at Filton. The raid was terrifyingly effective.

One bomb made a direct hit on a

crowded shelter. A young BAC employee described returning to work two weeks later: 'I cried because all my workmates had gone and there were strangers in their place.' In all, over 90 people were killed and 150 injured in the June raid on the BAC works. Many houses in Patchway and Filton were also damaged.

There was an outcry. The enemy planes had attacked Bristol unheeded. Why was Bristol so inadequately defended? The next time BAC was targeted on 25 September 1940 RAF Hurricanes were waiting and anti-aircraft guns banged into action. The German planes were dispersed and there were no casualties on the ground.

## The night sky turned blood red. Park Street was ablaze end to end.

On the night of Sunday 24 November 1940 a fleet of 134 bombers flew over Bristol. Flares were dropped to pinpoint strategic buildings. This was followed first by incendiaries and then by high explosive bombs which demolished buildings, destroyed roads and shattered water mains and



When Winston Churchill visited Bristol his stroll through the rubble was carefully stage-managed. Photo: Bristol Post.



To make matters worse it was a ferociously cold winter. The fire-fighter's turntables iced-up and water pipes froze. Photo: Bristol Post.

other services. The heart of the old city was the target, though the suburbs of Bedminster, Knowle, St George and Clifton were also hit. In Victoria Street 'flames were hundreds of feet high, the heat was terrific, even the shop window glass was melting'. The roads - paved with tarred wooden blocks - were on fire. The night sky turned blood red. Park Street was ablaze end to end.

The next morning residents viewed the devastation. Despite the valiant work of fire fighters the old shopping area of Castle Street and Wine Street had been reduced to rubble. St Peter's church was a shell, the medieval St Peter's Hospital had burnt to the ground, the landmark half timbered seventeenth century Dutch House was nothing more than a charred wooden frame. In just one raid 10,000 homes were damaged. A heavily censored *Evening Post* reported that casualties 'were relatively few'. In contrast, the German News Agency boasted that 'Bristol has been wiped out!'

Two weeks later the bombers returned. Again the city centre was the target; 156 civilians died, another 149 were seriously injured. And so the raids continued. At night people would seek refuge where they could. Public air raid shelters had been built hastily; some were not fit for purpose and had to be rebuilt. The shelters in St Andrews Park were built on the site of a spring and quickly filled with water. Others had their own home-built *Anderson* shelters in their backyards. Some sought protection in railway tunnels and even Redcliffe Caves.

The Mina Road railway tunnel was a popular spot - over 150 people lined the road on either side sleeping on mattresses and sofas. When a bomb demolished Redcliffe Infants School the



crater penetrated to the cavern below. People became twitchy and nervous. To make matters worse it was a ferociously cold winter. On 21 January -13°C. was recorded. The fire-fighter's turntables iced-up and water pipes froze. 'The cold was really numbing, it was debilitating. It pulled you down.' The government's Mass Observation study, a survey of public morale, was concerned that the spirit of people in Bristol was 'shaky'. 'There is quite open defeatism...there is less laughter and cheerfulness in Bristol than in Southampton or other places...' Bristol Corporation was not keen on such a slur. Not to be outdone it undertook its own survey, concluding that Bristol's 'spirit is high'.

The deadliest blitz was on Sunday 16 March. The warning siren sounded at 8.27 pm. The all clear wasn't given until 4.15 am. This time the targets were Avonmouth and the City Docks. Temple Meads and Lawrence Hill were also badly affected, as were other suburbs. The death toll was the worst yet: 257 killed, 391 badly hurt.

The public shelters were seen as defective and inadequate. In consequence, at night thousands of people would leave the city for the safety of the countryside. Those who couldn't afford to pay for a room slept in churches, village halls, huts, barns and even in the open fields. The evening departure, disparagingly called the *yellow convoy*, 'was like Piccadilly in the rush hour'. The official advice was to 'stay put'. The authorities were

concerned that the 'trekkers' weren't on hand to firewatch and wouldn't be around to put out incendiary bombs. After a particularly ferocious raid on Good Friday, 11 April 1941, Winston Churchill visited Bristol. His stroll through the rubble was carefully stage-managed. This didn't stop people from booing and jeering. (This went unreported at the time.) The citizens of the town in the West had had enough. They were hungry, suffering from disrupted sleep, scared and in mourning. Churchill promised: 'We will give it them back.' The newsreel of the Prime Minister's Bristol visit actually features enthusiastic footage of crowds in Cardiff.

Fortunately, the Good Friday attack was the last full-scale blitz. The nights of tragedy and horror were largely

over. Further occasional attacks did occur but they were nothing on the scale of previous raids. The enemy was now concentrating its increasingly stretched resources on other fronts.

During 1940 - 41 Bristol suffered some of the most concentrated air raids in Britain. It experienced more than 30 bombing attacks with 1,299 civilians killed and 3,305 injured. The term *Blitz Spirit* has passed into the English language. Over time, memory tends to soften the recollection of events. The frequent but unpredictable bombing so nearly brought the brave and courageous citizens of Bristol to their knees. Respite from the blitz came just in time.

*This is an extract from 'The Essential Bristol Miscellany' (working title) by Michael Manson, to be published shortly.*



Far left, November 24. Park Street was ablaze end to end. Photo: Bristol Post.

Left, Rescue worker in ruined house on St Michaels Hill. Photo: Bristol Post.



Below, Despite the valiant work of fire fighters the old shopping area of Castle Street and Wine Street had been reduced to rubble. Photo: Bristol Post





# Railings

Simon Birch asks what happened to our iron railings.

In Better Bristol 15 Autumn / Winter 2019 I made a request for help! Were any readers (or more probably their families) involved in railings removal? Or even in transporting the scrap to steelworks? I’ve been disappointed, having had no replies about those directly involved. In fact, only two replies – one alerting me to the Beaverbrook demand for the gates of Stanley Baldwin’s mansion! The other relating to Victoria Square and a failed attempt by its owners to retain its railings.

In September 1941, Baldwin’s old enemy, Lord Beaverbrook, asked all local authorities to survey their area’s iron and steel railings and gates that could be used for the war effort. Baldwin appealed against the loss of the railings and particularly fine gates at his country house, Astley Hall, in Worcestershire. Owners could appeal for an exemption on grounds of artistic or historic merit, which would be decided by a panel set up by local

authorities. A newspaper campaign hounded him for not donating the gates to war production. The *Daily Mirror* columnist *Cassandra* denounced Baldwin:

*“Here was the country in deadly peril with half the Empire swinging in the wind like a busted barn door hanging on one hinge. Here was Old England half smothered in a shroud crying for steel to cut her way out, and right in the heart of beautiful Worcestershire was a one-time Prime Minister, refusing to give up the gates of his estate to make guns for our defence”*

**In Victoria Square the removal of railings would open it up to “less desirable elements”.**

There were fears that if the gates were not taken by the proper authorities, “others without authority might”. Finally, the gates were spared but the railings were removed!

In Bristol there was a less high profile argument in Clifton where there was considerable debate about particularly prominent lengths of railing. In July 1940, the City Engineer wrote to the Merchant Venturers requesting that railings be removed from three locations, including around Victoria Square in Clifton where there were over 400 yards of railings.



The City Engineer received a frosty reply! The Venturers were not willing for their railings to be removed or at least not unless the State of Emergency became so acute that their removal was unavoidable. In Victoria Square the removal of railings would open it up to “less desirable elements”.

The correspondence continued into 1941 and even in October the Venturers wished to retain five lengths of railings. Eventually, of course, all the railings were removed and even today the boundary walls clearly illustrate the sawn off stumps of railings. Very little action has been taken over the past 70 years to provide a proper edge to the Square – the stone is now crumbling and in need of restoration.

Thank you for these fascinating insights into the workings of the removal process. I am no nearer knowing if the metal was actually used for the war effort. However, it does seem most likely that steelworks were so desperate for scrap that the railings were melted down and became mundane war materiel. The alternative – a massive underwater reef at the bottom of the Severn Estuary composed of railings from Stanley Baldwin and Victoria Square!

Simon Birch

# Bristol Civic Society membership

## Your Civic Society needs YOU!

Bristol Civic Society is more than 100 years old. It is a non-party-political body which campaigns for what is best for our city. Joining the Society is inexpensive and it is open to all. The bigger and more diverse our membership, the stronger we can be.

As a Society member you’re also on the invitation list to a range of events and benefits, from serious campaigning through to expert talks and social evenings and outings.

**Bristol Civic Society is:**

- \* Saving the best of Bristol’s past
- \* A powerful voice in Bristol’s future
- \* Campaigning on issues that affect us all - and the generations to come
- \* A great way to make new friends (and maybe re-connect with old ones!)

Find out more about the Society and its work at [bristolcivicsociety.org.uk](http://bristolcivicsociety.org.uk)



### Joining is easy

There are three ways to apply. You can do it via the website: [bristolcivicsociety.org.uk/get-involved/join-the-society](http://bristolcivicsociety.org.uk/get-involved/join-the-society) where you can join using PayPal, or download an application form. Or fill out, cut out or photocopy, and return the form below.

*Have you considered leaving something to the Bristol Civic Society in your will?*

### Membership application to join Bristol Civic Society

Membership (Annual)	Rate	✓
Individual	£20	
Joint living at the same address	£30	
Student	£10	

**Please return to:** Membership Secretary, Bristol Civic Society, 52 Oakwood Rd, Bristol BS9 4NT. Cheques, if not made by standing order, made payable to Bristol Civic Society.  
**Enquiries:** Tel: 0117 9621592.  
**Email:** [membership@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:membership@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk)

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**Please tick**

YES ☐ NO ☐

### Standing order mandate

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Please pay annually from 1st of ..... (1) 20 ..... (2)  
the sum of £..... (3) (.....(4) pounds)  
to CAF Bank Ltd (sort code 40-52-40) for the account of Bristol Civic Society (account no. 00087355)  
reference no. (5) ..... (for completion by BCS)  
Name.....  
Date ..... Signature (6) .....  
Insert (1) next month (2) this year (3) appropriate rate (4) amount in words (5) leave blank (6) wet signature needed by the bank



# Events

## Autumn and Winter 2020

Right, Public sculpture



The Coronavirus understandably laid waste to the best laid plans for the UK's summer outdoor and indoor events and gatherings. Hopefully taking account of changing circumstances, and probably at short notice (outside of the publishing deadline for this edition of *Better Bristol*), an interesting range of events will be offered in the autumn and winter months. Watch our Bristol Civic Society website for updates.

The growth and interest amongst our membership of Zoom type webinars offers the opportunity of talks and presentations to our membership regardless of age. Plans are in progress to line up some interesting speakers on a range of historic, and contemporary topics. These talks and discussions may be fixed at short notice and will also be advised to our members by email.

While we believe that a cautious approach to public meetings over the colder months is advisable we will look to host when possible, in appropriate venues, smaller walks and talks and hopefully occasional site visits. Promoted in the usual way, through invitation emails to members, and in the events section of the Bristol

Civic Society website.  
(bristolcivicsociety.org.uk)

Meanwhile we have access to a wide and interesting local film archive covering aspects of life in Bristol which we can share with members via email under the title 'More Bristol Views'.

### STOP PRESS:

We were all taken aback by Bristol City Council's new road and development proposals – they came out of the blue. Since then, the community has been on the back foot and always been reactive. We want to change this and move to being positive and proactive. We're not against change and development but this must take place with full community involvement, participation and consultation.

### Our proposed first steps:

With Covid restrictions it's a challenge to get moving but not impossible. Large groups and indoor meetings are not appropriate but smaller outdoor groups appear to be fine. We'll start there!

We propose a series of focused study walks. We will expect some in-depth findings from each group and will pull these together. To begin with we envisage groups of around 6 people

with everyone contributing – definitely not a guided tour. We plan to get going in the next few weeks.

We have an initial list of suggested topics but expect these to be increased: historical development of the area; views into & out of the area; the Floating Harbour, locks, structures, operation; tobacco bonds, history and options for the future; ecology and nature; green spaces; routes – walking, cycling; businesses and activities.

If you're interested in getting involved, please let me know. Would you like to help pull together the whole programme? To contribute to a particular walk? Or just keep in touch with what we're doing.

I look forward to hearing from you  
**Simon Birch**  
simon.birch7@gmail.com 07917 403473



Left, Shirehampton, Bristol's first garden suburb.



Wednesday 21 October  
at 2.00pm.

### Clifton plaques walk

with Gordon Young, shows us where the great and the good once lived, and some of the players in nineteenth century commerce.

### Other events planned and to be confirmed

Autumn: a talk on Bristol's cemeteries, by Dr Katie McClymont.

Visits delayed from the summer programme including: Ashton Court deer park; Bristol tannery; The New Yard development at the General; Weston Super Mare Civic Society.

Please check Bristol Civic Society website for updates:  
[bristolcivicsociety.org.uk](http://bristolcivicsociety.org.uk)



Tuesday 8 September at 7.00pm.

### Bristol Civic Society AGM Zoom conference event

Wednesday 16 September

### Westmoreland House Zoom discussion

Tuesday 24 September at 2.00pm.

### Shirehampton village guided walk

by David Martyn, an informative guide to local history and sites of interest in Bristol's first garden suburb.