

Better Bristol

The Bristol Civic Society Magazine - Issue 24 Spring/Summer 2024



BRISTOL
BEACON

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BRISTOL
CIVIC
SOCIETY

an independent force for a **better Bristol**





Front Cover: Bristol Beacon
Photo: Shotaway Photography.

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From the Chair Simon Birch looks back on his ten years as chair of the Bristol Civic Society



This issue will be my last as Chair of the Bristol Civic Society. After 10 years – generally very enjoyable, stimulating, instructive. Working with great company. Visiting sites and projects all over Bristol – what a great way to see the whole City. I'm stepping down with the Civic Society having over 600 members, sound finances, and a good range of activities. There's always room for change and improvement and I look forward to seeing that happen over the next 10 years.

One of the most rewarding jobs as Chair has been to write and to welcome new members to the Society. Quite a regular task in recent years. As part of the welcome, I do ask for the motivation in joining us. Not surprisingly the top reasons are the quality of our events and the quality of *Better Bristol*. And of course, both of these helped us all through the pandemic.

A balanced approach

One important lesson that I've found. A Civic Society needs to provide balance. Sometimes the Society needs to support and sometimes to challenge. We sometimes do this through support for development proposals. We certainly recognise and applaud good quality development through our annual Design Awards. Last year we presented awards to three really outstanding schemes - Brooks Dye Works, Merry Hill, and the Clayton Hotel in Broad Street. I can promise that the awards in 2024 will be equally exciting. And of course, we

recognise individual endeavour through our popular Blue Plaques.

Conversely the Society must actively oppose proposals which we consider will cause damage to the City. We spoke strongly against the designs for St Mary le Port and Waterfront Place. We are currently engaged in opposing very high rise developments at the Premier Inn at the Bearpit and at Debenhams.

In our view such high rise development is damaging to both future occupants and to the appearance of the City.

In my view, a balanced Society will always have more influence with decision makers and with the general public.

Delivering housing

Possibly the biggest challenge is the housing crisis facing Bristol. With a successful economy and an attractive environment, the City is hampered and constrained by unreasonably tight local authority boundaries. Greenfield sites are mostly outside Bristol and there is therefore a particular problem in delivering affordable housing on brownfield sites with their inevitable constraints and problems. Realistically local authority boundary changes appear a remote possibility. So, what is the solution? It can't simply be to build high rise developments. But can medium rise development deliver sufficient homes? This will be an ongoing and very urgent debate and one where the Civic Society

is uniquely placed to contribute and to guide public opinion.

The role of projects

Finally, I want to refer to the importance of Civic Society projects. These have a long history and the extensive tree planting in the 1970s makes a significant contribution to the attractive appearance of many parts of the City Centre.



Merry Hill, Lockleaze. We recognise and applaud good quality development through our annual Design Awards.

Hopefully we made a positive contribution to stimulating the successful restoration and reuse of St Michaels on the Mount Without. From a church boarded up for 20 years through a period of great uncertainty following the unfortunate fire but now restored and extremely well used. And the venue for our AGM in 2024.

And we continue to show perseverance in working to devise a solution for Ashton Court Mansion. The Society was actively talking about possible uses of the building in the early 1960s when the Council first acquired the estate – and 60 years on we keep plugging away! See page 21 for our progress so far.

Simon Birch
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 **Not already a member? Why not join TODAY!**
See page 27 for more details...

Major developments in Bristol

Simon Birch and Peter Ellis review a selection of important proposals.

Premier Inn redevelopment

The saga of the Premier Inn redevelopment has been a long and grinding one, and by the time you read this the planning decision is likely to have been made. From day one, we've been highly critical of what is being proposed. We've said we wanted to see more affordable homes in Bristol, but we didn't support cutting corners in their liveability, tackling the climate emergency or in delivering good design. At the turn of the year we commented on a number of limited changes including a paltry reduction of 4 metres off the proposed 28-storey tower. We've continued to question the carbon assessment and the lack of serious attention to reusing the existing buildings.

Recently we've responded to a consultation showing the combined impact with the 28-storey tower which would replace the Debenhams building. We've been pressing for such an assessment. Sadly, having seen it, it's all too clear that these proposals would change the face of Bristol and in doing so undermine its character for the worse. We reminded the council that national planning policy expected the planning and development process to achieve the "creation of high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places". By any reasonable metric, including the barometer of public opinion, individually and cumulatively, in our view these proposals fail to do this. We were also amazed, perhaps we shouldn't be, that the officer's report and recommendation was to be published before the deadline for responding to the consultation.

Debenhams building redevelopment

At the beginning of the year we objected in the strongest terms to the planning application for the redevelopment of the Debenhams building. In doing so, we underlined that we see tackling the housing crisis as a priority for the city. So it wasn't the principle of delivering



Premier Inn and Debenhams redevelopment. By the time you read this the planning decision is likely to have been made.

housing on the site that concerned us but the way it was being done. Not least the prospect of yet another 28-storey tower with depressing 'anywhere' architecture. We underlined that we can house our citizens in decent, affordable homes and densify with civilised dignity in ways that keep the essence of Bristol. We don't have to panic ourselves into accepting such dominating and depressing developments.

Wapping Wharf North

The Society had fundamental objections to the design of the development proposed for North Plot which cannot be resolved without a major redesign. In our view this is a 'special place', a particularly key part of Harbourside where views and context are especially relevant. We questioned the justification for a landmark building – at 10 storeys this is far too high and has no meaningful relationship to the existing Wapping Wharf development.

Wapping Wharf North. Fundamental objections cannot be resolved without a major redesign.



The proposed development would have a particularly negative impact on the silhouette of the harbour cranes, which are a significant feature of this part of Bristol's Harbourside.

2-8 Cannon Street / 160-164 East Street, Bedminster

The Society was pleased to see the expansion of health services in the use of the ground floor and choice of materials for this prominent corner site in Bedminster. However, we objected to the height of the proposal which is out of keeping with the conservation area and character appraisal. The prevailing height along Cannon Street and North Street is 2-3 storeys and 3-4 storeys on

East Street. Taking this into account the development should step up within the site to a focal point at the corner. This would emphasise this prominent corner, helping to reinforce the spatial hierarchy, legibility, and wayfinding. The proposed street elevations show how out of keeping the development is both with the conservation area and the character appraisal.

Graphic Packaging, Filwood Road, Bristol BS16 3SB

We were concerned regarding the loss of employment land and loss of employment opportunities in this part of Bristol. In our view there needs to be a significant amount of commercial space on the Graphic Packaging site. Provided that this fundamental concern is addressed satisfactorily the Society had the following points to make about the current proposals:

It would be ideal if the three adjacent sites (sites considered within the Atlas Place Strategic Framework) are considered at the same time, enabling a comprehensive approach to successful place making. In this way issues such as transport planning, permeability, building heights and the provision of services could be properly assessed in a co-ordinated way.

Premier Business Park, Sussex Street, Bristol BS2 0RA

We read the Old Market Community Association's representation on this revised proposal and were pleased to see such glowing feedback about the engagement process and what is cast as genuine listening by the developer and their team. Sadly, this sort of engagement has not been the norm in recent years in Bristol where schemes have been presented to the general



Premier Business Park. The range of proposed activity is welcomed locally, and something we would echo.



Former Bart Spices site. The developers proposed changes didn't address our concerns

public and community groups with it seems little intention of reflecting the feedback.

We focused our comments on matters of detail which we believed would further improve the proposals. These included:

Currently, other than the town houses, much of the scheme is blocky in appearance. Some articulation of the roofscape would bring interest and relief. There are parts of the courtyard and New Henry Street that will have no sunlight at any part of the year. A reduction in the height of the buildings fronting New Henry Street would help mitigate the adverse impact on the proposed accommodation.

The range of proposed activity is welcomed locally, and something we would echo. However, the reality is that unless a planning restriction is imposed or landlord control is envisaged there can be chopping and changing between the uses at any time without consultation and without the consent of the local authority.

Sheene Way, Bedminster

We weren't impressed by a proposed residential development on land at

Sheene Way, Bedminster. We were concerned about the loss of employment land in the absence of a clear policy for the future of employment sites in the city. We also felt the scale of what was proposed sat uncomfortably with the residential character of the area. Yet again we saw a design hugely at odds with the Government's drive for creating beautiful developments.

Bridge Farm, Bell Hill.

We welcomed the attention given to achieving good design outlined in the concept for this proposal and were supportive of the self-build approach. We thought the proposal was innovative and noted that it had considerable support. Given the site's proximity to the M32, we said the city council would need to be satisfied that the proposed location was both satisfactory in principle for family housing and a satisfactory living environment could be provided at the detailed design stage.

Bart Spices site, Mead Street

The developers of the Bart Spices site, Mead Street, have recently sought to cut the affordable housing offer and make a number of other changes to the approved scheme. We had objected to the earlier application (which was approved despite the officers' recommendation for refusal) because of the development's height and massing, the impact of these on important views particularly those towards the Totterdown escarpment, and concerns about the living environment that would be provided. The developers proposed changes didn't address our concerns and the cut in affordable housing made the proposals even less acceptable. We objected.

Bristol Beacon Shines

Nigel Dyke reports on Bristol Beacon's stunning £132 million transformation.

Billy Bragg
©Giulia Spadafora

The site on which Bristol Beacon sits has a long and interesting history, originally housing a Carmelite monastery, a Tudor Great House where Queen Elizabeth I stayed in 1574, and then a sugar refinery owned by Edward Colston.

The original concert hall opened in 1867, with funds raised by the Colston Hall company, a group of local philanthropists who wanted to create a Liberal meeting hall for the city. Beacon Hall has since been rebuilt three times before the most recent transformation project, and only the external walls and cellars exist from the original building.

The Hall was purchased by the Bristol Corporation (Bristol City Council) from the Colston Hall Company in 1919.

In February 1945, after surviving the incendiary bombs of the Second World War, a second major fire caused by a cigarette destroyed the 1936 auditorium interior, but the enclosing walls again survived.

The reconstruction scheme was designed by the City Architect J. Nelson Meredith and opened in 1951, but retained the deep balcony overhang, turning it back to a concert hall proper.

Rebuilt in the Festival of Britain style, it was constructed in an era of materials rationing and compared for example to the Festival Hall in London, the materials and details used to rebuild Bristol Beacon were relatively cheap and unremarkable.

Over 70 years after the venue was reopened, the building was widely regarded as not fit for purpose as a concert hall for both the audience and

performers. In particular the main auditorium was inflexible in terms of layout with the huge first floor balcony badly affecting acoustics and sightlines. The ventilation system was noisy and coming to the end of its life. £2.2 million worth of urgent repairs had been identified before the most recent work started. Summing the situation up well, Sir Mark Elder CBE, Music Director of the famous Halle Orchestra, called the facilities 'lamentable' when they performed at the venue in 2015.

The Beacon welcomed over 14k people into its free Housewarming party during its opening weekend.



The Foyer is a popular performance space. Picture Amy Boyle

That said, over the period since 1945 it has played host to many famous people particularly in the 1960s and 70s including Buddy Holly, the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, Jimi Hendrix and Elton John. Pink Floyd gave one of the first live performances of *Dark Side of the Moon* at on 5 February 1972, over a year before the album was released. Wrestling was a regular event until 2004.

In 2001, aware of the need to do something, the council commissioned Levitt Bernstein Architects to carry out a feasibility study to assess options for the building's future. The aspiration was to make the building an



The work was in two phases. The first phase being the construction of the £20m foyer space. ©Tim Crocker.

international standard that can compete with other venues in the UK, and at the same time make it accessible to everyone with multifunctional spaces suitable for everything from orchestral to rock, jazz and spoken word.

Having decided to retain rather than rebuild the original concert hall, the decision was made to undertake the work in two phases with the first phase being the construction of the £20m foyer space completed in 2009 on the site of a former gas showroom next to the venue. The second phase of the project started in 2017 and was completed in November 2023. As with the first phase the contractor was Willmott Dixon with local practice Alec French Architects appointed by Willmott Dixon to act as their architects for the detailed design and construction stages of the interior. Levitt Bernstein were architects for the external envelope as well as technical advisers to the council for the overall project.

The first phase was relatively straightforward and uneventful but the second phase was always going to be more complicated. As well as the refurbishment and upgrading of the original building as a twenty-first century auditorium was going to be inserted into the fabric of a listed nineteenth century one.

The increase in the original budget from £48.8m in 2019 to £132m in January 2023 has been widely reported. The construction period was during both the pandemic and Brexit which impacted directly on cost but the main reason for the significant increase in budget was that the original building turned out to be in a much worse condition than anticipated. Issues included:

- Significant amounts of asbestos with 12 tonnes in the roof alone.

- The gable at one end of the auditorium was wider than the wall on which it was bearing. The overhanging element partially collapsed one night.
- Three unrecorded Victorian wells located in the most awkward positions they could be!
- Masonry columns supporting the new Lantern Hall proved to be hollow.

The list could go on. A report by Grant Thornton in 2022 noted that there had been only limited investigation into the existing condition of the building before the works started and as a result the complexity and difficulty of the work had been significantly underestimated. The situation was compounded by the form of contract with the contractor which meant the council bore the risk for any unexpected issues. The main reason for the limited investigations was the desire to keep the concert hall in everyday use for as long as possible.

This desire was in part a reflection of one of the biggest challenges that the council and the Bristol Music Trust as operators of the Bristol Beacon faced. How do you maintain relevance, interest and even income in a venue that depends on public access when it will be shut for a considerable period to carry out the refurbishment?

During the five year closure period, Bristol Music Trust continued to present music across the city, working in 35 different venues, as well as continuing their in-depth programme of education work. During this closure period, the venue undertook a high profile and sometimes controversial name change to move away from the association with Edward Colston. There was no Colston money in the original concert hall, and the Trust could no longer operate the venue in a welcoming and

inclusive way under the banner of a slave trader. The Trust consulted with more than 4,000 people on the change and announced their new name Bristol Beacon in September 2020, hitting the international headlines. The new name speaks to welcome warmth and light, and an invitation for everyone to share in the joy of live music.

In simple terms the phase two construction works consisted of:

- radically improving the main auditorium with a new adjustable stage.
- reconfiguring the former bar area to create a second hall in the former Lantern Hall.
- restoring the historic core including restoration of original skylight and a new feature stair and bar area.
- a new glass fronted restaurant in the original entrance space and restoration of original Bristol Byzantine façade.
- opening up of the original vaulted lower cellars to create smaller performance spaces with music recording and practice and meeting rooms.
- the total replacement and upgrading of the services, back of house areas and repairs to the original building fabric.

As well as retaining original features such as the organ, the Lantern Hall skylight and the marks on the fabric of old features and structures, part of the approach to the refurbishment was where original materials could not be kept either entirely or in their original location they were repurposed when practical. For example, large areas of the original wood panelling from the 1951 auditorium were reused within the new space and the original

stage floor was reused within the new Lantern Hall.

The new Beacon Hall is clearly the most important space within the building given its function and brilliant acoustics were naturally a fundamental requirement. The original dominant balcony was replaced by two smaller balconies along with a carefully composed range of different textures and materials to scatter high frequency sounds and reflect deep bass frequencies. In addition, timber stage canopies can be adjusted in shape depending on the type of music being played.

It is quite soon after the opening but it is already clear from the feedback from performers that the acoustic character of the hall is now one of the best in Europe. ("If this were the Bristol Beacon's future, all would be well." *The Guardian*, 20 December 2023.)

Notwithstanding the challenges during construction and the politics around the name change the success of the project and the work to bring audiences and artists along during closure has paid dividends. The Beacon welcomed over 14k people into its free housewarming party during its opening weekend. They have had their most successful month of ticket sales ever, taking £1m in December 2023, with ticket revenues sitting at 59% higher than comparable periods pre-closure. The new Colonnade restaurant is attracting customers and the onward programme is diverse, with acts like the London Symphony Orchestra, Robert Plant and Hania Rani booked to perform.

The transformation project of Bristol Beacon has been interesting, uniquely challenging and has safeguarded Bristol's concert venue for the next 150 years.

Nigel Dyke is a Director of Alec French Architects

Left, The Beacon welcomed over 14k people into its free Housewarming Party during its opening weekend. Picture Amy Boyle

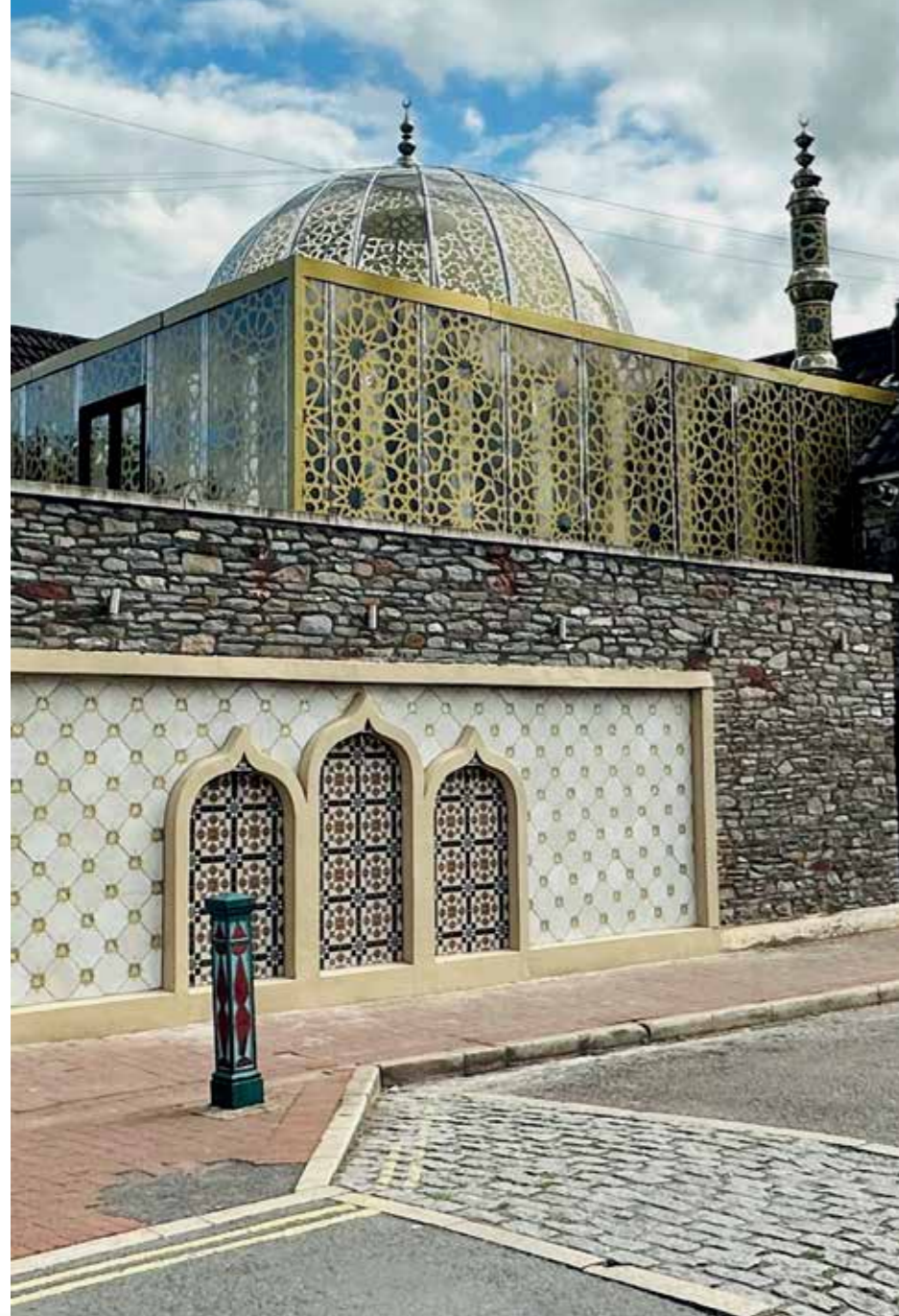
Easton Jamia Mosque

Abdul Malik writes of unity, growth, and inspiration in the heart of Bristol.

Easton Jamia Mosque In St Marks Road, Bristol, stands as a testament to an unyielding spirit of unity, growth, and inspiration.

Conceived by a cadre of elders seeking a haven for their predominantly Sufi strand of Islam, this sacred building has blossomed into a revered and widely embraced religious institution.

Hailed as one of Bristol's 'most inspiring and talked-about buildings'



The genesis of Easton Jamia Masjid unfolded within the walls of an annex adjacent to St Marks Church; a parcel of land procured by the nascent Muslim community for a mere £5,000. This seemingly modest transaction, however, laid the groundwork for a flourishing community that now serves more than 50,000 Muslims in the Bristol area.

In 2012, the stewardship of this transformational journey was assumed

by ex-councillor Abdul Malik, an entrepreneur hailing from the heart of Easton. Tasked with the management of the mosque's day-to-day operations and maintenance, Abdul Malik and his team embarked upon a quest to bridge cultural divides and cultivate understanding in a post-9/11 era that was fraught with complexities.

A community consultation laid out short, medium and long-term aspirations to sculpt the institution into a community fulcrum. In 2014, plans were unveiled for an extension to be built in Bristol pennant sandstone graced with a gilded glass dome. The ensuing approval in 2015 signalled the beginning of a project that transformed Easton Jamia Mosque into a spiritual sanctuary and an architectural gem.

The result was a structure that melded modernity with Islamic heritage. A transparent dome together with the incorporation of three Arab-inspired arches and lighting earned the mosque the distinction of being hailed as one of Bristol's 'most inspiring and talked-about buildings' by the *Bristol Post*. Other accolades followed, including the prestigious Beacon Mosque Award. This recognition has catapulted Easton Jamia Mosque onto a national stage, drawing visitors from across the country. With regular open days and tours the mosque has become a destination that transcends religious boundaries, while the Grand Iftar during Ramadan attracts thousands annually.

The impact has reached beyond the mosque's walls, contributing to the recognition of St Marks Road as 'The Greatest Street in the Country' by the Academy of Urbanism in 2020/21. Alongside the renowned Bristol Sweet Mart on the same road, the mosque has played a pivotal role in shaping the character of this celebrated street.

Easton Jamia Mosque recognises the importance of cultivating the younger generation. There is a daily madrasah for children that imparts lessons on good citizenship and Islam. Regular open days and community events became the threads weaving the mosque into the rich fabric of Bristol.

A pivotal moment in 2018 marked

a shift in conversations within the mosque. Questions were raised about the inclusion of women. Abdul Malik and his team responded by submitting plans for a wrap-around extension, featuring an equally impressive dome while continuing with the Bristol stone base. Consent was granted, and with unwavering commitment, the project was executed by the Chair of Trustees.

The challenges of 2020 brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic, did not deter the mosque from its mission. Instead, it emerged as a beacon of resilience, establishing a hub in collaboration with St Marks Baptist Church to provide aid parcels tailored



The Grand Iftar during Ramadan attracts thousands annually.

to cultural needs. The mosque's outreach extended beyond its walls, embodying solidarity in times of adversity. In 2021, Easton Jamia Mosque garnered the Beacon Mosque Award for the 'Best Green Initiative'. The mosque's engagement with the community through a booklet on reducing carbon footprints and tackling climate change exemplified its commitment to broader concerns.

The opening ceremony of the 'Sisters Section' in 2023 was a joyous 'Eid Fest' that invited the community and media to partake in this historic moment. Attended by over 3000 people, it became a celebration of unity and inclusivity. A 'thank you' ceremony paid homage to the builders and trustees.

Easton Jamia Mosque stands as a testament to not just architectural innovation, but also a commitment to inclusivity, cultural understanding, and societal contributions.

Beyond its religious mandate, the mosque has become a symbol of unity, a cultural hub, and a source of inspiration for Bristol and beyond. The trustees and volunteers, instrumental to the mosque's success, hold positions as governors, magistrates, and sports club trustees, underscoring the mosque's integral role in shaping the civic narrative of Bristol.

In 2024 Easton Jamia Mosque was



The opening ceremony of the 'Sisters Section' in 2023 was a joyous 'Eid Fest' that invited the community and media to partake in this historic moment.

In summary, Easton Jamia Mosque stands as an inspiring testament to the harmonious symphony that resounds when a community unites with a shared purpose. From its humble genesis as a purchased annex to the transformative extensions and community initiatives, the mosque has burgeoned into a bastion of pride for Bristol.

As the mosque looks toward the future, its gaze is not fixed merely on its architectural splendour or the accolades it has garnered. Instead, the focus remains on the community it serves, the dialogue it fosters, and the inclusive spirit that propels it forward.

From a modest annex purchased for £5,000 to a nationally recognised institution, the mosque's trajectory reflects the aspirations of a diverse and dynamic community. It invites not only the Muslim faithful but individuals of all backgrounds to partake in its cultural symphony. Easton Jamia Mosque stands as a beacon, not just for those who seek spiritual solace within its walls but for the city of Bristol itself. It is a testament to the possibilities that arise when communities come together with shared aspirations, embracing diversity, and transcending challenges. The mosque has not only become an

architectural talking-point but also a symbol of hope, understanding, and inclusivity.

In the pantheon of Bristol's cultural tapestry, Easton Jamia Mosque has etched its name with golden letters—a living testament to the transformative power of unity and community engagement.

Abdul Malik is chair of the Trustees of Easton Jamia Mosque.



Election fever

With council elections AND a general election coming up, Eugene Byrne tries to contain his excitement.



Whenever the local media run a news item about goings-on at City Hall they lazily illustrate it with a stock picture of the building taken from behind the fountain at the Park Street side. We can do that, too!

May 2 will see the biggest shake-up in the running of Bristol for 12 years. It might also see a political party which had no council seats at all 20 years ago take power down at City Hall.

If the opinion polls haven't shifted dramatically by then, this poll will see hundreds – probably thousands – of Tory councillors across the country losing their seats.



Nervous candidates watch votes being counted at a previous local election.

In Bristol, we will also see the end to the mayoral system which was introduced following a local referendum (in which less than a quarter of eligible voters turned out) in 2012. George Ferguson was our first elected mayor.

Our second was Marvin Rees, though in May 2022 a second referendum (with a slightly larger turnout - 28.6%) voted to end the mayoral system and replace it with a committee system. This does not, of course, have any bearing on the ceremonial office of Lord Mayor, which will continue as before.

This, in theory, means that committees responsible for various aspects of the city's running will have representatives from several political parties on them, and may lead to more consensual governing, and less of the unedifying political grandstanding and squabbling of the kind you see when the council meets to set its budget every year.

Whether or not many voters actually understood this when they voted to abolish the office of executive mayor is a moot point. Anecdotal evidence seems to suggest that many were simply voting to get rid of Marvin.

For a long time Labour have regarded



Green party Co-Leader and Bristol Councillor Carla Denyer. The Greens may take control of Bristol City Council on May 2. She hopes to take the new Bristol Central seat at the general election. Other candidates are available. (Pic: Bristol Green Party).

themselves as Bristol's natural party of government and have been in power down the Council House/ City Hall more often than not in the post-war decades. The Tories have not controlled Bristol since the 1980s (and even then it was only briefly, and in coalition with the Liberals) and the Lib Dems were in charge for a two spells in earlier this century.

While we currently have a Labour Mayor, though, it's the Green Party which has the largest number of the 70 Council seats – 25 to Labour's 23 (plus 14 Tories, 5 Lib Dems and 3 others).

The Greens – who had no council seats in Bristol at all until 2006 – will be looking to increase their hold on City Hall in May.

Local elections usually attract much smaller turnouts than general ones. In many wards, particularly the less affluent ones, or those with less settled populations, it can be well under 30%. It's often much bigger in more



Those new Bristol Parliamentary boundaries in full (source: Boundary Commission for England).

prosperous wards. For some years this has meant Bristolians are electing councils which are broadly more left/liberal than the city population as a whole.

The general election, whenever it comes, will see Bristol electing five MPs instead of four, as previously.

Across the country, many constituency boundaries have been altered in the biggest shake-up in electoral geography for a generation. The four nations' independent boundary commissions have tried to make the system fairer by fixing it so's each parliamentary seat has – very approximately – the same number of voters.

Bristol gets the extra seat because of its considerable growth in population in the last two decades. Each is currently home to between (roughly!) 70,000 and 77,000 voters.

British politics in recent years have been extremely volatile; if you want a local example, see how Bristol West used to be a safe Tory seat, but which in recent times has had Lib Dem and Labour MPs and where Labour's Thangam Debbonaire was returned in 2019 with a truly massive majority.

If everyone in Bristol votes the same way they did in the 2019 election, Labour would win all five seats. Given the state of the polls, one might assume that this is what'll happen, but not so fast ...

Given a low turnout and Bristol's habit of going its own way politically, it wouldn't be daft to wager a modest sum on the Greens being in charge of the city on 3 May.

The present reality is that it looks like Labour will take four seats, but the fifth is shaping up as a two-horse race between Labour and the Greens. This will be in the new Bristol Central constituency, much of which used to be in Bristol West, where Thangam Debbonaire's 28,000-plus majority would suggest an easy Labour win.

However, of the 14 council seats in the constituency, 12 are held by the Greens. The Green Party has fancied its chances in Bristol West in the past, and it really fancies Bristol Central. The pundits don't know which way to turn; some predict a narrow win for Labour's Thangam Debbonaire, others a narrow win for Bristol Green councillor and the party's national Co-Leader, Carla Denyer.

Anything can happen between now and election day, and Bristol Central is one of the youngest and most educated constituencies in the land. The chances are that a lot of voters here who might vote Labour in other places will want to give the Greens a chance.

The likelihood is that Bristol will have just a few Tories in the council chamber, and no Tories at Westminster. But lots can change between now and whenever Rishi Sunak calls the election.

Those new constituencies in full

Bristol East

The boundaries have been revised and it now includes the council wards of: Brislington East, Brislington West, Easton, Knowle, Lawrence Hill, St. George Central, St. George West, Troopers Hill, St. George West, Stockwood. Current MP, Labour's Kerry McCarthy, Shadow Minister for Climate Change, is likely to hold it.

Bristol Central

Comprises council wards of: Ashley, Central, Clifton, Clifton Down, Cotham, Hotwells & Harbourside, and Redland. On current form likely to be a two-horse race between Labour and the Greens. See left.

Bristol South

Slight boundary changes mean it will consist of Bedminster, Bishopsworth, Filwood, Hartcliffe & Withywood, Hengrove & Whitchurch Park, Southville, Windmill Hill. A historic Labour stronghold whose incumbent, Shadow Minister for Health Karin Smyth is very likely to win once more.

Bristol North East

Another brand new constituency, comprising the Bristol council wards of Eastville, Frome Vale, Hillfields and Lockleaze, but also taking in the South Gloucestershire Council wards of Kingswood, New Cheltenham, Staple Hill & Mangotsfield, Woodstock. This is (in)famously where the local Labour party chose Lewisham mayor Damien Egan instead of Bristol mayor Marvin Rees as its parliamentary candidate. Given the voting patterns in previous council elections, and the state of the polls, a Labour win is expected.

Bristol North West

An existing seat, though with slightly revised boundaries, now taking in Avonmouth & Lawrence Weston, Bishopston & Ashley Down, Henbury & Brentry, Horfield, Southmead, Stoke Bishop, Westbury-on-Trym & Henleaze. A traditional Labour-Tory battleground in the habit of voting for whichever party takes power in Westminster, but it bucked the trend in 2017 by voting in Labour's Darren Jones, who is now one of the party's rising stars and is expected to win once more.

The County that used to be Avon



"Mr Avon" - Gervas Walker, with the Queen in 1977 (Bristol Post)

Some 50 years ago the county of Avon came into being. As an administrative unit it made a lot of sense, but few regretted its passing just 22 years later. Eugene Byrne traces the story of the unloved county, and tries to figure out where, exactly, he lives.

On April 1 1974 the 800,000 or so people who had once lived in parts of Somerset and Gloucestershire, and in the entire city and county of Bristol, woke up in a place called Avon.

Avon had been on the cards for a long time. From the Victorian era onwards, Bristol's city fathers had lobbied with varying degrees of success for extended boundaries. This was no mere administrative conceit; Bristolians of all classes could see that many working in the city, or taking advantage of its various facilities, were not Bristol ratepayers. There were particularly fraught arguments over the (then) semi-rural suburbs like Stoke Bishop and Sneyd Park.

The boundaries were eventually extended to take in suburbs in north Bristol in the 1890s and again in the early 1900s. But the issue continued to be a hot topic of conversation and debate only occasionally resolved, such as when the

city took a morsel of Somerset for the Hartcliffe estate in 1949.

In 1966 the government set up a Royal Commission to look at the how local government in England & Wales could be modernised, changing boundaries where necessary. The Commission was chaired by John Redcliffe Maud.

(Maud was a Bristol-born career civil servant who spent much of WW2 in Reading Gaol, which had been appropriated for offices for the Ministry of Food. He became a life peer in 1967, hyphenating himself to become Baron Redcliffe-Maud, of the City and County of Bristol, which is kinda ironical in that he was instrumental in doing away with it.)

The Redcliffe-Maud Report of 1969 called for the reform of local council boundaries and for large "unitary" councils which would be responsible for all local government functions.

The Heath government preferred a reformed two-tier system. In a 1971 white paper, 'Bristol County', known by the rather totalitarian working-title of 'Area 26' was proposed, taking

in Bristol, Bath and much of the surrounding countryside and towns.

The 1972 Local Government Act put everything in place for the establishment of Avon. Elections were held for the new council the following year, and it came into being a year after that.

Avon was responsible for the big issues - education, planning, social services and highways. The six districts within it - Bristol, Bath, Kingswood, Northavon, Woodspring and Wansdyke - had the everyday local administration, such as roads, street-lighting and refuse collection.

It was not a happy arrangement. The vociferous "Back to Somerset" lobby and the only slightly less noisy "Back to Gloucestershire" campaign moaned about everything Avon did.

Bristol was no happier. For many years, a man in Redland flew a black flag every April 1 outside his home in mourning for the passing of the City and County of Bristol.

There was plenty of needle between Bristol and Avon from the start, and this could be intense, as for instance when the Thatcher government imposed spending cuts which Avon was willing to implement and Bristol was not.

Much of this was political; Bristol was a Labour fiefdom, while Avon included a lot of Conservative-voting areas. Although Labour won control of Avon for some of its history, it was seen as a Tory creation, and one which initially dominated by a Tory grandee, Gervas Walker.

Walker had been an influential Conservative on Bristol City Council in

the 1960s and 70s, and played a leading role in setting up Avon. As the new council's first leader, he was sometimes nicknamed "Mr Avon."

Education would become a particularly sore point; Bristol accused Avon of financially favouring popular schools outside the city. Many middle-class Bristolians sent their children to these, and when in 1996 the city became responsible for its secondary schools once more, it was lumbered with several under-achieving comprehensives, while the surrounding councils had some high-achieving ones, partly thanks to Bristolian kids with mummies and daddies who made them do their homework.



The Miss Avon beauty contest, 1985. Something that wouldn't happen anymore for at least two reasons. Did the ratepayers have to buy clothes for the poor women? The public has a right to know. (Bristol Post)

Bristol and Avon did often work together harmoniously, especially in lobbying central government and Europe for funding for various projects, or over issues like the development of Royal Portbury Dock, the expansion of Bristol Airport and initiatives in St Pauls following the 1980 disturbances.

Under John Major's government in the early nineties, a local government commission under businessman John Banham said that since Avon had not achieved "public acceptance" it should be replaced with four unitary authorities which would each be responsible for all council functions. Cleveland and Humberside, created at the same time as Avon, and similarly unpopular, should be abolished as well. With surprisingly little Parliamentary

debate, Avon was abolished on April 1 1996, and replaced by the City and County of Bristol, South Gloucestershire (formed from the Kingswood and Northavon districts); North Somerset (formed from Woodspring) and Bath & North East Somerset (Bath and Wansdyke).

Yet Avon stubbornly refuses to die. We have Avon & Somerset Police, Avon Wildlife Trust, Avon Fire & Rescue Service, the Forest of Avon and more besides. Bristolians having to fill in their addresses in online forms often find they autocomplete to "Bristol, Avon".

Relations between Bristol and its neighbours have often been tetchy, especially on the issue of public transport; one of the several failed tram/light rail proposals hit the buffers because of arguments between Bristol and South Glos over the route.

Meanwhile, the Bristol conurbation grows apace, and big lumps of what for all practical purposes are Bristol fall into other authorities. While many might have detested Avon, its unwanted step-children generate little enthusiasm. Did anyone ever claim passionate loyalty to North Somerset, swear they would die for Bath & North East Somerset or proudly sing the South Gloucestershire anthem?

Perhaps a handful of councillors and some particularly unimaginative bureaucrats; folks with trivial political or professional empires. Empires in which most of the residents depend on Bristol partly or completely for hospital care, entertainment, retail therapy and in tens of thousands of cases, their actual, like, jobs.

Right, The Bristol Proclamation Car is wheeled out for Lord Mayor Joan Maclaren and Lord Lieutenant Jay Tidmarsh to mark the return of Bristol's county status, 1996. (Bristol Post)



So where do we live, actually? Greater Bristol? West of England? Severnside? Or is it Cuba?

(As a joke, I suggested in a 1996 article in *Venue* magazine that we now lived in CUBA - the County that Used to be Avon, to find later that the term was being used by decision-makers in the four successor councils. A reader wrote in requesting a copy of the article as "proof" that we live in Cuba, as he'd told his girlfriend he was taking her there on a romantic holiday. One hopes the poor girl had a sense of humour.)

We currently also have a thing called the West of England Combined Authority (WECA), whose role has something to do with planning, skills and public transport, but whose

principal public-facing function seems to be putting pictures of "Metro Mayor" Dan Norris and his dog on bus shelters. (But hey, thanks for the birthday month bus-pass, Dan!)

Tellingly, WECA only includes three of Avon's successors, as North Somerset refused to join in, because ...

... Because ... Because ... Oh, who cares?

We need Avon back. Call it what you like, but it covered an area which looks to Bristol, which revolves around Bristol, and includes vast areas and populations which are Bristol in all but name.

OK, we can compromise a little. The city of Bath is a separate place, with a long history and traditions and culture all its own. Fair play. We can respect that. But Avon made perfect sense. The current set-up does not.



Left, Say what you like about Avon, but it gave us some, er, landmark buildings, such as Avon House North. (Bristol Post)

two-day event. Sort of. Ashton Court Festival was held on the Sunday and Peter Gabriel's WOMAD staged the Saturday event. Again, more than 10,000 people attended over the weekend. WOMAD acts included Hugh Masekela, Kanda Bongo Man, Totto La Monposina and Papa Levi. The Blue Aeroplanes and Brilliant Corners made their Ashton Court debuts in 1984, Wild Bunch (forerunners of Massive Attack) were among the DJs and other local acts included Nikki B, Joshua Moses and Kevin Brown.

So 1985 should have built on the success of the two previous Festivals. But torrential rain scuppered that.

Writing in *Court In The Act*, Dave Higgitt recalls that after the soaking wet Saturday, he arrived on site at 5.30 on Sunday morning to assess the damage. He discovered a swamp: 'I just remember thinking 'I really don't want anything to do with this Festival'. Bear Hackenbush

Working from a desk at the *Venue* office, Bateman somehow pulled together the two-day 1986 Festival which was attended by an estimated 20,000 people and featured acts including Andy Sheppard, Five Year Plan, Head, Soul Searchers, Jimmy Galvin and Flash Harry.

Bateman realised that co-ordinating Ashton Court was far too much work for one person being paid a pittance so in 1987 he recruited a management committee and in 1988 invited me to join in my capacity of Music Editor for the *Bristol Evening Post*.

I stayed on the committee until 1993 during which time we expanded the Festival to include more theatre, an acoustic/folk marquee, jazz stage, poetry tent, children's area, a classical marquee and dance music tent. We continued the work of others to make the Festival as representative as possible of all Bristol communities and fuelled by a combination of youthful exuberance and huge naivety continued to grow the Festival with crowds rising from 20,000 to 40,000 by 1993. I don't know who measures these things, but Ashton Court was said to be the largest free festival in Europe.

After 1993, the next generation of custodians of the Festival took over and somehow kept Ashton Court Festival going until 2007 when another deluge led to the Sunday event being cancelled.

This time the loss of revenue proved terminal and the organising group, Bristol Community Festival Ltd, started winding up procedures.

During the early years, until 1993, the Festival organisers were not overtly political, but for more than a decade Ashton Court Festival flourished while Britain was in the grip of the Iron Lady.

Margaret Thatcher's free market philosophy, her determination to dismantle the Welfare State and pronouncements such as 'There is no such thing as society,' were completely at odds with the spirit of Ashton Court.

As far as I know, not a single performer was paid to play up to 1993, apart from the co-ordinator none of the organisers were paid. The Festival ran on a mutual sense of goodwill, respect and shared values. Every year, punters put just enough money in the collection buckets to cover the cost of the Festival. That was something very special.

Below left, Ashton Court Festival aimed to be as representative as possible of all Bristol communities. 1989. Picture: Bristol Post. Below middle, Wurzels at Ashton Court. 1995. Picture: Bristol Post. Below right, The long-out-of-print book *Court In The Act* Ashton Court Festival 1974-1992.



Ashton Court Festival

Richard Jones has fond memories of Bristol's much loved, and missed, music festival.

Life is a confidence trick. If you've got the confidence, you can pull the trick.'

Such was the philosophy of Royce Creasey, widely credited as being the founder of the Ashton Court Festival in 1974.

Of course other people were involved, most notably a young couple from New Zealand, but Creasey assumed the role of Organiser In Chief, such was his formidable reputation for Getting Things Done. He only pitched up in Bristol in 1974 with a CV that included RAF technician, Formula One pit mechanic, journalist, printer and motorcycle designer.

In the long-out-of-print book *Court In The Act: Ashton Court Festival 1974-1992*, Creasey recalls that he and a group of self-confessed Hippy Deviants met with the Bristol City Council Parks And Open Spaces Committee and to their amazement were given permission to hold a music festival in the grounds of the Ashton Court Estate.

The Committee might have been less likely to give permission if they had realised that Creasey's inspiration was the Windsor Free Festivals of 1972 and 1973 which were largely organised by a group of London-based squatters and anarchists and which ended in a pitched battle with police in 1974.

Creasey's idea was for a Bandstand

In The Park with local musicians performing on Sunday afternoons. With this in mind, the first Ashton Court Festival was held over four successive Sundays. Performers included Fred Wedlock, Pigsty Hill Light Orchestra, Bath Arts Workshop and Crystal Theatre.

The third Sunday was a washout, but Creasey recalled it as being particularly memorable:

'We were visited by a

tribe whose main hit was

dancing in the mud at wet festivals. You did us proud, you 50 people, as did a singer called Wolf and his group blasting mains music off a stage that looked like a lake. The terrified cries of the electricians were a major part of the performance.'

In *Court In The Act*, Creasey writes:

'We'd learned from Windsor that free festivals are about being free, not about free admission and certainly not about confronting the sources of bad times. When you are being free, anyone can give you a bad time, as later events were to prove.

'I sloped off to what is now Slovenia in 1975 and was amazed to find the event still in existence in 1976. The spirit of a small community affair still lived on. I rapidly achieved demotion to assistant



Above left, Classical violinist Patmore Lewis gives impromptu concert at 1997 Ashton Court Festival. Picture: Bristol Post. Above right, Sunset at Ashton Court Festival. 1994. Picture: Bristol Post.

scaffolder and First Aid attendant.' The First Aid was famous.

The 1980 Festival was a low point in Ashton Court's history. For the first time a large number of people from outside Bristol travelled to the festival. Despite assuring the organisers they would respect the strict No Overnight Camping rule, they stayed overnight, lit fires and cut down trees to fuel them.

Creasey recalls: 'By 1980 I had reached the dizzy depths of tea-maker to the stage construction crew, so I took it a little hard when I found myself facing a large policeman. We could both hear the sound of chainsaws working in the woods and 130 fires were already alight around the edge of the field.

'You've really kicked over the traces

this time, haven't you,' he said, eyeing me keenly.

'I had no problem with the Festival being banned after the 1980 debacle.'

The Festival returned in 1983. Mark Simpson, Mike Gifford and other organisers from 1980 approached Dave Higgitt, rock editor of the newly-launched *Venue* magazine. Backed by publisher Dougal Templeton, Higgitt threw himself into resurrecting the festival.

About 10,000 people attended the 1983 one-day festival with acts including Black Roots, Ted Milton's Blur, Bristol's latest guitar sensations the Crazy Trains, Restriction and the Startled Insects.

In 1984, the Festival was again a

was running the Punk Stage and he just refused to give up. I remember him running around in the rain trying to find a screwdriver to fix the generator. It was a complete washout.'

Because so few people turned up, income from sales of programmes and donations was negligible. The main source of funds was from sales of bin liners for 20p each worn as protection against the rain.

Somehow the financial damage was not as bad as anticipated and the local creative community rescued Ashton Court by staging a series of benefit gigs which enabled the Festival to return in 1986. But it returned without Dave Higgitt who took a back seat and was replaced by Festival co-ordinator Mick Bateman.

Glenside Hospital Museum

Stella Mann celebrates the museum's fortieth birthday. However, the museum's future is uncertain.

The key to well-being is understanding our health.

We all have mental health, so Glenside Hospital Museum on Blackberry Hill, Bristol, is for everyone. It provides a unique environment for people of all ages to consider their own wellbeing. This year, 2024, the Museum is celebrating its fortieth birthday. It is a fascinating place sustained by many dedicated local people who have volunteered their time and energy to fashion a museum of national importance on the development of medical care for the most vulnerable: those with mental illness and learning disabilities. The history described is drawn from a collection of historical objects often saved from the skip, photographs, personal accounts and organisational records.

The displays, art exhibitions and events bring to life four important Bristol institutions: the state-of-the-art Victorian hospital for the mentally ill 1861-1994, formally known as Glenside Hospital, the military orthopaedic Beaufort War Hospital 1915-1919; the yellow Dower House above the M32 part of the Stoke Park Colony of hospitals for people with learning disabilities (1909-2000) and the Burden Neurological Trust and Institute (1933-present).

In the late 1700s and early 1800s people across Europe had begun to appreciate that those with a mental illness were 'curable sufferers'. It was

seen as a radical idea to provide care for the mentally ill, as any illness was considered by the powerful religious communities as God's punishment. Yet the Victorian government in 1845, made it mandatory for every county to have a safe place for the poor and mentally ill. This was why we had so many Victorian county asylums, which became large and out-dated buildings to be closed in the 1980s and 90s in favour of providing care in the community.



Each ward had a dormitory, dining room and living space for rest and recreation.

It was 1861, when 164 people were moved from the workhouse to Bristol's brand new hospital building on Blackberry Hill. Many working people in Bristol lived quite well by the standards of the time, but those in low-paid jobs, the unemployed, single parent families and those with alcohol problems or disabilities were very badly off. Many of the asylum patients

The grounds were built to lift the spirits of the patients,



came from the slums, where a dozen or more people might have to share an outside toilet over a cess-pit - a hole in the ground - which was emptied only occasionally. No running water. Often no cooking facilities. A reporter in the 1880s, James Jas Crosby, found a dingy and dirty room with a stone floor, and one bed, on which he found sleeping the man and his wife and four children. This was not unusual.

Bristol Corporation paid for the patients to have a bed at the asylum. The cost per person was higher than the workhouse but even so the asylum Medical Superintendents often complained that the hospital income was insufficient to provide what was needed. There were few drugs, so the main Victorian treatments are activities that we know support good health. The asylum provided a safe place in which patients were given exercise, good food, a bed to enable sleep, and activities to lift spirits. Each ward had a dormitory, dining room and living space for rest and recreation. There was a theatre, skittle alley and various entertainments. The grounds too were designed to lift the spirits of the patients; it was known as early as the 1700s that green spaces were good for people's health. Every ward window looked out on the landscaped grounds, and over 70 species of tree are to be found, planted for their different wellbeing messages. In addition it was modelled

as a therapeutic community and the intention was that patients during their stay would work to maintain the hospital. It was understood that having a purpose or occupation was an important part of enabling a person to regain their health. And this is what the hospital in its first 40 years provided.

By interrogating Dr Paul Tobia's studies of all 5117 Bristol Asylum patient case notes from 1861-1900 we have found all the patients had an illness that related to the brain. Some patients had afflictions that were incurable; one fifth had epilepsy, with a further one to two fifths having chronic diseases that affected the brain in the last stages before death but are now often cured through antibiotics. Yet the hospital had considerable success with 46% of all patients leaving, 70% of these in the first year of admission, as recovered or relieved.

The many Museum artefacts on display take a person from the Victorian treatment to the evolution of psychiatric and provision of learning disability health care over the last 150 years. Care in the twentieth century sought to find quick cures for the mentally ill, and there was a lot of experimentation with drugs. Bristol has some pioneers who made a real impact on the vulnerable, with Rosa Burden setting up the Neurological Trust and Institute in the 1930s, Grey Walter perfecting EEG to diagnose epilepsy, and Dr Donal Early creating the Industrial Therapy Organisation in the 1950s to provide patients with real jobs still with the support of nursing staff.

There is so much to learn and to continue to discover. Visit the Museum or volunteer to help create a better understanding of mental health care.

A single object or photograph can take a person on a journey back in time and reveal a pathway to consider mental health care not just in the past but in the present. What do we do to care for our health?

The asylum church, built for the patients in 1881 is the current home of the Museum. It has beautiful stained glass windows all designed to give hope and cure. However, with the University of the West of England closing the Glenside Campus over the next few years, the Museum is seeking new premises and partners that will value this extraordinary asset, protect the collection and take it forward for future generations.



Above, visit the Museum or volunteer to help create a better understanding of mental health care.



Above, the asylum church, built for the patients in 1881, is the current home of the Museum.

Glenside Hospital Museum, Blackberry Hill, BS16 1DD is open Wednesday morning 10am-12.30pm and all day Saturday 10am-4pm, admission £5.00 per adult for an annual ticket.

Blue Plaques

Commemorating war veterans and worthy citizens. *Gordon Young* reports.

There is just one unveiling to report since the last newsletter and it's an auspicious one, our fortieth since Bristol Civic Society took over plaque facilitation from Bristol City

Council in 2015. The plaque commemorates a welfare organisation which was based in Orchard Street. Its aim was to assist needy ex-soldiers, and it was inspired by a growing sense of national shame at their treatment.



The Crimea and Indian Mutiny Veterans' Association of the 1890s had a presence in cities around the country and it was the branch here in Bristol which set the bar high. And this is to the credit of three local men: The Revd Joseph Kettlestring Wain and two businessmen – Walter Paul, and James Fuller Eberle, OBE.

I know something of one of them. A proprietor of a coach-building business, James Fuller Eberle lived in Pembroke Road, Clifton around the turn of the nineteenth century.

He repeatedly declined nomination for Lord Mayor, probably because he was just too busy. He immersed himself fully in civic life: Councillor, Alderman, JP, Freeman of the City, Vice-Chairman of the Museum & Art Gallery Committee, founder of Clifton Rugby Club and Master of a London livery company. He was also involved with St Stephen's church bellringers and is credited with saving the Red Lodge from destruction.

A newspaper report of 1909 goes on: 'President, patron and liberal supporter of everything connected with the Bristol Veterans' Association, he has done some of his best work, and it is believed to be work congenial to him and his excellent wife, who in a quiet, unobtrusive way, has given him much willing help.'

Mr Eberle is not a man to sound the trumpet before him, but those who know him best appreciate him most, and he enjoys the esteem and regard of those who do know



him, and the affection of all concerned with the Bristol Veterans' Association.'

In us honouring the association which he helped to set up, it wasn't difficult to be distracted by thoughts of just how deserving of a plaque James Fuller Eberle was.

So, with this plaque, Bristol can celebrate both a worthy organisation and its citizens – those who, long before the Royal British Legion was established, asked social questions, and, with their strong sense of civic duty, answered them.

A blue plaque fails to make the big time . . .

Bad Wolf, the film production company responsible for the current series of *Doctor Who*, has got in touch. They are working with Sony on a major six-part historical drama, *Dope Girls*, for the BBC, to be screened later this year. Georgian Berkeley Crescent will feature as 1900s Soho and so our alloy, understated blue plaque honouring architect J D Sedding will be incongruous. Could I let them know the size of it so they could devise a London street sign to conceal it?

Dimensions duly delivered, not without a dram of disappointment that one of our plaques won't be immortalised on the telly . . .

But another one has . . .

The Royal Navy Day by *Day* is the standard naval history

London's blue plaques go national

English Heritage has run the London blue plaques scheme since 1986, when it had already been in existence for 120 years. Between 2000 and 2005, they piloted a national project, but found that much of the ground had already been covered, so they decided to retain the London-only focus. Now there are plans for a second attempt at a national scheme, and this time it's backed by Historic England.

Civic Voice and Historic England held a Zoom meeting in January with 69 attendees. It was to outline the thinking behind this emerging National Blue Plaques Scheme and how it might work with existing local initiatives. Historic England are working closely with their sister organisation, English Heritage and we should anticipate the country-



reference book which is issued to all H.M. Ships and Establishments. It is dedicated by permission to the Sovereign and the Foreword is written by the First Sea Lord. It embraces 500 years of maritime history and the current editor of the upcoming sixth edition has contacted us. Lieutenant-Commander Lawrie Phillips, a leading naval historian wants to include a brief description and a picture of our plaque commemorating Dame Katharine Furse, Dame Commander of the British Empire, who founded the Wrens. We are delighted that one of our plaques honouring such a worthy woman will feature in this definitive volume.

wide scheme to mimic their established London operation, with six to eight plaques each year around the country,

London plaques differ from our plaques: they are 4½ inches greater in diameter; are ceramic, not aluminium or glass fibre; and are cemented into facades, rather than affixed by rods. They opt for a calligraphic script – twirly letters in a William Morris style – whereas we prefer a plain, sans-serif typographic face. There is one London-style plaque in Bristol: it's in Princess Victoria Street and honours the distinguished architect, Berthold Lubetkin.

And London's plaques differ in other respects (we do things differently down here in the West Country). For one, we include more details about the individual being honoured. If we attempt to define what a blue plaque is, we can refer to the Wikipedia site. It claims 'a blue plaque is a permanent

Upcoming plaques

The All-Electric House, Stoke Bishop
Bristol has a notable but little-known example of domestic Modernist architecture. Commissioned by the Bristol Branch of the Electrical Association for Women and built in 1935, it was a show house to demonstrate the potential of new electrical technology to make the lives of women less onerous. The house featured all kinds of innovative electrical appliances and gadgets: an electric cooker, refrigerator, fires in every room, drying cupboards, electric clocks and food warmers. At present the façade cannot take a plaque as the render is cracked. The owner lives abroad and has assured us that remedial work will be done this year. We are keen for the plaque to be unveiled on 12 November, the centenary of the association. Take a look:

<https://drojkent.wordpress.com/2016/07/12/bristols-modernist-architecture-the-all-electric-house/>

St James's Church, Lockleaze

Did you know that the forerunner of the rock opera, "Jesus Christ Superstar" was conceived in Bristol? A Presbyterian minister, Rev Ernest Marvin created the passion play "A Man Dies" with his congregation in 1961. The church fabric requires some work and then the plaque can celebrate a remarkable man and his community.

sign installed . . . to commemorate a link between that location and a famous person . . . [my underlining].

London has many plaques honouring famous people. 'Tony Hancock, comedian, lived here'; 'Charles Dickens, novelist, lived here'. But famous people are already in the public domain; we prefer to commemorate unsung heroes. Our plaques are understated and big on narrative, English Heritage plaques are more highly designed with minimal text and, dare I say it, a bit flashy . . . ?

Should we be worried? Is a military offensive imminent whereby metropolitan usurpers would wrest control from the Panel and decide which plaques are erected in our city? Well, probably not. With so few intended across the country, Heritage England's ceramic plaques will be spread as thin as Marmite on toast.

Handel Cossham

To most Bristolians nowadays, Handel Cossham is just a curious name which might have something to do with a hospital in Hillfields, but in his day, he was a very significant local figure whose funeral might well have been the biggest in Bristol's history. *Eugene Byrne* sums up Cossham's life and work.

Handel Cossham's name lives on at the hospital he endowed in East Bristol, but the chances are that most of the thousands who've been treated, (or have given birth) there in recent decades know nothing of the man.

It wasn't always like that. Even allowing for the Victorians' love of funerals, anything up to 50,000 people lined the route when his coffin was conveyed to Avonview Cemetery in 1890. The only other send-off in all of Bristol's history to rival this was that of orphanage-founder George Müller eight years later.

In his day, Cossham was a very well-known figure – as a successful businessman, generous philanthropist and politician who shaped a lot of the character of east Bristol, particularly the St George area.

Handel Shepherd Cossham was born in Thornbury on March 31 1824 - 200 years ago this year. His parents were Sarah (née Shepherd) and Jesse, a

builder and carpenter, who was also a big fan of the composer of the *Messiah*. Cossham would be a staunch nonconformist and temperance campaigner all his life. He was teaching Sunday school at 16 and preaching by 18.

He was also a self-taught geologist who worked his way up to becoming owner of several coal mines around Bristol, starting with the Parkfield Colliery at Pucklechurch in 1851, a business he ran in partnership with the family of Elizabeth Wethered, whom he married in 1848.

Cossham & Wethered Ltd opened a number of other collieries in the area, and he would go on to have a few other companies, earning him a considerable fortune.

Much of this he gave away during his lifetime. He was known as a paternalistic employer who built housing and schools for the miners (though everything came with a hefty

dose of evangelism). Among many other philanthropic acts he bought a former Methodist chapel for the town of his birth and which became the Cossham Hall.

As a Victorian religious nonconformist and industrialist he was, of course, a Liberal. He represented the St Pauls ward on Bristol's council, served two terms as mayor of Bath and stood unsuccessfully for Parliament three times

before being elected MP for the newly-created constituency of Bristol East in 1885. In the meantime, he also lobbied successfully for the creation of a civil parish of St George in Bristol, enabling him and other local leaders to build schools, churches, new homes and improved roads.

He and Elizabeth did not have any children, and he famously wrote that: 'It is my earnest wish that I may be hereafter remembered by the sick and suffering as a friend who in death, as in life, felt it his duty to try and lessen human suffering and increase human happiness.'

Following his death, much of his fortune went into building the hospital that bears his name.

To mark his bicentenary, Bristol & Gloucestershire Archaeological Society and Avon Local History & Archaeology are organising a conference looking at Cossham's influence and legacy. This will be at the Turnberries Conference Centre, Thornbury BS35 2BB on Saturday April 13 from 10am to 4.30pm.

The cost is £15 per person and you can book via the Avon Local History & Archaeology website at www.alha.org.uk, or via Eventbrite at <http://tinyurl.com/Cossham> or by post to William Evans, 5 Parry's Grove, Bristol BS9 1TT.



Handel Cossham



The Cossham Memorial Hospital in 1965 (Bristol Post)



Ashton Court Mansion

The proposed objective consists of a radical approach to the future.

Bristol Civic Society is working to secure a positive future for this important building. *Simon Birch* provides an update.

Objective

The purpose of this current initiative is to identify a positive way forward. So many reports in the past have resulted in absolutely no progress. Ashton Court Mansion is on the Buildings at Risk Register, is deteriorating and urgently needs a sound future.

Progress so far

Our approach has had several workstreams. We've reviewed a whole raft of previous reports ranging from Rentokil in 1963 to The Prince's Foundation in 2022. We've visited a range of comparable houses including Delapre Abbey, Northampton, and Athelhampton House in Dorset. And of course, we have made several site visits to the Mansion itself. As well as talking to a wide range of contacts in and around Bristol.

What have we found so far?

It's apparent from all this work that we need to see if the Mansion can be made to be more relevant to the issues facing Bristol. It's a large building, owned by the City Council. What can it contribute to Bristol? Our approach isn't a building focused heritage project.

In moving forward, we have identified some guiding principles. Ashton Court Mansion will almost certainly accommodate a mix of different uses, possibly changing over time. A single use appears highly unlikely.

Renovation work will need to be broken into a series of projects, almost certainly phased over many years. It's not likely to be one large project.

Ideally Ashton Court Mansion should be in use 24/7 all year. There are many heritage buildings which are only open part of the week and only during summer months. The Mansion has the potential to work much harder. This also helps with security.

In the future Ashton Court Mansion will need to be self-sufficient in revenue terms.

Our current draft vision

In Bristol we have a Housing Crisis and a Climate Emergency. Ashton Court Mansion is of domestic scale, constructed as a house. It could make a contribution to the housing needs of Bristolians. For example, the upper floors could be developed to provide housing, possibly in a co-living arrangement.

In delivering this vision Ashton Court Mansion could be restored in an exemplary green approach in all aspects. The aim might be to create a

"green flagship" project in terms of energy use, travel plan, materials. This would link very well with the green credentials of Bristol.

The ground floors would continue with a café and publicly accessible event spaces in the music room and adjoining rooms.

Next steps

We are currently working on two closely linked initiatives

The drafting of a brief for a feasibility study to assess options for the residential use of the upper floors.

The proposed objective consists of a radical approach to the future: to reinstate occupancy of Ashton Court Mansion in a manner appropriate for the twenty-first century. How might this work? What sort of capacity? What are the key challenges?

The study will need to explore the use of modern materials and fabrication to create modern rooms without adverse impact on the historic fabric.

The challenge of the dismantled panelling

The historic rooms on part of the first floor have been dismantled with panelling and other components stored. Bristol Archives has a catalogue of



The historic rooms on part of the first floor have been dismantled with panelling and other components stored.

exactly what has been saved which was compiled by consultants in 1987. There are 12 volumes listing the rooms and the surviving panels and other features.

Discussions are ongoing with Historic England, Bristol City Council and North Somerset Council. The aim would be to agree a common approach to the treatment of the dismantled rooms. How feasible or desirable is it to attempt to recreate the lost rooms? What future use might they have? What alternative approaches are possible?

Thomas Rennison and his Grand Pleasure Bath

Peter Cullimore uncovers the story of a hidden eighteenth century swimming pool in Montpelier and the maverick businessman who created it.

Montpelier Health Centre is a spacious modern building serving a diverse community. What few of its patients, or even staff, realise is that where they tread today, for hundreds of years people swam. At the back is a paved garden, enclosed on three sides by high walls of stone and brick and normally unseen by the public. Still discernible are traces of an open-air swimming pool, dating from the mid-18th century.

It was known as Rennison's Baths. You can make out one corner of the pool. The rest lies buried under the health centre. There are still steps where swimmers descended into the water. Some blue and red tiles from the sides of the pool remain in place.

This was one of the earliest public swimming baths in Britain, preceded only by the far more upmarket Peerless

Pool in London. Rennison's included a separate smaller pool for women only. They were built by the proprietor, Thomas Rennison, for the whole community to swim and frolic in. Next door he built a tavern and named it the Old England, which is still there.

The Rennison name was well known in Bristol, from the Georgian era up to the First World War, when Rennison's Baths finally closed for good. Despite attracting tens of thousands of customers a year, the family business accumulated massive debts, from reckless borrowing by Thomas and relatives. His namesake son and grandson inherited the financial chaos. Yet somehow, the Rennisons stayed afloat.

Thomas Rennison (1707-1792) was a bold entrepreneur, originally from rural Derbyshire. He started as a thread maker in Birmingham but was declared bankrupt in 1742, probably moving to Bristol around this time.

The 19th century Bristol chronicler John Latimer estimated Rennison's main pool was taking customers from 1747. Rennison had rented the site, Terrett's Mill, to pursue his thread-making trade,

Rennison's Baths, house & Old England, 1911.



Montpelier Health Centre (front).

but found it hard to make a living.

He noticed that a pond on the mill premises was a popular spot for boys to go skinny-dipping in the summer, and had the bright idea of charging for admission.

Rennison's main pool, 138 feet long and 84 wide, backed onto the pond and took its water supply from Cutler's Mill Brook. He provided dressing rooms and a coffee house, soon converted into the Old England pub. A waterside "pleasure garden" was also developed. Rennison lived with his wife Mary and their three children in a house adjoining the tavern.

This was 70 years before Britain's oldest outdoor public swimming pool still in existence today. That distinction belongs to the elegant Cleveland Pools in the city of Bath. They first opened in 1817 and are now back in use after a magnificent restoration.

Uniquely, Rennison's Baths catered for the mass market, by charging just a couple of pennies for entry. Thomas Rennison invented the concept of swimming pools as a cheap leisure facility, affordable to ordinary working men and women. That was his great lasting legacy.

However, Rennison also targeted well-to-do gentlemen and ladies patronising the fashionable Hot Wells mineral water spa across town. He offered evening musical concerts in the Old England and its tea gardens.

The swimming pool enterprise was a big gamble for a businessman relying on borrowed money. Until the late 1700s, 'cold baths' in Britain had a therapeutic purpose and little swimming went on. You took a quick plunge and immersed yourself in the water. These private

baths were on the estates of landed gentry, most often as a separate bath house, but sometimes in the main house.

River bathing appealed to a wider public. In an era before running water was common at home, the nearest river could be the best place to wash. Men often bathed naked - a practice frowned on by the authorities and made illegal in Bath from 1801.

At Rennison's, the rules were more lax right up to the late nineteenth century. A report to Bristol's Baths and Wash Houses Committee in 1897 attributed a sudden drop in attendance to the enforcement of wearing a bathing costume. An article in the *Bristol Magpie* claimed the true reason was that swimmers had to bathe in "putrid fluid".

One eighteenth century enthusiast for river bathing in Bristol was a professional accountant and amateur doctor, William Dyer, who kept a diary. In a brief entry for 7 June 1762, Dyer recorded bathing in the River Malago in Bedminster: "Rose at 5 went to Mallow-go slum and plunged myself in the water."

A swimming place in the River Frome was also available in Dyer's time. In July 1755, a notice in *Felix Farley's Journal* offered "a bathing place in the River Frome, with commodious dressing houses", near the Old Fox at Baptist Mills.

Thomas Rennison's swimming baths lay just outside the city boundary in Gloucestershire, beyond the civic jurisdiction of Bristol. Rennison, with rowdy drinkers in the Old England, took full advantage to tease the authorities. They held an annual Montpelier Bean Feast, where a mock mayor, sheriffs and other dignitaries were elected. Rennison presided over what Latimer describes as "various high jinks".

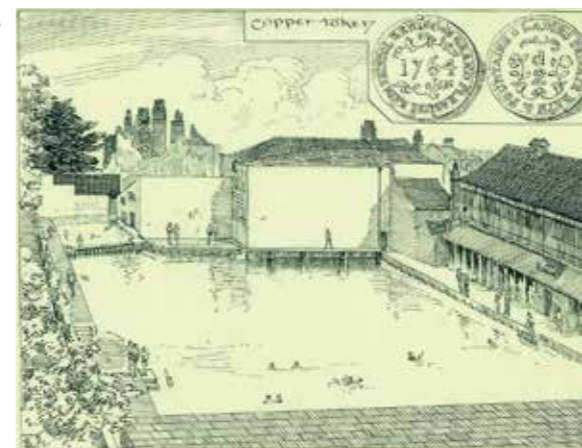
Thomas Rennison was born in 1707 in a South Derbyshire village, the youngest of four children. His father John Rennison, a yeoman farmer, sent him away at 16 to Birmingham as a thread maker's apprentice. John died in 1727, leaving unspecified debts which his will said must be settled out of his estate. The eldest son, William, inherited the farm, on condition that he paid Thomas £200 at the end of his apprenticeship. A decade later, Thomas had still not received the money.

In 1742 both brothers found themselves in court, facing separate actions for debt. The family had to sell their land

and farmhouse, while a bankrupt Thomas exited from Birmingham to Bristol and went even deeper into the red at Terrett's Mill.

In her research, historian Mary Wright found that Rennison purchased the mill site in 1764 via a £400 mortgage. He then borrowed a further £200 to finance construction of the Ladies' Pool and the Old England pub. Rennison later remortgaged the premises, this time for £1,000.

Thomas died in his eighties in 1792, leaving the mill, baths and tavern to his namesake son, Thomas Rennison junior. He proved no better with money. After his death in 1802, Rennison junior's own eldest son - another Thomas - inherited the property. The Baths survived the Napoleonic Wars thanks to the new owner's sister-in-law, Sarah Rennison.



Rennison's Baths, Loxton drawing c1900.

Sarah Burcher had married John Rennison, the youngest of Thomas senior's grandsons, in 1801. Sarah took charge of the Baths management herself. Even so, Thomas Rennison, grandson of the founder, was declared bankrupt in 1818. Ownership passed to the next-in-line brother, William Cox Rennison.

In a series of auctions from 1822, William sold off everything on the premises, except for the Baths. John and wife Sarah stayed in charge of the Baths until John's death in about 1849 ended the family's century-long rollercoaster.

Rennison's Baths carried on regardless - under new owners but keeping the old name. Contamination of the pool water increased from the 1840s as Bristol expanded. Although public water supplies were transformed from 1846 by the new Bristol Water Works Company, it was different with sewage and sanitation. Bristol had a higher mortality rate than other big cities, from a series of cholera outbreaks.

Even a prosperous suburb like

Montpelier had no drainage. Human excrement, horse manure and other waste collected in cess pools, or seeped directly into Cutler's Mill Brook from domestic privies.

Yet still Rennison's drew the crowds. Total attendance for the summer of 1896 was 33,000. Post-Rennison owners organised swimming lessons for schoolchildren and competitive races for all ages. The *Western Daily Press* reported on a gala in September 1865:

"One race was a juvenile race, between Master J.W Searle, 8 years of age... and a little girl named Alice Maude Brentnell, said to be the youngest female swimmer in Bristol. The race was well contested, and was ultimately won by the little girl, who distanced her opponent by one foot only."

The swimming galas also featured a local high-board diver, Robert Backwell. One event in August 1849 got a press build-up:

"M.R.B., the celebrated diver, will be in attendance, and dive from an eminence of more than fifty feet with his boots in his hands, and will put them on before rising to the surface."

Under municipal control later, attendance figures slumped. The Ladies' Pool dried up and a report to the city's Health Committee, in June 1914, told of "half an inch of slime" in the other pool. Permanent closure followed in 1916, and the Baths were filled in.

Thomas Rennison had launched his Baths just to keep his head above water. He ended up turning swimming pools into a popular leisure attraction. They gave many generations immense pleasure - and a brief escape from their arduous working lives.



Thomas Rennison ad *Felix Farley's Journal*, 9 May 1767.



Cracks in the code

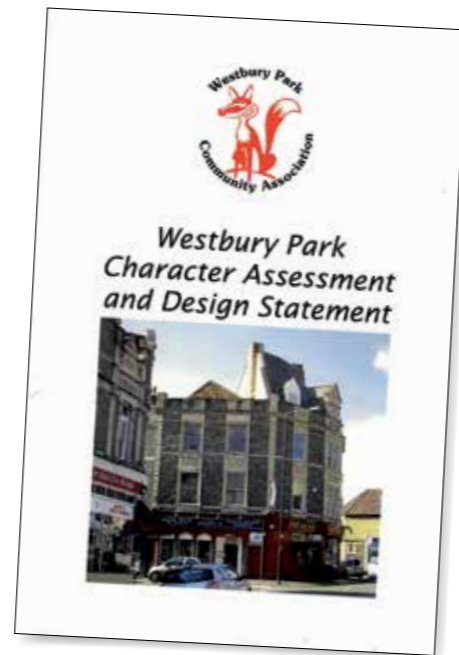
Jeff Bishop queries government design guidance.

The *Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023*ⁱ states that “a local planning authority must ensure that the development plan includes requirements with respect to design ...”. Sounds OK because I’m sure we’d all like to see better design. And one of Bristol City Council’s latest papers – *‘Draft Policies and Development Allocations’*ⁱⁱ – includes five pages on “Design and Conservation” standards. So that’s OK too or is it?

In fact, the heading in the Act is “*Design Code for whole area*” so, behind that ‘velvet glove’ phrasing in the Act, there is potentially an ‘iron fist’; a rather worrying one for us all. What is actually meant by “*requirements with respect to design*” is something that meets, or is very close to meeting, the standards set out in the National Model Design Code (NMDC)ⁱⁱⁱ published in 2021. And note the word “*must*” above because other edicts emerging from on high suggest that the government’s own Office for Place will take over and develop Bristol’s code if our planners fail to produce one, or if what they produce fails to meet the NMDC standards.

Many readers will be familiar with the idea of design guidance which, as with Bristol’s draft policies, uses words such as ‘appropriate’, ‘expected to’ and ‘should’ on aspects such as liveability, respecting local character and so forth. However, a design code is far more draconian, dictating aspects such as heights, building lines, roofscapes, entrances and active travel, often in real detail. (There are 42 basic standards plus another 22 that might apply!) Suggesting such a code for “*every part of their area*”, i.e. such detail for all of Bristol, seems terrifying not just in terms of the time, resources and skills needed for a place the size of Bristol but also its potentially homogenising effects on our gloriously diverse city.

There might seem to be a moment’s relief because the NMDC introduces the idea of breaking down the “*whole area*” into “*Area Types*”. Some area types potentially on offer for Bristol (there are 12/13 in total) might be ‘City Centre’, ‘Urban Neighbourhood’, ‘Inner Suburb’ and ‘Outer Suburb’. This implies, for example, that just one single code would be produced for all the Inner Suburbs of Bedminster, Lawrence Hill, Redfield, Easton, Clifton and so on, as if the same designs might be appropriate in such patently different places (see photos). This highlights perhaps the most worrying aspect of the NMDC; the extraordinary lack of emphasis, before drawing up any code, on



character assessment. Local character assessment should surely be the basis on which any code should be built – something recognised by Bristol’s draft policies - but the NMDC gives the impression that a single code can be imposed on an area almost regardless of its distinctive character.

And when one reaches the level of local character, we are probably all aware that what are still quite large areas such as “*Inner Suburb*” have many different sub character areas within them. My own area for example (Westbury Park) has 10 distinct character areas as defined by the local community and accepted by our planning officers. This offers a hint of a possible way

Above, could one code work for three such different places?

forward because the other theme operating throughout the NMDC is that of community engagement – surely something to support?

Yes and no. Community engagement is required to start very early on in code-making by engaging the whole community – that’s around 480,000 people in Bristol – in drafting an overall “*Vision*” for the code; something rather vacuous about which the vast majority of people would be blissfully unaware or unwilling to contribute. Putting in place a programme to do this, and then to carry it on through to significant community engagement on detailed codes for areas, is another staggering task in terms of resources and skills. As it happens, the projects in the government’s own pilot code-making initiative have shown clearly that all such aims are completely unachievable.

So what might be a possible way forward through appropriate and achievable community engagement? Perhaps in a moment of panic about all the criticisms of the NMDC as above (I am not alone in making such comments), the government now states that communities can do their own codes as part of Neighbourhood Plans. In the last year, Wiltshire Council have taken the bold step of producing an overall ‘*Wiltshire Design Guide*’^{iv}. It is definitely a ‘*guide*’, not a detailed

county-wide ‘*code*’, but that Guide quite rightly encourages communities developing Neighbourhood Plans to develop their own very local design codes at community level, and guidance is being produced for communities on how to do that. However, as yet Bristol only has two made Neighbourhood Plans (worryingly typical of city areas) and only one of those includes any detail about design.

As of now, it appears that Bristol City Council will also use Wiltshire’s approach and focus on producing some form of broader, less detailed, city-wide Design Guide, not a code - great. They are also interested in the idea of encouraging community/ neighbourhood groups to complement this broad-brush approach by producing neighbourhood level design statements, guides or even codes that genuinely describe, celebrate, protect and enhance the immensely valuable local distinctiveness of each of our city’s neighbourhoods - also great. (At least two of these have been done already by local people, for Westbury Park and Westbury-on-Trym.)

I firmly believe that it is possible to develop a programme, in association with the City Council, to train and support local communities to do such local level work, in part because we are lucky to already have the

Neighbourhood Planning Network with almost 60 groups as members. And there are also other areas with some form of amenity or community organisation, so we are not far off complete coverage.

If each community took on this work as a form of Neighbourhood Plan, getting the City Council to fund this in these constrained times is extremely unlikely. However, if they could simply say they support it, each local group could get up to £8,000 grant aid (which I know to be possible because others have done it); enough to siphon off a little of each to fund the overall training and support work. And this would not be new. Back in the 1990s, a colleague and I invented Design Statements to be done by communities in villages and towns specifically to promote and support real local distinctiveness. We then ran, with others, a guidance and training programme that eventually generated over 2,500 community-produced Design Statements^v, many of which became Supplementary Planning Guidance.

Why not this same approach in Bristol, led through the Civic Society? I’m up for helping (and know others to drag in). Comments - or even offers of support and help – back to me would be very welcome. Our wonderfully rich and diverse city deserves it!

Contact Jeff Bishop: patandjeff@cbsd.com

ⁱ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2023/55/enacted>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/files/documents/2275-local-plan-review-draft-policies-and-development-allocations/file>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-model-design-code>

^{iv} <https://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/article/6110/Wiltshire-Design-Guide>

^v As an example of a village design statement in a Neighbourhood Plan, go to: <https://2a5c70ad-63f7-4a56-ba3b-deded52911a2.filesusr.com/ugd/>

Book Reviews

Mike Manson reads some Bristol books.

Bristol 650 – Essays on the Future of Bristol

Edited by Amy O’Beirne and Andrew Kelly

Bristol Books and Bristol Ideas – ISBN 9781909446373

£20.00

2023 marked the 650th anniversary of Bristol becoming an independent county. In this book over 30 contributors consider some of the

challenges the city faces. A range of essays from experienced practitioners address a range of issues – from social care, to housing, even to the future of shopping – encouraging new ideas to come forward.

A magnificent swan-song from Bristol Ideas. Over the last thirty years Andrew Kelly and his team have done so much to put Bristol firmly on the cultural map. With the demise of Bristol Ideas I fear Bristol will not be the same again.



Beyond Bristol Again: Another 24 Country Walks

Robin Tetlow

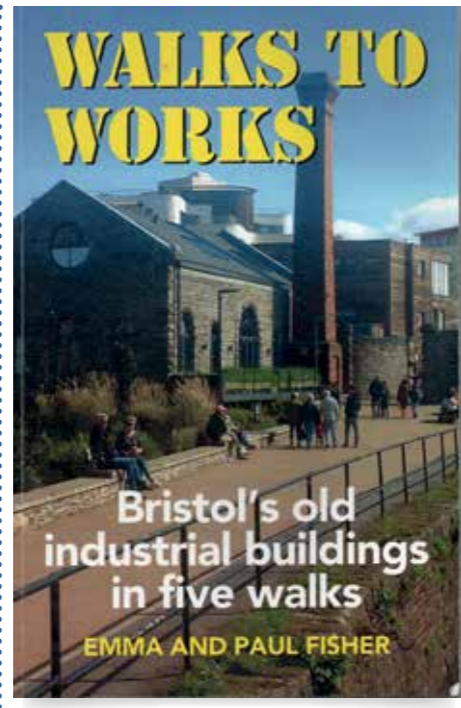
Redcliffe Press – ISBN 9781915670021

£16.00

The first two books were huge – selling over 15,000 copies. Now there’s a third volume.

Attractively illustrated, each circular walk is accompanied by an OS map, which is reassuring. Some of the walks are quite a distance away from Bristol – one even across the Severn! Walks vary in length from five to eleven miles. Robin Tetlow takes walkers through interesting landscapes, along quiet paths, through woods and villages to hilltops and along river banks and coastal waters. ‘There is a walk for every mood, every season and every ability.’

As Spring approaches this is the book to provide inspiration for excursions from Bristol.



Walks to Works – Bristol’s old industrial buildings in five walks

Emma and Paul Fisher

Smallish Books –

ISBN 978-0-9542446-8-2

£10.99

If you want shorter urban walks, here’s a fascinating look at all those red brick or pennant sandstone industrial buildings that you half-notice but never really pay much attention to. The book is divided into five walks around central Bristol and Bedminster. Lots of information that was new to me. Well illustrated. Just my type of book!

Art & Activism – Volume One: A Portrait.

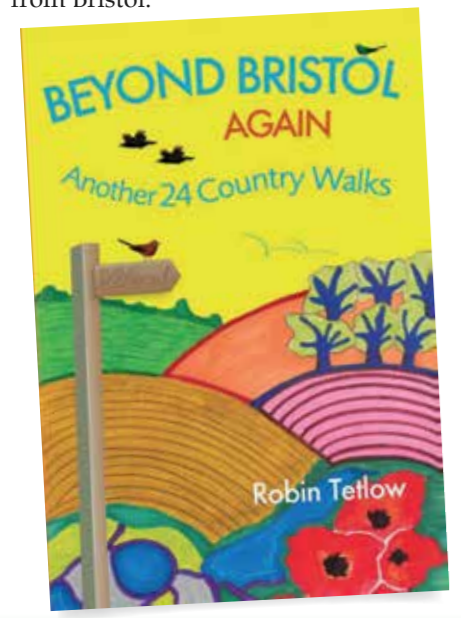
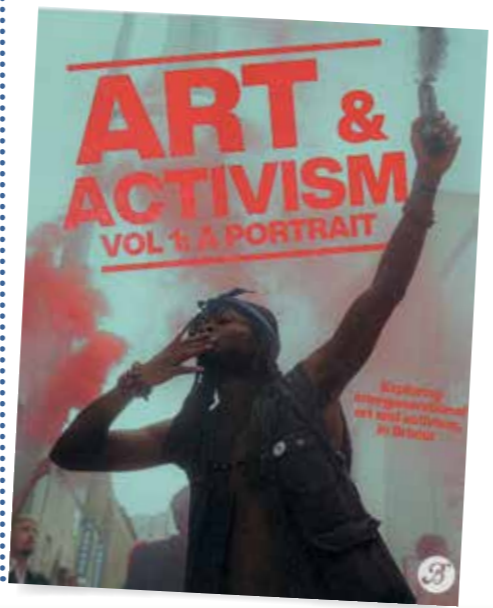
Trinity

Bristol Books – ISBN 9781909446366

£12.00

According to this book, Bristol is a city of protest, uprising and alternative lifestyles. *Art & Activism* tells the rousing stories of an eclectic range of Bristol based ‘activists’. Artists, community workers, councillors, environmentalists, film makers, performers, photographers, singers, song writers, women’s campaigners and many more tell their own unique tales.

Art & Activism is a ‘window into the struggle to create a just, inclusive society.’ An inspiring read and a call to activism, which is, of course, what Bristol Civic Society is all about. I look forward to Volume 2.



Bristol Civic Society membership

Invitation

Bristol Civic Society 2024 Annual General Meeting

Members and friends are warmly invited to attend our 2024 AGM. It will be held on:

Tuesday 14 May, from 6.30pm,

at “The Mount Without” (formerly the Church of St Michael on the Mount Without), St Michael’s Hill, Bristol BS2 8DT.

We are returning to the venue of our very successful 2022 AGM, through the kind generosity of the owner, Norman Routledge.

Doors open from **6.30pm** (cash bar; buffet provided); the meeting starts at **7.30pm**.

The Agenda will include: Annual Report from the Management Team, Finance Report, election of officers and other Management Team members.

Nominations for officers and Management Team members must be sent to the secretary no later than 7 May, at secretary@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk

Your Civic Society needs YOU! 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?

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

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, 17 Bathurst Parade, Bristol, BS1 6UB.

Cheques, if not made by standing order, made payable to Bristol Civic Society.

Enquiries: Tel: 0117 927 6991.

Email: membership@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk

Title..... Forename Surname.....

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Address.....

Phone(s).....

giftaid it By completing this Gift Aid Declaration, Bristol Civic Society can increase the value of your subscription at no extra cost to you by claiming a tax refund.

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Please pay annually from 1st of (1) 20 (2)

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Events

Spring and Summer 2024

Much of the programme is yet to be confirmed (opportunities often arise after the publishing date of *Better Bristol*) so please check the Bristol Civic Society website for updates and details of new diary events.

We usually notify members by email

of upcoming events, particularly when booking is required. Bookings are taken on a first come first served basis. Some events may have a small charge payable in most instances by card. Keep a lookout in your in-boxes for information on new events.



Above, The old shopping area of Castle Street and Wine Street were reduced to rubble. Guided walk by Eugene Byrne on the topic of the Bristol Blitz.



Ed Hall will lead an evening walk around the harbour and Cumberland Basin.



APRIL Wednesday 3 April, Ed Hall will lead an evening walk around the harbour and Cumberland Basin.

Wednesday 10 April, 7.30pm on Zoom. Paul Smith will talk on the topic of social and affordable housing in Bristol.

Monday 22 April, 10am, visit to see and hear about the inside story of the revamped **Bristol Beacon**. See pages 6-7 of *Better Bristol*.

Saturday 28 April, guided walk by Eugene Byrne on the topic of the Bristol Blitz.



MAY Tuesday 14 May, starts 7.30, doors open from 6.30. **Bristol Civic Society AGM**, The Mount Without.

Thursday 30 May, visit and tour of **The Bristol Old Vic Theatre School**.



JUNE Tuesday 18 June, Bristol Beacon. **Bristol Civic Society's Annual Design Awards**.

Coming up

- Summer Social evening, August, details to be announced.
- Walks exploring areas of the city's industrial or social history.
- Visits to sites of interest.
- Monthly Zoom events on culture, local history and infrastructure.
- Occasional archive films

We head full of hope and optimism for the warmer months after a rather wet and breezy winter which saw some grim patches of violent news in our otherwise peaceful city. As always the Events Team emerges from its winter semi-hibernation working to provide an interesting programme of events to inform and amuse our society's members. However (here is the thing) to keep the momentum and freshness going the team would appreciate more volunteers to join us. In particular we are looking for help with publicity and membership communications, technical help in (for instance) Zoom hosting and video editing, general admin and ideas generation. The team gathers once a month and our meetings are friendly, democratic and productive but would benefit from more diversity. If you are interested in helping and finding out more, please drop an email to events@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk.