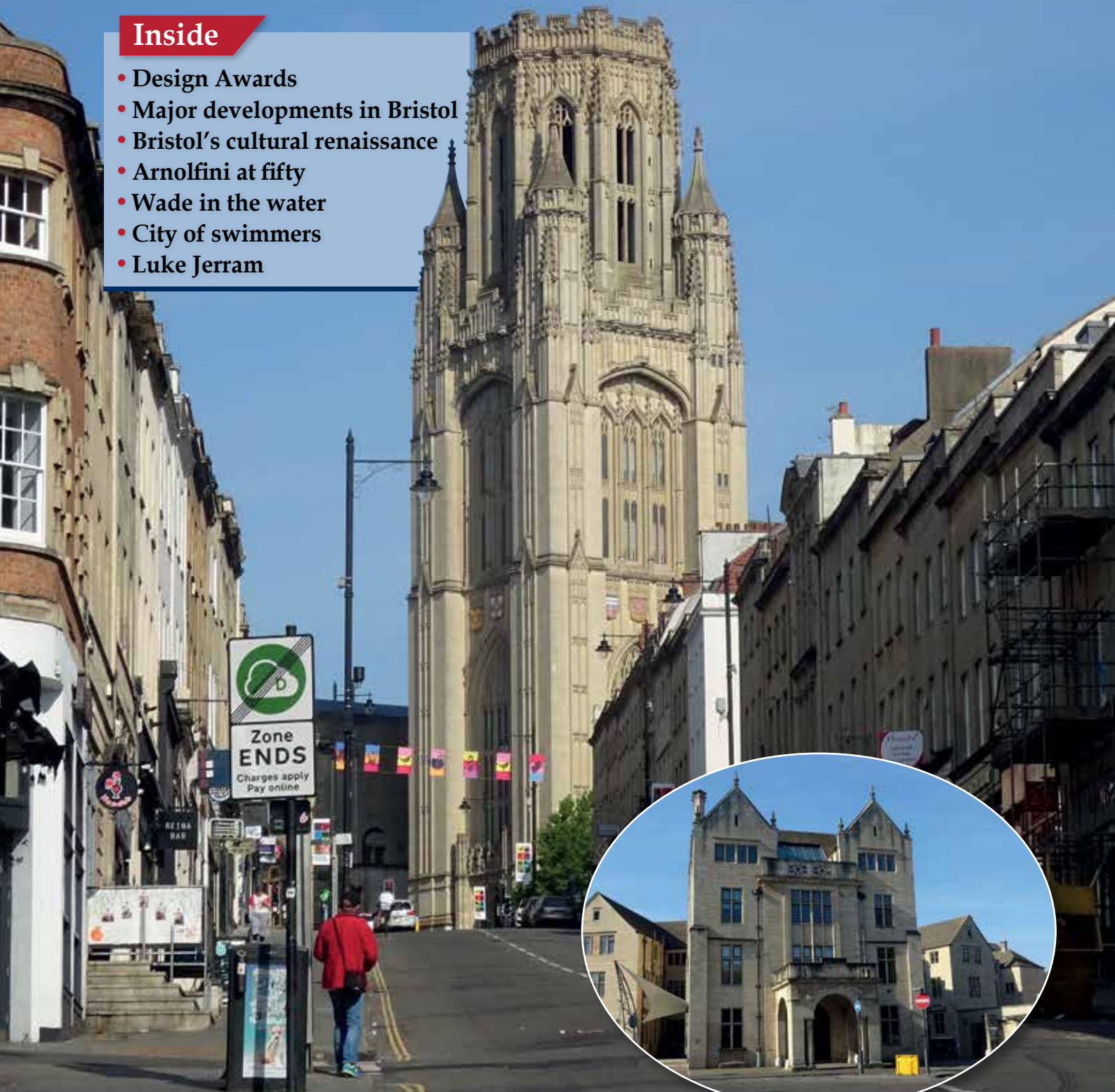


# Better Bristol

The Bristol Civic Society Magazine – Issue 27 Autumn/Winter 2025

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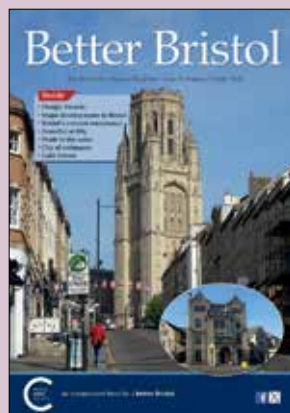
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- Wade in the water
- City of swimmers
- Luke Jerram



an independent force for a **better Bristol**







**Front Cover:**  
Park Street, Bristol and the Wills Memorial Building.  
Photo: Mike Manson.

## Bristol Civic Society: Who's Who General Enquiries

**Membership Secretary:** Laura Demery  
0117 927 6991

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

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

## Organisation

**Chair:** Sandra Fryer

[sandra.fryer@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:sandra.fryer@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk)

**Secretary:** Mike Bates

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

**Treasurer:** John Jones

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

## Communications and Events

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

**Events:** Mike Bates  
[events@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:events@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk)

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

**Web and E-Mail Bulletin Editor:**  
Alan Morris

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

**Design Awards Scheme:** Vacant  
[awards@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:awards@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk)

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

## Campaigning

**Major Sites Group:**

Ian Jenkins

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

**Transport and Place-Making Group:**  
Alan Morris

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

## Links with Other Groups

**Planning Network:**

[networkadministrator@bristolnnpn.net](mailto:networkadministrator@bristolnnpn.net)

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

**Conservation Advisory Panel:**

Stephen Wickham

[stephen\\_wickham@btinternet.com](mailto:stephen_wickham@btinternet.com)

**Historic England:**

The Historic England rep is still vacant.

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## EDITOR

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



## DESIGNER

Tracey Annear  
[info@quirecreative.co.uk](mailto:info@quirecreative.co.uk)

## ADVISORY PANEL

Alan Morris, Eugene Byrne, Sandra Fryer.

## DISTRIBUTION TEAM

Led by Dave Thomas.

## PRINTERS

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## From the Chair

# Engaging in the issues facing the city

Welcome to this, the autumn 2025 edition of *Better Bristol* magazine.

I hope you find it an interesting and informative read.

First, I would like to say thank you to all of you who have supported our events including the AGM over the last few months. I must own up that it was a bit daunting running a zoom call for Western Harbour with 180 people signed up and again for Ashton Court Mansion for 120 people on a hot summer evening. I found some IT support that helped me update my zoom and all went well. Our midsummer AGM also seemed to go well, with around 70 people attending the formal meeting and enjoying music and social time afterwards. We have had really good feedback on our events and hope the next few months will be equally successful. We have a full programme coming your way soon!

As autumn comes into full colour, many of you will have recently returned from summer travels and may feel you have some time on your hands. Why not volunteer to support Bristol Civic Society? There are several things you could join in with.

We are planning three round table 'state of the city' events. Is there anyone keen to contribute to these? Can you suggest brilliant speakers to inspire us all?

We will also want to consider the outcome of the Bristol Local Plan public examination held earlier this year. The Bristol Civic Society made representations on several points concerning loss of employment land, the lack of tall building policy and the principle of urban densification assumed in the plan. At times there

was uncomfortable discussion as the inspectors quizzed the City Council officers on the draft plan, the strategy and how certain they were that the Bristol's housing and employment needs would be met. I think, it is clear that without an agreed joint strategy at sub-regional level Bristol will not meet all its needs. We would like to engage in a conversation on the issues facing the City and how they may be planned for.

Some of you have asked us to look wider. The West of England Combined Authority (WECA) must pick up the baton co-ordinating a plan between Bristol, South Gloucestershire, Bath and North East Somerset and North Somerset Council, the latter expected to join WECA very soon. Would you be interested in more events on the growth agenda across Bristol? Have you visited any really good carefully planned new developments on your travels that you could talk about?

**We would like to engage in a conversation on the issues facing the City and how they may be planned for.**

We are expecting a government announcement on new towns and urban extensions early on the autumn. I wonder whether this will bring any opportunities for the greater Bristol area?

We would like to talk about the modern growing city in terms of culture, creativity, health, wellbeing, diversity, and engagement. The success of good place-making with a focus on local economic activity to create healthier happier places is well documented and we plan to explore what this means for Bristol. Do you have any suggestions for an expert you would like to hear talk?

And finally, many of you joined in our virtual Design Awards event in July



where we showcased three important yet very different projects. We celebrated the cutting edge University of Bristol Digital Centre, St Philips, Agile homes' brilliant temporary homes project at Stonebridge Park, Fishponds and the innovative Cargo Work shared office space in Harbourside – see pages 4-5. The Management Team have reflected on the awards scheme and propose to update it by creating three categories to cover good placemaking, well designed buildings, and community projects such as gardens and playgrounds. We need new members to join the Awards Group to run the process, to identify the brilliant projects and to lead a successful awards event. If you would like to get involved, please contact me or the Bristol Civic Society Management Team. See contact details on page 2.

Do please reach out to me and the Management Team if you have ideas to share or would like to get involved. Please keep attending our events, and encourage your friends to join Bristol Civic Society. We rely on you for our continued success.

**Sandra Fryer**

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



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

*See page 27 for more details...*



# 2025 Design Awards

**T**his year, three very different awards, yet all delivering high quality and fascinating design solutions to challenging sites.

## Valley View

At Valley View, in Stonebridge Park, the Panel was impressed by this project's vital contribution to addressing our ongoing housing crisis while supporting society's most vulnerable residents. The developer was Places for People and the architects Agile Homes. The units are thoughtfully positioned to maximise the

benefits of the site, creating long views.

The architectural response demonstrates how targeted design can address the specific spatial and social requirements of residents transitioning from homelessness to independent living, within well considered home design.

This award recognises that this is a project that exemplifies the type of innovative housing solution we desperately need more of. We saw this as a great prototype, one which should not be viewed as a "one off" but with the potential to be rolled out, a project with low capital costs coupled with very low running costs, on a range of sites across Bristol. Surely part of the response to the current spread of caravans and camper vans on streets?



*Valley View. Thoughtfully positioned on a challenging site.*



*Simon Birch presenting plaque to Lucy Wood, architect of Agile Homes on behalf of developer Places for People.*

## Cargo Work

And at Cargo Work, Wapping Wharf, we admired the seamless combination of historic prison wall with cutting edge modern office development. Developer Umberslade teamed up with

Mark Osborne of local architects Alec French. The reference to containers is unmistakable as is the response deploying steel framework and modern office ceiling heights. The view from the top floor over the historic wall to

distant Dundry is simply awesome.

This latest component of the Wapping Wharf comprehensive redevelopment has an enviable central location and a distinctive and positive impact on the street scene. This contemporary



*Cargo Work has maximum visual impact.*



*Simon Birch presents plaque to Stuart Hatton of Umberslade and Mark Osborne, Alec French.*

BRISTOL CIVIC SOCIETY

*Bristol Digital Futures Institute.*



## Bristol Digital Futures Institute

We held the awards presentation at the Bristol Digital Futures Institute, located in Avon Street, that part of Bristol undergoing a very rapid transformation as a result of University developments and associated student housing.

Because of limited capacity within the building, we held the actual presentation in one of the studios with Society members also able to watch online.

The Panel was impressed by the considered and clever architectural design that leans into the industrial setting, highlighting the parts of the existing building that are attractive, robust and historic, with high ceilings, stone walls and steelwork. There is a strength to the interior fit out that is also warm and welcoming due to the material palette.

Placemaking is emerging but relies on external landscaping to be completed

office building reflects its industrial dockside setting with its appearance of stacked light-filled cargo boxes. The Panel was impressed by the unique and "fun" architectural design with the physical interaction limited to a

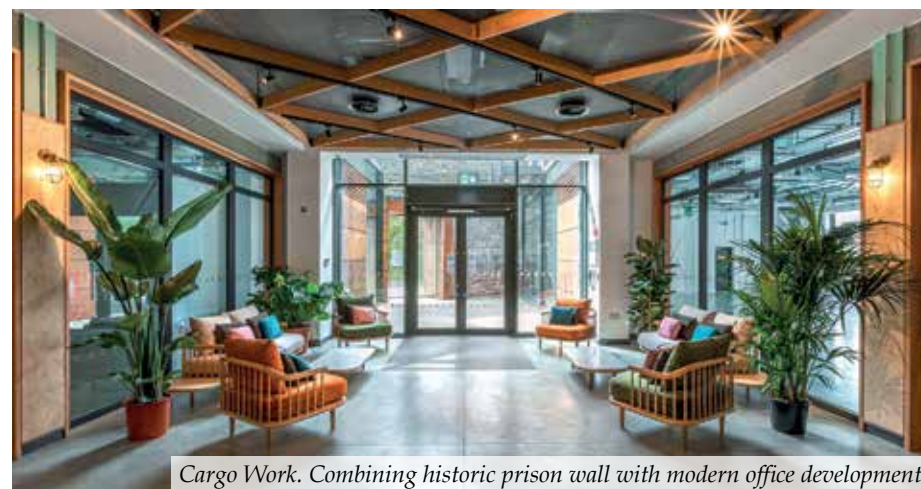
together with future development to take place. Now there is limited impact on the street scene and this Award is given with the belief that the external

works will be equal in design quality to that of the building itself.

*Kerry Chester, Tony Berongoy and Simon Birch.*



*Above, Bristol Digital Futures Institute. A warm and welcoming materials palette.*



*Cargo Work. Combining historic prison wall with modern office development.*

The Bristol Civic Society has made Awards since at least 1990, with upwards of 200 awards being made, sure evidence that good design quality is alive and kicking in Bristol.

This year we had a panel of six volunteers, from a range of backgrounds. We received nominations from Society members, architects, and also the Bristol Post. Projects need to have been completed in the previous year and make a positive contribution to the street scene. Panel members visit all the nominated projects.

The actual plaques are made of cast aluminium and are from Wards of Barton Hill. In the past there have been up to nine awards in a single year but in recent years it's more usually three or four. The cost of the plaques is met by Bristol Civic Society.

[www.bristolcivicsociety.org.uk](http://www.bristolcivicsociety.org.uk)



# Major Developments in Bristol

## Comments on a selection of important proposals.

### St Philips Marsh masterplan – first consultation.

Bristol Civic Society has responded to the first consultation on a masterplan for the St Philip's Marsh area. St Philip's Marsh is the largest part of the Bristol Temple Quarter Development Framework area. It is currently mainly industrial and commercial, but it is one of the few remaining areas in Bristol that could be used to provide a significant amount of new housing.

This consultation summarised some planning constraints and opportunities in the area, and asked for views on the location of local centres, open spaces and movement.

We suggested:

- additional pedestrian connections across the barriers of the waterways

*St Philips Marsh Masterplan. St Philip's Marsh is the largest part of the Bristol Temple Quarter Development Framework area.*



and railway line to make the area more permeable.

- a more nuanced approach to land-use zoning.
- a new large central park.
- a station in the centre of St Philips Marsh, making use of the reserve railway line which runs through the Marsh, which would provide easy access to the rail network.

We asked how the transformation from

the current spatial arrangement of industrial sites and uses to the future configuration will be achieved, and what sorts of employment uses will be pushed out to other areas.

We look forward to the two further rounds of consultation that are planned before the end of 2025, which will reveal a fuller picture of the draft masterplan – the strategic approach and how it will be delivered.



### Hope Road, Bedminster

This is a development of a back-of-street former print works for 88 flats, with no retail or workshop uses incorporated. It is some 200 metres off West Street, and is adjacent to Airpoint, a noted 2007 housing conversion of the former Mail Marketing building. The Bristol Civic Society's view is that the wrong layout was chosen in the first place and the site is overdeveloped, with insufficient amenity for its own residents, and an unacceptable impact on daylight, both internally and among neighbours.

It is a car-free proposal in a relatively high car dependency area. It is an

isolated site with constrained access due to hill topography, existing development and the main railway line below. Public transport and services improve from a quarter mile to half mile walk-range.

The neighbours' objections centre on parking and over-shading.

### Temple Gate Industrial, Mead Street.

This site is situated within the Mead Street Development Brief area which incorporates existing light industrial commercial workplaces.

It is a welcome surprise and we support the initiative to bring the site forward by retaining its business use with an application to retain and upgrade the

existing light industrial buildings. This must be assumed to be driven by the changing commercial balance of supply and demand as it is not driven by policy. Bristol Civic Society welcomes and supports this outcome especially as there is space around Temple Meads for small start-ups but not enough larger space for when they grow bigger.

Building 3 is the only unoccupied building and as such may be the only one that is upgraded initially although the documents show the concept for the Mead Rise Park, buildings 3,4 and 5 upgrade. These documents show the possible improvements to the look of the buildings, their environment standards and landscaping which are all welcomed. The images look good.



It would be interesting to know whether the intention is to over-clad the existing brickwork or remove it and replace it with new insulated cladding.

We will wait for more detailed information, specifically regarding any access street improvements along Mead Street, St Lukes Street and York Road to ensure easy access for the tenants' vehicles with due regard for the pedestrian, cyclist, etc. We would also like to suggest that any solar panels/PVs that are intended to be placed on roofs are analysed in relation to the Totterdown Hill residents so that any glare is avoided.

### Transom House, Victoria Street

We accept the city must expand and inevitably that will mean some vertical height increase. Therefore, we would support the proposed reuse and expansion option submitted as this is by far the most sustainable use of the existing building and site. However, it is yet another student living proposal and a lost opportunity to create real residential dwellings and permanent community in the city.

Reviewing the proposed height, we suggest that one floor is removed from the height so that it aligns better with Hartwell House and its neighbouring buildings. This would also help reduce the excessive overshadowing of the Victoria Street and Temple Street public areas. There is also an opportunity to



*Transom House. Yet another student living proposal.*

create a better architectural treatment for the new extension or crown of the building. There could be a treatment that reflects the historic nature of the site's architectural forms and relate better to the verticality of the existing elevation.

### Princess Street Bedminster

The Society has objected strongly to this large development in an area between the New Cut and Victoria Park, abutting a main-line rail embankment. 400 student bedrooms are proposed in a single tower set 45 metres from Victoria Park, and 437



*Princess Street. Utterly out of keeping with its surroundings.*

rental flats in 3 blocks, with some workshops, retail and other ground floor possibilities. An ultra-dense car-free development with no public transport connectivity at present.

This "anywhere" proposal is utterly out of keeping with its surroundings with multiple heritage harms. This is a highly controversial scheme with significant well-grounded local opposition. It ruins skylines at roof level and is founded in a flood zone.

The proposal would, through its 19-storey purpose-built student tower and three other bulky accommodation blocks for rent, be widely visible across Bristol and have a devastating effect on the north view from the very popular Victoria Park. The proposed tower is three times the height of the hill and would be clearly visible from the south of the Park, permanently changing its ambience by day and its dark skies status by night. The proposal would also be visible from Park Street, St Michael's Hill and Clifton, and have devastating precedent effects on the local conservation areas. Historic England are particularly concerned re the effect on the view of Grade One listed St Mary Redcliffe Church.

The scheme aims to provide a huge number of poor quality of life short-tenure flats, almost all single-aspect by design.

The scheme is not compliant with the community-led Whitehouse Street Development Framework. The Framework contains no reference to student accommodation, rather a focus on homes, workspaces and active travel corridors.



*Coop Funerals. Many north facing flats would result in poor day light standards.*

### Coop Funeral site, Church Road

This is another attempt to gain planning permission on this site for residential/student living. The previous scheme went to appeal and was lost on scale, massing, damage to the local character and loss of employment. The local policy suggests that student living would not be suitable. However,

the appeal decision suggested this use would be acceptable.

Unfortunately, the Bristol Civic Society cannot support this application in its current form. There is still a loss of employment on a site. Employment use has been on the site since the turn of the twentieth century. These uses, a timber yard, perambulator depot and undertakers should have a bearing on the new proposals. There is also the Wain Brook and Chapel of Rest which all give the site a history which is not acknowledged within the proposals. The history of the site also shows a certain Victorian terrace urban grain, and this should be captured within any new proposals.

The loss of the chapel is disappointing, especially as no reference in the current building proposal is given. The use of this larger open space would have been ideal for large flats or communal study lounges.

There should be a more active street frontage to any proposal. The proposed layout is very simple and offers no real benefit to the site or community and unfortunately provides many north facing flats which would result in poor day light standards.

We acknowledge the applicant has tried to take account of the inspector's comments regarding scale and massing; however, the overall impression is now one of a large Victorian workhouse totally at odds with the local Redfield area character. Using the historic burgrave plot lines would help in breaking up the elevations and further reducing the scale at the Brook Street corner incorporating a more traditional parapet and roof would help ease its integration into the street scale.



# Can we help build another cultural renaissance in Bristol?

Asks Andrew Kelly

Bristol Ideas invested in many artists, writers and poets. Here Vanessa Kisuule reads her council house centenary poem for Homes for Heroes 100 in Sea Mills. (@joncraig-photos)

In the book I edited for the closure of Bristol Ideas in 2024, Anthony (ACH) Smith's essay argued that there had been a renaissance in Bristol's culture in the 1960s. I have thought much about this since especially the lessons learned for the future of culture.

These are tough times for culture. We need to look long term and address immediate challenges. Austerity, standstill budgets, cost of living crisis, the increase in employers National Insurance and exhaustion make progress difficult.

Cultural activity will continue without support. The inventiveness of artists will see new work created. There was limited funding for the arts in the 1960s. Councillors spent more on full council meeting dinners than on the arts and Arts Council of Great Britain funded little in what they called the provinces. Ambition to expand will always be ahead of resources available, but we are nowhere near funding what we have already, let alone aiming for more.

How should we think about renaissance? You cannot plan a renaissance, and others must bestow the accolade. Smith writes about things 'stirring in the city' in the early 1960s with theatre especially: George Brandt at University of Bristol and Tom Stoppard's and Harold Pinter's first staged work there; Peter Nichols and Charles Wood writing their first plays in Bristol. A strong theatre presence led to wider opportunities for



Writer and poet Helen Dunmore helps launch the 2004 Great Reading Adventure *The Day of the Triffids*. (Martin Chainey)

writers, producers, and actors. Angela Carter, then living in Bristol, performed in Centre 42 and went on to publish her Bristol Trilogy of novels. Val Lorraine's house became a home for theatrical people – Tom Stoppard lodged there – and a hub for theatre people to meet and discuss the arts and their work.

Important for Smith was the creation of the Western Daily Press arts page in 1960, which he co-edited and which saw culture taken seriously in a local newspaper. Smith adds Jeremy Rees opening Arnolfini, and Billy and Jean Poeton's work in creating the Arts Centre in King Square. Also significant was John Boorman's work in BBC Bristol first with *Citizen '63* and then *The Newcomers* which featured Alison and Anthony Smith, as well as Stoppard, Derek Balmer, then a photographer, later a distinguished artist and others

including Raghubir Singh the first person of colour to join the Bristol Omnibus Company after the bus boycott, first as a conductor, later a driver.

Smith says, 'the buzz went on' with Aardman, Banksy, Watershed, Massive Attack, the Tobacco Factory, Andrew Hilton's annual Shakespeare productions, and young actors at the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School going on to national fame.

As I was working on Smith's essay, historian Eugene Byrne told me that he had also witnessed a renaissance during the last 30 years. For him, things changed in the 1990s, when Bristol 'became interesting'. This was '...a marked change in culture, a marked change in Bristol's brand.' It was bottom up, but then the brand – edgy, cool, different – became adopted officially. Investors wanted a vibrant culture, though this contributed to housing inflation, making rents and prices prohibitive. Byrne adds the huge growth in universities, pirate radio and Fanzines, street art and free festivals, Tricky, Portishead, Roni Size, and other musicians. A breakthrough was the 1999 Respectable Trade exhibition which addressed the city's trade in enslaved people in detail for the first time.

We could add more: folk music in the 1960s; Black Roots, DJ Derek and Bristol's reggae scene; poetry with Lyra Festival and Raise the Bar; street art with Paris, Inkie, Stewy and Upfest; specialist film festivals including Cary (Grant) Comes Home, Forbidden World, Cinema Rediscovered, Slapstick, Future City Film Festival, Come the Revolution on Black cinema and South West Silents joined Encounters and Wildscreen helping in part Bristol's



Poet and writer Jackie Kay reads her work in the last Festival of Ideas event. (@joncraig-photos)

designation as a UNESCO City of Film. Bottleyard Studios, BBC and independent companies made Bristol an important centre for film and television production. Work in the Pervasive Media Studio and Knowle West Media Centre helped create new work and brought together many communities.

Bristol also became a centre for circus and physical theatre with Circomedia. Visual arts prospered in Spike Island, Jamaica Street Studios, Peoples Republic of Stokes Croft. Richard Long's work – rooted in Bristol – is internationally renowned. The work of Ken Stradling at the Bristol Guild saw Bristol as a centre for design. And the Architecture Centre played a valuable role in promoting debate and learning about Bristol.

Activity in neighbourhoods at Trinity Arts, Easton Community Centre, Bricks in St Annes, Hamilton House in Stokes Croft, Wardrobe Theatre in Old Market as well as St Paul's Carnival and the work of Vic Ecclestone at Hartcliffe saw increased culture in these places. Bristol BroadSides showed the richness of the lives and words of working-class people. In music Ujima radio, Sarah Records and Revolver Records all played important roles. We know about the city better thanks to the work of Local Learning and Know Your Place. Bristol has more independent bookshops than ever. The work of the Bristol Short Story Prize is exemplary. Redcliffe Press and other publishers ensured that Bristol's history was recorded, and the Bristol Review of



Andrew Kelly, Director of Bristol Ideas, interviews Salman Rushdie for Festival of Ideas. (@joncraig-photos)

## Enabling cultural activity in the future

Bristol has seen enormous change in the last 65 years. It is a much better city but faces many problems. What can we learn from this past to identify the conditions for enabling more cultural activity in the future? How can we build on this past to overcome challenges and prosper again? The city can solve some of these; others need the involvement of national government. Even if we might not benefit today, and perhaps not in our lifetimes, we need to be good ancestors and put in place now what others will value in the future.

**First** – belief in cities and Bristol's potential. Cities are among humanity's greatest inventions. Prosperous cities are vital for nations and regions. Culture and cultural development have a role in contributing to, reflecting, and supporting city inclusive growth.

**Second** – leadership and management. We need strong cultural leadership. Bristol has excellent cultural leaders. In the past, business leaders took risks and backed projects, and we need new ones to step up. Bristol City Council's support for culture has been variable: commitment present, but budgets limited. It is likely that attention will now move to West of England Combined Authority (WECA), though strong city council support is essential.

**Third** – addressing the past. Bristol has long struggled with its history, especially its role in the trade in enslaved people. Recent changes – renaming institutions and removing the Colston Statue – have been important, but more work is needed. A full reckoning, like Germany's post 1968 process, is essential.

**Fourth** – media and arts coverage. A healthy local media is crucial for culture and democracy, but it is under threat. Venue Magazine and strong coverage in the Bristol Post are gone. Today, Bristol 24/7 and The Bristol Cable try to fill the gap. Independent TV arts programming has disappeared, and BBC coverage is weak. There's potential for renewed storytelling about Bristol projects and its people, but local media needs investment.

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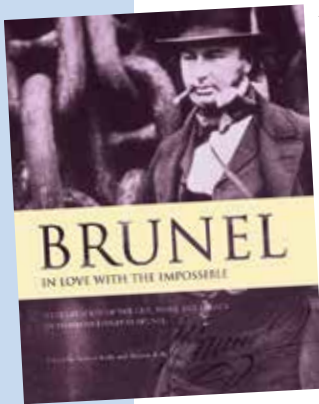
**Fifth** – free expression and truth. Culture must support open debate to encourage understanding and learning about promising ideas and to challenge difficult and troubling ones.

**Sixth** – connecting through culture. Culture links people to each other and to the city. Cultural planning means working across sectors – from transport and housing to health and sustainability.

**Seventh** – funding. The £4m raised for Brunel 200 in 2006 would be impossible today. The traditional arts funding model is broken. Increased Arts Council and local authority support is vital, as are new incentives for private giving. Attacks on sponsors like Baillie Gifford have hurt festivals and promised alternative models have not materialised. Positive developments include the West of England citizens assembly for culture and campaigns like the effort to buy Turner's painting of Bristol. 'Devolution max' should give cities more power to raise and direct funds, including tourism taxes dedicated to culture.

Disillusionment is rife. We need new ambition and vision and always a commitment to quality. We should reject cultural pessimism. Emma Harvey from Trinity Centre argued in Bristol Ideas that we need cultural beacons in each part of the city as well as Bristol Beacon in the centre. Another promising idea from the cultural sector.

Research and experience prove that culture is good for a place, economically, socially, for communities, and health. Art is a good thing and an honourable pursuit. We need to constantly remind funders and policy makers of this, but we can have the confidence that we are right. Putting in place the things I have discussed here would help create more support for culture in the future. We need to remain ambitious and optimistic. If we do, that plaque at Temple Meads will say something different – and I will pay for the screws.



Left, Publishing was an important part of the work of Bristol Ideas. This was one of 10 publications in 2006 for Brunel 200. (Qube Design)

Books proved invaluable in discussing literature and promoting reading and writing. Our city poets have provided new work about the city as well as encouraged new ways of thinking. There

is also the physical transformation of parts of the city – the triumph of Queen Square and College Green and parts of Harbourside.

Bristol Ideas built on this with new projects. Cultural planning was about arts, nature and science which helped build social capital and social infrastructure essential for people to meet, network, work, and create. We celebrated the culture of everyday life across the city and ensured culture was central to the redevelopment of the Harbourside area. We did the work others could not do – raising money, management, marketing, reporting, and evaluation – and freed up organisations, artists, writers to do what they did best. Our first project was establishing We the Curious and the development of Harbourside. We led Bristol's bid for 2008 European Capital of Culture and being shortlisted meant we could launch a four-year programme which saw us develop city-wide and national reading projects, Brunel 200, BAC 100 – on a century of aviation in Bristol, and what Smith calls the creation of the 'Bristol Agora' – the Festival of Ideas.

I have experienced many magical and transformative moments: The Wills Girls play by Show of Strength; Adventures in Motion Pictures at Arncliffe; Banksy at Bristol Museum; the ship appearing in Up the Feeder Down the Mouth in Bristol docks; Jane Duffus's Women who Built Bristol series published by terrific local press Tangent; the RWA



Our Project was the City – the work of Bristol Ideas – was published in 2024 to mark the closure of the company. (@joncraig\_photos)

reopening exhibition of artists' self-portraits; the many hundreds of writers, poets, scientists and commentators I interviewed; 30 years of Encounters Film Festival; the opening of We the Curious; bringing to public attention the Bristol work of the Romantic poets and Angela Carter; the giant Triffid we took round Bristol for the launch of our 1994 reading adventure; learning about the importance of the aviation industry from those who had worked in it; the child who filled in an evaluation form for one of our school projects who said: 'This has been the best day in the seven years I have been alive'. I recently read Moses Mackenzie's two novels set in and written from Bristol. Another example of the remarkable talent here. All these show that culture is about arts and science; the rootedness of culture in everyday lives; the potential of culture changing people's lives; culture helping us understand others; and Bristol as a centre of culture, a title given to us for being shortlisted for European Capital of Culture.

Smith starts his essay pessimistically: 'Andrew Kelly emailed me in 1995 for suggestions for memorial plaques to significant artistic figures in Bristol's history. I offered a few thoughts but finished with: 'One plaque at Temple Meads could cover them all, though. It might read: "The City of Bristol, always pleased to see the back of artists"'. He ends with our closure and the loss of other people in the city which '...have been grievous for the city we love, a misfortune for which Oscar Wilde would have found a witty phrase. I'll settle for: it may be time to think again about that plaque at Temple Meads. I'll pay for the screws.'



Above, Learning about Bristol's past was a key part of the work of Bristol Ideas. The Bristol Story in 2008 was distributed widely and free of charge to more than 85,000 people.

There will be a one-off screening of these two unique films:

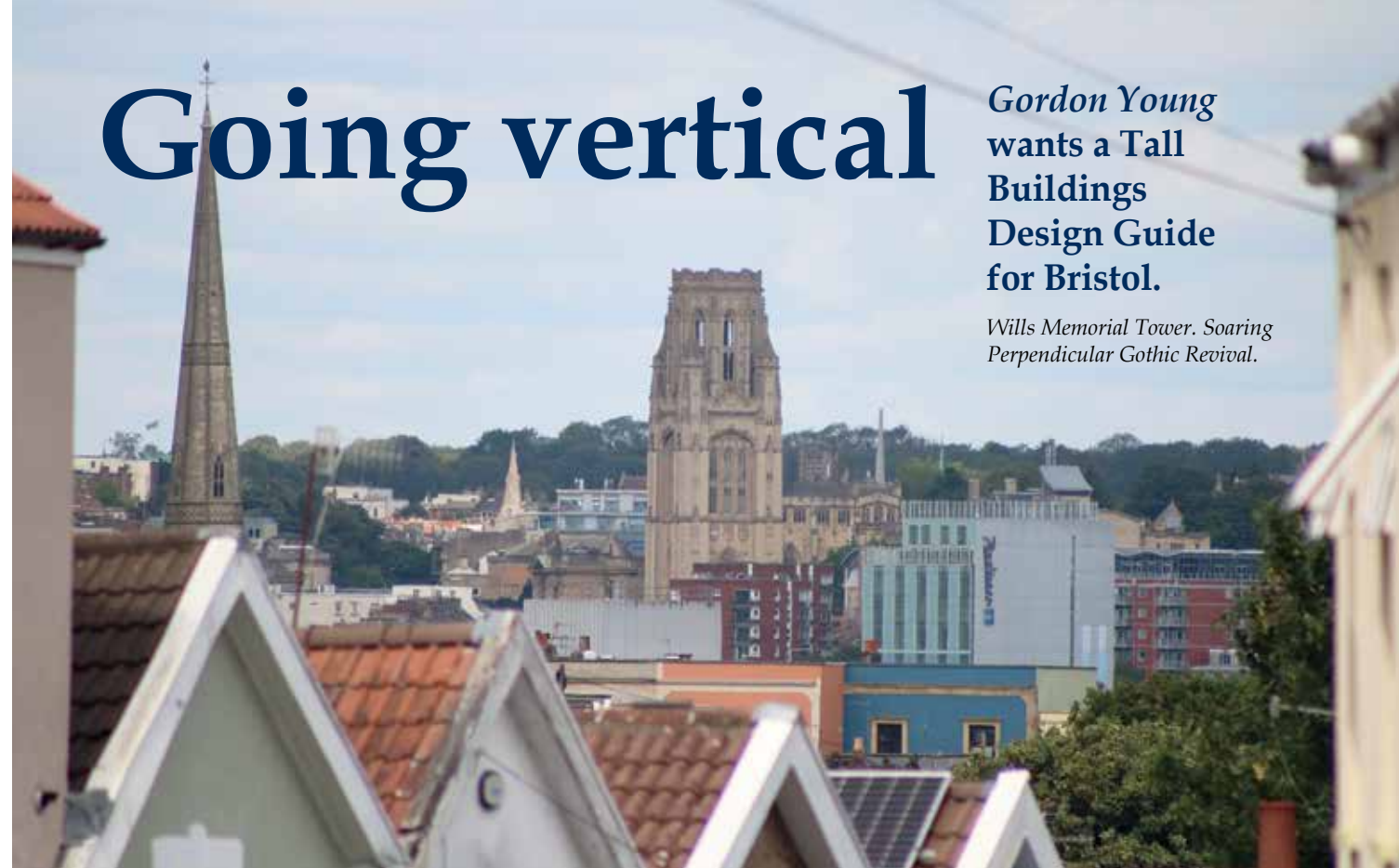
John Boorman and Bristol: The Newcomers and Money into Light  
12-5pm, October 26th, 2025  
Bristol Megascreeen, Bristol

<https://share.google/QYtlb1aJkn6MmQ4e>

# Going vertical

Gordon Young  
wants a Tall  
Buildings  
Design Guide  
for Bristol.

Wills Memorial Tower. Soaring  
Perpendicular Gothic Revival.



It looks like tall buildings are here to stay and are determined to sprout far higher than our much-loved historic landmark buildings – medieval church towers. But is there a strategy for dealing with these lofty intruders? When a site has lost its usefulness (departmental store Debenhams, the Bearpit Premier Inn) then it becomes a candidate for a tall tower, regardless of its situation and any affinity it might share with neighbouring buildings.

So, we permit the Boat Yard development, a stark 17-storey tower block on Bath Road right next to Totterdown. Why? The suburb is described by writer Jonathan Meades as 'the best-named place in Britain, where late Victorian houses do indeed teeter madly on impossible slopes'. In Manhattan, skyscrapers were seen as the solution to high land values. But this site was just an old filling station propped up on piles sunk into a muddy bank of the River Avon. Hardly Fifth Avenue...

But I've discovered a city where they are forming a strategy to deal with developers with very high ambitions: Glasgow. It has just published a Tall Buildings Design Guide.

Now, I've always had a soft spot for Glasgow: my mother hailed from there, and I consider it just as interesting topographically as Edinburgh. I can recommend Blythswood Square in the heart of the city. It crowns a hill and at each corner two roads drop away from it at right angles. This might sound like a mere geometric layout, but it is a wonderful piece of townscape. Strolling around the square, you reach each corner, and arrow-straight roads fall away. The square is like a crisp linen tablecloth with sharp folds at each corner. I once raved about it to my Scottish relatives and they laughed like Caledonian drains – it was once infamous for being Glasgow's red-light district, they gurgled.

Here's what the city's guide suggests: skyscrapers should 'express elegance' and 'slab blocks and bulky forms' are discouraged. Glasgow's skyscrapers should be 'distinctive and of exceptional design quality', with three distinct architectural sections at the base, middle and top, rather than monolithic. They should be proportionate to their location, set back from the street or include a step-back – a taller tower on top of a shorter building with a wider footprint 'to prevent taller buildings over-dominating the context below'. And clusters are to be encouraged.

Can we learn from Glasgow's deliberations? Surely, it is difficult to devise broad generalisations since every

development site is unique? Bristol has a tower which is completely out of scale with its neighbours: it has Georgian houses marching up Park Street to it, and from Blackboy Hill it's a wonderful distant silhouette.

Yes, the Wills Memorial Building doesn't follow much of Glasgow's advice and yet it's a spectacular civic ornament. It has a few enormous windows and lots of small-scale ornamentation. Today's tall buildings are polar opposites: no ornamentation and hundreds of little windows. They suffer in comparison...



Boat Yard Development. Hardly Fifth Avenue.



# How do we get a Rapid Transit Network for Bristol and the West of England?

Where's Bristol's integrated transport system? Asks Gavin Smith.



## What's odd about Bristol's public transport?

Come from a comparable city – Nottingham, Sheffield, Birmingham, Manchester, or soon Cardiff – and arrive at Temple Meads or Bristol Parkway, both some distance from the city centre. What do you notice that's odd? Why: There's no tram interchange right outside (or indeed anywhere)! More so, if you're from our twin cities Bordeaux or Hannover. Bath Spa is slightly better – it has a bus interchange. Bristol is connected to its airport by bus only. Government has now said it is willing to invest in rapid transit in Bristol, which since Leeds has the beginnings of a plan, is possibly the largest city in Europe without such a network. Mind you, Southampton, Brighton, Milton Keynes are no better. It's a Southern England complacency issue. London at least has the Underground, the London Overground, the Docklands Light Railway and the Croydon Tramlink.

Bristol is problematic. Traffic congestion and general urban efficiency, obviously. Air pollution (though the limited Clean Air Zone has tinkered with that). Street unpleasantness and safety, including 'white noise'. Rampant commuter car rat-runs through inner-city residential



areas. So it's a social justice issue. We compare poorly with pedestrianised Dutch or German city centres. Is complacency a valid excuse? Equally serious is car dependency. Many places and services are simply very hard to get to without a car or a taxi, unless you fancy cycling or scootering through miles of pumping exhausts. An issue of class and age and possibly sex.

On a regional level it's the same. If you live in Thornbury, Clevedon, Chipping Sodbury, Trowbridge, Chew Magna, and you want to get to Bristol or Bath (or travel between these towns) you might be able to take the train or a bus but it's a fair bet you're going to drive. So in a way it doesn't matter what we do inside Bristol, we'll still be inundated by cars arriving from outside.



Temple Meads Station. No integrated transport hub.

## How come?

It's not as if there haven't been plans. Since Bristol abandoned its trams in the 1940s and decided cars and aeroplanes were an adequate replacement, there has been a change in heart now that the limitations of road capacity have clicked in. In the last quarter of a century Bristol has had a string of notions and attempts to get a tram or underground system off the ground – all failures so far. We do have the beginnings of a regional rail improvement strategy, called MetroWest, everlastingly under-resourced and under-valued. We've had a white elephant too: the 'guided bus' from Ashton Gate.

Why then these on-going failures? The reasons are not hard to find. Avon County Council had a decent embryonic tram plan for Bristol, but was disbanded. When Bristol City Council (BCC) took it up they fell foul (in the absence of co-ordinated regional planning) of a disagreement with South Gloucestershire. The last Mayor of Bristol plumped for a vastly expensive 'Underground'. And as we speak, the West of England Combined Authority (WECA) may be toying with 'bus rapid transport' down Redcliffe Street to the Airport. All these proposals are and were politically inadequate. They failed



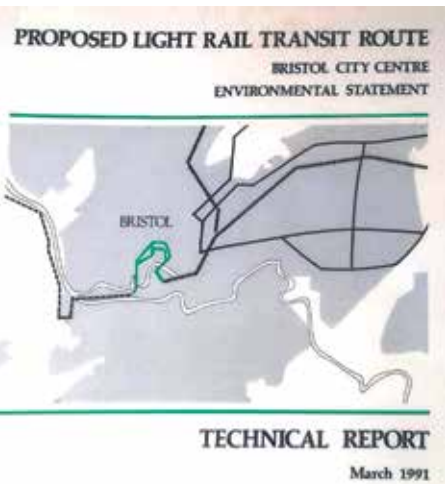
to gather popular support, having hardly been consulted upon; and being insufficiently regional, created areas that would have receive no benefit. They were unimodal: whereas transport modes have to be integrated. They did not in parallel embrace parking or ticketing policies, nor traffic management, nor civic design. Contrast Bordeaux, which in the time Bristol has been ineffectual has built an on-street tram network and done a civic redesign. Compare neighbour Cardiff, who with the Valleys and Newport have in similar timescale planned a regional rail upgrade, connecting on-street trams, bid for them and started to build. A generation ago Nottingham's trams were the brainchild of the city's Chief Planner and an equally visionary city councillor, not the transport guys at all. Croydon's trams were the result of constructive agreement between the Greater London Council, British Rail and Croydon London Borough, resulting in a marked improvement in life-chances in a major urban-edge estate (see <https://claverton-energy.com/how-trams-in-croydon-tramlink-improved-the-economy-and-sink-estates.html> ).

BCC and WECA have spent considerable sums on consultancy transport 'models', but received insufficient benefit from doing so. One model apparently 'proved' the Avonmouth-Henbury rail loop would be 'uneconomic' to re-open, because it was assumed people would have to walk to the stations. We have no idea how people will react to a new facility, but we do know public support is crucial. On the Continent, with new rapid transit systems opening yearly, they rely more upon vision and regional planning.

## Regional housing policy

Government is attempting to up the pace of housing construction by instructing Local Authorities how much rather than where development has to go, without the benefit of urban planning. But housing should not be car dependent; rather, based on a vision of regional rapid transit as they do in Sweden or Holland.

In the east of our region, Transport for New Homes together with other interests and with transport consultants, have produced an outline plan for linking the partially-satellite towns Frome, Westbury, Trowbridge, Melksham, Chippenham and Swindon by a minimum half-hour rail service on each line: a success already scored in that Melksham has been pulled back into the rail network. Massive housing expansions in these areas will otherwise continue to be almost completely road-based. Congestion worsens daily.



There has been a string of attempts to get a tram or underground system off the ground.

## Developing a plan

Now the new West of England Transport Association (WETA), a voluntary group, has come up with a proposal to crowd-fund a £20,000 consultancy study for rapid transit in the rest of the Bristol and Bath region. Here is the Scoping Study, <https://claverton-energy.com/short-and-long-version-of-transport-scoping-study-for-bristol-and-surrounds.html>. The consultants will be asked to initially evaluate a series of options. Rail re-openings on a half-hour or more frequency not only to Portishead (currently planned for hourly, and lacking an M5 Park & Ride stop), but Thornbury and Clevedon reconnecting them to the mainline at Yate and Yatton respectively. Re-opening the Yate-Westerleigh-Emerson's Green line (bypassing the mainline Winterbourne viaduct bottleneck). Running buses initially, then trams, along the Avon Ring Road. De-motorwaying the M32 – a policy adopted by the last city Mayor – removing its time-expired grade-separated concrete structures, and running a tram down it from an M4 Park & Ride with intermediate stops at Eastgate and Easton Way. A Bristol city centre tram circuit linking interchanges at Temple Meads, the Centre, Cabot Circus and Old Market. Safeguarding not only the rail lines but existing rail depots. Investigating on-street trams between Bristol and Bath and along their former tram routes, but also wide roads like Airport Way and Winterstoke Road (see map). Orbital bus routes linking suburban interchanges. Vehicle and track options: tramtrain, low-floor, overhead wires, low cost track beds, etc. All combined with a Workplace Parking Levy (like Nottingham's), completion of the ring of Residents Only Parking Zones and integrated public transport ticketing. Taxicard for the disabled. This outline evaluation is to be handed over to our MPs and the WECA Mayor. Watch this space.

Gavin Smith (ex-Bristol City Council Transport Planning & Public Transport). Many years ago, working in the voluntary sector, he commissioned Mott MacDonald for a token sum to argue the West London Line could be reopened to passengers; it is now part of the Mildmay Line of London Overground. WETA is working informally with a number of transport engineers and consultants of international repute.



# Arnolfini at Fifty



*Bush House, new home to the Arnolfini, in the 1970s (Bristol Post).*

**This autumn, the Arnolfini will mark 50 years at its home in a dockside warehouse built in the 1830s for another art lover.**

*Eugene Byrne looks at the story.*

**B**ush House, home of the Arnolfini, started out as a dockside warehouse, but its cultural heritage is longer than you might think.

On an outside wall is a Bristol Civic Society blue plaque commemorating the man it was originally built for. Daniel Wade Acraman, it says, was described as “the father of the fine arts in this city” by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, no less.

Acraman (1775-1847) was a leading businessman and merchant whose wealth enabled him to become a significant patron of the arts and a major sponsor of what are now called

the “Bristol School” of painters in the first half of the 19th century. Acraman’s support left Bristol with a priceless legacy of images from the time just before the invention of photography.

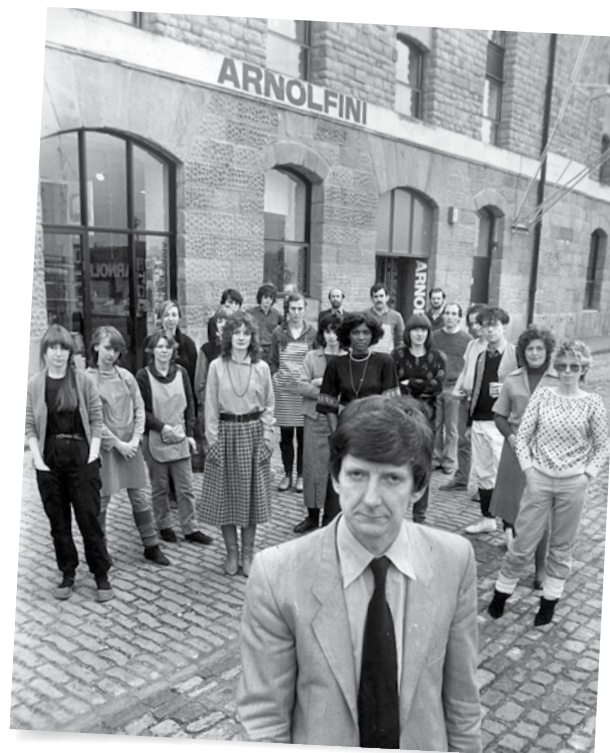
Meanwhile, Bush House remained a workaday storage facility which in its time housed everything from tea to turpentine to tobacco.

Fast forward to the 20th century and in 1961 three people - graphic designer and printer Jeremy Rees, textile artist Annabel Lawson and painter John Orsborn - opened a small art gallery on the Clifton Triangle. Its name came from one of Rees’ favourite paintings, Jan van Eyck’s Renaissance masterpiece the 1434 ‘Portrait of Giovanni Arnolfini and his Wife’.

The three founders - Rees and Lawson had recently married - were all just in their twenties, and contributed £100 each to secure the lease.

Their aim was to show new and experimental art, but it was also committed to performance, with poetry, jazz and lectures. It even hosted an appearance from superstar Beat poet Allen Ginsberg in 1965. Such was its success in the relative cultural desert of 1960s Bristol that the Arnolfini was soon in need of bigger premises.

For a while, the plan was to move into a new purpose-built complex in Castle Park. Casson, Conder & Partners were commissioned, with Council approval, to draw up plans. Not only would there be a gallery and exhibition spaces,



*Jeremy Rees and staff outside the building, January 1984 (Bristol Post).*

but it would also have a cinema and an auditorium for music, theatre and dance. There’d be craft workshops and a bar and restaurant. The latter would also offer fashionable “cordon bleu” cookery classes, too, for the same upwardly-mobile middle classes who were buying their furniture and kitchen ware from the Bristol Guild or Habitat.

The plan fell through and the Arnolfini moved to a building on Royal Oak Avenue, at the corner of Queen Square. This allowed it the space to open its famous bookshop, as well as being a bigger venue for performances, now with more emphasis on music. Michael Tippett was “composer in attendance” and Arnolfini was one of only three venues in Britain to host Steve Reich when he toured in 1972. It also started showing experimental and art films, and hosted the first of many exhibitions by Bristol artist Richard Long.

By the early 70s, with the Council’s plans for roads and covering over the docks falling through, a deal was done to move into Bush House. The Arnolfini would completely refurbish the interior and get a 199-year lease on the lower two floors, while developers the JT Group, which owned the building, would rent out the upper floors as office space.

Arnolfini temporarily moved to W-Shed (later the Watershed) while Bush House was completely gutted and refurbished on the inside with gallery spaces and an auditorium and restaurant/bar.

Arnolfini had some powerful supporters. Some £250,000 of the total

£400,000 cost of revamping the building came from a private donor and there was also sponsorship from firms like Harveys and Imperial Tobacco, plus, of course, support from the Arts Council.

The whole building would later be bought outright from the JT Group, though in 2016 it was sold to the University of the West of England with the artistic spaces leased back and the proceeds going to Arnolfini’s endowment fund.

Bush House became Arnolfini’s permanent home in October 1975. Aside from the gallery space and bookshop, there was a cinema which would become the place to go to for art movies (or perfectly mainstream European films which people in the 1970s thought must be “arty” because they had subtitles.)

At the time, Jeremy Rees said how much he wanted the place to be “approachable and accessible”, somewhere that was open to all.

“We had to spend a lot more money making the place feel friendly and open.

“The last thing I want is for the public to feel it is an exclusive club for a fringe minority.

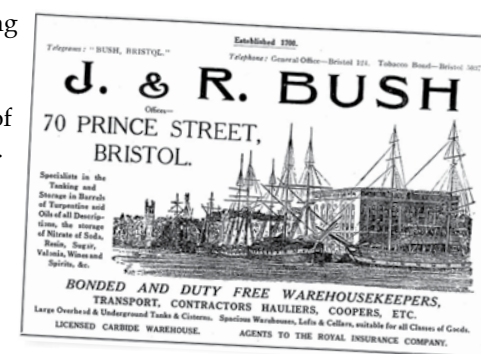
“It is not; I simply try to offer the best examples of contemporary work in the arts to the public and let them judge for themselves what they think.”

The Arnolfini’s more lasting legacy for Bristol was that it led the regeneration of the City Docks. Placing a major cultural venue right in the middle of all the dereliction of the recently-closed City Docks brought people in. It also demonstrated to councillors, developers and businesses that this was an area where all sorts of exciting things could happen. The move to Bush House was very influential in the creation of what’s now called ‘Harbourside’.

This had official recognition as early as 1984 when Arnolfini featured on a postage stamp as part of a Royal Mail issue on the theme of urban regeneration.

Jeremy Rees stayed at the helm until 1986. Just after leaving, he said: “If you ask, ‘What do people want?’ the answer, as we would all say if we’re honest with ourselves, is that we want the familiar; something that doesn’t challenge our perceptions. The Arnolfini is about challenging perceptions,” adding that the motto of the place should nonetheless be “Enjoy Yourself!”

Those two words are now displayed just inside the front door.



*Bush House in its previous role. Advert c. 1900*

## Five moments from 50 years

### 1985:

Graffiti Art was the title of an exhibition of what we now call “street art” by Bristol artists and a Londoner. At a time when this sort of thing was considered vandalism by many, it legitimised what others were seeing as an exciting new development. The local press had at least one letter demanding the Arnolfini be closed down for encouraging this sort of thing.

### 1995:

Young British Artists were becoming all the rage when a touring show called Minky Manky came to the Arnolfini, featuring work by Damien Hirst and Tracey Emin. Emin’s contribution included a tent festooned with the names of everyone she’d ever slept with.

### 2000:

Paul McCartney, who only started painting in his 40s, opened an exhibition of his paintings at the Arnolfini, having asked them if they would host it. Obviously they weren’t going to turn Macca down. Critics were a bit sneery about it, while the more conservative press was outraged by a picture titled: ‘The Queen After Her First Cigarette’.

### 2010:

Gordon Brown, David Cameron and Nick Clegg turned up at the ‘Fin’i for the second of the leaders’ debates in the run-up to the General Election. Millions watching at home, while hundreds saw it on a big screen in Millennium Square. A light-show made it look like the Arnolfini walls were falling down.

### 2017:

Grayson Perry: The Most Popular Exhibition Ever! packed them in at a time when the Arnolfini was going through a major financial crisis.



*Above left, It is vandalism or is it art? The Arnolfini makes street art respectable (among the chattering classes anyway) with its landmark exhibition in 1985 (Bristol Post). Above right, One of the party leaders’ debates came to the Arnolfini during the 2010 general election campaign. While Messrs Brown, Cameron and Clegg argued inside, a spectacular light-show was going on outside (Bristol Post).*



# Public art in Castle Park - a sad state of neglect

Gordon Young and Malcolm Ravenscroft explore the faded glory of Castle Park.

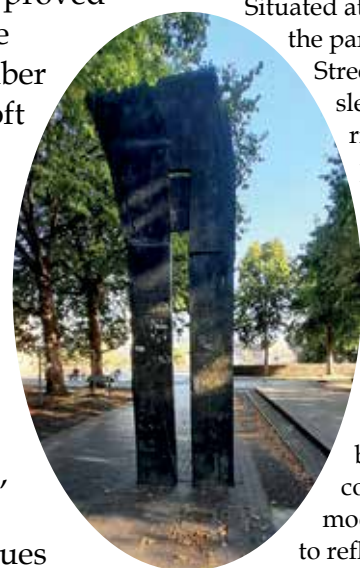
Some of you will know that I have devised walks around Clifton based on Clifton and Hotwells Improvement Society's many commemorative green plaques. The walks proved popular and so Blue Plaques Panel member Malcolm Ravenscroft and I traced our way around the city centre, logging plaques and other features – words written into our streetscape, effectively. We created more walks, highlighting a rich mix of plaques, statues with inscriptions and public artworks.

But there was a stark difference between Clifton's plaques and the installations elsewhere in the city. Plaques in Betjeman's 'handsomest suburb in Europe' are mostly high up on facades and in good shape; we were now seeing freestanding features in various states of neglect. The most alarming examples were in Castle Park. In the late 1980s, Norwich Union developed the Galleries shopping mall on condition that they would generate

a 'planning gain' by contributing £1.5m towards creation and enhancement of the park. Much of the money went on landscaping and engineering works but around £100,000 was allocated to a programme of public art installations

Here is what we discovered:

## Line From Within



Line From Within.

Situated at a busy entrance to the park at the top of Union Street, it's a lofty edifice, slender bronze pillars rising up from a base plate below ground. Sir Hugh Casson said the artist's work showed a 'sophisticated choice of surface textures interrupted occasionally by a controlled vertical cut or fine-edged aperture'. The overall brief for the sculpture commissioned for the remodelled Castle Park was to reflect the history of the site. And the sculptress, Ann Christopher affirms this: her flat shapes suggest a castle gate rising from the hidden foundations of the ancient city below.

The 4.6-metre tall structure is stained and pock-marked with the remains of posters. Last year, when we first viewed it, there was even a city council planning notice on it relating to the adjacent proposed St Mary-le-Port development. Around it, the ground is littered with chewing gum and cigarette ends. Rather than presenting itself as a well-considered

stylistic interpretation of the historic area, it is now reduced to what might be assumed to be a jagged girder, a remnant from the blitzed Castle Street shopping centre.

## Throne

It's intriguing – a carved cube of Normandy marble, an appropriate material as it connects with the invaders of our land 1,000 years ago. The throne deserves close examination to identify a similarity with the work of the sculptress Barbara Hepworth: she claimed her work was a fusion of two elements: the human figure and human spirit inhabiting the landscape. Sculptor



Throne



Beside the Still Waters.

Rachel Fenner has created footprints on the step, the folds of a robe around the seat and another garment draped over the left side. But a portion is missing and the marble is stained and needs a decent clean. And the immediate surroundings are far from regal – just overgrown bushes strewn with litter.

## Only the Dead Fish Go With the Flow

It took some finding. It's tucked away in the north-east corner, set within four walls and standing on the medieval foundations of the castle. Within, the floor has white ceramic tiles decorated with skeletal fish. But the installation is damaged and many tiles are missing or cracked. The book we consulted\* for scheme details is dated 2011, and the artwork is described as being in a dilapidated state then.

It's even worse now. We chatted to a young construction worker there who was sharing his lunch with a one-legged seagull. He recalled some years ago squatters occupied the installation and set up barricades. In the piece's concept, artist Victor Moreton chose to reference the site's association with Richard Champion's eighteenth-century porcelain factory. The fish design points to the salt cod trade undertaken by both Bristol and Oporto in Portugal, one of our twinned cities, where the tiles were produced.

The overall impression is one of a bleak, unloved feature, a sense of any cultural legacy abused, dispirited and discarded. Let us pray that Portuguese visitors do not come upon this work:



Only the Dead Fish Go With the Flow.

**STOP PRESS:** We understand that the council is currently undertaking a large-scale, master-planning project for Castle Park. Initial stages are well under way, with an audit of all the public artworks. A substantial

\*Credit: As Malcolm and I surveyed the park, we each had copies of Francis Greenacre and Douglas Merritt's book: *Public Sculpture of Bristol*, published by Liverpool University Press, ISBN 978-184631-638-8. Much of the detail above is lifted from the book. We can thoroughly recommend buying a copy – it's still in print.

they would be mortified. We weren't sorry to move on to the next piece.

## Drinking Fountain

A drinking fountain, adjacent to the cycle path, celebrated its unveiling by delivering orange juice and red wine from its fish mouths. Kate Malone has iconic images of Bristol – boats, castles, tobacco leaves, hot-air balloons, coins and lots more. At first glance it looks robust (sturdy bronze) but brickwork at the base is damaged and tiles are missing. And it's no longer a fountain since the water outlets are sealed. Riders on the cycle-path go thirsty.

## Beside the Still Waters

Peter Randall-Page was awarded this commission, the only one which makes no reference to the site's history. His brief was 'to provide a key work for the park' and he chose a formal style since his allocated site was adjacent to St Peter's Church. Two carved stones align with the nave and with a connecting canal, shaded by lime trees. We sensed a state of tranquillity but the slate inscription, adjacent walls and lamp-post are defaced with graffiti. A regular local informed us that the water flows intermittently and at times is stagnant with slime and algae. The filter is easily blocked, the pump then fails and water stops flowing.

Our exploration of Castle Park made us ponder on what is preferable: an artwork in a run-down state, a faded glory – or no artwork at all? Should we just decommission them and be done with it? But surely, that's admitting defeat – best if we don't end up with this dilemma by ensuring planned maintenance from the outset. And for this, we can take inspiration from one of our city's greatest adopted sons: Brunel. His Clifton bridge has got the decorators in. They are painting the 4,200 links of the chains holding up



Drinking Fountain.

the bridge deck. It's done every thirty years – Brunel designed the bridge to be maintainable. Nowadays, bridges are constructed for a service life of 120 years. The Suspension Bridge is 161 years old – vivid testimony to the enduring benefit that planned maintenance bestows.

Similarly, Castle Park needs a maintenance plan. Did it have one from the outset? At the Centre, the Industrial and Fine Art Exhibition of 1893 is commemorated by a little drinking fountain (yes, also not working) located between the Cenotaph and the Colston plinth. It was inspected by a conservator in 1982, who judged that regular cleaning with brass polish was wearing away detail and spoiling the stonework.

Are artists and sculptors asked for details of how to periodically clean their works?



Beside the Still Waters. Pine Cone.

for the sky. And the Galleries will be replaced by 28 storeys. With that lofty level of investment there should be enough cash to refurbish artworks, install some new ones, and devise long-term maintenance programmes.



# Wade in the Water

*Clive Burlington taps into the history of Wessex Water.*

Three years ago I embarked on what has been a real labour of love. Even though career-wise I moved on from Wessex Water 25 years ago, I occasionally I get asked for help. I've curated exhibitions, produced short films and done some writing. Up until now, my favourite assignment was *Wading Through the Years*, a book I researched and wrote that marked the 40th anniversary of the organisation in 2014. A few copies left at [www.bristolbooks.org](http://www.bristolbooks.org) if anyone wants one. Proceeds to WaterAid.

I was already familiar with the now mothballed Museum of Water Supply at the company's water treatment works at Sutton Poyntz in Dorset. Nestling in a beautiful valley, with crystal clear water from chalk streams forming the grandly named River Jordan, the site became the home of Weymouth Waterworks Company when it acquired the village water mill in 1855.

The company built cottages for its workers and a magnificent turbine house, now Grade II listed. Although the Victorian-era steam engines, workshops, pumps, pulleys and water supply and river flow measuring devices are no longer in use, they are a reminder of past engineering and innovation. The site is still operational today and supplies much of Weymouth's drinking water.

Until he retired some years ago, one of the cottages – featured in Thomas Hardy's *The Trumpet Major* – was used as an office and store for the Museum's curator. John Willows, a water-supply man all his working life, established the homely museum and archive in 1989, just as Wessex Water Authority was

*At the height of the 1976 drought, water authorities employed novel and sometimes desperate measures to restrict water consumption. The use of hosepipes and sprinklers was banned and we were encouraged to share baths. You had to watch out if you dared to water your petunias, else the hosepipe patrol police would pounce.*



being privatised.

One of his favourite stories concerned the intrepid water engineers of Weymouth. On its maiden voyage on 9 September 1859, Brunel's SS Great Eastern was severely damaged by a boiler explosion off the coast of Hastings that claimed the lives of five crew and destroyed one of its funnels. The ship was towed to Portland for repairs and seizing the opportunity, Weymouth's water engineers acquired part of the funnel. By horse and cart, they transported it to Sutton Poyntz where, after drilling hundreds of holes, it was used as a water strainer up until 2000. In 2004 the funnel was removed from the site and donated to the SS Great Britain Trust in Bristol where it is on display in the Being Brunel exhibition.

Another story concerned Eric Aubin, the superintendent of the site back in the 1950s, whose protective spirit is omnipresent. Enough said.

Although the Sutton Poyntz museum is no more, the large objects remain and some of the buildings not needed operationally, are put to good use as an Education Centre with school children visiting the site as part of their studies.

In April 1974, with Abba number one in the charts with the aptly named

'Waterloo', Wessex Water Authority was born. It was one of 10 regional water authorities set up under the 1973 Water Act. The re-organisation was revolutionary for its time, with 'integrated river basin management' coming under one roof.

Overnight the new organisation inherited sewerage and sewage treatment from District Councils, land drainage and flood protection from River Authorities and the water supply operations of some councils water boards. Throw in fisheries

protection and pollution control and it was quite a task.

The fledgling organisation brought together 2000 people from 99 different organisations. It spanned 10,000 sq kms across the counties of Avon (as was), Somerset, Dorset, Wiltshire and parts of Hampshire and Gloucestershire.

Required by statute to 'have regard for its water heritage', Wessex Water went further than most. It established an Industrial Archaeology Group to record what it had inherited and put in place a plan to conserve and protect these artefacts and paper records.

Already proud custodians of its heritage, the culture was already there long before John Willows was handed the task of establishing the museum and archive. For 40 years he harangued colleagues, kept abreast of office and depot closures and at every internal re-organisation, ensured as best he could that the internal archive would have first call on any plans, documents, photographs, charts and so forth that were surplus.

The 99 organisations that made up Wessex Water Authority, were themselves formed from dozens of other smaller concerns going back to the early 1800s. The outbuildings and the waterworks cottage were bursting at the

seams long before the curator retired.

With advice and visits from specialists from Dorset History Centre and Bristol Archives, in September 2022, I set about sorting through the shelves, cupboards, plan chests, metal trunks and all the outbuildings with their hidden nooks and crannies. Every visit to the foreboding turbine house has to start with the greeting, "Good morning Eric." Or else...

Since then more than 100,000 documents, plans, ledgers, charts,



*Above left, Wessex Water's new HQ at Passage Street, Bristol in 1978. No desktop computers for the Accounts Dept in those days. Note the adding machines, telephones and bottles of Snopake. Above right, Analytical testing of trade effluents and treated sewage at Katherine Farm Laboratory, Avonmouth in 1967 when managed by the City Engineer and Planning Officer's Dept.*

photos, glass plates and volumes of files have been gifted to the county and city archive services that cover the Wessex Water region. Vans and estate cars were dispatched from Bristol, Bath, Taunton, Trowbridge and Dorchester, returning with the historic records relating to their areas.

Some items needed conservation, some were worn through constant use, but most were in decent condition. Thanks to a £200,000 grant from Wessex Water, the respective archive services are able to care for the collections in perpetuity and are now cataloguing the material they have inherited.

Most of the cataloguing will be completed by the end of the year. Academics, researchers, social historians and former employees will then be able to search the online catalogues at Bath Record Office, Bristol Archives, Dorset History Centre, Gloucestershire Archives, Hampshire Archives, Somerset Heritage Centre and Wiltshire History Centre. The centres are open to anyone to inspect and use these resources.

One document made me chuckle. It was an analysis of a water sample taken at Mr Huntley's well by Devizes

Rural District Council on 15 March 1902. After testing the sample in a laboratory, Dr J Tubb-Thomas reported thus... "This is a water of very bad quality, very seriously polluted with organic matter of animal origin, and absolutely unfit for drinking or indeed any domestic use. It would make an excellent liquid manure...for delicate plants." A useless fact uncovered since, is that Dr Thomas's car, was the third vehicle to be registered in Wiltshire!

Closer to home, the Bristol-related



material in the collection mostly concerns infrastructure improvements in sewerage and sewage treatment, ie the dirty water side of the business. In the city, drinking water is supplied by Bristol Water, and its historic archive was deposited with Bristol Archives in 1994 and is available for online research and visits to B Bond Warehouse.

On the sewerage front, the Wessex Water material comprises volumes of files and photos showing, for example, the building of Avonmouth Sewage Treatment works in the 1960s, the

Ashton Pumping Station in the 1970s and the ship, the Glen Avon, plying its trade up and down the Bristol Channel in the days when disposal of sewage sludge to sea was acceptable. If you're into tunnelling there's plenty showing interceptor sewers being built deep under the city.

In addition to the infrastructure material, the collection records what office life was like and how technological improvements have changed the landscape considerably.

Adding machines in accounts offices, typewriters and typing pools, telephone exchanges and switchboards, massive mainframe computers and the obligatory staff sports and social events. The collection of employee magazines from 1974 is magnificent.

My job is not quite done. Around 1000 video tapes and some 16mm films are currently being digitised and I'm slowly sorting through the remaining 20,000 or so photographs.

I've started, so I'll finish...



*Foundation work for the Ashton Pumping Station exposed an old river quay seen in the foreground. In the background is A Bond Warehouse. Photo taken on 3 April 1968.*



# Bristol Homeopathic Hospital

*Marian E Read gives a brief history.*

In May 2025, the Bristol Homeopathic Hospital (BHH) building, at the apex of Cotham Hill and St Michael's Hill, celebrated the centenary of its opening. This building replaced the original BHH that was first located at 7 Brunswick Square (1903-1920) and later, in Cotham House (1920-1925).

In the mid-1880s, conventional medicine often did more harm than good, while homeopathy was considered to be harmless and safe. This contrast is depicted in the allegorical painting by Alexander Beideman in 1857, 'Homeopathy Looks at the Horrors of Allopathy', which is in the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow, Russia.

However, at the turn of the century, medical staff of hospitals in Bristol forbade physicians practising homoeopathy to hold any office in them. To overcome this restriction, in 1903, the Brunswick Square Homeopathy Dispensary (1884-1903) was converted to incorporate 12 beds, thereby

becoming the first Bristol Homeopathic Hospital (also known as Hahnemann Hospital). Walter Melville Wills (1861-1941; hereafter called Melville) and his wife Lousia Gertrude Wills (1862-1936) were active supporters of the BHH both financially and practically.

To increase the number of hospital beds where physicians could legally practise homeopathy, they funded a new hospital in memory of their son Robert Bruce Melville (1891-1915) who was killed at St Éloi.

## The new Homeopathic Hospital

In March 1916, Melville instructed Oatley and Lawrence Architects to draw plans for a hospital and in 1917 purchased Cotham House estate. The new BHH was also known as the Bruce Melville Wills Memorial Hospital. Because building the hospital could not commence until after WWI, it was not until 10th June, 1921, that HRH Edward, the Prince of Wales laid the foundation stone. He used a silver trowel that was donated by local silversmith David Fullerton.



*The entrance to Hampton House was moved to the side of the building.*

On 26th May 1925, the new BHH, with 61 beds, was opened by HH Princess Helena Victoria, granddaughter of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert. Melville endowed the hospital to the people of Bristol; however, it was not legally documented, allowing the NHS to sell it in 1993.

The low balustrade over the arched original entrance has 'BRISTOL HOMOEOPATHIC HOSPITAL' carved into the stone.

Each ward was south-facing, bright, airy, with windows overlooking the gardens, and had a balcony. People travelled miles for treatment where homeopathic remedies were offered alongside conventional medicines. It was a Voluntary Hospital run by committees; members of which and most doctors were unpaid.

The hospital had state-of-the-art underfloor heating, electric lighting, X-Ray & electrical shock equipment, an ultraviolet lamp, laboratories, a laundry, a steam disinfectant and a kitchen that could cater for 80 people. The operating theatre had marble-lined walls for ease of cleaning.

Admission to general wards required a letter from the individual's Medical Attendant, and patients paid one guinea/week. Funding for patients who were unable to pay came from donations and fees from paying patients. Patients in semi-private wards paid 3½ guineas/week and an additional ½ guinea for the use of the theatre. Private patients paid 7 guineas/week, which included board, nursing, use of theatre, medicine, dressings and stimulants. In 1929 there were nearly 1,000 in-patient and 15,000 out-patient attendances.



*South facing aspect.*

## The NHS years

In July 1948, most hospitals, clinics and dispensaries transferred to the NHS. Despite concerted efforts to be disclaimed by the Minister of Health, the BHH passed into the control of the NHS Authority of the South West Regional Hospital Board. Apart from a change in funding, the BHH continued to function much as it always had, at least for a while.

In 1980, while the Bristol Eye Hospital (BEH) was rebuilt, BHH in-patients were transferred to the BRI and the BGH while ophthalmic in-patients were accommodated at the BHH. The Out Patients Department (OPD) remained at the BHH. From July 1981 to 1986, BHH accommodated both BHH and ophthalmic in-patients, who in January 1986 were transferred to the newly rebuilt BEH.

David Spence (Consultant Homeopathic Physician and Clinical Director of Homeopathic Medicine at BHH, later Lead Clinician) and John Hughes-Games were assured that the BHH would be reopened for homeopathic in-patients. Throughout 1986 and 1987, they fought hard to

save the BHH but homeopathic in-patients never returned to the BHH. The BHH was destined to change its occupancy but at least the magnificent building was not demolished to build a block of flats!

## Post NHS Years

In early 1993, the Bristol Health Authority sold the BHH building and Cotham House to the Secretary of State for Health and a few months later ownership transferred to the University of Bristol (UoB). The BHH building was renamed Hampton House. The Homeopathic OPD moved into the converted Annexe.

In 1999, it was decided to relinquish homeopathic beds at the BEH to finance an additional Homeopathic Consultant. Elizabeth Thompson was appointed and in 2009, became the Clinical Director of Homeopathic Medicine when Spence retired. In January 2013, the Homeopathic OPD moved to the South Bristol Community Hospital in Hengrove and remained within the University Hospitals Bristol NHS Foundation Trust.

The entrance to Hampton House was moved to the side of the building.

The current Landlord of Hampton House leases the building to both the University Hospitals of Bristol (NHS) and UoB who rent spaces to various practitioners. In January 2012, Hampton House became a Grade II listed building (National Heritage for England, entry 1403123). Hopefully, this secures its future.

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This article was extracted from 'History of the Bristol Homeopathic Hospital: In celebration of the centenary of the opening of the Bruce Melville Wills Memorial Hospital' by Marion E. Reid (mereid2010@gmail.com).

*Foundation stone*



*The low balustrade over the arched original entrance has 'BRISTOL HOMOEOPATHIC HOSPITAL' carved into the stone.*

## Hospital Odyssey

by Linda Ewles

The historical hospital homeopathic was built and funded by folk philanthropic. Hampton House, Cotham House, steeped in history, were loved by the public, lauded by royalty. For over a century they've existed, those elegant buildings, Grade Two listed.

Treatments that are homeopathic are not like orthodox allopathic which once used methods quite horrific like bleeding and leeches, mercury, arsenic while homeopathic was harmless, holistic, practitioners healing and so empathetic. Clinics, dispensaries at first were nomadic, homeopaths quite peripatetic, till hilltop St Michael's was duly selected as the site for the hospital to be erected. Foundation stone laid nineteen-twenty-one by the Prince of Wales, royal patron.

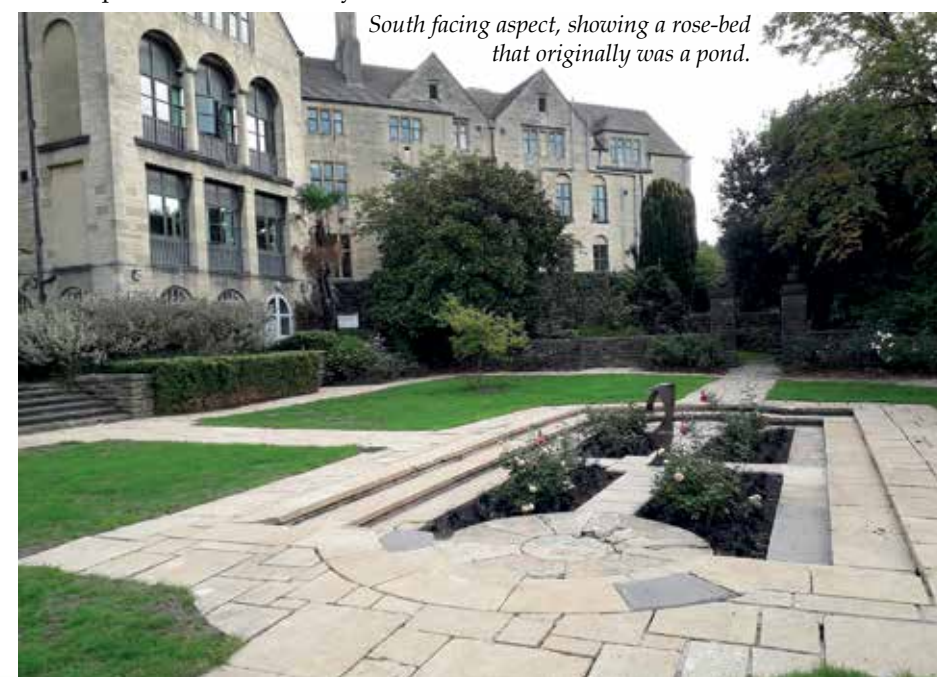
Now was the heyday of this lovely hospital, everything done for uplift psychological: porters would meet you and carry your cases, gardeners' sweet roses brought smiles to your faces, flowers were cut daily to place in each ward, and patients paid only what they could afford.

Treatments for everything: gynaecological, optical, dental, all faults anatomical, operations, medications, procedures electrical, with outcomes convincing even the sceptical. Trained nurses looked after the sick and the weak and had half days off, two every week.

But war came with bombs and evacuation, and then there was NHS incorporation. The buildings and gardens were bought, sold and rented, their homeopathic days finally ended. (Use by the Uni for student accommodation was met by neighbours with great consternation.)

But let's celebrate - homeopathy survives. Today you could even say that it thrives, practised in many Bristolian places by caring healers with smiley faces including The National Centre for Integrative Medicine which does not sound poetic like 'homeopathic' so here's where this odyssey ends.

Views on the efficacy of homeopathy vary. In 2017 NHS England said it would no longer fund homeopathy on the NHS as the lack of any evidence for its effectiveness did not justify the cost. Ed.



*South facing aspect, showing a rose-bed that originally was a pond.*



# Behind the Scenes at the Museum



**M Shed? You've probably been there more than once. If so, you'll think you've seen it all. Maybe, but have you seen what's not on show? Eugene Byrne joins one of their popular Behind-the-Scenes tours, and learns a thing or two.**

**T**hey have all sorts of stuff in storage down at M Shed. There are things that everyone can agree might have a place in a museum display – a sedan chair made in the 1700s, some Douglas motorcycles and a Douglas-made Vespa scooter, for instance. And anyone familiar with Bristol's history and mythology will be fascinated by the death-mask of Alfred, Bristol Zoo's famous gorilla.

And then there's stuff that looks like junk. In a couple of plastic boxes, for instance, are spools of wrapping for chocolate bars – rubbish of no interest at all, right?

But these were the last wrappings on the machines on the day that chocolate production ended at the Fry's factory in Keynsham, the last vestiges of a local industry going back hundreds of years.

All this and more besides is what's on offer if you take a look at the M Shed storage facilities. Join one of the Behind The Scenes Tours and, along with a Left, Cary visits M Shed. But does he know what's behind the scenes?



*An old typesetting machine from a printer's in Kingswood – an absolute triumph of engineering genius and analogue complexity, long superseded by computers, and now in storage.*

small group of others, find out about just a few of the items, all explained by an experienced and knowledgeable guide.

Sue Thurlow, M Shed volunteer and one of the regular guides, says: "I think for almost everybody it's the privilege of seeing things that aren't on view to the general public.

"You can sense their excitement in doing something that feels a little bit forbidden, and on every tour when I open the door to go into the stores, someone in the group will go 'Wow!'"

So yes, you get to see all sorts of interesting things that you've not seen before. If you've lived in Bristol long enough and have visited M Shed, or its predecessor on the same site, the old Bristol Industrial Museum, you're possibly also going to be reunited with things that used to be exhibits but which have since gone into storage. For instance, those old scale models of various Bristol built ships that were one of the popular features at the Industrial Museum.

Longstanding Bristol residents might also remember the statue of Thomas Chatterton which used to be by St Mary Redcliffe Church. The local press still sometimes gets letters from people wondering why it can't be put back there, or erected somewhere else. The reason is that years of weather and air pollution have taken their toll and it's so tatty that it's not worth looking at. (Wasn't that good in the first place. Ed)

Perhaps the real value in taking a tour is the insights you get on how



*"It's a completely different way of engaging with things." Sue Thurlow realizes it's Fry's.*

museums work, and the processes behind what to exhibit and what not to. And, just as important, how are things exhibited in the way they are?

So here's a photo stand-in board in which you can be one of the Five Boys from the famous old Fry's chocolate advert. It was made for an M Shed exhibition on chocolate in 2013, and, Sue explains, there was more to it than just a bit of fun.

It was also a promotional tool for the museum and the exhibition because, the thinking went, people would take pictures of family and friends with their heads stuck through the holes and then post them on social media, which would then hopefully prompt those who saw the pictures to go and visit the exhibition. Cunning, eh?

Or here is a bust of 19th century Bristol sugar refiner Conrad Finzel. It once stood in what's now Bristol Beacon but disappeared when the Colston Hall (as it was then) was undergoing a major refurbishment in the 1970s.

The bust resurfaced some years later in the Shakespeare pub in Totterdown when it was being run by the legendary "Mad Ernie" Somers, an extrovert figure who made his pub famous

London fleeing the Napoleonic Wars. His sugar business in Bristol was a huge success and he became known as "The Good Conrad Finzel" for his Christian rectitude, his paternalistic employment practices and the huge charitable donations he made.

But hardly anyone has heard of him nowadays, and a bust of some dead Victorian geezer won't be of much interest to museum visitors. But if you leave on the woolly hat that he wore in Mad Ernie's pub and stick a sign on him explaining how he was a sort of



*A souvenir of the last day at Keynsham.*

honorary regular there, you have a story. So the bust was on display at M Shed in that guise for some years before it was decided his time was up.

Further along, we're looking at a bunch of signs and placards from the Black Lives Matter demonstration in Bristol in 2020 that led to the toppling of the Colston Statue.

Whatever you think of the statue's removal, we can surely concur that it was a pivotal moment in Bristol's history. Consequently, it was thought necessary not just to fish the statue out of the Floating Harbour, but to retrieve some of the signs held by the demonstrators as well. These were collected from around the base of the Colston plinth and taken to the M Shed.

But most of those who made the signs improvised them in minutes with no thought for posterity. It turns out that storing and preserving them, especially the cardboard ones, is a complicated process

*Left, Placards from the demo that saw Colston's fall. They're history now.*



involving some A-Level chemistry.

In the space of a tour that lasts about an hour (maybe a bit longer if everyone's keen) there's really only time to look at some of the objects, but all have a story to tell about the city's heritage.

"Every object comes as a surprise, and it's hard to say what are the favourites with visitors," says Sue. "Certainly the chocolate easter egg making machine gets a lot of interest, but then anything involving chocolate is going to engage people.

"With some of the engineering stuff I keep an eye out to check that none of the visitors are glazing over. But then in nearly every tour there's an engineer, or 'frustrated' engineer, who finds it fascinating.

"It's a different experience from visiting a museum. Seeing the things behind the scenes and having them explained to you be a fellow human being means you might well get more out of it. It's a completely different way of engaging with things."



*Victorian industrialist and philanthropist, or the object of late 20th century pub silliness? Conrad Finzel's bust.*

**# M Shed's Behind The Scenes Tours** take place every Tuesday to Saturday at 2.30pm and also at 11.30am on Wednesdays and are suitable for all ages over 12 years. Tickets are £6 (additional donations welcome!) and advance booking is advised though walk-ins are welcome on the day if the space is available. For further details and booking, see [tinyurl.com/MShedTours](http://tinyurl.com/MShedTours)



# Every Bristolian a Swimmer

**Stephen E Hunt gives a verrucas-and-all history of swimming in Bristol.**

*A few days ago I visited Bristol, with the idea of discovering for myself to just what extent these efforts to popularise the sport were meeting with success, and I have to confess that I was absolutely amazed at the progress which the natatory art is making. Probably in no town in the country is swimming booming to such an extent, as it is in Bristol.*<sup>1</sup>

12 July 1922, Bristol Archives, Miscellaneous Papers relating to Bristol Swimming Baths.

In the nineteenth century, the demand for access to places to swim was included in a set of basic municipal amenities necessary for the betterment of working-class lives and for a flourishing urban community.

In Bristol, this was expressed in the 1871 pamphlet called *The Cry of the Poor*, written by “sixteen working men of Bristol” which lists “free bathing places”, alongside appeals for facilities such as libraries, public parks, and a fish market. John Fox, Labour candidate for the city’s School Board in 1886, decried the imposition of religious education upon school children, preferring “something more practical, such as swimming or something that would be of real benefit.”<sup>2</sup> Among the City Museum’s treasures, a Bristolian 1920s Transport and General Workers’ Union

banner also illustrates this cause. The banner includes complementary insets featuring swimming baths (possibly based on those at Kingsdown) to the left, and a public library to the right, representing the labour movement’s physical and mental aspirations. Happily, between the mid-Victorian era and the 1920s, much progress had been made in providing such amenities.

I have been keen to document and celebrate Bristol’s swimming tradition as part of our maritime city’s heritage. It is also important to make the argument for continuing and enhancing public provision of pools and access to swimming sites for community and personal well-being in the twenty-first century. The five periods that make up my chronological typology of municipal swimming provision are all well represented in Bristol: Victorian, Edwardian, interwar, postwar, and twenty-first century. The city has two surviving historic public swimming pools in use, namely Bristol South Baths in Dean Lane, Bedminster, and the Jubilee Swimming Pool in Jubilee Road, Knowle. To these can be added baths that have been repurposed, including Hotwells Baths in Jacobs Wells Road (empty, pending development by Trinity Community Arts), and Bristol North Baths in Gloucester Road (offices and studios).

The Victorian era is represented by early, segregated, rather paternalistic facilities constructed by the Bristol Corporation. The public baths at Broad Weir in the city centre were

opened as early as 1850, being among the first in the country constructed under the Baths and Washhouses Act of 1846, partly motivated by public health concerns in the aftermath of cholera epidemics in the city. However, initially these offered only slipper baths for washing, and laundry facilities; swimming baths were not added until 1877. Bristol’s first municipal swimming facilities were at the Mayor’s Paddock, between Redcliffe and Bedminster, featuring a purpose-built “plunge pool” for swimming from the outset in 1873. In 1889, these were joined by the Hotwells Baths. This surviving “Northern Renaissance Revival style” building is beautifully described as featuring “Red Cattybrook brick with buff terracotta dressings, gable stacks and slate roof” in its Historic England listing. While it has long since ceased to be a swimming pool, it retains an aesthetically appealing exterior that shows why Victorian pools are often likened to chapels, palaces, or temples. The municipal baths were considerably predated by Rennison’s eighteen-century private swimming baths in Montpelier. Together with formerly private baths at Clifton and Kingsdown, Rennison’s boosted the Bristol Corporation’s complement of swimming facilities when they came into public ownership during the later Victorian era.

The construction of outdoor amenities marks a striking shift in the Edwardian period. Although one new indoor pool was opened at Barton Hill, three outdoor swimming baths

were constructed in recently created “Peoples Parks”. While seasonal, these would have been quicker and cheaper to construct. They were free of segregation into 1st and 2nd class facilities and were sooner to adopt more relaxed attitudes to mixed swimming. A 1930s Bristol Baths Committee brochure illustrates the public health claims being advanced for outdoor swimming:

*Bristol is singularly fortunate in possessing three such spacious open-air baths as those provided in Eastville, Greville Smyth and Victoria Parks... It cannot be too strongly impressed upon city workers and dwellers that the regular practice of open-air bathing has tonic and restorative effects on the whole system, which result in a definite increase in health, energy and efficiency... perhaps it is not generally recognised that the use of the open-air bathing facilities provided in these three Bristol parks is as effective for ultra-violet irradiation as a visit to the seaside. Early morning open air bathing is available at these establishments at reduced rates, and Mixed Bathing at all times.*

It was during the interwar period that Bristol established its reputation as a “City of Swimmers,” as proclaimed by a newspaper headline in *The Evening World* in 1930.<sup>3</sup> The Bristol Baths Committee announced its aspiration “Every Bristolian a swimmer” and set a target that every home should have a swimming facility within a mile.

Charles Frederick William Denning (1876-1952) is a hero of the Bristol’s public baths story, transforming the swimming experience during the interwar period. Denning was President of the Bristol Society of Architects, and made a major contribution to the city’s built environment. Given his involvement with planning the garden-suburb style municipal estates at Sea Mills, Horfield, Knowle West, and Bedminster, Denning defined much of the urban geography of Bristol’s residential areas as we know them today.

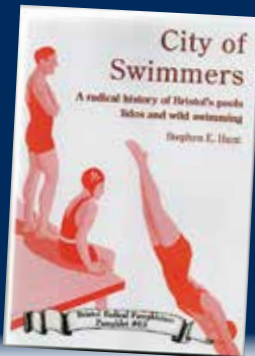
Five swimming baths were constructed during the interwar period, largely in areas associated with these burgeoning garden-city influenced council estates.

Right, Every Bristolian a Swimmer. Credit Bristol Archives.

Far left, Bristol Corporation Baths. Credit Bristol Archives.

Middle, The former Victorian bath house on Jacobs Well’s Road has sat empty since 2017. There are plans for development by Trinity Community Arts.

Left, Bristol Corporation Baths brochure (c1930s). Credit Bristol Archives.



Denning drew up the plans for them from his Orchard Street office. There were new facilities at the two surviving today, Bristol South Baths (1929) and the Jubilee (1935) and at Shirehampton (1931) and Speedwell (1935). He was also responsible for rebuilding and modernising the mid-Victorian facilities at Broad Weir.

When designing the Bristol South Baths, Denning undertook extensive research, combining art-deco style with the most cutting-edge features of other baths he visited around the country. Their opening prompted celebration and municipal pride, being regarded as the most up-to-date and “finest bath in the kingdom.” The *Bristol Times and Mirror* reported that the jubilation was such that “several policemen were required to control the huge crowd,” at the first gala, in 1931.



Jacobs Wells Baths. Credit Bristol Archives

After World War II, swimming regained its popularity, with attendances at Bristol’s pools reaching 900,000 in 1950. As austerity eased, there was renewed demand for modern amenities and a more inclusive ethos emerged from the early 1960s onwards. The Filwood Swimming Baths (1962) were an example, with the City Architect, Albert Harry Clarke, overseeing their Modernist design. This complemented Knowle West’s existing set of community assets, including the community centre, cinema, and the art-deco shopping boulevard. The expansion of provision was promoted by the foundation of the Sports Council, in 1965, and the launch of the Sport for All initiative, in 1976. To date, social and architectural historians have largely ignored the post-War leisure centres and swimming pools such as those locally at Henbury, Yate, and Bishopsworth. This is partly because

they are felt to be too recent and perhaps because many are utilitarian, no-frills constructions, meriting little architectural interest. The investment in new facilities with modern pools, however, perhaps reflected some prevailing social-democratic consensus around community welfare.

Sadly, in the twenty-first century, characterised by neoliberal policies and a return to austerity in the public sector, there has been a staged decline, with municipal swimming provision diminishing across the city. Already in 2002, a residents’ survey included the finding that “the sports and leisure facilities provided by the council [were] one of the ten worst things about living in the city”. It was also reported that 40% of Bristolians used out-of-town swimming amenities.

There were two new pools to offset the closures, with the addition of a pool to the leisure centre at Horfield, in 2005, and state-of-the-art facilities at Hengrove (2012), constructed under Public Finance Initiative arrangements. There are six swimming pools within the Bristol City Council area in the present day. While other urban areas may have fared worse in terms of public provision, we have drifted some way from being a City of Swimmers.

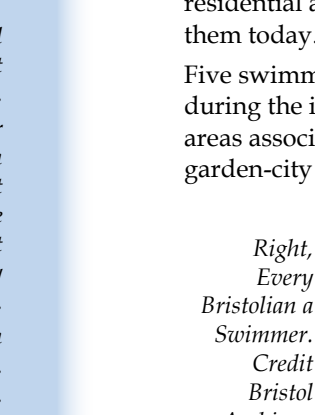
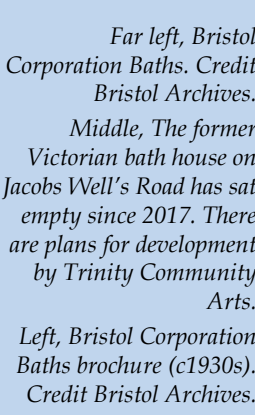
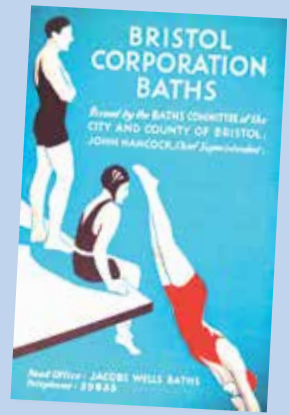
It is important to sustain integrated sets of key community infrastructure and services under democratic control at the neighbourhood level. Resources such as swimming pools turn a space into a place and nurture belonging. Such social goods help to make a neighbourhood a pleasure to inhabit, full of opportunities to take part in sports and other shared social activities for wellbeing. With their role in promoting preventative medicine, pools act as an unofficial wing of the national health service, as evidenced in Swim England’s 2017 report *The Health and Wellbeing Benefits of Swimming Pools*. As a part of the city’s living heritage, affordable municipal swimming facilities should be cherished and defended, but also developed and ideally expanded, for the enjoyment of the next generation.

Stephen E Hunt is the author of *City of Swimmers, Bristol Radical Pamphleteer Pamphlet # 63*.

1 “The New Crawl. Little Girls who can Swim the Hundred in 1 min. 10 secs!” [newspaper cutting – newspaper unknown], 12 July 1922, Bristol Archives, Miscellaneous Papers relating to Bristol Swimming Baths, Newspaper cutting scrapbooks 1911-1931, 12782/2.

2 Samson Bryher, *An Account of the Labour and Socialist movement in Bristol: Describing its Early Beginnings, Struggles and Growth* (Bristol: Bristol Labour Weekly, 1929), 46.

3 “Bristol A City of Swimmers”, *Evening World*, 12 July 1930, Bristol Archives, Miscellaneous Papers relating to Bristol Swimming Baths, Newspaper cutting scrapbooks 1911-1931, 12782/2.







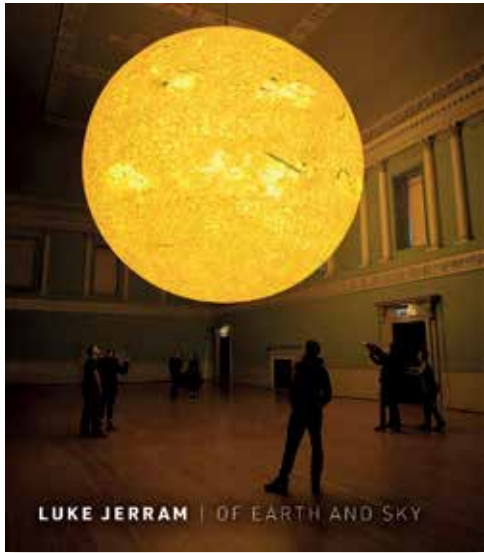
# Book Reviews

Mike Manson looks at some books.

## Of Earth and Sky

Luke Jerram

Bristol Books £18.00



## Days out around Bristol, Bath and Somerset

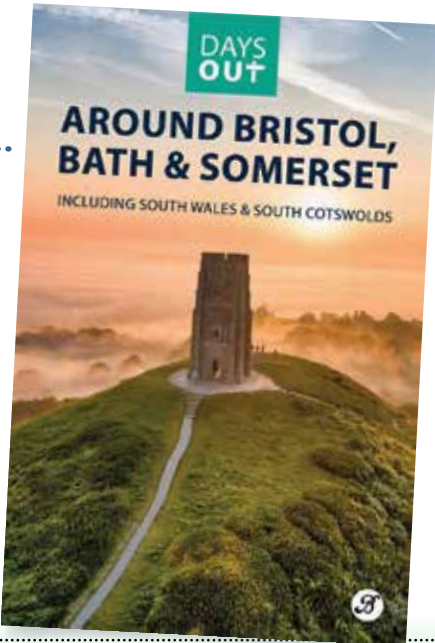
Bristol Books, £14.99

If you want to go further than Clevedon this book will be useful. Packed with ideas for days out within around an hour or so's drive. From the Mendip Hills and Somerset Levels, to South Wales, the southern Cotswolds, the Coast and its resorts. Quirky facts and background information provide context, while divided into micro-regions, maps provide orientation.

Of Earth and Sky celebrates 30 projects by Bristol-based artist Luke Jerram.

Jerram is a specialist in creating artwork which often attracts large audiences. If you've seen his Museum of the Moon, which was shown in Wills Memorial Building, or Gaia at Bristol Cathedral, you will know how awe-inspiring Jerram's art works can be.

In this sumptuously illustrated book Jerram gives an insight into how he works in collaboration with other artists, performers, scientists, anthropologists and members of the public right across the world to create his astonishing projects.



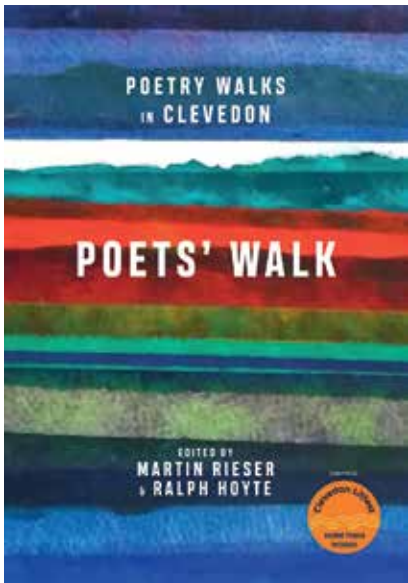
## Poets' Walk

Edited by Martin Rieser and Ralph Hoyte

Bristol Books, £12.00

Clevedon, whether it's an amble along the pier or a cup of tea on the waterfront, is always a satisfying trip from Bristol. In this book several of our region's best-loved poets have responded to subjects explored by Coleridge and Tennyson – themes of loss or sounds in nature. Gorgeously illustrated by black and white photos.

Also available to download from your smartphone as an audio poemscape. Supported financially by Clevedon LitFest.



## The Severn

Low Tide at Poets' Walk

Judy Darley

We built our nest in winter and watched days lengthen as spring storms raged. Now, strolls up coastal hills reward with seesaw-calls of goldcrest, firecrest, trilling green finch, ticking robin and wren.

Close to St Andrew's church, chickens scrape through cabbage leaves.

At low tide, sandbanks crest like whales, while Penarth lights its windows almost close enough to wave. Starboard as we gaze, the pier bares fishbone pilings, while to port, beached boats imprint ribcages into mud where waders feast.

Just twelve months ago, we caught the bus here for a daytrip. Curlews piped promises shivered my spine. Now, when the curlew calls, I press my palm to yours: silent applause for our move to this brink of sea.

# Bristol Civic Society membership

## Your Civic Society needs YOU!

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

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

### Bristol Civic Society is:

\* Saving the best of Bristol's past

\* A powerful voice in Bristol's future

\* Campaigning on issues that affect us all - and the generations to come

\* A great way to make new friends (and maybe re-connect with old ones!)

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



### Joining is easy

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

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

## Membership application to join Bristol Civic Society

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

**Please return to:** Membership Secretary, Bristol Civic Society, 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](mailto:membership@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk)

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

Email .....@ .....

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.

I would like tax to be reclaimed on my donation under the Gift Aid Scheme. I am a UK tax payer and pay an amount of income tax and/or capital gains tax at least equal to the tax that can be reclaimed on my donation. Bristol Civic Society is registered charity No. 244414

### Please tick

YES ☐ NO ☐

### Standing order mandate

To: (name of your bank).....

Account Number..... Sort Code .....

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

the sum of £..... (3) ( ..... (4) pounds)

to Lloyds Bank (sort code 30-94-80) for the account of Bristol Civic Society (account no. 00663177)

reference no. (5) ..... (for completion by BCS)

Name.....

Date ..... Signature (6) .....

Insert (1) next month (2) this year (3) appropriate rate (4) amount in words (5) leave blank (6) wet signature needed by the bank



# Events

## Autumn / Winter 2025

We are the BCS not the BBC, but like that august institution we do try to follow Lord Reith's principles of "informing, educating and entertaining" and our events programme is a key part of this.

We try and strike a balance between, on the one hand, topics which celebrate and illuminate Bristol's history and heritage, which are always popular, and on the other, as a Society that looks to the future, we also engage with the thornier issues of today's city- the often knotty problems of housing, planning, transport and the economy which will determine the sort of city our grandchildren live in.

We also aim for a mix of types of event: visits to venues of interest, always popular but which can only cater for small numbers; conventional speaker

meetings in a hall; and online talks using zoom - very convenient for speakers and audience - but perhaps something is lost in terms of immediacy, and the absence of any

opportunity to meet other members. We are aiming to revert to doing more meetings in halls - and perhaps with free tea and coffee, practicalities permitting. We tried this earlier this year and it was very popular.

At the time of going to press a lot of things are in the planning stage and so far we have relatively few fixed dates for the autumn.



23 September there will be a visit to the Knowle West Media Centre.



6 November a talk on the prospects for the future of the Glenside Hospital Museum.



Between 29 September and 10 October, two events about plans for the future of the St Philips Marsh area - a walkabout on site, and an online briefing/discussion. And it's a fair bet that as usual we will be having a Winter Social in the latter part of January, probably in the Watershed.

Events in planning: most importantly, we have the three of State of the City round table events as mentioned by Sandra Fryer (page 3). These are still very much at the concept stage, so if you have any thoughts, do get in touch.

Other plans include (but aren't restricted to) talks on Bristol Ferries, Bristol's part in the film industry, housing density (and how to achieve it without building high), the commercial property market, and a look at how the Clean Air Zone has worked. We are also fixing a visit to see the interior decor of City Hall.

Details of future events are posted on our website [www.bristolcivicsociety.org.uk](http://www.bristolcivicsociety.org.uk) but the best way to ensure that you are aware of events as they are arranged is to sign up to our mailing lists. Just go to:

<https://www.bristolcivicsociety.org.uk/get-involved/keep-in-touch/>

And you don't even have to be a member- events are in principle open to non-members as well, though members will get first refusal when numbers are tight.

Or there's an even better way of getting on the inside track: join the events team and help us make it all happen! If you're interested, or if you have any suggestions or indeed complaints, we want to hear from you. Just email [events@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:events@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk).



*Above, what's happening in the commercial property market.*

*Right, Housing density. How to achieve it without building high.*

