

Better Bristol

The Bristol Civic Society Magazine – Issue 19 Autumn/Winter 2021

Inside

- Bristol's housing crisis
- Trams for Bristol
- Intriguing mosaics
- Bristol's twin cities
- Vanguard exhibition
- The smells of the city



an independent force for a **better Bristol**





Front Cover:
Ever-changing Bristol. Cranes and a new building peek over Redcliffe Back.
Photo: M. Manson.

Bristol Civic Society: Who's Who General Enquiries

Membership Secretary: David Giles
0117 9621592

membership@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk

General Enquiries: Alan Morris
enquiries@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk

Organisation

Chair: Simon Birch

chair@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk

Secretary: Mike Bates

secretary@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk

Treasurer: John Jones

treasurer@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk

Communications and Events

Better Bristol Editor: Mike Manson

mageditor@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk

Events: Nic Billane

events@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk

Webmaster: David Demery

webmaster@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk

Web and E-Mail Bulletin Editor:

Alan Morris

webeditor@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk

Building Awards Scheme: Sue Ellis

awards@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk

Blue Plaques: Gordon Young

plaques@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk

Campaigning

Major Sites Group:

Simon Birch and John Payne

msg@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk

Bristol Heritage Group:

chair@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk

Transport and Place-Making Group:

Alan Morris

alan.morris@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk

Links with Other Bristol Groups

Planning Network:

networkadministrator@bristolnbn.net

Bristol Walking Alliance: Alan Morris

enquiries@bristolwalkingalliance.org.uk

Conservation Advisory Panel:

Stephen Wickham

stephen_wickham@btinternet.com

Historic England: Simon Birch

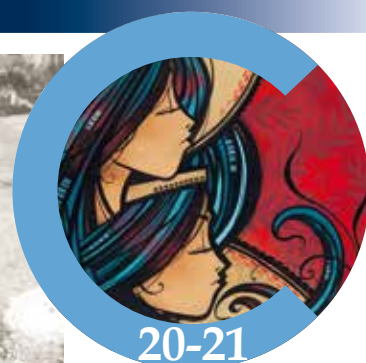
simon.birch7@gmail.com

BRISTOL CIVIC SOCIETY

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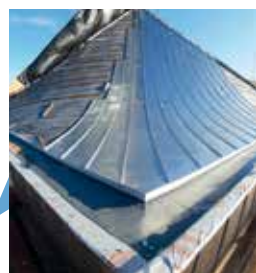
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EDITOR

Mike Manson
mageditor@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk

DESIGNER

Tracey Annear
info@quierecreative.co.uk

ADVISORY PANEL

Alan Morris, Eugene Byrne, Nic Billane, Simon Birch.

DISTRIBUTION TEAM

Led by Dave Thomas.

PRINTERS

Sebright, Bristol.

We welcome contributions. If you have an idea for an article for Better Bristol contact the editor.

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All articles in Better Bristol are the opinion of the author and don't necessarily reflect the views of Bristol Civic Society.

Chairman's report



Left, The best view in the country. Above, Are Voi scooters the only practical solution?

Bristol is changing – too quickly for many of us. Cranes seemingly everywhere. What's the plan? Where is all this development leading? Some questions which you've recently posed:

- What will happen to all that superfluous retail space? Can it all be converted to housing? What other uses may be suitable? What will the City Centre look like in future years? And suburban shopping centres? Surely, we can't do all our shopping on a screen?
- Is there an end in sight to the seemingly incessant demand for student housing? Will it really be designed in a flexible enough way so that, if necessary, it can be changed to mainstream housing in the future?
- Will all the City's light industrial sites be under threat from residential development? Already we have development proposals for Bedminster Green, St Philips and Temple Quarter. Where will all these existing companies and jobs

go? Surely they can't all relocate to Avonmouth?

- Is there really a market for new offices in a post pandemic economy? Temple Quarter, Victoria Street, St Mary le Port, Temple Island? Will home working have a long-term impact?
- How will we manage to move around the City with so many new developments all generating travel demands? It's already challenging enough for many of us! Are Voi scooters the only practical solution?

We're planning an event later this year – provisionally titled the Changing Face of Bristol – with the aim of investigating these issues. Quite a complicated event to organise! If you have ideas for speakers or for other issues to assess, do let me know. It may well be the start of a series of such meetings – there is so much to cover.

And, of course, we are also involved in contributing to a sustainable future for Ashton Court Mansion, encouraged by the involvement of The Prince's Foundation working with City Council and others. It's certainly long overdue for a firm plan to be adopted which will secure a sustainable future for such an

important and historic Mansion. And a personal mission!

Much uncertainty still surrounds the future of Western Harbour (Cumberland Basin) (see pages 12-13) but we will persevere and aim to make a positive contribution to the ongoing consultations. What wonderful views from that end of the Harbour to the Avon Gorge and Suspension Bridge and across to Ashton Court. These views deserve to be much better recognised and made accessible to all. It's currently quite hazardous to reach that end of the Floating Harbour and not terribly inviting. But well worth the effort for one of the best views in the country!

Over the summer I've certainly been excited and even uplifted by watching so much sport – the Euros, the Tour de France and Olympics. And, of course, now we have the start of the football season – with packed stadiums. Great to see sport so active, and well supported in Bristol and we are supportive in principle of proposals for additional development at Ashton Gate.

Simon Birch

Email: chair@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk



Not already a member? Why not join TODAY!

See page 27 for more details...

Major Developments

There are so many proposed developments coming forward in Bristol. *John Payne and Simon Birch* outline a selection of the most important schemes.

St Mary le Port

The Bristol Civic Society is keen to see an appropriate redevelopment of the St Mary-le-Port site in Wine Street. It's an important city centre site which is currently an eyesore. However, we cannot support the current planning application. Our strong view is that this is not an appropriate design response to this sensitive site located in Bristol's historic core. Although we have identified a number of commendable aspects of the scheme, the harmful impacts, particularly those flowing from the heights of the buildings, outweigh these.

In particular, the Society cannot support the proposed heights of the three office buildings. This is because of the substantial impairment to the setting of a significant number of other listed buildings as well as harm to views to the development when seen from many viewpoints.

The site's current condition and the wish to see it redeveloped and brought



Proposed view of St Mary-le-Port site in Wine Street. Currently an eye-sore.

into productive use, should not be to the detriment of the historic features and character of this sensitive part of the city.

Ideally, the Society would like to see the application site and adjoining

highway land considered together in the redevelopment of the area. Not doing so potentially risks missing an opportunity to deliver an outstanding piece of place making that Bristol would be proud of.

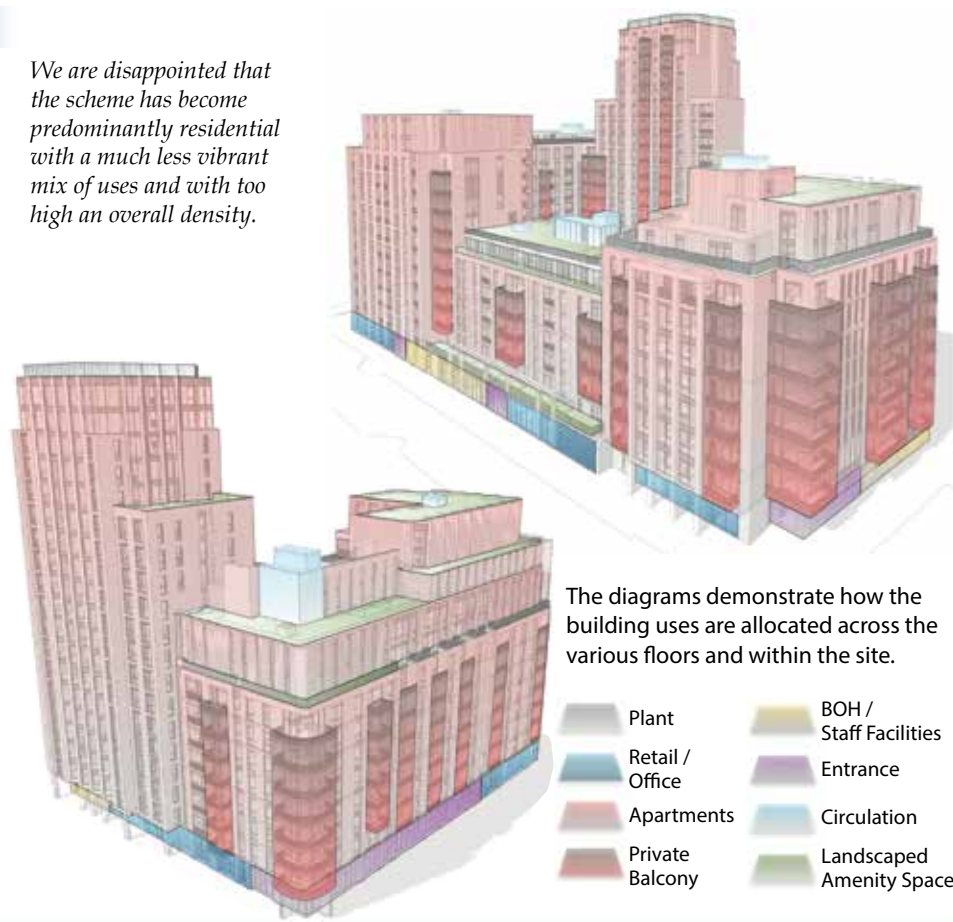
Redcliff Quarter

Bristol Civic Society objects to the latest proposals for Redcliff Quarter, another important City centre site. This is bounded by Redcliff Street, St Thomas Street and Three Queens Lane. The proposal has an over-dense design which has little or no relationship with the historic street pattern and which will have an adverse impact on the neighbouring properties.

We have consistently responded to consultations with the following key points. Disappointment that the scheme has become predominantly residential with a much less vibrant mix of uses and with too high an overall density. We urge the developers to seek more variation in the treatment of the elevations.

The Society is concerned that the scale of the proposal will be harmful to neighbouring buildings particularly those on the west side of Redcliff Street. This harm is demonstrated clearly in the proposed elevations showing the scale of the proposed development. Of particular concern is the building proposed at the corner of Three Queens Lane and Redcliff Street.

We are disappointed that the scheme has become predominantly residential with a much less vibrant mix of uses and with too high an overall density.



The diagrams demonstrate how the building uses are allocated across the various floors and within the site.

- | | |
|-----------------|--------------------------|
| Plant | BOH / Staff Facilities |
| Retail / Office | Entrance |
| Apartments | Circulation |
| Private Balcony | Landscaped Amenity Space |

in Bristol

Land to the west of Aston Gate Stadium.

The application is for demolition of the existing buildings immediately to the west of the Ashton Gate Stadium and development of a sports hub, hotel, offices, housing and multi storey car park.

The Society supports, in principle, the

development of the land adjoining Ashton Gate Stadium which will create a sporting and hospitality hub of benefit to the City and south Bristol in particular and boost employment opportunities in the area.

We have urged the developers, Bristol City Council, and transport providers to maximise public transport accessibility, and other measures that

could lead to a further reduction in on-site parking in order to achieve a sustainable development.

We are particularly concerned about the proposed 14 storey residential tower and nearby office building. The Society considers that tall buildings do not provide a satisfactory living environment unless built to a high standard and closely managed. We are also concerned about the impact of these tall buildings on views in the city. Looking to the south across the site they would break the skyline presently formed by the hills east and west of Dundry and partially block views of the hills themselves. They would also harm the view across the site from Ashton Court at Woodman's Cottage.



Left, Ashton Gate development. There are concerns about the quality of the living environment.

Baltic Wharf

The Major Sites Group has recently considered and commented on the planning application to develop housing on the caravan site at Baltic Wharf. This application is for the erection of 166 residential dwellings including affordable homes, commercial floorspace, integrated car and bicycle parking, refuse storage, landscaping and associated infrastructure and services. The buildings facing the Floating Harbour would be five storeys and a block in the centre of the scheme six storeys.

The Society supports the Council's policy of meeting the shortfall in the City's supply of housing particularly affordable housing. We do not take issue, therefore, with the principle of

developing this site for housing with some commercial activities adjacent to the quayside walk. However, we do have real concerns about the height and design of the proposal and its impact on the neighbourhood. The Cumberland Road elevations of the development also require improvement. We have suggested



height reductions of at least one storey for the gabled roofs bordering the east and west side of the site to reduce the impact of the development on the Floating Harbour and improve the relationship with buildings to the east and west.

We have concluded that we cannot support the proposal as it stands. The design of the buildings and public spaces has to be of a very high standard to compensate for the loss of the open feel of the caravan site, to be sensitive to the character of the City Docks Conservation Area and to ensure that valued views across the Floating Harbour are not compromised.

Left, There are plans to develop housing on the caravan site at Baltic Wharf.



Boklok is a partnership between Ikea and Skanska. Housing units are precision-made in factories in Derby and Estonia.

Housing Crisis

Mike Frost asks what's to be done?

Bristol is facing a chronic housing crisis. The council's list of homeless people is bulging, and first-time buyers face eye-popping valuations which have pushed owning a home way out of reach for many.

The house price to income ratio average for Bristol as a whole is around nine times. So you will pay nine times your salary to own an average property. In sought-after places, it is far higher. The historical average in the UK has been between two and five. The average age at which people buy their first property has been pushed back and back and for many a first home is now way out of reach. And Bristol has people sleeping in vans under flyovers and in tents. Housing supply shortages ripple down the system, and affect us all: if we want to ensure an adequate supply of nurses and carers for our future needs, we need to ensure we are providing enough homes now for people to live in.

What might housing solutions for Bristol look like? The good news is, there are interesting initiatives going on which could offer some longer-term solutions. The housing fly could yet be shown the way out of the housing bottle.

A core issue is housing supply: we have simply not built enough new homes nationally over the past two decades. We have a national housing shortage of around 2 million homes. The exact figure doesn't really matter – we see the effects of this shortage in a broken

housing market and housing stress in Bristol, manifesting itself in ever-increasing prices. Homeowners sitting pretty on a property they bought in the 70s might think this is a good thing, but remember that those carers, nurses and bus drivers all need somewhere decent and affordable to live.

Bristol is a popular, prosperous and growing city. People want to come and live here. Changing demographics mean that there are more single people and so more households are forming. Cash-rich buyers from London can outbid locals, breeding resentment, and foreign 'investor buyers' may seek investment opportunities outside the capital. This 'financialisation' of housing – seeing housing as an investment asset providing returns on capital in the form of rent 'dividends' – can buy up stock and 'crowd out' first-time buyers.

What of solutions? Francis Bacon, the sixteenth century thinker, said, "To achieve things never before accomplished, we must use methods never before attempted": we must



Fewer trips to the office are predicted.

innovate to find solutions. And the good news is that Bristol is leading on some novel housing approaches. Modular housing has been around for donkeys' years, but modern modular is very different to 50s and 60s modular. It has come on leaps and bounds. And in 'Boklok on the Brook' in south Bristol, 173 homes are being quickly built using a proven Scandinavian modular approach for the first time in the UK.

Boklok is a partnership between Ikea and Skanska. Housing units are precision-made in factories in Derby and Estonia, transported to the site, lowered into a pre-built shell and homes quickly prepared. The construction time is cut by 50%, it is claimed; the whole site is planned to be completed by March/April 2022.

Purchase prices are similar to traditional build – around £310,000 for a 3-bed home. The main advantages of Boklok are the speed of construction, and the 70% or so estimated reduction in waste from the modular offsite prefabrication. The life-cost of the property is also lower. Ikea and Skanska are now looking for new sites.

Over the past 20 years, 12,000 homes have been built this way in Sweden, Norway and Finland, so it is a proven system. A great many of the Bristol homes will be classed as 'affordable' to buy or rent. Boklok is certainly delivering. Judging by their computer generated images the new homes on Airport Road, Hengrove, look promising; the brick-style cladding keys in with the existing red brick of nearby homes in Knowle West.

Modular construction on larger sites could be one part of the solutions mix. Economies of scale may thus put a new home within the reach of younger buyers.

Smaller scale initiatives in Bristol include the innovative ZedPods in St George, which uses the vacant airspace above a council car park to provide 11 units – cars park underneath.

Park St has an example of 'innovative modular facading' – at No.50, above Mrs Potts Chocolate House the whole area behind the stone facade was removed. At one point, you could look through the empty window frames and see blue sky beyond. There was literally nothing there but air. Park St was closed and a giant crane lifted in modular units to the site over the roof, which were then built up and 9 new studio flats created above Mrs Potts. I bet most hot chocolate drinkers are unaware that this was a first for Bristol and for England.

Such 'repurposing' of existing buildings has always gone on – think of Bush House being boldly and imaginatively transformed into the Arnolfini and offices. Developers respond to meet market signals and human need.

This trend is likely to continue as high street retail space becomes available for new purposes. John Lewis & Partners recently announced that it was making

some of its closed stores and warehouses available for housing use. There needs to be enough natural light and we must avoid creating the 'slums of the future' with shoddy developments. We need to be vigilant and "good ancestors" to prevent inappropriate Bristol development.

Self-build is an area for potential growth. Around 5% of new-build homes in the UK are self-built, compared to 10% in Germany and 45% in Scandinavia. Modular self-build

What seems more certain is that the pandemic will change the kinds of homes people choose to live in.

has been transformed since the 1960s. Got a large garden and outgrown your family home? Get planning permission and self-build a smaller new modular home, then rent out your main home. The main claimed advantage of self-build is lower cost and personalised specification. This could work for some.

Could new left-field digital developments radically change the way we build? And could the pandemic impact on housing preferences and mean that demand changes? Construction is the second least digitalised of 22 sectors in the economy, say global management company McKinsey. So on the face of it, there

could be scope for digital innovation in housing. Could Bristol housing be about to face its iPhone moment?

Digital '3D printing' of homes sounds futuristic, but it's already being done. An on-site robot is programmed to squirt quick-drying concrete from a nozzle, and walls are then built up 'additively'. Small scale prototype disaster emergency homes have been built. It isn't too far-fetched to imagine robotic house production emerging over coming years. Unlike site workers, the robots can work 24/7 – and Bill Gates, among others, is investing in research into reduced-pollution 'green' concrete. We shall see.

What seems more certain is that the pandemic will change the kinds of homes people choose to live in. People may now prefer to live in homes with gardens over city-centre flats. And with more remote working from home, we may see growth in satellite commuter towns: lower housing costs, more space, and trips to the Bristol office one or two days a week for some people may be preferable to overpriced Bristol homes and Bristol traffic. If this trend comes to pass, it will mean greater importance for public transport and broadband links.

There are, then, various welcome housing initiatives going on in Bristol. On housing and housing solutions, as Yogi Berra said – 'the future ain't what it used to be!'

Smaller scale initiatives in Bristol include the innovative ZedPods in St George.



Trams for Bristol

A second chance? Asks Mike Bates



Whenever we travel on the continent of Europe trams seem to be everywhere.

Could this be Bristol's second chance to get a modern tram system? The West of England Combined Authority (WECA) - our transport authority - is soon to launch a consultation about a regional Mass Transit System. (By the time you read this, it may already have been launched.)

This will be based on preparatory work by consultants, which will be deliberately 'mode-neutral'. Thus, it won't make any prior assumptions about the type of technology - or about the exact routes. The purpose of the consultation is to seek views on these aspects before moving to the next stage, the Outline Business Case.

Buses, bus rapid transit (BRT or Metrobus), an underground railway even- all have been floated. But the idea of trams has been getting a lot more attention recently. There have been several articles in the press, and in June Zero West and Transport for Greater Bristol published a detailed

study "Trams for Bristol", which is well worth a read: (<https://www.movingbristolforward.co.uk/tram-study>)

And the Bristol Civic Society contributed to the debate, hosting a Zoom lecture by Roger Harrison, the former head of Nottingham's tram system and an expert in the field:

(<https://www.bristolcivicsociety.org.uk/bristol-tram-zoom-event-12th-may-2021/>)

In Bristol, one of the biggest threats to air quality and carbon neutrality is over-reliance on cars.

Trams have a romantic, nostalgic appeal to many of us. But aren't they hopelessly impractical? At first glance, tram systems may seem to start with numerous handicaps: they are expensive to build; construction causes disruption in busy city streets; they need intrusive overhead wires; and they are inflexible and can't be diverted if a road has to be closed temporarily, or new development calls for a route to be changed.

And yet, and yet.... while there are only some seven systems in the UK,

whenever we travel on the continent of Europe (remember those days?) trams seem to be everywhere - often modern, recently installed networks, not hangovers from earlier days. For example, 29 French towns and cities had trams as of 2020, with more planned. And it's not just Europe. In the USA, where rugged individualism rules and the car is king, 42 towns or cities had public streetcar/light rail systems as of 2020, most of them recently installed or modernised. Could it be that other countries know something we don't?

We've been here before

We have of course been here before. Bristol used to have an extensive tram network; and back in 2000 we had a very real possibility of a 'Bristol Supertram'.

Bristol trams began in 1875, and were converted to electricity in 1895 (making Bristol the first UK city to have electric trams). At its peak, the network comprised 17 routes. It came to an end literally overnight on Good Friday 1941, when a Luftwaffe bomb hit St Philip's Bridge and severed the power supply from the adjacent generator building. Trams never ran again.

Then, in 2001, the government backed a plan by Bristol and South Gloucestershire councils for a "Bristol Supertram". Line 1 (and another four were proposed) would have run from the centre out to Almondsbury - mainly along Network Rail tracks, but running on streets in the Centre and on purpose built tracks at the outer ends. For a while, it looked like a very real possibility: central government's contribution to the funding was confirmed, and Bristol could have been vying with Nottingham to be the sixth British city with a tram system. But the project was cancelled in 2004 following disagreements over the route and increasing cost pressures on the local authorities.

Today

So why are trams back in the public eye now? Partly it's a recognition that Bristol urgently needs a better public transport system and that trams could form the core of it. But that's long been the case. What has changed in recent years is an acute awareness of the need to reduce our carbon use and also to



Above left, Bristol urgently needs a better public transport system. Trams could form the core of it. Above right, Trams in the Centre again. Images Nic Billane.

improve the city's air quality generally; and the increasing recognition that trams, using the latest generation of tram technology (in both vehicles and track) could help us tackle these challenges. And moreover could do so at less cost than earlier forms of tram.

New designs of tramcar include lightweight types, cheaper for less busy routes, and ones that don't need overhead wires. And new types of track can be laid more quickly and cheaply and with less disturbance to buried services

It's always been clear that they are environmentally friendly in that they don't produce 'tail-pipe emissions'; but we are now becoming aware of an equally dangerous form of pollution, the micro-particles of rubber, plastic and steel, from tyres and brakes - the so-called Oslo Effect. Trams, with steel wheels on steel rails, produce far less of this. (And even brake pad pollution is significantly less, if they use regenerative braking, as many modern electric vehicles do, reducing the wear on pads.)

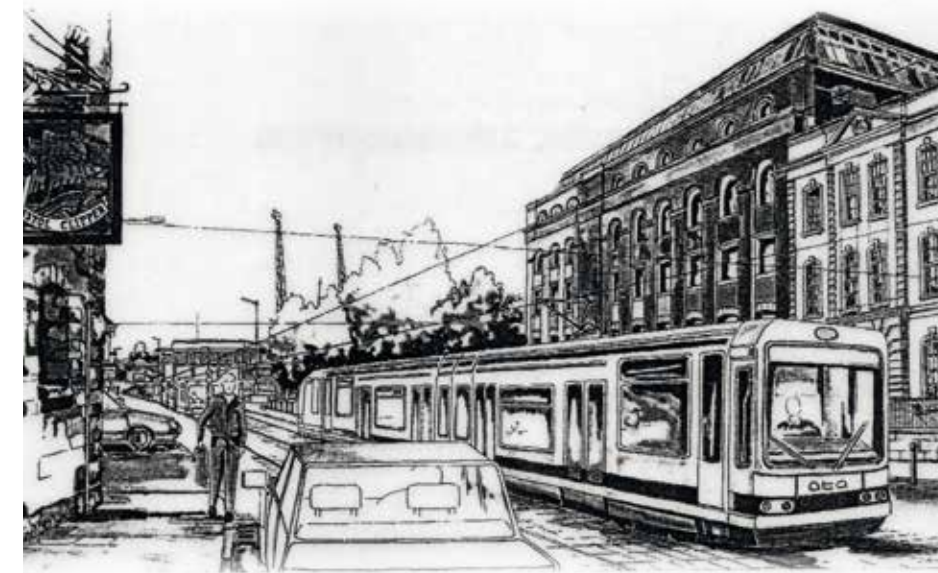
In Bristol, one of the biggest threats to air quality and carbon neutrality is our over-reliance on cars. It's been said that if the city is to meet its target of carbon neutrality by 2030, we need to reduce car use from some 50% to 20% of journeys. And here, the tram can have a key role: there is ample evidence that, when it comes to persuading people to leave their cars and use public transport ("Modal switch" in the jargon of the trade) trams and light rail are much more effective than buses, even Metrobuses

See Toulouse and weep

Toulouse isn't an official twin of Bristol, but it does have some links and resemblances: a similar size of population (both central area and hinterland); it's involved in aerospace and the manufacture of Airbus; and

(pre-Covid) it could easily be visited from here, with a daily Easyjet flight. Its public transport infrastructure includes two metro lines (underground), the first built in 1993 (!), with another planned; two tram lines dating from 2010, with another

planned; and something called Lineo which appears to be a tram-style, rapid transit bus, on seven routes. That's what you get when city authorities have real power delegated to them, and have the vision to use it effectively.



Below, Bristol's proposed Light Rail Transit, 1990.

Trams look increasingly relevant to today's problems.

Trams aren't the solution to every problem, and any sensible public transport system will need a mix: starting with better provision for walking and cycling, then an integrated network including buses (including short distance feeders and perhaps hail & ride hoppers), Metrobus/BRT lines, trams or similar, and conventional rail. But trams do look increasingly relevant to today's problems. The forthcoming WECA consultation should provoke a lively debate, and - just possibly - pave the way for trams to reappear on Bristol's streets.



Left, 35 mosaics were installed in 1994.
Below, Should the mosaics be moved to a more appropriate location?



Picking up the pieces

What is the history of these intriguing mosaics? *Julian Brenard* investigates

On a bike ride four years ago I was surprised to discover a series of ceramic mosaics in a passageway that passes underneath the St Philips causeway or the A4320 in St Philips/Lawrence Hill. Recently I returned to this same underpass on Days Lane and discovered the mosaics are in a dreadful and deteriorating condition, increasingly covered in graffiti and apparently abandoned.

The 35 mosaics were installed in this passageway in 1994. They are made up of 1cm tiles and range in size from approximately 30cm square to as large as 300cm by 120cm. They depict the industries and places that featured in Bristol's development as a city from the thirteenth century to the present.

When I tried to find out about the history of these mosaics I could discover absolutely nothing in any website, newspaper, organisation, archives, library references, etc. except that they were probably part of an initiative undertaken by the Bristol Urban Development Corporation. (*The Bristol Urban Development Corporation (BUDC) was appointed by Margaret Thatcher's government. It was tasked with developing the St Philip's area, which was said to be suffering from a large amount of vacant or derelict land. The BUDC, which operated*

under its own rules and regulations, was not popular with Bristol City Council. Ed.)

I believe it is important to find out about the history of these mosaics. Why were they put there? Who were the artists that made them? How much did the project cost? How long did it take to install them? Who is responsible for them and why are they abandoned? Surely someone must know. It's not that long ago.

I believe they are quite unique and important to keep and maintain as a work of art and as a record of Bristol's industrial development. I also believe it is important to make them more visible to the city and its residents and to that end I have added them to Bristol's 'Know Your Place' map.



Finally, because of their location off the normal path of many Bristol residents and visitors, I would love to see them moved to a more appropriate location.

Perhaps this could be somewhere such as Temple Meads station, Bristol Airport or a similar sort of setting where they could be seen on a daily basis by significant numbers of citizens and visitors and be reminded as to what made Bristol the city it is today.

If you have any information about these mosaics I would love to know. Contact: jmbrenards@gmail.com or phone 07857 601 741.

Below, The mosaics depict the industries and places that featured in Bristol's development from the thirteenth century to the present.



A major £1m project is now taking place to lay a new roof and to carry out other improvements to the church.

St Bernadette's Church, Whitchurch

Simon Birch explores this landmark church on the Wells Road.

You have probably noticed that modern church – on the right side driving south towards Whitchurch! Now shrouded in scaffolding and being given a makeover. The church is a landmark on the Wells Road. Its tent-like appearance and liturgical plan were key considerations in the design of the church.

The Hengrove and Whitchurch Park suburbs to the south of Bristol were developed in the interwar period and expanded following the Second World War. In 1958 a Roman Catholic school was built and dedicated to St Bernadette, marking the centenary of the apparitions at Lourdes.

The church was designed with steep curving roofs and pointed peaks to emulate a tent-like structure, apparently to recognise the ephemeral nature of human life on this earth as well as the humble nature of traditional roadside pilgrimage structures! The internal arrangement was specified to emphasise a close relationship between the altar and the congregation, and to present an open and inclusive appearance to the wider community. The church served a new parish comprising Whitchurch, Hengrove and Stockwood.

The Roman Catholic Church of St Bernadette, Wells Road, Whitchurch, was opened in 1968. It was an innovative design by James Leask of Kenneth Nealon, Tanner & Partners.

The building is now listed at Grade II for the following principal reasons:

Architectural interest: the dynamic design displays considerable architectural flair and innovation, particularly in the bold use of the hyperbolic paraboloid form. It is a building of real quality in its materials, composition and detailing

Historic interest: it is a good example of a Roman Catholic church where design and plan form express the liturgical developments that took place after the Second Vatican Council held in 1962-5

Interior: the innovative plan and use of light add to the interest and its fixtures, fittings and embellishments are of good quality. The impressive sculpture of

the Risen Christ by Frank Roper also enhances the level of interest

Degree of survival: the church, including the internal fixtures and fittings and embellishments, has survived virtually intact

The materials used in constructing St Bernadette's included reinforced concrete shell roofs and piers with red brick flank and rear walls in stretcher bond. The church roofs were covered in a felt layer faced in aluminium foil.

However, this gave rise to significant problems with condensation as the innovative roof was not sufficiently ventilated and the original detailing was not effective. Indeed, it seems the technology was not developed sufficiently in 1960s for such an unusual roof shape.

A major £1m project is now taking place to lay a new roof and to carry out improvements to the church heating and other internal works. The roof project is designed by architect Jonah Jay, based in Wickwar, and carried out by conservation company Corbel Conservation Ltd. Site manger Arthur Murray described the extensive works which involve placing battens on top of the existing roof, followed by counter battens and two layers of 9 mm ply. There is then a membrane (to allow movement) and then the new aluminium outer layer. The result will be startling and extremely bright!

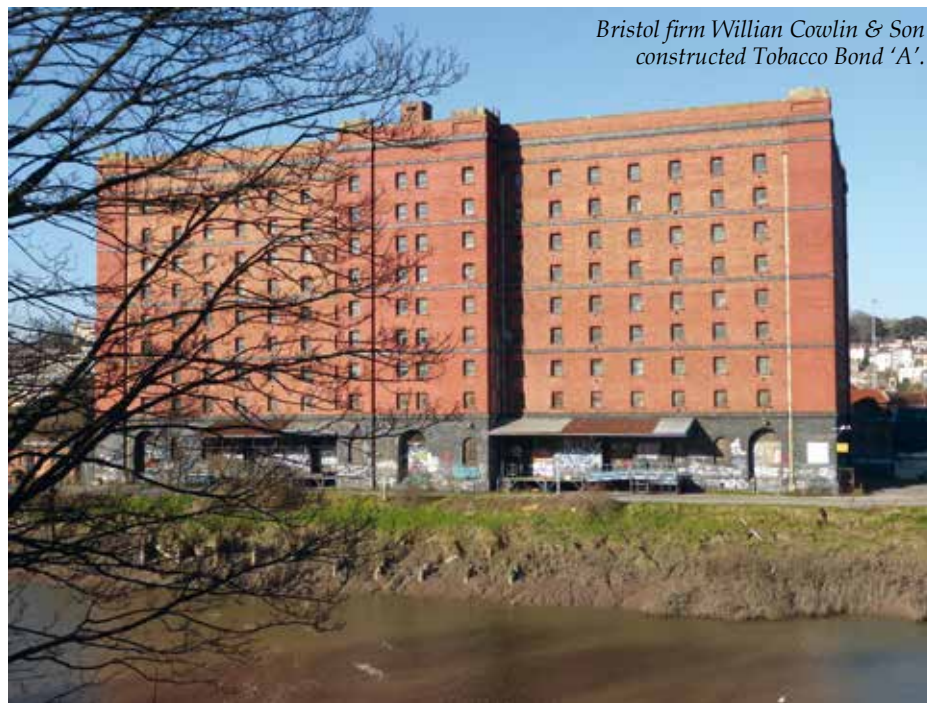


The Roman Catholic Church of St Bernadette, Wells Road, Whitchurch, was opened in 1968.

Industrial Heritage in

the Western Harbour

Bristol firm Willian Cowlin & Son constructed Tobacco Bond 'A'.



Geoff Wallis explores the fascinating industrial archaeology of the area.

Cumberland Basin and the Harbour entrance locks are the vital but unglamorous parts of the City that allow north-south road traffic to cross waterways heading east-west. These functions will continue for the foreseeable future. But if, and when, the Western Harbour development takes place the landscape will change, offering exciting opportunities for our industrial and maritime heritage.

'Ship-Shape and Bristol Fashion' no more

In the eighteenth century ships moored along Bristol's quays would settle on the mud at low tide and roll, risking damage to the cargo if everything was not stowed or tied down 'ship-shape and Bristol fashion'. So, facing competition from new docks being built in Liverpool, The Bristol Docks Company commissioned William Jessop to design the new 'Floating Harbour' which was opened on May Day 1809.

Jessop's original junction lock survives, flanked by a picturesque row of dock-

workers cottages and a terrace of three Georgian houses which now form the Nova Scotia pub, all dating from the early 1800s. The dam in the west end of Jessop's lock has four sluice-gates which are still opened monthly to sluice out mud and silt brought into the Harbour by the River Avon, a problem for shipping throughout the life of the Floating Harbour.

Concrete innovations

Nearby in Avon Crescent an electricity sub-station was built in 1905 to provide power at 'Bristol Voltage' (360V) for the hydraulic pumps at Underfall Yard. It was constructed using a new reinforced concrete technique developed by Francois Hennebique and is one of Britain's earliest examples and predates another Bristol Hennebique building,



Thomas Ware's Tannery, still uses traditional techniques.

Canons Marsh Goods Shed. Although the outside of the sub-station is plain, the inside is embellished with white tiles, green-banding and an elegant decorative ironwork balcony.

In the same year the well-known Bristol firm Willian Cowlin & Son constructed Tobacco Bond 'A' nearby. Demand in the south Bristol tobacco industry continued to increase so three years later they built Bond 'B' using Edmund Coignet's new reinforced concrete design. It was the first major building of its type in Britain, and nine years later they completed Bond 'C' using the same system. All these early concrete buildings survive in use, Listed Grade 2, except the Avon Street substation which has no statutory protection.

Local Industries still visible

John Lysaght & Co. Ltd of St. Vincent's Works in Feeder Road, became world renowned for their 'Orb' brand of galvanized corrugated iron sheeting. Tens of thousands of tons of it were shipped to the colonies, much of it to Australia to clad settlers' buildings.

Two of Lysaght's riveted steel bridges survive. Ashton Swing Bridge was built in 1905-6 for Bristol Corporation and the GWR. It had two decks, a railway crossing with a road above, topped by a fine, elevated control cabin. Its remnants were restored recently as a static bridge to carry the Metrobus over the New Cut.

Merchants Road swivel bridge, dated 1925, continues to operate to allow shipping to pass through Junction Lock, rotated by hydraulic equipment housed in a modern cabin.

Here Junction Lock, built in the 1870s, still functions, together with later



Just outside the entrance lock is a gridiron on which ships were placed to allow minor maintenance.

stop-gates which hold back flood-water during exceptionally high tides.

Another reminder of a once-extensive local industry is Thomas Ware's Tannery, still prospering using traditional techniques, including Victorian scouring and tanning pits, to make world-class quality leather goods. Take a walk along Coronation Road beside the tannery to experience the wonderful smell of curing leather!

Underfall Yard's famous patent slipway still hauls out boats for maintenance, but there was another, cheaper, way of beaching a ship in Bristol, using the falling tide in the River Avon. Just outside the entrance lock is a gridiron on which ships were placed to allow minor maintenance. The gridiron is still there, covered with silt, but it could be cleared to provide a rare, visually interesting historic feature.

The Entrance Locks

Jessop built two entrance locks linking Cumberland Basin and the tidal River Avon, but within a few decades growth in the size of ships demanded the construction of a new lock.

Brunel's elegant elliptic, stone-lined lock lies under the Plimsoll Bridge, although it has been allowed to silt up over the last decade. The Lock was so wide that its heavy hinged gates, called 'caissons' were made to float like ships. They were operated by chains and winches, drawn into recesses in the lock's walls to allow ships to pass. The giant recesses can still be seen,

giving an impression of just how large Brunel's 1844-9 caissons were.

Shipping continued to grow, so in the 1870s City Dock Engineer Thomas Howard designed a new entrance lock that was larger than Brunel's and better aligned with the river. A toll-house, offices, mooring pins, and

The Western Harbour Development will hopefully provide the opportunity to showcase our past industries and restore historic assets.

hydraulic capstans still survive. Under metal plates old hydraulic 'jiggers' which operated the lock gates can be found, an interesting early form of mechanization.

Brunel designed a swivelling bridge to cross his new entrance lock. It was his first rotating bridge, and incorporated a number of innovative design features which he subsequently used elsewhere.



Brunel designed a swivelling bridge to cross his new entrance lock.



Under metal plates old hydraulic 'jiggers' which operated the lock gates can be found, an interesting early form of mechanization.

The structure was so successful that two more were built in Bristol, and a copy has recently been found in St. Petersburg.

In 1873 Brunel's Bridge was relocated over Howard's new entrance lock where it remains today, rusting under the Plimsoll Bridge which replaced it in the mid 1960's. Volunteers funded by Historic England grants have restored the turning mechanism so that the Bridge can rotate a short distance again, the only part of Brunel that still moves! The Swivel Bridge could be restored to provide a much-needed low-level crossing for pedestrians and cyclists.

Western Harbour Development

The Tongue, (the island of land adjacent to the entrance lock) could be central to the proposed Western Harbour Development. Here Brunel's Lock and Swivel Bridge, both Grade 2* Listed structures, offer exciting opportunities to tell more of the Brunel story. Perhaps this area could become a new campus for the ss Great Britain Trust who are telling the Brunel story so well, and already have a proven track-record in large-scale conservation projects.

The Tongue affords magnificent views of Hotwells and Clifton, the City, Ashton Court Park, the Suspension Bridge, and down the River Avon, Bristol's 'Gateway to the rest of the world'.

The Western Harbour Development will hopefully provide the opportunity to showcase our past industries and restore historic assets using Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) monies. It is a unique place to celebrate the City's maritime, trading and technological achievements, offering an opportunity for 'place-making' to rival any in the world.



Most of us nowadays probably think of squatting – the occupation of property without the owner’s permission – as something done by people with radical political views and/or lifestyles.

In 1946, though, it became seen as a respectable temporary solution to a chronic housing shortage, and Bristol was one of its leading centres.

Britain’s housing problems at the end of the Second World War were acute. In Bristol demobbed servicemen and women were returning to a city where almost no new homes had been built since 1939, where thousands of houses had been damaged or destroyed by bombing, and where thousands more were no better than slums anyway. Added to this was an increasing number of births at the start of the postwar “Baby Boom”.

House-building was one of the government’s most urgent priorities, with most resources allocated to council housing. In Bristol, as elsewhere, construction was dogged by a shortage of labour, and shortages (and thefts) of materials.

The pre-fabricated houses made by the Bristol Aeroplane Company (among others) were not nearly enough to fill the gap and by 1946, there were 26,000 names on Bristol’s council house waiting list. This, and the stately pace of construction of what’s now City Hall, gave rise to a local joke: A returning soldier is walking around town with a friend and sees the big half-finished building on College Green.

BRISTOL CIVIC SOCIETY



1946 August 14,
Squatters White
City 3 girls.



Squatters at white city 1946.

Stolen Paradise

In the summer of 1946, Bristolians were at the forefront of a nationwide movement of people who took the law into their own hands to solve their desperate housing problems. *Eugene Byrne* tells the little known story of post-war squatting.

“What’s that?” he asks.

“Why that’s going to be the new Council House.”

“Nice. I’ve got my name down for one of those.”

At the same time, a very large number of military sites, from huge camps all the way to a handful of huts next to an anti-aircraft battery, were now vacant.

In August 1946 people across the country started to occupy them. One of the earliest was the Vache Camp in Buckinghamshire; newspaper and radio coverage of this seems to have triggered the movement nationally.

In Bristol, it began with the camp at White City in Ashton. On August 12, left-wing Labour councillor and Housing Committee member Alderman Henry Hennessey announced that he would be at White City at 7.30pm the next evening to ‘meet any families contemplating moving into the huts and to help them select the best’.

Shortly after Hennessey spoke, people were gathering at the camp gates, reasoning that if they waited another 24 hours they’d be too late. They rushed in, undeterred by the camp caretaker, or by a police inspector and his men. As long as they did no damage, they were not breaking the law.

By the end of the week, almost every vacant ex-military hut in Bristol would have new residents.

The mass-squatting movement of August 1946 was one of the most remarkable episodes of civil disobedience in British history. It was sudden, rapid and nation-wide and was entirely working-class. The elected leaders in each of the camps were almost all demobbed servicemen who had been NCOs or warrant officers.

The first thing they all did was set up a management committee in each camp, and collected weekly “rent” money to hand over to whichever authority would accept their right to stay.

The day after White City was occupied, seven sites in Bristol were taken over by several hundred people, including camps at Hanham, Speedwell, Brislington and a former American camp at Shirehampton golf course.

The anti-aircraft gun site at Bedminster Down was occupied by people who had initially gone to White City and found it full up. They were lucky; many of the huts boasted wash-basins and lavatories in separate rooms. One of the Bedminster Down squatters, ex-paratrooper who had been at Arnhem told a reporter that he, his wife and two children had been

sharing a three-room flat in Hotwells with seven other people.

“I was one of those who had applied to the Corporation for a house,” he said, “but you could not get better conditions in any house than you have here.”

By the end of the week 20 disused camps in Bristol and surrounding districts were occupied by over 1,000 people. At Penpole Point, the squatters renamed the camp ‘Stolen Paradise’ (the title of a Hollywood melodrama). The occupants of a disused RAF camp at Weston-super-Mare dubbed it ‘The Last Straw Estate’.

Tom Kirk became one of the Stolen Paradise residents. He had served in the army from 1938 until 1946 and he and his wife were now living with her parents in Shirehampton.

Some years ago, he told the Post: “They were very nice people, but we wanted our independence. There was this squatting going on all over the country. So I thought, well we’re not going to get a place anywhere else, so we squatted up at Penpole Camp ... We were fortunate, there was a sink in there with a cold tap. I altered the hut to make a bedroom and living room.

“Nobody at that time thought it was illegal or immoral - there was a great housing shortage and there were all these army huts going to waste.”

There was little hostility towards the squatters. A vicar wrote to the Evening Post: “I speak from personal knowledge of the people and conditions at White City. They went there because they were desperate; nobody would go there in the way they did unless they were desperate.

“Their action was unusual, unconstitutional, but let no-one think they are ruffians. They are ordinary people, they shave every day, eat at tables, go off to earn their own livings.”

By early September, Bristol City Council announced that it had arranged, in the interests of public health, for the provision of sanitary facilities, refuse collection, water supplies and lighting.

By the autumn, the government had come to accept the situation and, in all but a few cases, the squatters were permitted to remain. The management of the camps, and the provision of services, was delegated to local authorities. The huts became, in effect, council housing.

In Bristol three camps - at Speedwell, Avonmouth and Shirehampton Park - were to be vacated as they were required for government use. The inhabitants were to be re-homed, where possible, in other camps.

Five others - former anti-aircraft gun sites at Whitchurch, Westbury-on-Trym, Bedminster Down and Purdown plus a barrage balloon site by the Portway - were not immediately needed by the government, and could be occupied for at least 18 months. The remainder, at Brislington, White City, Shirehampton West and Southside Wood (Westbury-on-Trym) could be used indefinitely.

The Council set weekly rents and by Christmas, its tenants included 326 families living in huts, and that of these 200 had enough ‘points’ on the waiting list to be allocated a council house within 12 months.

Some families lived in huts for years, and their memories were not always happy ones. Some who lived in them as children recalled being bullied at school because they did not live in a “proper” house.

The adults had problems too. A woman who had squatted an abandoned camp at Abbots Leigh with her Eighth Army veteran husband encountered hostility from locals, she told the Post a few years ago:

“My retort to that was ‘we are tenants, not squatters’ ... Because of the atmosphere at the village shop, I registered our ration books at a small shop in Ashton, from where my husband would collect our rations once a week, on his way home from work.

“My husband had cultivated a nice little garden so we were OK for veg. We also kept a few chickens, but abandoned that after we lost several to foxes. It certainly wasn’t easy living, but we were young and healthy and really quite happy there.”

In 1949 they were allocated a council house: “Oh the luxury of moving into a palace, after three years in a Nissen hut!”

www.bristolcivicsociety.org.uk

Twin cities

On 24 June 2021 Bristol City Council renamed meeting rooms within City Hall after Bristol's twin cities. *Nic Billane* investigates Bristol's international links.

Have you ever wondered why a road sign on approach to a city, town or village might proclaim to the visitor that city 'X' is twinned with city 'Y'? It got me wondering what it means? I knew that Bristol is "twinned with Bordeaux" with its historic links to the wine trade, and I recalled the city of Hannover as being a twin.

The Bristol Council website, informs us that apart from Bordeaux and Hannover, Bristol has links with cities in Asia, Central America, and Africa. Thus seven cities in four continents have signed up to boost educational, commercial and cultural relationships.

How long have these twinning relationships been in place, and what value do they bring to communities? I asked Alix Hughes, International Twinning Officer for Bristol City Council. Alix explained that the concept of sister cities or 'twinning' was created shortly after World War Two to foster better relationships after the conflict. The concept has evolved and grown since.

Bristol teamed up with Bordeaux and Hannover in 1947. Links were formed with Oporto (1984), Puerto Morazán in Nicaragua (1985), Tbilisi in Georgia



Georgain banquet or supra. Hosted by the Bristol-Tbilisi Association.

(1988), Beira in Mozambique (1990), and Guangzhou, China (2001). The role of Bristol City Council as a financial sponsor of the umbrella twinning association declined about five years ago but the linkage programmes have been driven by interested individuals or groups in Bristol such as the Bristol Bordeaux Partnership (BBP) and the Bristol-Hannover Council (B-HC) who have extended friendship to cities on a global basis.

So is the old image of 'twinning' associated with mayoral delegations, civic ceremonies, and post-war peacebuilding still valid? The answer is NO, things have moved on. Do the names of Central American, African and a Chinese City twins hint at a change in what has been utilised to develop a wide array of relationships across the globe? The answer is YES. So what does it look like?

Bordeaux, famed wine-growing region in southwestern France, population 250,000

The Bristol Bordeaux Partnership (BBP) amplifies the many educational and cultural links between the two cities, and it is estimated that 30,000 secondary school students have taken part in personal and school exchanges to Bordeaux over the years resulting in many lifelong friendships. In pre-Covid times Bordeaux University masters students offered two week fun French lessons in six South Bristol primary schools. From September 2021 a Bordeaux digital learning pack, aimed at helping young Bristolians find out more about their French twin, will be launched.

The cultural traffic is not all one way. The Musée des Beaux-Arts de Bordeaux is currently hosting an exhibition entitled "Absolument Bizarre" that celebrates more than 70 years of the

Bristol-Bordeaux twinning relationship. It features over sixty loaned artworks from Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery, bringing attention to the creative output of the 'Bristol School of Artists' movement of over 200 years ago.

Hannover, capital city of the German state of Lower Saxony, population 535,000

The link between the cities began in 1947 when five prominent Bristol citizens made a goodwill visit and ended up by providing some much needed aid to a war-torn city, many contacts between individuals and groups have since flourished. The objectives of the independent Bristol-Hannover Council (organising group B-HC) have developed to include arranging exchanges between schools and educational bodies, initiating and developing cultural and social ties of all kinds with Hannover including sports, band, choir and drama visits. Unfortunately the Covid pandemic has halted much of these activities, but hopefully in 2022 Bristol will celebrate the 75th Anniversary of our twinning with Hannover. Covid permitting, a series of cultural events are planned.

Oporto, coastal city in northwest Portugal, known for its port wine production, population 215,000

The Bristol Oporto Association (BOF) has an active membership organisation and runs an ongoing social programme celebrating Portuguese culture, wine and food. Visits to Oporto, with reciprocal visits to Bristol from members of the Associacao Porto Bristol (APB) are a tradition. BOF supports a varied cultural and educational programme: Porto street artists participating in Upfest; film making with a Portuguese production team in Bristol telling the story of past links with the wine trade. BOF support an awareness-building 'Portugal day' in seven Bristol primary schools, as well as aiding university student exchanges. All of which are keeping old friendships and historical links alive.

Tbilisi, capital city of Georgia, population 1,114 million

The Bristol-Tbilisi Association (BTA) is a voluntary association which works in partnership with the city councils



Hannover Rathaus and lake.



Tbilisi, Georgia.

of the two cities and other civil society organisations. The link was established in 1988, as the country of Georgia reached out to establish independent links and identity away from the old Soviet Union. The co-operation has enabled BTA to organise regular visits to Tbilisi for its members and to organise (pre -Covid) an annual programme of events. In 2020, Georgia was a partner in the Bristol Festival of Literature when three top Georgian authors took part in a fascinating on-line event. Georgia is famous for its food and wine which is celebrated with an annual Georgian Feast, known as a supra, in Bristol.

Puerto Morazán, a municipality in the Chinandega department of Nicaragua, population 13,500

The Bristol link with Nicaragua (BLINC) is an interesting and relatively new one. As a registered charity, Friends of Morazan (FOM) has now built its 10th new pre-school for the under-5s in partnership with the Nicaraguan Ministry of Education. It also provides and supports teacher training for local schools. Every year

- pandemic restrictions permitting - BLINC arranges, and pays for, coffee and cocoa producers to attend Bristol's Fairtrade Fortnight. This includes talks to schools and further education establishments in the region.

Beira, port city in Mozambique, on the 'Cyclone Corridor' coast of the Indian Ocean, population 600,000

For over 30 years the Bristol link to Beira (BLB) has been supporting and assisting Beira and its communities through a range of targeted programmes such as linking schools and University placements; offering direct support to local organisations to facilitate programmes such as renewable energy generation, and other infrastructure improvements. BLB also promotes Mozambican culture within Bristol through film screenings, food events and music nights. More recently BLB responded to cyclone damage within Beira with funding help to a local school and community centre.

Guangzhou, large Chinese port city on the Pearl River, population 15 million

Most people are conscious of the remarkable economic development in China, and many will be aware of the Chinese community in Bristol. The West of England China Bureau (WoECB) connects Bristol and the South West of England with Guangzhou, Bristol's twin city. The Bureau offers support in understanding people, culture and language and especially business

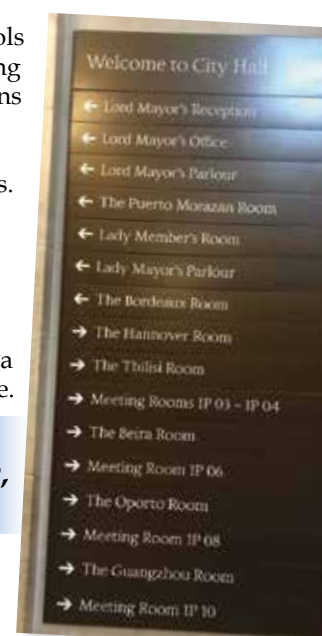
opportunities. They also offer a programme of events to help inform members on China initiatives, support the UK Chinese Students and Scholars Association with the next generation of budding entrepreneurs and work to strengthen international relationships.

A lasting friendship

Fundamental changes, political, social and economic, have happened in the world since the city twinning initiative of the late 1940s. Yet the founding principle of fostering friendship ties among citizens of different countries

and the value of reciprocity remain. The objectives for each partner organisation vary, but beneficial results in education, business, cultural exchange and lasting friendship formed between citizens of the twin cities are evident.

Left, Sign board in City Hall with renamed rooms.



My thanks go to the volunteers in each organisation and to Alix Hughes for their help.

If you are curious to find out more, or are interested in getting involved, see www.bristol.gov.uk/twinning

Festival of the Sea

Twenty-five years ago, Bristol hosted a huge televised celebration of its maritime heritage. Eugene Byrne says that the 1996 Bristol International Festival of the Sea would have consequences which are still resonating today.

The Bristol International Festival of the Sea which took place in the City Docks over the long Bank Holiday weekend of May 24-27 1996 would turn into a pivotal moment in Bristol's recent history, with a powerful influence in shaping the city in the early 21st century.

In the short run it was a public relations triumph for Bristol and for the development of the docks into what we now call Harbourside, although things did not look promising to start with.

The event was being organised by a private company, though with the support of the Council, and there were complaints in the local press from locals demanding to know why so much of "our" docks were going to be fenced off, with visitors being charged an (adult) admission fee of £20.

The weather on the first day was atrocious, and attendances were poor. As one local journalist wrote at the time, "This festival looked set to make the Titanic's maiden voyage look like a PR triumph. Before the Bank Holiday weekend, you wouldn't have found a single person, other than the organisers, who had a good word to say about the



One of the many tall ships arriving at Cumberland Basin for the Festival (Bristol Post)

event ... It was like launching a rubber ducky into a Force Eight storm."

But the weather turned more benign and people started to flock in. In the end there were an estimated 350,000 admissions. Even allowing for repeat visitors and upward revision of the numbers, anyone there that weekend could see the crowds were huge.

What made it such a success? You'd probably have got 350,000 different answers.

There was, for instance, a touch of Hollywood glamour in the shape of a green puppet and a pink one. Muppets Kermit the frog and Miss Piggy arrived as the Festival was chosen for the UK premiere of *Muppet Treasure Island* at the Odeon, with the after-party at the Industrial Museum where lucky ticket-holders got to have their picture taken with Miss Piggy.

The Festival was officially opened by Kermit and round-the-world yachtsman Sir Robin Knox-Johnston firing a cannon from the (American-built) replica of a British warship of Nelson's era.

For others, it was about the ships. The Festival delivered a truly spectacular line-up of historic and replica craft which had come from across the globe to lock in at Cumberland Basin. Not even the most dedicated landlubber could fail to be seduced by the sheer romance of those big, rakish sailing ships.

The star of the show, though, was no sleek windjammer, but the dumpy little Matthew, the replica of Cabot's ship being built in Bristol to mark 1997's 500th anniversary of his first voyage. Visitors queued up for hours for the chance to go aboard and take a look.

For other visitors it was simply the chance to sample the atmosphere,



The Festival in full swing; an estimated 350,000 visitors over the long Bank Holiday weekend (Bristol Post)

which took on a real party vibe in the evenings. Next to the water, and away from it, Bristol's pubs, restaurants and clubs came alive.

But what really put the event – and Bristol – on the map was hours of coverage broadcast by the BBC, with various presenters including Peter Snow, Sandi Toksvig, Tony Robinson and Jill Dando.

Even if you couldn't make it down to the docks, or didn't fancy the £20 entrance fee, you could watch the lot on TV, and millions of people did, all the way to the finale with a spectacular show of lights and water jets and £35,000 worth of fireworks.

It was a PR triumph, telling the world that Bristol was rich in character and history; that the old City Docks were being turned into one of the most desirable places in Britain in which to live and work; that Bristol was open for business.



Tony Forbes' 'Sold Down the River'. The Festival's silence on one aspect of the city's seafaring past would have consequences.

The regeneration of the old floating harbour area was now well under way. The Lloyds Bank HQ had been completed in 1990 and the amphitheatre in front of it was an established space for performances. There were new developments of housing and flats at several points overlooking the water.

The Festival would bring discussion of the city's slave-trading past into the mainstream, but you could also say it kicked off Bristol's "culture war" over the legacy.

The transformation of Canons Marsh was going to happen, and at this point we were also expecting the spectacular Harbourside Centre to take pride of place on the waterside next to the Lloyds Amphitheatre and opposite the Arnolfini.

This remarkable venue for music and performances would be of glass and steel going out at all sorts of angles, "like an exploding greenhouse", as one observer put it. It was a change of policy by the Arts Council – which had promised £50m for the venue – two years later which put the kybosh on the project.

(Though we did get that rather handy, if pricey, underground car park under Millennium Square out of it.)

The Festival projected a confident, bullish image to the world. Any remaining doubts about the future of what would be Harbourside were dispelled in four days, and we had shown the world that we could put on a great party.

The Festival had another effect, too, though. Before it had even taken place there were complaints that this celebration of the city's sea-going past made no mention whatever of Bristol's part in the transatlantic slave trade.

This wasn't quite true; a couple of

fringe events included talks which examined the subject, but the fact remained that you'd have had to look very hard to find mention of it.

This prompted a major civic discussion in which it became clear that official Bristol was no longer able to keep the subject under the carpet, as it had done since the 1960s.

The Festival would bring discussion of the city's slave-trading past into the mainstream, but you could also say it kicked off Bristol's "culture war" over the legacy. Massive Attack, Bristol's most successful musical export for a generation, refused to play the Colston Hall until it changed its name, leading to a predictable backlash, albeit from the kind of people who would never have bought their recordings anyway.

The Festival omission also led to a major exhibition at the City Museum & Art Gallery, *A Respectable Trade?*, which aimed to explore and de-mystify the history. Black Bristolian artist Tony Forbes would later say that the Festival's failure to acknowledge the slave trade broke his heart. His portrait of himself as being kept in chains by the memory of Colston and the local media while Cliftonians partied on regardless was a centre-piece of the major exhibition.

On the day it opened, the new and long-mooted footbridge across St Augustine's Reach was inaugurated as Pero's Bridge, named after an eighteenth century enslaved man brought to Bristol.

Years of argument would ensue over the re-naming of the Colston Hall, and what to do about the Colston statue, all the way to nit-picking discussion over the wording of an interpretation plaque on the plinth.

Rightly or wrongly, decades of argument led some people last summer to take matters into their own hands. There is a direct line from the Festival of the Sea in 1996 to the fall of Colston's statue in 2020.



Bigger even than Miss Piggy; the Matthew at the Festival finale (Bristol Post)

Vanguard

20

The flagship exhibition at M Shed this summer has been looking at the emergence of Bristol's world-leading street art scene. *Eugene Byrne* looks to see if it matches his own memories of the 1980s and 1990s and is impressed.

Vanguard Bristol Street Art: The Evolution

of a Global Movement (to give it its full title) blew into town in June with as much gloss and hype as social distancing would allow.

Fair enough, though; along with the musicians who forged the so-called "Bristol Sound" at the end of the 20th century, street art put Bristol on the global map, and changed the character of the city fundamentally. It's now a key part of Bristol's brand, vital to the local economy in bringing in tourists and students, and motivating skilled and talented workers in every field to settle here.

Bristol's street art scene emerged in the mid-1980s when it was usually condemned as vandalism by the police, councillors and 90% of the people who write angry letters to the local press. Between then and now, the journey for many of the artists has been from the magistrates' courts to lucrative careers.

Much of the early scene originated at the Barton Hill Youth Club in the 1980s thanks to the efforts of youth leader John Nation, and largely inspired by the street culture of New York in the late 70s and early 80s.

BRISTOL CIVIC SOCIETY



"The Duchess's Rouge" by Inkie, one of the Bristol artists who helped put the exhibition together. (Image: Johnny Green).

As early as 1985 Bristol's scene was regarded as vibrant enough to feature in an entire exhibition at the Arnolfini, one of Britain's leading galleries for showcasing new and emerging art.

The 'Fini's Graffiti Art in Bristol' featured the work of local artists like 3D, Z Boys and Bombsquad as well as local hip hop crew The Wild Bunch who, along with 3D (real name Robert Del Naja), would become Massive Attack.

Street art and the emerging "Bristol Sound" were intimately linked from the very start, something the M Shed show covers well and accurately. It even has a mock-up of Imperial Music, the record shop on Park Street which was one of the key meeting-points for the two artforms.

Despite the Arnolfini show, much of mainstream Bristol wasn't ready for street art yet, and calls to put an end to this vandalism grew ever louder.

The crunch point came in 1989 with Operation Anderson, Avon & Somerset Police's crackdown which saw the arrest of 72 people, most of them names harvested from the records of the

Barton Hill Youth Club.

Houses were searched and anything with spray paint on it (including, apparently in one case, a chest of drawers!) was confiscated. It was the biggest graffiti bust in British history.

Among those arrested was Tom Bingle, aka Inkie, one of the kingpins of the scene, and who has an unmistakable style, drawing on Art Nouveau influences. From being in trouble with the law in 1989 he has since gone on to become one of the world's leading artists, working for video game companies and, until recently, as in-house designer for Jade Jagger.

John Nation himself was also caught in the dragnet and faced charges of inciting the youngsters under his care to commit criminal damage. This "incitement" was because he gave young artists a legal space (and walls) to work on at the club.

Operation Anderson made the authorities look ridiculous. The full spectrum of "graffiti" went from

tagging by barely-literate adolescents spraying their signatures on walls through slightly more mature words and slogans in bubble letters all the way to artworks for which people will nowadays pay millions at auction.

Who was to judge? Is it really the job of the police to distinguish between vandalism and fine art?

The shotgun approach backfired, the farce dragged on for a year. The final case, against John Nation himself, collapsed in the spring of 1990 when the prosecution offered no evidence and invited the jury to return a verdict of not guilty.

Despite Nation's acquittal, six other cases went as far as the Crown Court. There were no custodial sentences but there were fines, Community Service Orders and threats of prison for further offences.

It had the effect of driving street art underground and perhaps also of giving it more of a glamorous edge of rebellion which it might not have had if Anderson had never happened. Artists were still being caught, though usually they didn't



"Bristol B-Boys head spinning in front of 3D's and Z Boys' Wild Bunch Rocit, 1983." The exhibition boasts rare or previously unseen photos of Bristol's street art, dance and music scenes in the 1980s and 1990s. (Picture © Beezers Photos).

get much further into the criminal justice system than the magistrates' courts.

Gradually it became more acceptable. For instance a 1998 show called Walls on Fire made good use of the derelict part of Canons Marsh for a temporary festival of painting which produced 400 metres' worth of murals.

By then, everyone in the know was raving about an up-and-coming star who called himself Banksy and who claimed to come from Easton.

In an interview with Venue, the local arts and entertainment magazine, he said: "If you want to say something, you have to put your message up where people can see it.

"It's about putting your neck on the line and putting the effort in to create something; about having the energy and guts to see it through."

Banksy made a provocative move which, with hindsight, forced the issue once and for all. In 2006 his naked-man-hanging-from-a-window-ledge appeared opposite the Council House (City Hall).

This was a direct challenge to the powers-that-be, and one that the politicians met in the time-honoured way of Bristol politicians – they held a poll. Bristolians voted overwhelmingly to keep it.

From that day to this, it has to be pouring with rain for there not to be



More recent work, such as "Blue Surfer" by Will Barras also features. Barras grew up in Birmingham, but embraced Bristol's scene after coming here to study graphic design. (Image: Johnny Green)



"Spex handplant, Dean Lane, early 1980s" (Picture © Yan Saunders).

one or two admirers, or whole groups of visiting schoolkids, taking photos of it with their phones. It is Bristol's Mona Lisa, its Sistine Chapel, an instantly recognisable icon.

With the Banksy exhibition at the City Museum & Gallery in 2009, street art had definitely arrived. For all its oppositional and anarchic origins, the queues of people, children and pensioners alike, that snaked around the block to see the show, told everyone that it was now completely mainstream.

Refreshingly and rightly, the M Shed exhibition pays relatively little attention to Banksy and focuses on a number of other figures who played an important role early on, not least Inkie and John Nation, and Felix ('FLX') Braun and Graham ('Paris') Dews, all of whom are among the consultants who have helped put the show together.

The show's early depiction of 1980s Bristol as some sort of Thatcherite hell-hole goes a little too far, but it gets the history broadly right and assembles a wealth of memorabilia and photos from 1980s and 90s Bristol.

It also brings in more recent work (including film and a cheeky sculpture) from artists from Bristol and elsewhere to examine "the drive for social change underpinning the work of many of today's street artists." This delivers one especially startling piece of work towards the end.

And as you exit through the gift shop (as Banksy would say) you'll find a wealth of merch to buy, including an accompanying book and an exclusive album of Bristol music from the period.

Vanguard Bristol Street Art: The Evolution of a Global Movement is at M Shed until Sunday October 31. For booking and details, see <https://tinyurl.com/tw6v6yh8>

www.bristolcivicsociety.org.uk

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No Parking!

John Payne welcomes the ruling that land on the Downs may no longer be set aside for car parking related to events or activities which are not on the Downs.

Bristol Civic Society warmly welcomes the success of the High Court challenge mounted by campaign group Downs for People (DfP) to the grant of a 20 year licence for car parking for zoo visitors on the Downs off Ladies Mile. This success means that land on the Downs may no longer be set aside for car parking related to events or activities which are not on the Downs.

The Society has been opposing the regular granting of temporary planning permissions for the use of an area off Ladies Mile as an overflow car park for Bristol Zoo since the 1990s. Some of our members joined other interested parties to form Downs for People after years of frustrated efforts to negotiate with Bristol Zoo and the Downs Committee to seek alternatives to the Downs for managing the Zoo's parking requirements at busy times.

Matters came to a head in May 2020 when a Freedom of Information request revealed that a twenty year licence to use the Ladies Mile site for parking for



Above, Land on the Downs may no longer be set aside for car parking. Top picture, How it should look.

the period 2020 - 2039 had been granted secretly by the Downs Committee. DfP felt that it had exhausted all reasonable approaches to finding a solution and so it sought leave for a Judicial Review of the decision to grant a twenty year licence as this clearly breached the terms of the Clifton and Durdham Downs (Bristol) Act 1861 passed to protect and manage the Downs. Under the terms of the Act the Downs must be managed so that they "shall for ever hereafter remain open and unenclosed, and as a place for the public resort and recreation of the citizens and inhabitants of Bristol". Leave for a Judicial Review was granted and in doing so the judge made it clear that when looking at non-Downs related

activities there was no difference in law between a zoo and a supermarket.

In the end the defendants decided to settle out of court. The Downs Committee and Bristol City Council have given a legally binding undertaking that they will never again set aside land on the Downs for parking for activities taking place elsewhere.

The defendants have agreed to pay up to £72,000 towards DfP's legal costs, twice as much as the maximum award if the case had gone to court. As part of the out-of-court settlement, DfP have agreed that Bristol Zoo may continue to use the land off Ladies Mile for parking until 1 October 2022, when the Zoo will leave its Clifton site, and the North car park outside the Zoo's main entrance until the end of 2023. The North car park is on land that is part of the Downs. The defendants have undertaken not to make arrangements to allow people to park there for non-Downs activities after the end of 2023.

DfP has gratefully acknowledged the support received from a number of groups including the Bristol Civic Society and many individuals for its campaign. In particular, the Open Spaces Society contributed not only financial assistance but also valuable procedural and legal advice.

What a stink!

Michael Manson sniffs his way round the city

Of all the senses, smell is the most neglected. Some smells stick in the throat and leave a gritty taste in the mouth; acid smells clear the nasal passages and make the eyes water. Other smells reek of nostalgia – comforting, jolting us back to childhood and less complicated times. Before smoking was banned in public places in 2007 you could smell a pub a mile off. A few smells are so pervasive that you crave a shower and a change of clothes.

Even today, if you close your eyes and walk around Bristol it is not difficult to identify your location by smell. Natural smells include the comforting odour of cut grass on the Downs while, in the height of summer, the lime trees that line so many roads exude an intoxicating perfume. And in the Spring, the smell of the wild garlic which coats the shady woodland floor of the Frome Valley or Leigh Woods is unmistakable.

A not unfamiliar smell in Bristol is of roasting coffee. The aroma of coffee from Brian Wogan's hangs over the gateway to Bristol at the end of the M32. In the past, Carwardine's coffee

shop, at the top of Park Street, roasted beans so violently that billowing clouds of smoke could be hazardous to traffic. Then there are the warm fragrances, evocative of exotic shores, percolating from Bart Spices on York Road. And dare I say it, the earthy herbal whiff of illicit skunk marijuana is not an altogether alien feature of the bohemian streets of Montpelier.

In the middle of the twentieth century the whiff from the faggot and pea shop on Redcliffe Hill made many mouths water.

Going back a few years, Courage's – formerly George's – brewery (now Finzel's Reach), filled the Victoria Street air with a hoppy, malty smell. While in Bedminster the gentle tang of tobacco from Wills's various manufactories infused the nearby streets.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth century a pleasing chocolaty aroma from Fry's hung like a haze over Union Street in central Bristol. While in Greenbank, a chocolaty fragrance from the Elizabeth Shaw factory (closed 2006) pervaded the neighbourhood. Over the years there have been a number of owners. Products made at Greenbank included *Famous Names Liqueur Chocolates*, *Walnut Whirls*, *Mint Crisps* and *After Dinner Mints*.



Courage's brewery (now Finzel's Reach), filled the Victoria Street air with a hoppy, malty smell.

In the middle of the twentieth century the whiff from the faggot and pea shop on Redcliffe Hill made many mouths water.

Mostly, though, smells are unwelcome. In the past, the worst stink came from the Frome and the Avon which acted as a depository for raw sewage. Before their tidal flow was interrupted by the building of the Floating Harbour in 1809 these rivers had at least benefited from a twice daily cleanse. But once this natural flushing process was interrupted, during the warmer months, a foul miasma would hang over the near-stagnant docks.

Eventually, in 1832, a young Isambard Kingdom Brunel was brought in to advise on the stink. The solution was to build an 'underfall' which enabled the flow of a cleansing current through the floating harbour.

For many years, on a still summer's day, the odour of sweet decay from the huge piles of bones waiting to be processed at Cole's bone yard – also known as the Glue Factory – on the Feeder Road could be smelled from miles away. Bone processing on the Feeder Road site ceased in the 1980s.

Today, a slightly urinous odour lingers around the west end of Coronation Road, Southville, where Bristol's last tannery owned by Thomas Ware and Sons (operating since 1840), continue to produce high quality leather.

Michael Manson is the author of Manson's Bristol Miscellany Volume 1 (Bristol Books/Tangent) £18.00. Volume 2 is due to be published in 2022.



The walks received a special accolade when Her Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant of Bristol, Mrs Peaches Golding (third from the right) asked to come along on one.

Bristol's Blue Plaques get a regal acknowledgement

Gordon Young on the latest Blue Plaques.

July saw two unveilings, each one connected with schools. The campaigning Sturge sisters – Emily Sturge (1847-92) and Elizabeth (1849-1944) – are remembered with a plaque on Redmaids' High School, Westbury-on-Trym and they also played a part in the foundation of Redland High School for Girls. So Redmaids' High, together with site developer Juniper Homes, agreed to another plaque on the gates pillar of the former school site in Redland Road. Three erstwhile headmistresses attended the unveiling which had me pondering on a collective noun for such a reputable trio . . .

Eleanor Addison Phillips was headmistress of Clifton High School for 25 years. In 1920 she was the first president of a networking association for women, a counterpart to the (then) all-male Rotary Club. It became known as the Soroptimists, a movement which has fought for human rights and gender equality globally.

The plaque manufacturers, Ward Signs, have a new product. Glass reinforced plastic (GRP) is now a strong contender to replace aluminium as plaque material. The sample we saw was impressive and we will be offering it as an option for future plaques.

Members have joined me on plaque walks in Clifton. The suburb has

an astonishing number of plaques; they are mostly green and we have to thank Clifton & Hotwells Improvement Society (CHIS) for their endeavours. London has almost 1000 plaques and a book, *Track the Plaque* features many of them grouped into circular walks. But you are faced with a daunting four, even six miles walk (Hampstead, Wimbledon, etc), and there is just one (of 32) which compares with our Clifton walks: it's in Mayfair.

Certainly, there is an enduring appeal in commemorating and celebrating notable residents of our city. And the walks received a special accolade when Her Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant of Bristol, Mrs Peaches Golding asked to come along on one. It was a privilege and a pleasure to welcome her. I have since considered applying for a Royal Warrant for the walks, to imbue them with a regal quality. (Surely, you are majestic enough, Gordon? Ed.) Trouble is, a Royal Warrant is conferred on those who have supplied goods or services to the Royal Household for at least five years. The Lord-Lieutenant was only with us for an hour.

While leading the walks, it occurred to me that attendees must have a natural interest in commemorative plaques. Perhaps their favourite colours are light green and blue. After the first series of walks I invited three participants to consider joining the



A scholastic assembly from the two seats of learning.

Blue Plaques Panel. We needed more members to share the workload. The Panel met them (in proper, pre-plaque, face-to-face fashion, not via Zoom) and we are delighted to welcome them on board. They bring with them a range of skills and they are already contributing to our research and lively, cut 'n' thrust debates. Between us, we are actively considering seven applications and working with applicants on planning the unveiling events for several more.

Crofton Gane

The subject of Nic Billane's article in this issue (pages 16-17) on city twinning resonates with an upcoming plaque unveiling. A promoter of Modernist design, Crofton Gane also deserves recognition as one of the pioneers of the Bristol-Hannover exchange scheme. The Panel were keen for both attributes to appear on his plaque.

Andy King (1956-2021)



Andy preserved the feel of the once thriving working city docks.

Andy King, to many the face of M Shed (and its precursor the Bristol Industrial Museum – 'BIM'), lost his battle with cancer in July 2021.

His absence will be felt by many but his influence upon the preservation of Bristol's industrial and maritime heritage, a key part of the unique identity of the city, leaves a lasting legacy.

Andy's career in museums began at Wheal Martyn China Clay Museum in Cornwall. He moved to Bradford Industrial Museum and then finally settled in Bristol when appointed Assistant Curator at BIM at the end of 1981. With Paul Elkin's retirement as Curator in 1996, Andy took over the role, a post he would hold until ill health forced his premature retirement in March this year.

In nearly 40 years, Andy built up an encyclopaedic knowledge of the history of the city, a place noted for its maritime heritage but one which, Andy would stress, has seen nearly every form of industrial activity from digging coal to designing satellites for space exploration; a lot to get your head around. His quiet but immense passion for that history inspired very many.

As the Curator of the Industrial Museum, Andy developed the

collections and displays but also crucially preserved the feel of the once thriving working city docks through a team of dedicated volunteers restoring and operating for the public the cranes, historic boats and Bristol Harbour Railway. A prescient move in reminding us all of how different the city looked and felt before the inevitable gentrification and re-purposing that has occurred since the 1970s.

A very practical, hard-working, forward-thinking curator, Andy could always be relied upon to support his colleagues and co-workers.

An event remembered with great affection by many was the mounting of the performance in the museum buildings in 2001 of the play 'Up the Feeder, Down the 'Mouth' by A.C. H. Smith which incorporated into the production all the elements of the preserved dockside, the boats, cranes and trains. It was a true tour de force which mesmerized all lucky enough to experience it and an occasion which was only possible thanks to Andy's vision, knowledge and skills.

The opportunity to create a brand new museum only comes along once in a curator's lifetime (if you are lucky) and the transformation of the Bristol Industrial Museum into M Shed

was such an event. Andy was a key member of the team which developed and delivered the new museum. For those who had loved the old Industrial Museum, the M Shed approach did not always sit comfortably but Andy always saw the need to be moving forward and to broaden the appeal of museums to new audiences, something he clearly helped achieve.

A very practical, hard-working, forward-thinking curator, Andy could always be relied upon to support his colleagues and co-workers. As a person, his intelligence, approachability, integrity and understanding shone through and he was universally liked and appreciated. After undergoing the amputation of his right arm in 2020, his empathy and reassurance for others who may have been embarrassed and unsure about what to say to him, with no hint of self-pity, demonstrated his qualities. Since his death, the outpouring of messages of sympathy on social media and elsewhere, not just from Bristol but also from the many museums and individuals he had influenced across the country, along with his many friends and relatives, has been testament to the esteem he was held in.

Our heartfelt sympathies are extended to his widow Helen Moody, to his brother and sister and to his many friends.

Ray Barnett and Sue Thurlow

How are we doing?

Matthew Montagu-Pollock reports on the Bristol Civic Society's members' survey.

The Bristol Civic Society's members' questionnaire in June woke us up a little. We already knew that people really like our magazine, Better Bristol. We didn't realise – as the survey revealed – how popular our online talks have become; they're now our second most popular offering. Due to Covid we expanded them and Nic Billane, Mike Bates and Graham Egarr have done an amazing job. The smash hit was a talk which explained Nottingham's trams, whose outstanding success may suggest that trams are the way forward for Bristol (see pages 8-9). In the audience, quietly listening, was one 'Marvin Rees'.

The city has been promoting a housing agenda which includes a much-increased role for tall buildings. So we asked whether we had been too passive in the face of what's happening to the city's built environment, or too confrontational? It's not that we don't criticise, but we're very polite. 52.9% of our members think we're getting it just right. Which is reassuring. But 40% think that in one way or another we're not pushing hard enough. No-one at all thinks we need to tone things down. If we were performing ideally, I believe, the dial would be mid-way between "push stronger" and "tone it down!" But



Has the Bristol Civic Society been too passive in the face of what's happening to the city's built environment.

actually, we are not in the mid-way position. Which tells me that we maybe need to push a bit harder, and be more direct in our criticisms. We asked specifically what issues we should campaign most strongly on. The answers that came out strongest were:

1. Preventing parks being built over
2. Imaginative solutions to the housing crisis
3. Preserving historic buildings
4. Challenging tall buildings applications

Parks was a surprise, because it isn't an issue we usually cover. That answer, plus the call for us to think about the housing crisis and the concern about tall buildings, all suggest that we need to approach things more pro actively – not just responding to the council's plans, but coming up with alternatives. That seems to fit the popularity of our talks, a natural place to ask people to present forward-

looking ideas about Bristol's future. The Civic Society's Management Team has also, in response to the survey results, recognised the need to be more forward-looking, and the first outcome will be to gather views about the Western Harbour. Open-to-all discussions of the biggest planning applications by members, like St Mary le Port in Castle Park (see pages 4-5), was another popular idea. Some were sceptical whether a Zoomful of general members would be productive. But the general view was "try it and see if it works". We asked: "There seem to be a lot of ugly buildings going up in Bristol. Should we award a Bristol Carbuncle Cup of the Year?" That question was super-popular! It also had the clearest response of all – Yes: 60.8%, No: 16.9%. But your answers have created something of a problem for the awards panel, distinctly nervous about carbuncle people they may meet around town. Watch this space.

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



Joining is easy

There are three ways to apply. You can do it via the website: 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

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Events

Autumn and Winter 2021-2022



The changing face of Bristol.

Hopefully, with the bulk of the population vaccinated, a wary return to a more normal life becomes possible. The events team are working on a varied programme of walks, talks, site visits, archive films, Zoom meetings and perhaps a seminar or two, for the darker months.

Please check the Bristol Civic Society website (www.bristolcivicsociety.org.uk/events) periodically for updates on the events shown below and for other so-far unannounced events. We usually notify members via email about individual upcoming events. Some events may have limited capacity and may incur a small charge. They can be booked via the events page on the website.



SEPT Tuesday 14 September, 10.45am.

Visit to Ashton Court Mansion: building and landscape

overview, with insights into construction, history, and conservation issues.

Sunday 19 September, 2.00pm.

New Cut walk. Three hour tour of Bristol's green corridor led by Ed Hall.

Wednesday 22 September, 10.00am.

Ashton Court Deer Park visit.

Saturday 25 September, 10.30 am.

Plaques walk (1), Central Clifton and Pembroke Road, with Gordon Young.

Wednesday 29 September, 7.30 pm.

The 20 minute Neighbourhood. A Zoom talk by Julia Thrift of the Town and Country Planning Association, on the much discussed concept of 'The 20 minute neighbourhood'; i.e. compact and connected neighbourhoods where people can meet their everyday needs within a short walk or cycle ride of home.'



Sunday 17 October, 10.30 am.

Plaques walk (2), West Clifton and Hotwells, with Gordon Young.

19 or 20 October (To be arranged).

Bristol Civic Society Design Awards.

Saturday 23 October, 10.30 am.

Plaques walk (3), East Clifton with Gordon Young.

Friday 29 October, 7.30pm.

Author and social historian Clive Burlton uncovers Bristol's lost *White City*, built for the International Exhibition of 1914, and subsequently used as a barracks. Venue: Friends Meeting Room, 126 Hampton Road, Redland, BS6 3JE. (Or Zoom).

Events in planning for October / November / December (dates to be advised).

- Housing forum / discussion.
- Seminar on 'Changing Face of Bristol' chaired by Simon Birch.
- An overview of the transport choices facing Bristol; speakers and venue (or Zoom) to be confirmed.



January Winter social gathering to welcome a new year. To be arranged.