

Better Bristol

The Bristol Civic Society Magazine – Issue 21 Autumn/Winter 2022/3

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BRISTOL
CIVIC
SOCIETY

an independent force for a **better Bristol**





Front Cover:
St Michael on the Mount Without received a Bristol Civic Society Design Award. It also hosted our AGM.

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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

This year we held our AGM at St Michael on the Mount Without, with over 120 attending. Unusually this was a joint event combining the AGM and Bristol Civic Society's Design Awards. What an attractive venue and such a success story, from over 20 years of being boarded up, followed by a disastrous fire, and the subsequent regeneration. We have been keen to hold our AGM there for a while but were then delayed by the pandemic!

At the AGM we reported that the Society is in good shape with over 600 members and in a financially sound position. There is a wide range of activities, many reported elsewhere in Better Bristol. During the past two years membership has steadily increased with new members reporting the attraction of our numerous zoom-based events and of Better Bristol.

But what next? Where will Bristol Civic Society be in five, or ten years' time?

The Management Team met recently and started to address this critical question. In headline terms we felt we should take a much clearer stance on important issues facing the city. And we should then secure a much higher profile in communicating our views as widely as possible.

Key issues would include the challenge of accommodating substantial housing numbers with pressure on other land uses, such as employment, and the impact of tall buildings, in terms of potential damage to health and of the negative impact on the appearance of the City. The Society held a thought-provoking event addressing the tall buildings issue just before lockdown. We recognise the opportunity to build on that event and to continue to draw attention to the downsides of building high.

There is also the ongoing and complex challenge of tackling traffic congestion and of moving to a more sustainable transport situation, at a time when bus services are being reduced in many areas and the Portishead line suffers yet another delay! (Stop Press: funding just confirmed.)

We will continue to be involved in plans for areas of significant change

AGM at St Michael on the Mount Without.



There is no consensus on what a sustainable future for Ashton Court Mansion might look like.

such as Western Harbour and Temple Quarter. In Western Harbour we have encouraged a team of expert enthusiasts to undertake a detailed assessment of the heritage assets in the area, and there are a quite amazing number of important assets which must be protected in any future development. Following our involvement in the recent high level "visioning" exercise we wonder how this will feed into the more detailed master planning work.

In December it will be five years since the City Council closed the main part of Ashton Court Mansion for public events. Despite visioning led by The Prince's Foundation last year there still seems to be no consensus on what a sustainable future for the Mansion might look like. We will continue to contribute to any initiatives aimed at saving this wonderful building.

The Society acknowledges the great changes which have taken place in terms of communications and the rise of social media in publicity and information. We plan to do much more to expand our audience as we campaign on key development issues. If you feel you can assist us with this initiative please get in touch.

Simon Birch

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Not already a member? Why not join TODAY!

See page 27 for more details...

Design Awards 2022



The Malthouse.

Bristol Civic Society is grateful to Savills, property advisers, for sponsoring the Design Awards.

Bristol Civic Society's Design Awards have been a popular part of the programme for over 25 years. The deadline for nominations is the end of February 2023 (and there are already 14 for 2023).

The judging panel, currently with seven members from a range of backgrounds, assesses them all with final decisions in April and the presentation held in June.

The distinctive blue plaques are manufactured by local company Wards, located in Barton Hill.

The Malthouse, Wilder Street

Client: Watkin Jones

Architect: AWW

Panel Member *Andy Reynolds* reports that The Malthouse contains accommodation and amenity space for 348 students, employment space and a private house in a Grade II listed townhouse.

Situated at the boundary between St Paul's and Stokes Croft, the area is undergoing rapid regeneration and change. This development has replaced a post-war office block, light-industrial units and surface car-parking with a four storey, u-shaped block of student accommodation.

The panel particularly liked the way that the building respects the historic grain of the cityscape, integrates and restores the historic 25 Wilder Street, and offers varied facade treatments and bright, vibrant murals to passers-by and the local community. Hopefully it will be a model for future student accommodation developments in the area.

University of Bristol Humanities Hub, Tyndalls Park Road/Woodland Road, Clifton

Client: University of Bristol

Architect: ADP Architecture

Craig O'Brien's citation notes that the panel were impressed by the design

of the new Humanities building, particularly as it meets Tyndalls Park Road. It was considered that the building is of an appropriate scale that blends well with the existing listed buildings, including direct physical connections, while offering a contrasting high quality, modern vernacular. The materials used including brick, timber louvres and glass as well as stainless steel railings created a particularly successful composition complimented by a landscaping scheme that also formed a new entrance to the buildings from Woodland Road.

Redland Court, Redland Court Road, Redland

Client: Juniper Homes

Architects: AWW with Nash

Partnership, and KWL

In its previous incarnation as a girl's school, Redland Court had suffered utilitarian additions that hid its elegant origins. Clearly, its value as a residential development is tied into the restoration of the site's good looks. *Chris Leeks* points out that the central building in particular has been carefully restored and looks magnificent especially when viewed across the freshly landscaped grounds.

Thankfully new buildings aren't just a pastiche of Redland Court itself. A variety of materials have been used from red brick to a Bath and grey stone mix. These marry well with neighbouring properties. The limited car parking is discreetly accommodated.



University of Bristol Humanities Hub.



Hope Rise.

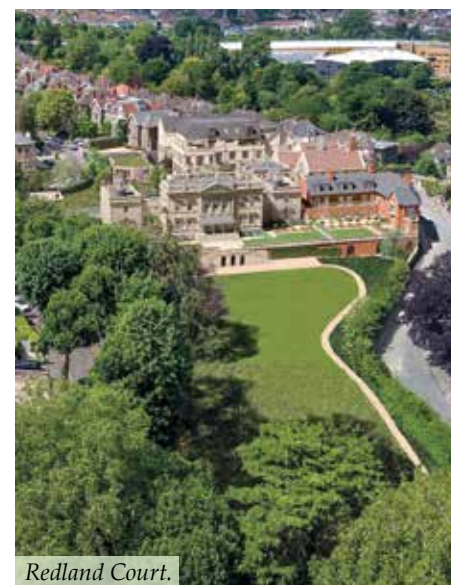
Hope Rise, Chalk Road, St George

Client: Bristol City Council

Architect: Zed Pods Ltd

Kat Hegarty asks how to contribute to solving the housing crisis? Build homes off site and above carparks says Zed Pods who was a very different award winner.

Situated on council-owned land in St George, this innovative approach provides 11 affordable and low carbon apartments for young workers and vulnerable households. This tried and tested concept offers ample opportunities to provide light filled modern living homes above disused air space.



Redland Court.

The Mount Without, Upper Church Lane, St Michael's Hill

Owner and project manager: Norman Routledge

Architect: Quentin Alder

The church of St Michael on the Mount Without is a Grade II* listed building. The church became redundant in 1998 and for many years lay idle and was boarded up. In 2016 vandals set the building alight leading to the collapse of the roof over the nave and northern aisle and the exposure of the interior to the elements.

Mike Craggs noted that the future of the building looked bleak until it was acquired by Norman Routledge in 2019 and since that time considerable

resources have been devoted to re-roofing the building and restoring elements of the interior culminating in the impressive space where the Design Awards Presentation took place.

Unlike other awards, this accolade doesn't principally concern the quality of design or the visual impact of the scheme. It's a recognition of the importance of retaining a key building in the local townscape and of securing uses in that building which are beneficial both to the local community and to the wider city.

Judge notes supplied by: *Andy Reynolds, Craig O'Brien, Chris Leeks, Kat Hegarty and Mike Craggs.*



The Mount Without interior.

Major developments in Bristol

John Payne and Simon Birch review a selection of important proposals.

In recent months *Bristol Civic Society* has been involved in a significant number of major proposals in Bristol. During 2021 we counted no less than 49 schemes where we made submissions! Here's a snapshot of some recent proposals. For fuller details visit the Society's website (www.bristolcivicsociety.org.uk).

St Mary-le-Port Wine Street Bristol

It's now over six months since we emailed the Secretary of State (on 28 January 2022) to ask him to 'call in' these proposals and to hold a public inquiry. Perhaps the recent political changes have delayed a decision, but we would have anticipated receiving a response by now!

We took this unusual step because we felt that the proposed commercial buildings would be monolithic blocks



St Mary-le-Port. Monolithic blocks dominating Bristol's historic heart.

dominating Bristol's historic heart and townscape.

Hopefully more news on this one shortly.

Waterfront Square Millennium Square Bristol

In December 2021 we submitted our strongly worded objection to this planning application, stating that "It cannot be considered as a high quality, beautiful and sustainable building and for this reason the application should



Waterfront Place, Millennium Square.

be refused". No feedback on the timing of a decision on this one but we are watching closely and will be ready to take any appropriate action.

Pre-application proposal for Plot 3, Temple Quarter

This is the triangular site adjacent to the northern entrance to Bristol Temple Meads and between The Friary and the Floating Harbour. The pre-application proposal is for a mixed-use development comprising a hotel with ground floor commercial uses, an aparthotel (self-catering) and a residential block. Building heights do not exceed 10 storeys. The area between the buildings would be set out as a pocket park.

Bristol Civic Society welcomes the redevelopment of this site. The proposed uses are suitable and the proposed permeability and pocket park would provide a welcome relief from the dense development of the surrounding area. We welcome the commitment to minimise vehicle access to the development but urge that cycle parking and storage facilities are at least compatible with the Council's requirements. We make a number of suggestions below which we feel could improve the scheme.

We felt the application could be improved by ensuring building heights did not break the profile of the Brunel buildings at Temple Meads Station when viewed from the station approach; keeping roofs free from servicing equipment; introducing some different shapes such as curves into the residential block; maximising planting and active frontages adjacent to Isambard Walk (Friary) and signposting the pocket park particularly from the station.

Dove Lane, St Pauls

The proposed development comprises 358 residential dwellings and 586 sq m of commercial, business and service floorspace and associated works.

Bristol Civic Society welcomes the development of this site and is broadly supportive of the planning application. Our only real concern relates to the ten storey block of flats in terms of its height and location close to the A4032. The massing is otherwise well considered and frames the view from Portland Square. Quality of living could be improved with a higher proportion of dual aspect homes. However, good quality public amenity space is proposed with a car free central square. More affordable housing units, better distributed would be desirable. We support the low level of vehicle parking spaces in view of the site's proximity to public transport facilities and the location of parking spaces at the site's periphery. The development should strive for a high level of energy efficient homes.

Pre-application proposal for the former Peugeot Site, Clarence Road, Temple Gate

*Proposed scheme
Temple Gate
elevation.*

This pre-application proposal is for redevelopment of the site at the junction of Temple Gate and Clarence Road for c 412 homes, c 1027 sq m of communal amenity space, 635 sq m of flexible Class E commercial space, and associated infrastructure, plant, elevated ground floor car parking, highway and pedestrian access and public realm works.

Although Bristol Civic Society supports the principle of redeveloping this

site, we object strongly to a number of aspects of the proposal. We are particularly concerned about:

- The proposed building heights, which we feel are intrinsically inappropriate and inconsistent with policies;
- The intensity of development and its impact on the quality of life;
- The proximity of many flats to the poor air quality and noise adjacent to the major roads;
- The high number of single aspect flats, many of which are north facing;
- The predominance of one and two bedroom flats.

A more equitable balance between residential and commercial uses would enable a development to comply more closely with established policies and avoid residential accommodation adjacent to the major roads.

This is an important site at the gateway to the centre of Bristol and we feel that the design, as it stands, does not do justice to the location.

Wapping Wharf North.



Wapping Wharf North

Proposals for developing the final part of Wapping Wharf – the site immediately behind M Shed – were challenging for the Group to assess. Reaction from members was fairly evenly divided between those who were broadly enthusiastic about the proposals and those who had considerable objections to them. It wasn't possible to identify a consensus.

In favour, some considered that the scheme was well thought through by

developers with a successful track record in this part of Bristol. The proposed buildings, particularly the ziggurat form, would contribute to the variety of building styles around the harbour and have a visual appeal of their own. The public realm proposals were welcome and Rope Walk, in particular, had the potential to be an attractive route and place. Public access to the upper floors of the 12-storey building to take in the view would be an important asset.

In contrast, the main focus of the

objections was on the height and the bulky mass of the proposed buildings which were felt to diminish the impact of the cranes and hide them altogether from some viewpoints particularly from the south and west; harmfully breach the silhouette of the M Shed building; be an unfortunate precedent for future proposals in the harbourside area; and block the glimpse of the harbour from Gaol Ferry Steps and possibly other glimpsed views harming the attractiveness of the area as a pedestrian experience.

Bristol Zoo Gardens, Guthrie Road, Bristol

The Zoo Gardens are designated as public open space in the development plan and on reflection Bristol Civic Society is not convinced by the current plans to partially develop the site for housing whilst retaining open space as publicly accessible gardens. We think that the proposal is neither fish nor fowl. It would be better either being kept as open space or redeveloped for housing.

The Society questions who will wish to visit the site when it is surrounded and dominated by private housing. The special character of the existing gardens will be further eroded with vehicles accessing an area where no vehicles have previously been permitted, both passing through the open space and parking there on a permanent basis. The verdant nature of the area will inevitably be completely transformed.

Bristol Zoo Gardens proposed development.



As seen on TV - Dove Street settlement

The scenes of drug dealers and teenagers hanging around in an atmosphere of danger and tension in the BBC TV series *The Outlaws* are far from the truth, writes *Pauline Marson*.



The Dove Street location is attractive to residents and film-makers.



There was a general sense that if the children are safe, then everyone is safe.

When searching for a place to live, location plays a vital part alongside number of bedrooms, amenities, out-door space... whatever is on your list. In Bristol, dubbed England's second coolest city outside London, the very names of our localities conjure atmosphere, culture and...affordability.

Picture Bedminster, Henleaze, Horfield, Southville. Images come to mind, and some will be more appealing to you than others. Reputations of areas change through time, as does their character. Between Kingsdown and Stokes Croft lies the Dove Street settlement, built as an answer to the post-war housing crisis and as seen on TV!

Dove Street, Kingsdown

A short walk to the Centre, bus station and hospital, with superb views of the city and surrounding countryside from the striking, colourful tower blocks, the Dove Street location is attractive to residents and film-makers.

The BBC series *The Outlaws* used different areas of Bristol as characters on community service whizz around locations from the docks to the historic centre, from estates to high-rise flats. Filmed on the terrace in front of Carolina House, one of the high-rises in Dove Street, were scenes where drug dealers and teenagers hang around in an atmosphere of danger and tension. Archetypal characters embedding an impression of an impersonal, rough urban area.

In real life, Carolina House is far from impersonal. It is home to NHS, school and university staff, business owners, long term tenants and owners. It is home to resourceful people who may have fled their countries in search of sanctuary. Communities form in clusters, long-standing neighbours, people who share language and culture, people with children at the same school.

Community groups are built on inclusion and empowerment rather than bullying, respect rather than stereotypes. They can also be engendered by place.

The Community: a place and people case study

Kingsdown and Dove Street residents formed a community group called Friendly Neighbours to look after one another during the pandemic. Delivering flyers to all homes in Kingsdown and Dove Street, the two communities became one.

With support from Bristol Council Community Team, Helen went for a walk to discover who might be interested in gardening. April suggested looking for those who have plants on their balconies. Soon Bernie was leading a community group *Dove Gardens*, reclaiming a tipping area, the wider community donating plants, resources and skills.

The gardeners meet monthly, the social and community benefits are immense. 'It is not the garden, it is the gardening that makes the community.' (Bernie) Shared outside spaces were little used. There was a general sense that if the children are safe, then everyone is safe. Together we bid for Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) money to improve the outside spaces. The grant has funded a playground on *that*



In Dove Street we see what happens when location, architecture and community create a place where people can thrive.

terrace, and the dingy garage area is now basketball and football courts.

Nurse Sudi became involved and her energy and positivity has helped shape the development of the CIL bid. Incidentally she speaks several languages fluently and is a basketball coach.

The CIL-funded transformation has been delivered through an innovative partnership with the Council, less 'the Council', more 'our Council'.

Dove Street residents are people with agency, participants in their own neighbourhood and resourceful together. So much more than stereotypes, they rejected negative images of people in this neighbourhood, and expressed this in a creative response to *The Outlaws*.

Making Bristol a better place

How do we support and influence the City to develop for the benefit of all? In Dove Street we see what happens as

Architecture for housing

Yes there are issues in the buildings. There are cracks in the concrete and mould in some flats. Flat-living requires shared spaces, laundry rooms, community rooms, staircase, lifts and corridors. How people share time and space, and how they connect with one another has greater intensity. A laundry can be a place to chat or a place for disharmony.

location, architecture and community create a place where people can thrive through questioning and transforming the architecture we have inherited.

Front doors open onto shared corridors leading to lifts and staircases. Rough sleepers still find their way into the settlement, but relationships and mutual understanding are strong enough to deal with this.

Can you design out crime? Or are we more aware of, and impacted by it, because of the amount of shared space? Goram Homes, the Bristol City Council funded company, have a plan to build



The dingy garage area is now basketball and football courts.

Our lives in Dove Street

'You may have seen our street on TV being portrayed in a negative way, but hearing our stories might make you change your view of our community. Yes, we do have problems in our area, but that isn't the case with all the areas of Bristol? We are lucky that we live here, because of the caring and supportive community' *Jamila and her brother Jibriil (Winner- Bristol 2022 Young Environmental Hero)*

'Although it could be argued that planners designed Carolina House as a non-place, a space only meant to be transited through, we humans inhabit the space and assign meaning to it. Sound plays a major role in that inhabitation, embodying the meanings of both the transitory and of our home.' *Simon*

'It is a place of strange contrasts: uniquely ugly, but with beautiful views of the city. When I moved to Dove Street, I wondered: why is it here, why is it so tatty and ugly, and what was here before? So I did some research, and here is my short history of Dove Street.' *Mike*

'This is our home and we work hard to keep it safe and beautiful.' *Jamila*.

And we made our own films!

Becoming film-makers was a community response to the negative portrayal of their area. Super quality and content and mostly run around five minutes. Do take a look. The ability to communicate on screen is uplifting, impressive and energising.

To view the films and find out more, Nick Gray, researcher in education and film at the University of Bristol has links to all the films mentioned: <https://nmgrayb2b1.myportfolio.com>

For more about the history of Kingsdown see: Mellor P. & Wright M., *Kingsdown. Bristol's Vertical Suburb*, Phillimore & Co, 2009.

2,000 homes, of which 1,000 should be affordable. This will take time: last year 474 were built, a record high in the last 12 years. It is to be hoped these homes encourage community, safety and sustainability. In the meantime the £18m in the housing budget for Dove Street will need to be spent on essential upgrading of electrics and kitchens to meet current safety standards.

The vision is to make buses a viable option for many more of our residents.



On the buses

Bus Service Improvement Plan.

Andy Strong, Bus Improvement Manager, West of England Combined Authority, explains what's happening to our buses.

The West of England Combined Authority (WECA) published a joint Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) with North Somerset Council in October 2021.

The BSIP is the West of England's response to the Government's National Bus Strategy and sets out the measures that will make it easier to access and use public transport, get people out of cars and tackle congestion. The

BSIP will also support transport decarbonisation, and improve the health and wellbeing of people in our communities.

Attached to the BSIP was a bid for funding over three years to deliver enhancements. The Department for Transport (DfT) has allocated our joint West of England bid £105.5m – the second highest award in the country – consisting of £48m capital for North Somerset Council and £57.5m revenue for the whole area.

After receiving final confirmation of the award, the Combined Authority is

looking to introduce changes to help buses get through traffic so they run more reliably, improve the frequency of buses on well-used routes, and develop demand-responsive services to meet the needs of more rural communities.

Increasing passenger numbers across the region.

Delivering high quality bus services is a crucial part of achieving the vision of the BSIP. The aim of the plan is to bring about a step change in services across the region, as well as improve the quality of the whole local bus network. At the centre of this is a vision to make buses a viable option for many more of our residents – both in urban and rural areas – to really help tackle traffic congestion, air pollution, carbon emissions, and the significant social and economic demands of this decade.

The BSIP sets out the region's ambitions:

- To get back to the strong, steady



The West of England Combined Authority is looking to introduce changes to help buses get through traffic.

growth in the number of passengers travelling by bus that the West of England had before the pandemic first struck – returning to pre-pandemic levels by 2025 and continuing to grow beyond that.

- To move forward on decarbonising our transport system as part of the commitment to really tackle the climate emergency – with the ambition for all buses to be zero emission by 2030.

- To make travelling by bus the natural and automatic choice for our residents with:

- Convenient services taking residents where they want to go at times they need to travel.
- Reliable bus journey times that get them to their destination as quickly or quicker than by car – reducing bus journey times by 10% and ensuring 95% of services run on time.
- Good value for money with tap on, tap off ticketing and capped daily prices.
- First class bus stops where passengers can wait in comfort and safety with all the information they need.
- A co-ordinated public transport network with a recognisable local brand: West of England Sustainable Transport (WEST) – providing easy access to information, integrated ticketing across operators and enabling simple connections.

Delivering the initiatives outlined in the BSIP will be achieved by collaboration between local authorities and operators. That is why the West of England Combined Authority and

North Somerset Council are working in partnership with local bus operators and the highway authorities.

The ongoing shortage of bus drivers and engineers represents a significant challenge to the delivery of new and enhanced services. The WECA is looking at what additional support it can provide through its Business and Skills team, and is working with partners in the sector to address issues as far as possible.

A key part of the BSIP, a new "Tap On, Tap Off" fare-capping service, has just been launched across all First Bus services thanks to funding from the Combined Authority and North Somerset Council. Passengers can now simply tap their card or phone (which must have Apple Pay or Google Pay enabled) against the reader when they get on the bus and again just before they get off. First Bus then works out the correct fare for each journey and ensures that customers never pay more than the relevant Day or Week ticket fare each day they travel, no matter how many journeys they make. As customers travel more over the week, the system also ensures that each extra day costs less.

Further improvements through the BSIP's Ticketing Programme will equip all bus operators, large and small, in the region with Tap Off readers by April 2023 so they can all have capping on their day and week ticket prices. By April 2024, it is hoped that multi-operator capping will be in place, allowing people to travel on different operators' buses in the same day or week and get capped fares at the multi-operator ticket price.

Editor's comment: While this article about bus service improvement plans paints an optimistic picture based on increased government funding, it is easy to feel gloomy about the prospects at a time when bus companies continue to announce cuts in services due to driver shortages, and bus service costs are rising steeply. A difficult path lies ahead.

Alongside the successful BSIP funding award, the Combined Authority has also recently been awarded significant additional funding to invest in more bus priority along key corridors around the region through the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS). Together, these programmes will enhance the attractiveness of travelling by bus and encourage passenger growth across the network even further.

Robert Sanderson, First Bus Operations Manager writes:

The BSIP offers a fantastic opportunity to welcome a whole new group of customers to our buses. Operators working collaboratively with WECA and the local authorities will allow us to reduce journey times and make bus travel more attractive. In the long term this will allow for increased frequencies and a sustainable network with higher passenger numbers and a high-quality service.

In the short term, as a condition of post-pandemic transitional funding arrangements, bus operators must undertake full network reviews to assess the viability of all routes once that funding ends in spring 2023. Therefore, like all other bus operators in the UK, we must adapt our networks to match the post-pandemic demand for services.

The majority of our networks will be retained, and we will work to match our resources with demand for services in order to provide our customers with the most reliable network. We are committed to constructive partnerships and have been working with local authorities to provide as much notice as possible of any changes to allow them to consider alternative arrangements.

Happily, we are starting to see progress with recruitment improving as we look to address our driver shortage issues from the industry-wide labour crisis and an exciting package of BSIP fares initiatives which will hopefully kick-start the recovery and start to grow our customer numbers.

The path to a low-carbon future relies on reducing car use. The BSIP presents a strong foundation for accelerating a move to sustainable travel habits and allows us to offer our customers an even better service in the future.



Above left, The path to a low-carbon future relies on reducing car use. Above right, The ambition is for all buses to be zero emission by 2030.

People in green houses

Can we build the homes in Bristol we need using non-polluting materials and methods, and inspire others, asks *Mike Frost*?

Bristol faces a housing crisis and a climate crisis. Bristol's population has grown by an estimated 50,000 in the past twenty years but we haven't built enough new homes - with the result that we have a housing market with sky-high prices putting home ownership beyond many people's reach, and we face a deadly serious climate challenge.

The July mini-heatwave was a harbinger of things to come: soaring temperatures as the planet heats up. Scientists say there is now no doubt that global heating is happening, caused by the pollutants humans have been blithely pumping into the atmosphere.

We need to build new homes to meet the housing needs of Bristol's growing population, but concrete and brick are highly pollutant and exacerbate the climate crisis. Making concrete produces a lot of harmful greenhouse gasses - five to ten per cent of annual man-made carbon dioxide emissions on some estimates. Can we build the homes in Bristol we need using non-polluting materials and methods, and inspire others?

The good news is that, yes, we can and that there are small-scale greenbuild projects with great potential to scale up. There are two main pollution issues with homes: the pollution cost of building the home, and the pollution cost of heating and running it. Here we focus on building new homes.

Bricks, mortar and concrete are the current main building materials and are heavily pollutant. Two alternative low or zero carbon materials are straw bales, and hempcrete. Bristol already has some homes made using compressed straw bale walls which are coated with a weather-proof and fire-resistant render. To look at the new homes in St Bernard's Road, Shirehampton or Rochester Row in St Anne's, you'd never guess that the walls were made with straw bales. It is claimed that the seven houses in



Rochester Row in St Anne's. You'd never guess that the walls were made with straw bales.

St Bernard's Road were the world's first straw bale homes commercially available on the open market.

Straw is a waste material and it can be compressed and treated, then used instead of bricks and breeze blocks - either load bearing or in wooden frames. The projects done this way so far have been small-scale, but there is "proof of concept". While we hope for volume developers to adopt greener

methods, Bristol's smaller developers and community projects have been exploring and innovating with low and zero carbon building.

Hempcrete has immense potential for natural building. It comes from the fibres extracted from the hemp plant and is combined with lime to make a type of lightweight concrete. Hemp is a highly effective building product: an excellent insulator, it is water-resistant



Hanham Hall. Judged Best Sustainable Development in Britain in 2014.

and can save time and material costs. It is said that a typical UK builder can learn to use hempcrete in a morning. Hemp houses elsewhere have proved very comfortable to live in.

Hempcrete can be made on-site from chopped-up hemp straw and mixed with a lime binder and water, then cast, sprayed or made into blocks. It is long-lasting, robust and fireproof and also provides a healthy indoor environment. As one natural building materials author commented, "It's hard to go wrong with hempcrete" (Tom Wooley, *Natural Building Techniques*, The Crowood Press, 2022).

We need to build new homes to meet the needs of Bristol's growing population, but concrete and brick are highly pollutant and exacerbate the climate crisis.

Hempcrete can be used with timber frames, and research shows that hempcrete houses outperform identical houses built with bricks and mineral wool insulation. It should be possible to build five or six-story blocks of flats with hempcrete in Bristol. Hempcrete could potentially be adopted by "mainstream" construction.

Developers in Bristol like ModCell, SNUG Homes, Hawkland and Dovetail are doing interesting small scale projects using hempcrete or straw bales, and the Bristol Green House (actually, not a house) overlooking Ashley Vale is a fascinating example (see online) of self-building with new methods. The innovative Knowle West Media Centre was also built with straw bale walls.

Barratt Homes developed Bristol's Hanham Hall eco-estate under the Homes and Community Agency's Carbon Challenge scheme. It claims to be England's first large-scale housing scheme to achieve zero-carbon standard. Hanham Hall has 186 homes, adjoins the greenbelt and is about 4.3



Eve Build Design project which is aiming to offer zero carbon renting.

miles from Bristol city centre. It was judged Best Sustainable Development in Britain in 2014.

A 4-bedroom home on the eco-estate sells for £370,000, which with two people earning the median salary means a price to income ratio of around 6.6 - not as affordable as a 3-bedroom BoKlok home in south Bristol with a price to income ratio of 5.5 for two main earners, but not completely

unaffordable. A single person might need a (cheaper) one-bedroom flat as a first step onto the private housing market ladder. The challenge remains to build the affordable and social homes to rent that Bristol urgently needs.

What of renovations and extensions to existing housing stock? In south Bristol, small private developer Eve Build Design is extending a property using low-carbon build to offer "Zero Carbon Renting" for tenants. The main energy sources will be an air-source heat pump and solar renewables, and carbon-offsetting makes the homes carbon neutral.

We may well see more of this kind of greener development of existing stock. Between 65-80% of existing housing stock could still be standing in 2050 and there is much to be done to improve and insulate these homes. Extensions and conversions like Eve Build Design's can add capacity and offer people a decent, low or zero carbon home.

A future development could be new eco-homes built by robots. Yes, eco-homes built by robots! 3D printing of homes ("additive layering") uses programmed robots to build up structures. Experiments have added graphene into the mix to reduce concrete's harmful greenhouse gasses. It is claimed that this means that the cement needed (and thus pollution produced) can be reduced. But there is a green alternative with some promise.

Hempcrete can be liquid and YouTube has videos of 3D printed homes in Australia built this way. Robotic production might considerably reduce costs and waste.

Let us hope that new and greener ways of volume-building homes come in. It is possible to imagine that in 10-15 years, Bristol might have embraced zero carbon housebuilding and be sharing acquired know-how around the world. But will that be too late?

Bristol has some interesting "green" building projects which could potentially be scaled up to provide more homes. There are no easy solutions, but there are some emerging examples to light ways forward, if there is the political leadership and will to do this (and if we release fringe land for new housing at scale). As the Renaissance philosopher and scientist Francis Bacon observed, 'To achieve things never before accomplished, we must use methods never before attempted'. He could have been writing about Bristol's housing and climate crises.



The innovative Knowle West Media Centre was built with straw bale walls Pic. Knowle West Media Centre.



Guilbert's Chocolates founded in 1910.

We are a nation of chocolate lovers: consumption continues to grow by 3% per annum, and we eat an estimated 660,900 tonnes each year, an average of 11kg per person, equating to 3 bars a week. Bristolians realise that eating chocolate makes you feel good and may also be good for your heart and brain – but they just might not realise its historical significance to the city. Perhaps, as with our local tobacco industry, memories of a pathfinding confectionery enterprise are being lost, despite the millions of chocolates made, the thousands of local jobs created and the past prosperity generated.

So what is this semi-magical bean, where does it come from, and when did Europeans bring it home? The short answer is that the cocoa beans, having been uncovered by the Spanish conquistadors in South America, were brought back to Spain where 'chocolate' was incorporated into Spanish cuisine and went on to become a fashionable drink for rich Europeans throughout the eighteenth century. The Industrial Revolution allowed chocolate to be mass produced and thus brought treats to the masses. This is where the Bristol involvement becomes integrated into the story. It must be acknowledged from an early stage that, as with other crops such as sugar and tobacco, the trade has responsibility for the enslavement of populations, who were brought in to sustain the new European tastes.



Fry's moved to Somerdale Garden City near Keynsham in 1923.



Elizabeth Shaw factory, Greenbank. Closed in 2006.

Bristol's sweet heritage

It may come as a surprise, says *Nic Billane*, to many citizens in Bristol that our city has a special place in the history of the most popular indulgent confectionery treat in the world, namely... chocolate.

But back to Bristol and the Quaker Fry family. Fry began in Bristol in the eighteenth century, and purchased a patent for a chocolate refining process. The business went through several iterations of ownership becoming J S Fry & Sons in 1822 (hereafter Fry's). In 1847 Fry's produced the first moulded solid chocolate bar when they combined cocoa butter with chocolate liquor and sugar to produce a sweet eating treat. This innovative company introduced the famous Fry's Chocolate Cream, the first mass-produced filled chocolate bar in 1866. Their equally famous Turkish Delight product was launched in 1914. As the business grew, the company's chocolate works moved in 1777 from Newgate Street to Union Street. During the 1820s Fry's became the largest producer of chocolate in the UK: over 220 products were introduced in the following decades including the UK's first chocolate Easter egg in 1873. By the early twentieth century the company was one of the largest employers in Bristol. By 1907 Fry's had opened seven factories in central Bristol and in 1919 merged with rival company Cadbury Brothers, resulting in a loss of operational independence, but permitting the move from Union Street to the large new 228 acre site at Somerdale Garden City near Keynsham in 1923. The move took 11 years as production was transferred to the modern manufacturing plant. At its height Somerdale had a workforce of

over 5,000, had its own railway sidings and power plant, and produced the nations favourites, Fry's Chocolate Cream, Double Decker, Dairy Milk, Creme Eggs and Crunchie, to name a few. The plant was closed in 2011 (when significantly smaller) with the loss of 500 jobs, as Kraft Foods moved production to a new factory in Poland. No doubt the high value of the site and land was a consideration for Kraft, and subsequently developers have invested millions to build 136 retirement apartments, a large care home, office space, housing and leisure facilities.

Another significant local confectionery company, Elizabeth Shaw, in production until 2006, was renowned

for its chocolate liqueurs (Famous Names) and after-dinner mints. The factory was based in the district of Greenbank, alongside today's Bristol to Bath cycle path. The company endured a fairly chequered history of ownership: the business was founded in 1881 by a former employee of Fry's, H J Packer, who provided local competition to Fry's. The company's fortunes fluctuated over the next hundred years; employment was 800 people in 1924 but changes in ownership, brands offered, bursts of investment in markets, plant and machinery, were always part of the story at the Greenbank site. In 1968 Cavenham Foods (Sir James Goldsmith, remember him?)

acquired the rights to manufacture Elizabeth Shaw chocolates, producing a range of branded products including Mint Crisps and After Dinner Mints. Goldsmith sold out in 1981, and other owners came and went including Imperial Tobacco, Hanson Trust and management buy-outs. In 2006, owing to high costs, production was diverted to mainland Europe, thus closing the doors on the 105 year old factory with the loss of 100 jobs. In 2012 the buildings were still standing empty but development plans for the site were put forward by the Generator Group who proposed a development of flats and housing which has eventually come to pass, with 36 shared ownership homes being created alongside private housing.

Bristol does have a small-scale chocolate maker with a national reputation in Guilbert's Chocolates. Founded in 1910 by a French/Swiss immigrant, Guilbert's Chocolates is located in central Bristol on Small Street and produces some of the best luxury chocolates in the UK, offering a product range of original and exquisite flavours. The company has been in its current location for over 12 years, moving from various sites over the decades including Bath, Park Street and Leonards Lane in Bristol. Today the owner Alan White explains that his market has changed and that business is conducted through trade partners and over the internet rather than through high street shops,

although the gift shop at Buckingham Palace remains an important outlet and showcase for the company's products.

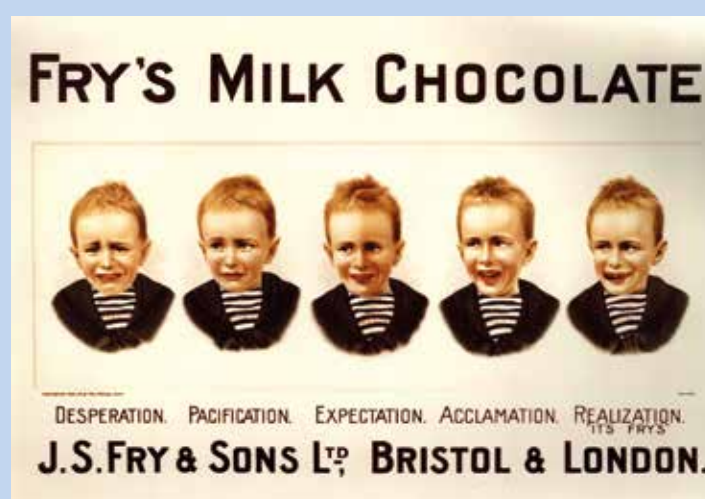
Today the confectionery industry has to contend with rising health consciousness, volatile input prices and changing consumer tastes. The organic, vegan and fair-trade movements have gathered pace and shoppers can find new bespoke chocolate products on the shelves. Chocolate confectionery which is free from (variously) gluten, soy, nuts, and palm oils are increasingly found in mass market lines. Retail patterns are also changing - supermarkets dominate the mass market, but specialist companies like Thornton's have declined on the high street. Niche chocolate companies sell more product on-line. Some small boutique chocolate makers like Zara Chocolate on North Street, Bedminster, have started up, and are forging their way to establish their reputations. Climate change may lead to a decline in cacao production in traditional production areas, but this change will stimulate growers to establish plantations in such countries as Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Indonesia and Brazil. Fair-trade, single-origin high-cocoa products are gaining traction with discerning consumers.

Bristol's former role in leadership in confectionery has gone, the land re-used and the factories replaced with predominantly residential developments. But the lasting appeal of chocolate treats seems secure. Incidentally, according to the Grocer, the 2021 UK chocolate top 10 still contains three former Bristol products: at number one Cadbury's Dairy Milk, at number six Cadbury's Twirl, and at eight Cadbury's Wispa. Bristol must have been doing something right so let's not forget our sweet heritage.

Thank you to Alan White of Guilbert's for additional information.

Fry's famous advert for Five Boys Chocolate

The model was Lindsay Poulton, the son of the photographer. He was supposed to pull five different faces headed "Desperation, Pacification, Expectation, Acclamation, Realization, it's Fry's". The first image, 'Desperation' was only achieved when Lindsay's father soaked a cloth in ammonia and wrapped it round the boy's neck to make him cry. *Thank you Eugene Byrne for this information.*



Fry's famous advert for Five Boys Chocolate.

Watershed at 40

The Watershed marked its 40th birthday earlier this summer, though, in keeping with the times, the celebrations were low-key, writes *Eugene Byrne*.

It's impossible to imagine Bristol today without the transformational effect that the Watershed has had on many aspects of the city's life and economy. It played a pivotal role in the metamorphosis of the run-down old City Docks into today's gleaming "Harbourside", it put Bristol at the forefront of new digital media, and it even changed the way that many of us work.

Watershed opened in 1982, proclaiming itself a "media and communications centre", something that needed a bit of explaining.

What it definitely was not was an "arts centre", which apparently upset some people. Interviewed some years later, Watershed's founding director, Steve Pinhay explained that the original plan had indeed been to create a bigger version of the old Arts Centre which had been in King Square.

"But when we were on the point of starting to raise the money, we came up with the concept of a centre completely devoted to the media," he said.

"That appealed to some funders like the British Film Institute, but not to some of the local authorities, Bristol's old guard movers and shakers or even some local artists who felt they'd be squeezed out."

Watershed in 1982.



Sir Richard Attenborough in 1987 at birthday celebrations of Watershed which he opened five years previously. Picture Evening Post.

Pinhay defined it as "a place where people could participate in, learn about and enjoy contemporary mass media ... through photography, electronics, celluloid and anything other than things normally defined as live events.

"I had to spend a lot of time trying to convince people it was a forward-looking idea."

Nowadays we're all accustomed to our media all converging into a single device, whether it's phones, tablets or the big flat screen in the living room which we still call a TV but which bears as much resemblance to a traditional TV as a Tesla does to a Model T Ford.



Watershed publicity for its 1982 opening.

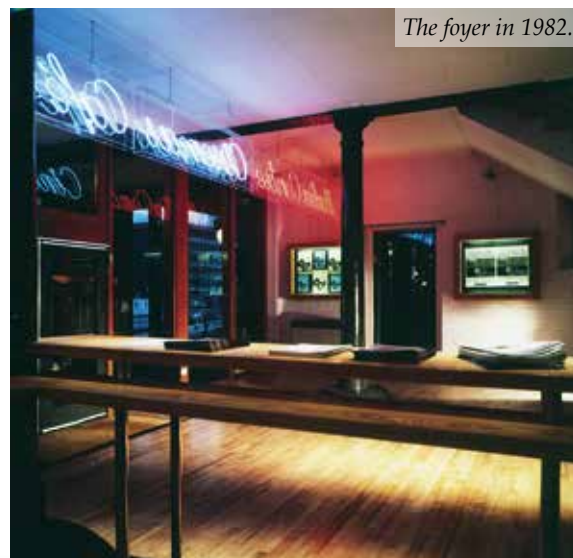
None of this was apparent in 1982 when TV, radio, newspapers, photography and cinema were all quite separate things. Computers were for playing crude arcade games on, and nobody had heard of the internet.

Watershed was – and still is – based in a former dockside transit shed which had been refurbished by developer John Pontin and his JT Group, who would play a major part in the transformation of the City Docks into "Harbourside."

While much of the docks area in 1982 was overgrown wasteland, things were already starting to move. Although arguments went on in the Council chamber and the letters pages of the local press about the future of the area, there was plenty of activity in many corners. The Arnolfini had been in Bush House since 1975 and opposite it the Bristol Exhibition Centre had been doing a good business with trade and consumer events and, an annual highlight at the time, the World Wine Fair. As Watershed was opening, the same building was also home to the studios of Bristol's first independent radio station, Radio West.

While not everyone knew what a "media and communications centre" was all about in 1982, everyone understood well enough that it had a cinema, which then, as now, was one of the main reasons people visited the place.

To begin with, the cinema tended to screen English language art and independent movies, and under a



The foyer in 1982.



Watershed was – and still is – based in a former dockside transit shed.

non-aggression pact with the Arnolfini, the latter screened arty foreign language films.

Both places also boasted café/bars, both of which have never been unfashionable. The difference was that Watershed's café would also become the first workplace in the region for an emerging breed of digital nomads.

Pinhay and others succeeded in getting the place up and running and steering it through the early years. Later, it was Dick Penny's long tenure in charge that managed its growth through various crises and put it on a firm financial footing with the outright purchase of the building.

The £6.4m deal in 2007 was done with more than a little help from the South West Regional Development Agency, which saw the move as a major investment in the growth of creative businesses in the Bristol area.

By then Watershed was already an undisputed regional leader in emerging digital technologies, usually working in partnership with the universities and local tech firms.

Watershed was also one of the earliest places in the UK to offer free wi-fi access, something we all take for granted nowadays but which in the early

noughties was a great novelty. With it came a whole new breed of people who would work doing Important Things on their laptops in the café.

One of the more obvious public-facing aspects of its growing digital arm was the Electric December online advent calendar. The first of these appeared in 1998, before most Bristolians even had a home internet connection.

Since then, the biggest news has been Watershed's subsidiary Pervasive Media Studio, working at the cutting edge of digital entertainment and one of the things which makes Bristol one of the UK's most significant players in new media.

Over the last four decades, Watershed has also been involved in all manner of media projects, exhibitions and events, and has funded or run a huge range of educational activities as well, many of them reaching into the more deprived areas of the region.

Coming out of the pandemic, the Watershed folk decided that they would not mark their 40 years with a large and extravagant celebration, but with a number of low-key events through the year.

"We decided on a slow and steady approach as we didn't want to

overwhelm ourselves," said present-day CEO Clare Reddington a few months ago.

There is work to be done on the building to make it carbon-neutral, and this summer should have seen the refurbishment of its toilets.

On which subject ... As you may know, the Watershed's toilets are very convenient if you're in that part of town and get caught short. But there was a lot of controversy earlier this year when it turned one of its toilets "gender neutral". That is, there are no urinals, but a row of cubicles with lockable doors that can be used by anyone.

Watershed staff couldn't understand the fuss. If you're in the Watershed and you've gotta go, you don't have to use the gender-neutral cubicles. There are alternatives.

"We have all-gender toilets which are welcoming for everybody," said Clare Reddington, "but we also have male toilets, female toilets and a range of accessible toilets, so the upset about it is confusing to all of us."

Anyway, by the autumn they should have new toilets "which will be lovely and full of light."

"If we don't win the best toilets in town award I shall be very upset."



How is Bristol's nightlife doing?

Nothing stops nightlife happening, says Annie McGann of Save Bristol Nightlife.

People will always want to get out and socialise, whether it's a trip to the theatre, a meal in a restaurant, a quiet night in the local pub or a mad all-nighter at a night club.

At *Save Bristol Nightlife* we work with venues that have problems. In June it was reported that the night-time economy is spearheading the financial recovery of the city centre and that the money's coming in, but behind the scenes nightlife is still having to cope with many challenges.

Let's start with the bins. Anyone who has been part of a community group will know that one mention of the bins and the rest of the agenda flies out of the window. In Bristol we have bins cluttering up the streets all over the place. Commercially the bins are collected by more than one company,

and hardly anyone in hospitality is thrilled with their bin collection service. Even less thrilled are the council's bin police who would like bins to be invisible. Indeed, wouldn't it be great if we couldn't see bins all over the Centre marring the look of our beautiful city? So, the bars and restaurants are struggling with concealing their bins, what with pedestrianisation, negotiating access to this and that street and being fined for leaving the bins out yet having nowhere to store them. Such a dull thing to read about but such a difficult thing for late night businesses to deal with ... store the bin in the restaurant? No. It's unhygienic and we don't want rats. Fly tip the rubbish in the bin bay of a business that's got one? Only if you want it delivered back to your front step by the irate venue manager.

These days planning applications must include details of where exactly the bins will be stored and cars are not encouraged so there will be few

Stretch tents and flowers, fairy lights and heaters, have created some lovely outdoor spaces.



Please support your local campaigns to save pubs. Pic: Colin Moody.

designated car parking spaces for developments. In the old city there is no space for bin storage and nowhere to park. You may as well break the rules and park wherever you like (*This approach is not endorsed by Bristol Civic Society! Ed.*) because the parking fine is less than the cost to park in the multi-storey car park all day. And then we have the clean air zone to look forward to where the government has ruled that the 24 hour day goes from midnight to midnight, so if you turn up for work

at 6pm and your shift ends at 2am you will have to pay twice.

Beyond the bins, where is the glamour and fun of nightlife to be found? Well, the festival scene is getting back into the swing of things and the Centre is drowning in new cocktail bars and bars with a twist. You can play digital darts, golf, go bowling, or axe throwing. There are drag queens and bottomless brunches and Abba sing-a-long sessions. There are lots of new venues to discover and many of the old ones are doing well, with their new outside areas left over from the height of covid and a new regime around pavement licensing. Stretch tents and flowers, fairy lights and heaters, have created some lovely outdoor spaces, although the neighbours might complain having got used to the silence of lockdown.

At *Save Bristol Nightlife* we have continuous battles with developers who want to gut a venue and build flats in its place or to build nearby and make life hell for any neighbouring nightlife. There is a delay in planning decisions and cuts to the departments in the council that are crucial to nightlife ticking over. Council officers and night-time industry representatives like those of the *Bristol Association of Restaurants, Bars and Independents* did a sterling job in supporting hospitality businesses during the covid crisis but many businesses were left with rent and bills to pay with no income. Many businesses have changed hands or gone under. At the Council, planning and licensing are short of staff and as senior people retire, they are not being replaced. One must wonder how Bristol City Council will retain its top staff if there is no progression to be had for them careerwise.



One of the situations concerning *Save Bristol Nightlife* right now is a proposed development opposite the Trinity Centre. And the developers haven't even got their planning permission yet! Then there are the smaller developers appealing the status of places designated to be assets of community value in order to have their way with them. The public try and have their

The festival scene is getting back into the swing of things and the Centre is drowning in new cocktail bars and bars with a twist.

say. There are well supported public campaigns to *Save Redfield Cinema* and *The Rhubarb Tavern* (Better Bristol Spring 2022) in Barton Hill.

We have joined forces with the CAMRA pubs group who are old hands at keeping track of pubs in jeopardy. They took the step of inviting all the different pub campaigns to their meetings so that everyone can learn from each other and find support. The tenacity of pub campaigners, the time they spend and who and what they represent is encouraging in terms of



People will always want to get out and socialise.



In Bristol we have bins cluttering up the streets all over the place.

admiring the human spirit yet soul-destroying as these battles go on for years and developers withdraw and resubmit their plans over and over again, chipping away at the will of those who want to keep their local pub a pub. Developers can afford lawyers and professional lobbyists so it's not a level playing field. The campaigns have to muster a response each time and then that effort is often dismissed at planning decision meetings by saying, 'Oh, they did an internet campaign using social media,' so it somehow doesn't count. Despite the support of campaigns by councillors, the public, the media and nightlife industry experts, the developers always seem to get their way in the end. We live in a time when government have changed planning law and public opinion is of no consequence and public consultation is used to launder decisions already made behind closed doors.

What's the answer? Make sure that council planners enforce policy as it stands – challenge bogus statements on planning applications – scrutinise those statements – don't take a developer's word for it. Observe Agent of Change policies. Help get buildings listed and protected from change of use. Do something about pub owners vandalising their own property in order to create an unviable eyesore. Make sure venues are properly consulted before making grand announcements about redevelopment that impacts on them. Be aware of where venues exist. Make a map with all the nightlife establishments, pubs and music venues on it. Collect data and share it. Don't do sound assessments when a music venue isn't open. Don't mislead about the marketing of a pub for sale or its viability. That's a start! The list could go on! What can Bristol Civic Society members do? Please support your local campaigns to save pubs, especially, keep an eye on *The Cornubia*. Keep up the good work in looking out for our city and get out and about and experience what the city at night has to offer. Let's make people aware of the concept of place making. Let's make a better Bristol at night.

Plaques & Pedestals

Words written into our townscape

Gordon Young gives a glimpse of his forthcoming city centre plaque walks.

Some of you will have walked around Clifton with me, admiring the rich variety of commemorative plaques – green, blue and dark, gold-coloured bronze – which adorn the sumptuous suburb’s facades. It was relatively easy to devise the three distinct walks as there are so many plaques in Clifton. But what about further afield? Is there another district in Bristol with facades festooned with plaques? Well, the city centre has a wide-ranging selection, often unattributed, but worth researching.

What was needed was a military-style reconnaissance, a campaign to seek out worthy plaques and draw up routes which would ensure regular encounters with them. In recent weeks, fortified by frequent coffee and cake stops, Panel member Malcolm Ravenscroft and I have been on manoeuvres. No facade or memorial has escaped our frontal assaults. We now have a hit list of more than 60 targets.

But standing at the fulcrum of the harbour – the end of Narrow Quay

by the Arnolfini, it seemed mean-spirited to admire the plaque commemorating Brunel’s iron supplier Daniel Wade Acraman, and not acknowledge the statue of John Cabot a few metres away. So, we decided to include statues along with plaques, since most of them have inscriptions on their pedestals. And a natural follow-on was war memorials.

The tours will start in the autumn and, for now, to whet your appetite, here are some calorific confections relating to what’s on offer:

- Cities twinned with Bristol – Hannover, Bordeaux . . . and there’s lots more.
- A secluded garden with stone benches inscribed with wise quotations from ancient Greek scholars.
- A dog who refused to be put down when the company using it as a logo wished to update their image.
- On a 14-sided office block: handsome, high-up medallions which deserve close examination.
- A deceased king, originally intended as an equestrian statue, but his replacement argued for a standing

A filmscript in Millennium Square.

figure – ‘less militant’, he thought. The plinth bears the title of an Adge Cutler ditty, ‘Virtute et Industria’. If you’re not familiar with it, here’s the first verse (for authenticity, I’ve added a Bristolian terminal ‘I’ on the first line):

*“Virtute et Industrial,
Three cheers for Novers ‘ill
If the City don’t win Sa’urday
P’raps the Rovers will.”*

- Another monarch, this one with some of her regal digits missing.
- A baffling art installation: initialisms, carved into a circular bench – ccTLDs, country code top-level domains, which define countries where internet sites are based: .uk (United Kingdom); .de (Germany); .nl (Netherlands), etc. (No, we couldn’t figure it out, either).
- A nautical pair: an adventurous mariner and a privateering sailor. Yes, the first one is John Cabot. We

locals know the truth about Cabot’s voyage of discovery – he hired Bristol men as crew because our fishermen were famed for their knowledge of the Atlantic ocean (a plaque in Pill honours Cabot’s pilot, a hobbler from the village). There’s sound evidence that our forebears were already fishing off Newfoundland’s Grand Banks, but keeping it to themselves, since it’s one of the world’s richest fishing grounds. They would land their catch on Nova Scotia shores and pickle it in brine to preserve it for the homeward voyage. When Cabot made landfall at Cape Bonavista, Newfoundland in 1497, he was the only one on the ship who hadn’t been there before!

Just imagine those brave Bristolians in the 1400s casting off from Welsh Back and sailing on a falling tide beneath Clifton’s crags, to the mouth of the Avon, and slipping out into the Severn estuary. They would put on full sail and set course due westwards, out into the cold, open, empty Atlantic ocean. They deserve both plaques and statues, I reckon.

- A promoter of Modernist design who was a pioneer of the city twinning movement.
- A knighted actor, sire of an acting dynasty.

- From chocolate-packer at Fry’s to principal soprano with D’Oyly Carte.
- A theatre designer acknowledged by a plaque, although he’d already built around 164 other theatres.
- An architect who designed a building rich in cornices, crenellations and corbels in south Bristol.



Salted cod anyone?

- The god of the sea, brazenly admiring a naked mermaid for the past 180 years.
- A Georgian square – home to an engineer who worked on the Severn railway tunnel as well as one who made the greatest improvement to our road system since the Romans. Did such pioneers of transportation know each other and talk technical in the square’s garden . . . ?
- An optical illusion on a café wall.
- An inventor with a dubious claim

to fame yet he still has four plaques honouring him in the city.

- Byron’s wife gets a brief mention on a plaque along with others, but I reckon she deserves one all to herself what with putting up with her husband, that nineteenth-century bad boy . . .

- An inadequate facsimile of our High Cross – Bristol’s Elgin marbles – the original now at Stourhead. Anyone up for hiring a mobile crane and low-loader, and driving down there under cover of darkness, and getting it back . . . ?

- A tiny brass plaque set in the pavement to mark Bristol lagging behind London by 10 minutes and 23 seconds.

- A practical inventor who designed an early teasmade

which boiled eggs in its steam.

- The alleged theft of a five-shilling postal order which inspired a celebrated playwright.
- A handsome statue, marooned, with traffic whirling around it. We see a soldier in a dynamic pose, remaining resolute in his stance despite decades of being disrespectfully crowned with a traffic cone.

Still hungry for more? Then look out for announcements detailing the city centre plaques walks.

Barton Hill boy makes good

The Blue Plaques Panel is very mindful that, when we erect a plaque on a building, we endow it with a biography. We insist that the plaque bears not only the birth and death dates of the notable resident but also the residency span. We want to demonstrate which period of a notable person’s life was spent in the building. Were pioneering scientific experiments performed behind the facade? Metaphysical concepts imagined? Great poetry or music written?

Often, the achievements of a resident do not link directly with the building. Such was the case with Albert Victor Alexander. Born in 1885, the son of a blacksmith and a corset-maker, most of his childhood

was spent in Barton Hill where he attended local schools. He began work at the age of thirteen and, in a truly inspirational example of upward mobility, went on to become three times First Lord of the Admiralty and was eventually raised to the peerage as Viscount Alexander of Hillsborough.

AV, as he was known, was an eminent Labour and Co-operative Party politician of the old school. His childhood home in Barton Hill is no longer there; in fact, the entire road had disappeared and been rebuilt to a different street pattern.

How can we establish a firm historical link with a deeply respected senior politician and the place of his childhood? Well, the directors of a long-established local community centre were eager for the plaque to be affixed close to the entrance to their

building. We thought the suggestion commendable. The Wellspring Settlement is a distinctive landmark building in Barton Hill and the plaque should provide inspiration to all who visit it.

Gordon Young

Mayor Marvin Rees praises a distinguished politician. A.V. Alexander First Earl of Hillsborough.



Above: We would prefer the real thing...Middle: A literary accolade. Right: Neptune. Moved so many times he ought to be on castors.

Travelling at unimaginable speed *God's Wonderful Railway*

Bristol City Council, alongside partners including Network Rail, Homes England and central government departments, is working on station redevelopment plans that will see Temple Meads become a twenty-first century integrated regional transport hub. *Michael Manson explores the station's history.*

On 31 August 1840 excitable passengers climbed aboard open-top carriages for the first journey from Bristol to Bath along Kingdom Isambard Brunel's (1806-59) wide gauge Great Western Railway. Thousands of spectators watched with awe as the steaming *Fire-Ball* thundered down the line. Within fifteen minutes of leaving Temple Meads Station the train had reached Keynsham. After a two minute stop it was on its way again. It was travelling at an unimaginable speed. The 20 mph velocity was exhilarating.

Some passengers even feared the rapidity of the motion would be harmful to their health. In all, the journey to Bath took 32 minutes.

The railway age was underway, though it would be a further six months before the 119 mile route to Paddington was opened.

Meanwhile, the Bristol and Exeter line, run by a different company, but with the omnipresent Brunel as engineer, was completed in 1844. It also had its terminus at Temple Meads – placed at a right-angle to Brunel's passenger shed.

The concept of a *rail way* was nothing new in Bristol. Since 1832, coal had been transported by wagons on iron tracks, the Dram Way, from the Kingswood Coal field down to a wharf at Keynsham – a distance of 5 ½ miles. But the steam train turned the world upside-down. By reducing the time and cost of travel

the railways gave an enormous boost to Bristol's trade and industry.

Temple Meads Railway Station wasn't best placed. Ideally, a train station should be centrally located. In Bristol, a terminus adjacent to the docks would have been the preferred option. But Bristol's hilly topography limited the options. In the end, Temple Meads was the nearest undeveloped land available. And just as important, the land was owned by the Bristol Corporation who was keen to sell.

In 1861 there was a proposal to nudge the passenger railway station further into the city. There was a plan for central terminus in Queen Square, and from there a new branch line would extend to the lower slopes of Brandon Hill. Alarm at the appropriation of public open spaces, together with the fear of damage by fire to houses and shipping meant the idea was fiercely opposed and subsequently dropped. A year

later, another unsuccessful proposal was put forward, this time, with a grand terminus built over a covered-up Frome (as it is today) at Narrow Quay.

Nevertheless, the arrival of the GWR unleashed a burst of industrial hyperactivity. Brunel set the example. Civil engineering on such a scale could be done! 'The greatest public work ever constructed' claimed Arrowsmith's 1906 Dictionary of Bristol. The trains were as much for the transport of goods as for passengers. In just twenty years Bristol's trade hinterland expanded beyond recognition. Soon Bristol was connected by rail to Gloucester, Birmingham (just about!), Cardiff and Exeter. Smaller lines crossed the city to Avonmouth, Portishead and Fishponds.

'A third-class passenger in 1908 has the choice of numerous trains; he travels in luxury compared with his predecessors; he can reach London in two hours' smooth running, and enjoy an excellent luncheon on the way.'

There was no lack of investors – money was to be made from railways. This enthusiasm for the railways has been described as a 'feverish mania'. Bristol's business people could see the wider opportunities for the distribution of their wares. The railways became the beating heart of Victorian Bristol. Bristol's major industries – chocolate, tobacco and packaging – employing thousands of people, were spurred into action. Life moved at a faster pace – the streets of Bristol were crowded with wagons, drays and carters moving

goods to and from the stations and yards. Within twenty years, the roads leading from the station to Bristol Bridge became so congested with traffic that a new thoroughfare, Victoria Street, 'with every conceivable style of architecture', was cut through the old and run-down residential area of Temple and St Thomas.

The fields of Temple Meads and St Philips disappeared under acres of goods yards. Even the serenity of the Cathedral was disturbed by the letting-off of steam and the clanking of shunted wagons from neighbouring Canon's Marsh.

There was the difficulty of the gauge, however. Brunel had insisted on the 7ft ¼ in broad gauge, which he claimed allowed a faster and smoother ride. He didn't see it as a problem, asserting that the GWR would never have any connections with other main lines. How wrong he was. For example, goods going from Bristol to Birmingham had to be unloaded at Gloucester, where the broad gauge ended, and then reloaded onto a standard gauge (4ft 8 ½ in) train. This was one of the few battles that Brunel was to lose. The GWR recapitulated and under government pressure, bit by bit, they reluctantly converted their lines to standard gauge. This painfully slow process was completed by 1892.

Nevertheless, the energy was palpable. Teams of navvies – nomadic labourers – were everywhere. Bristol's landscape



The roads leading from the station to Bristol Bridge became so congested with traffic that a new thoroughfare, Victoria Street, had to be built.



For all its faults Temple Meads remains as Bristol's core train station.

was newly sculpted by railway cuttings, embankments, bridges and viaducts. Recently built villas next to Whiteladies Road had to be demolished to make way for the Clifton Extension Railway. A mile-long tunnel was then dug under Durdham Down to extend the line to Avonmouth. The hill to the east of Ashley Vale – now called Narrows – was carved up like a hot-cross-bun. St Mary Redcliffe lost part of its churchyard when a tunnel for the Docks Railway was bored under Redcliffe Hill.

Of course, there was another side to the coin. Within three years of the opening of the GWR to London all horse drawn coaches from Bristol to the capital had ceased. Market towns such as Marshfield on the Gloucestershire border were by-passed. The once hectic eighteenth century coaching inns, with their wide arched entrances and busy stables, fell silent. The landscape of the country was forever changed.

For all its faults Temple Meads remains Bristol's core train station. Today, however, Brunel's splendid Victorian gothic engine shed is used as an exhibition space, while his offices are occupied by an 'innovation and incubation centre'.

This article is an extract from Manson's Bristol Miscellany Volume 2 (Bristol Books/Tangent). Extensively illustrated. £20.00.



Today, Brunel's splendid Victorian gothic engine shed is used as an exhibition space, while his offices are occupied by an 'innovation and incubation centre'.



Temple Meads Station. GWR terminus on the left, Bristol and Exeter line, centre. Copyright; Bristol Museums, Galleries and Archives.

The Great Western sails again



Great Western's maiden voyage, 1838.

If all goes to plan, the SS Great Britain, already one of the region's leading visitor attractions, could be joined by another of Brunel's ships in a few years' time. Eugene Byrne reports on a very ambitious £20m project.

In June the SS Great Britain Trust unveiled its plans for the Albion Dockyard site, a project which could see a full-size replica of Brunel's first ship becoming a close neighbour of his second one.

The Trust announced that it had been awarded a development grant of £600,000 from the National Lottery Heritage Fund for what will hopefully become a £20m initiative to revitalise the dockyard. With the re-created SS Great Western alongside the Great Britain, the site should prove a huge boost to Bristol as a visitor destination.

The project aims to "protect and enhance Bristol's unique harbour heritage and ecology while transforming the Albion Dockyard with a world-class maritime attraction inside a thriving working shipyard."

The dockyard, long the home of Charles Hill & Sons, and later David Abels' shipyard, closed in 2016. The plan is now that the Grade II-listed dock will be conserved as a working dry dock, and with Great Western as its centre-piece.

The project will also have a significant educational element, becoming part of the SS Great Britain Trust's "Future Brunels" programme, which aims to inspire secondary school pupils to consider careers in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM).

For young and old visitors alike,

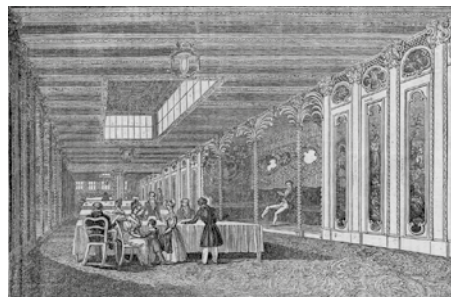


Great Western launched from Pattersons Yard. 1837.

though, the facsimile of Brunel's first ship alongside his second one would underline Bristol's role in pioneering steam-powered passenger travel.

And while no-one doubts the importance of SS Great Britain as the forerunner of the passenger liners which came late, the story of modern mass-travel really begins with the ship Brunel built before her.

Great Western's significance was that she proved that transatlantic steam



Great Western's saloon.

navigation was practicable.

Brunel's idea was that it should be possible to take a "single ticket" journey from London to New York – take the train from London to Bristol, then embark on a steamship which would take you across the Atlantic faster and more reliably than any sailing vessel.

Of course there had long been passenger ships sailing between Britain and America, but they were slow and powered by sail. Wind and weather made them impossible to timetable precisely, and the journey at the best of times could be dreary. At the worst of times, if the Atlantic weather turned bad, the trip could be terrifying.

By the 1830s steam-powered vessels were nothing new, but it was believed that no ship could cross the Atlantic under steam power alone because no steamer could carry enough coal for such a long voyage. Brunel was one

of the first engineers to grasp the fact that it was indeed possible, because a ship's carrying capacity increases as the cubic multiple of the hull's dimensions, whereas the water resistance – the area of hull you have to drive through the water – only increases as its square.

Among the leading figures in the new Great Western Steamship Company were Brunel himself, his friend the Bristol businessman Thomas Guppy, Bristol shipbuilder William Patterson and a semi-retired naval officer named Christopher Claxton, also a Bristolian.

The Bristolians did much of the groundwork, finding that it would be perfectly feasible, but that at 1200 tons the ship would have to be the largest ever built up until that point.

Patterson designed the ship, while Brunel oversaw her engines, which were built in London by Maudslay, Sons and Field. Brunel also took a great personal interest in passengers' comfort. A huge amount of thought went into making the journey as great a contrast as possible with the horrible experience of crossing in a sailing ship. (For the wealthy passengers, anyway.)

The ship would serve sumptuous menus comparable to the best hotels. The décor was also finished to a very high standard.

Great Western was launched from Patterson's yard at the Western Wapping Dock in Bristol on July 19 1837 (there is a plaque high up on the wall of L Shed close to Prince Street Bridge marking the spot).

Her maiden voyage was delayed by a fire when she was undergoing trials on the Thames, but there was no serious damage (though Brunel was injured) and she was brought back to Broad Pill to take on coal.

News of the fire led many nervous passengers to cancel their bookings. Nonetheless, hundreds of well-wishers came to see her off as she left for New York on 8 April 1838.

By now, everyone knew that getting across the Atlantic by steam was the future, and that the first firm to do it would reap all the commercial benefits. The London-based British and American Steam Navigation Company, founded by American Lawyer Junius Smith and Scottish shipbuilder Macgregor Laird were planning a transatlantic steamer of their own, but construction work had not even started on it.

Instead, they chartered the Sirius, a small steamer built to travel between Britain and Ireland and decided to pit her, loaded down with fuel and carrying 22 passengers, against Great Western.

It was a reckless and dangerous stunt, but if the Londoners won the race, they might well win the business, too.

Because of the fire on Brunel's ship, Sirius had a four-day head-start, but was not up to the task. As she neared America, the story (probably exaggerated) goes that items of cargo, one of her masts, most of her furniture and even passengers' children's toys were thrown into the furnaces to keep her boilers going.

Aboard Great Western everything proceeded much more smoothly, although passengers would later complain about the smoke and smuts getting everywhere, and of the all-pervading smell of the animal fats used to grease her machinery.

Sirius reached New York half a day ahead of Great Western with hardly any coal left. Then she grounded on a sandbank at the harbour entrance. A few hours later, Great Western swept past with more than two hundred tons of coal to spare in her bunkers.

Safe and (relatively) comfortable steam travel to and from America had been proved possible. And the journey only took half the time it did under sail. And, a key point, it meant that ships could run according to a timetable. The uncertainty of the weather was hugely reduced.

Great Western was, you might say, the forerunner of the mass-travel we all

take for granted today.

Of course Brunel was supposed to ensure Bristol's primacy in the transatlantic passenger market by following up Great Western's success by making one or two more ships just like her. Instead, he built something far bigger and using radical new technologies, tearing up plans several times and letting other firms steal a march on Bristol. So while we all think he's a great guy, his contemporaries in Bristol started to see him as a show-off who lost the city a great opportunity.

The initial Lottery funding for the Albion Dockyard Project means the SS Great Britain Trust can now make detailed plans which will then be considered by the National Lottery Heritage fund for the award of a further £5m. The rest of the cost will have to be raised from other sources. If all goes to plan, the new attraction should be open in five years' time.

Matthew Tanner, chief executive of the SS Great Britain Trust, spoke of "a world class heritage experience that will protect and transform the Albion Dockyard while providing far-reaching benefits for the harbour and the whole region, growing the tourism economy and maritime and shipbuilding industries."

For more, see www.ssgreatbritain.org/albion-dockyard-project/



The Albion Yard in former times.

School's out forever?

Alexander Smith and Ian Beckey are concerned about the future of the building that once housed Barton Hill Infant and Nursery School.



The building continues to sit empty to this day.

If you walk along Queen Ann Road in the neighbourhood of Barton Hill, you will not be able to miss an imposing red brick building, the former Barton Hill Infant and Nursery School.

This building sits opposite the *Rhubarb Tavern* public house, another Barton Hill landmark that was written about by Mark Steeds in issue 20 of *Better Bristol*.

The school was built on the site of a seventeenth century mansion known as Tilly's Court. The mansion house was named locally as 'Queen Anne's House' (hence where the road gained its name from) following the tale that in 1702 Queen Anne stopped at the house to 'powder her nose'. It was also the County seat of Sir Thomas Day, twice Lord Mayor of Bristol and a wealthy soap manufacturer.

By 1894 the mansion was in a state

of decay and was purchased by the Bristol School Board. The building was demolished and in its place in 1895 the imposing red-brick school was built for the education of children between the ages of three and seven.

Preserved in the room once used by the school as an office is the remains of part of the original ornate Tudor ceiling salvaged from Tilly's Court. Also salvaged from the mansion was a fireplace with the inscription D.T.A. 1672 (believed to stand for Day, Thomas A.) which was moved across the road to the *Rhubarb Tavern*.

The local community have always valued the school with its many memories from parents and former pupils

In the Summer of 2007, the pupils and staff were relocated to a newly built school constructed on the grounds of the former Barton Hill Primary School, further along Queen Ann Road (now Barton Hill Academy).

The school was put up for sale in 2009 and turned into a Sikh Community and Resource Centre.

In the Summer of 2017, the building was up for sale again at an asking price of £1million. According to Maggs & Allen's website, the building was sold 'Subject to contract'.

The premises was earmarked in 2019 in the City Council's Local Plan as having the potential for the existing building to be converted into flats.

It was put back on the market again for sale in November 2021 at an asking price of £1.2 million, and again has been marked as sold 'Subject to Contract'.

The local community have always valued the school with its many memories from parents and former pupils (including myself and my brothers). Thus the school was granted an Asset of Community Value (ACV) listing in 2021.

However, the landlords requested that the ACV be reviewed in February of this year before they submitted notice of intent to sell within the same month. The ACV was eventually removed by Bristol City Council's Community Right to Bid team in April citing it as an 'invalid nomination'.

The building is Locally Listed, but not Nationally Listed. Much the same applies to the *Rhubarb Tavern* public house directly opposite.

The building remains empty to this day. Its future continues to be much debated, with fears within the local community that a property developer will swoop on the premises and demolish the building either in part, or in its entirety.

Credit for the information included goes to the Barton Hill History Group, Up Our Street community newsletter, Maggs & Allen property consultants and Professor Richard Coates.

Left, The former Barton Hill Infant and Nursery School.



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 2022/23

Brislington Tram Depot



The nights are drawing in, energy prices are at an all-time high, inflation is painful, but life carries on. There is still a lot to enjoy about our city. The events team will offer a variety of walks, visits, talks, Zoom meetings and films to raise your spirits and hopefully inform and entertain you during the dark months.

Much of the winter programme is yet to be confirmed, so please check the Bristol Civic Society's website (www.bristolcivicsociety.org.uk/events) for updates on events shown below and for other so-far unannounced events. It is our usual practice to notify members via email about upcoming individual events particularly where booking is required. Some events may have a small charge, and numbers can be limited.

Keep an eye on

www.bristolcivicsociety.org.uk/events
for more details of upcoming events.



SEPT Wednesday 14 September, 7.30pm.

Zoom talk by Ian Harvey, Executive Director of Civic Voice, on High Street Development.

Thursday 21 September, 11.00am.

Visit to Bristol Old Vic, guided by Tom Morris, Artistic Director.

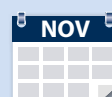


OCT Wednesday 12 October, 11.00am.

'Plaques and Pedestals' – a new series of walks around the city centre led by Gordon Young. This is a programme of three different walks which will run throughout the last quarter of the year.

Wednesday 19 October

Francis Greenacre will lead a tour of the Merchants' Hall home of the Society of Merchant Venturers. Located in private grounds just a short walk from Clifton village, the magnificent Merchants' Hall is an imposing, detached house. Following the tour Francis, a Merchant Venturers member since 1995, will answer questions on the contemporary and historic activities of the Society.



NOV Wednesday 9 November

A visit to Spike Island. This will be a tour and talk on the range of artistic elements that Spike Island provides to Bristol and the surrounding area.

Brislington Tram Depot Walk with David Martyn. Date to be confirmed.

Coming up. Dates to be advised:

- Visits to places of local interest including the Merchant Venturers Hall and the Spike Island studios.
- Walks, including a look at the traces of the Bristol Harbour Railway, guided by Dave Blackburn.
- Resumption of archive film mail outs.
- Zoom presentations will continue at rate of one a month, sometimes more.

Bristol is awaiting announcements/consultations on some weighty issues including the long-delayed consultation by the West of England Combined Authority (WECA) on the possibilities for a Mass Transit System. As and when these see the light of day, Bristol Civic Society will aim to organise events to throw light on the issues and give people a chance to ask questions.