

# Better Bristol

The Bristol Civic Society Magazine – Issue 28 Spring/Summer 2026

## Inside

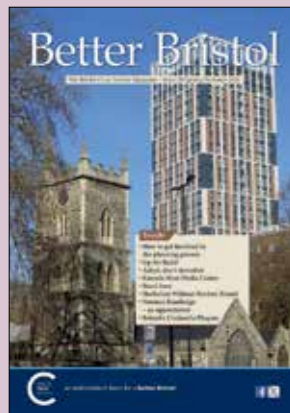
- How to get involved in the planning process
- Up the Rads!
- Adapt, don't demolish
- Knowle West Media Centre
- Berni Inns
- Herbalists Without Borders Bristol
- Norman Routledge – an appreciation
- Bristol's Cinderella Plaques



BRISTOL  
CIVIC  
SOCIETY

an independent force for a **better Bristol**





**Front Cover:**  
Pip 'n Jay's  
overshadowed  
by Castle  
Park Tower.

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:** Tony Berongoy

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

**Bristol Walking Alliance:** Alan Morris

[enquiries@bristolwalkingalliance.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@bristolwalkingalliance.org.uk)

**Conservation Advisory Panel:**

Stephen Wickham

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

**Historic England:**

The Historic England rep is still vacant.

BRISTOL CIVIC SOCIETY

# Contents



4-5



10-11

3

**From the Chair**  
Ambitious plans  
for the future.

4-5

**Major developments  
in Bristol**  
Comments on a selection of  
important proposals.

6-7

**How do the public get  
involved in planning  
decision making?**  
Alison Bromilow explains.

8-9

**Up the Rads!**  
Rosie Wild explains how  
the Bristol Radical History  
Group is refocusing Bristol's  
history.

10-11

**Adapt, don't demolish**  
Says Peter Weeks.

12-13

**Take a walk**  
Mike Manson checks out  
some recent developments  
beyond the bridge.

14-15

**The New Bristol Centre**  
Eugene Byrne, our man in  
A&E after a spin round the  
ice rink, reports.



16-17

**Shaping fairer futures  
together with arts,  
tech and care.**

Martha King writes about the  
award-winning Knowle West  
Media Centre.

18-19

**Berni Inns**

Eugene Byrne has a sudden  
craving for prawn cocktail  
and Black Forest gâteau.

20-21

**Herbalists Without Borders  
Bristol**

An innovative project to  
support migrants, refugees  
and asylum seekers.



22

**Who ordered the unicorns?**

Mike Manson celebrates the  
70th anniversary of City Hall.

23

**Norman Routledge  
(1957-2025)**

Simon Birch remembers.

24-25

**Bristol's Cinderella Plaques**

Malcolm Ravenscroft seeks out  
some forgotten plaques.

26

**Book Reviews**

Mike Manson reads  
some Bristol Books.

27

**Bristol Civic Society**

Bristol Civic Society needs you.  
Bristol needs us. Join.

28

**Events**

## 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

Smarts Print  
Services Limited.

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

Copy date for next  
edition 1 August 2026.

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

From the Chair

# Ambitious plans for the future



As spring turns into  
summer and the  
days get longer  
there is time to  
explore our great city, to  
cherish great places across  
Bristol and to reflect on those  
parts which are not so great. I  
love Bristol and am concerned  
for the city's future.

The city is changing. The City Council  
is seeking to improve Bristol by  
maximising public funds for the  
new Bristol Temple Quarter, for  
sustainable transport and public realm  
improvements. It is finding ways to  
build more new homes of all types and  
tenures. We also face significant growth  
on the edge of the city with major urban  
extensions and a possible New Town.

Many of you have said you are  
unhappy about the way growth is  
happening and the lack of engagement  
and listening to other views. The  
Management Team has reflected on  
members' comments and developed a  
three-year business plan that sets out  
our ambitions. We have agreed four  
key priorities/projects for 2026 as well  
as the 'business as usual' Major Sites,  
Transport and Placemaking, Events,  
Blue Plaques and Design Awards  
groups and activities.

## Our City Centre

We have agreed to make a special effort  
to support the City Council and others  
in regenerating the City Centre, in  
celebrating our cultural assets and in

cherishing the City Centre history from  
its medieval core onwards. Have you  
visited the reimagined Cabot Circus?  
Did you contribute to the St Nick's  
Market consultation? Have you been  
to the Old Vic or the Bristol Beacon?  
Did you make a trip of it, eat out and  
explore the city before your gig? Bristol  
Civic Society encourages you to 'use it  
or lose it'. We are planning a range of  
events focusing on the City Centre – see  
you there.

## Tall Buildings in Bristol

Our next priority is to launch a campaign  
for a tall building strategy for the  
city. The Council must have a clear  
tall building policy that agrees where  
there might be tall buildings. Good  
design, higher density and lower scale  
development create better places to  
live, work and enjoy. It's an interesting  
fact that in the past Bristol Civic Society  
members campaigned on some important  
environmental issues and won. They  
helped stop the filling-in of the harbour  
and agreed plans to regenerate the  
Canon's Marsh area to what we enjoy  
today. We wish to promote a reset: a  
new Tall Buildings Policy creating a  
networked 20-minute city.

## Ashton Court Estate

This is a city park with an historic  
house at its heart, part of Bristol's long  
history. As the city grows, Ashton  
Court Mansion and the wonderful park  
around it need to be transformed for  
the twenty-first century into a true sub-  
regional city park, accessible and open  
to all. Bristol Civic Society has agreed  
to support the Bristol Historic Buildings

Trust, chaired by Simon Cook MBE, in  
its plans to secure the long-term use  
of Ashton Court Mansion for our city  
ensuring a viable and successful legacy  
inspired by Norman Routledge (See  
page 12).

## Citizens of the future

Many of you have told us you are  
concerned at the lack of involvement  
of young people with Bristol Civic  
Society (indeed their parents too).  
The Management Team have agreed  
to set up a working group to bring  
together community and education  
organisations that are already running  
projects for young people around the  
built environment. We want to explore  
how we can inspire young people to be  
involved in the future of our city. If you  
would like to join this group please get  
in touch.

None of this can happen without you  
coming to Bristol Civic Society events  
or listening and contributing to the  
virtual meetings, which are listed on  
our website. But why not go one step  
further? Consider using your skills  
and joining one of our groups or  
special projects. Help us with events?  
We urgently need a communications  
person to help us modernise our press  
and communications. There are also  
other committee vacancies. Please get  
in touch if you would like to explore  
this further.

**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...

# Major Developments in Bristol

## Comments on a selection of important proposals.

### St Philip's Marsh Masterplan

We think that the masterplan is on the right lines. Our remaining concerns are:

- we agree that dense development is appropriate in this regeneration area, but we are concerned that the guidance is not clear enough to deliver an outcome in line with the masterplan's objectives.
- we cannot see that the main open space will be large enough for the increased population in this area, let alone surrounding areas too.
- business intensification has not been delivered in many places nationally, and the concept has yet to be fully proved to work.
- in principle we support the low-traffic approach, but we do not see how a masterplan can commit to anything transport-wise without a more detailed study, which must include consultation with Council highway designers.
- the objectives seem right, but we wonder what the area's unique identity will be.

### Redevelopment of the NCP car park at Fairfax Street for student housing

The Society appreciates that the design of this development has greatly improved since the submission of the initial pre-application enquiry. The proposed brick detailing at ground floor is particularly welcomed and the entrance to the student accommodation is attractive.

Despite our enthusiasm for the ground floor design, we still consider that the



Fairfax Street. Nice entrance but too high.



St Philip's Masterplan is along the right lines

development is too high and that it should be two floors lower. This would create a much better relationship with the neighbouring Pithay development. As proposed, the excessive height will create a dark canyon effect along All Saints Street and will have a significant depressing impact both on the public realm and also on the adjacent neighbours.

### Albert Road, St Philip's Marsh

Bristol Civic Society has commented on this development proposal, which is another high-rise tower block for predominantly student accommodation between Albert Road and the river. This one is close to the junction with Feeder Road, to the south of the newly-built similar development called Avon Point. Two similar consented developments lie to the south, with one remaining industrial site in between these and the application site.

The development comprises a square

tower of 17 storeys and a curved block of 7 storeys, with some floorspace for commercial and healthcare. It would add to the domination by tall orthogonal buildings of the west side of Albert Road. It would contribute to a dense cluster of tall buildings emerging on both sides of the river in this area, which would have very harmful impacts on a number of long-distance views.

A monoculture of student use is developing in this area. The concentration of student accommodation here and on the island site west of the river will do little to foster a vibrant community, as called for in the draft masterplan for St Philip's Marsh that is out to consultation.

### Spectrum Building

Change of use from office and medical/health services to student accommodation.

Bristol Civic Society supports the principle of reusing the existing structure and converting it for student housing.



Albert Road. Another high-rise development

# in Bristol



Spectrum Building.

This makes sense as it will retain an attractive building and will significantly reduce the carbon cost associated with demolition and reconstruction.

The Society is pleased to note that, following pre-application advice, proposals for an upward extension have been removed from the proposed plans. These would have had very negative impacts both on the building itself and on the setting of nearby heritage assets.

However, the current proposals for replacement glazing and window frames are not considered acceptable as these would fundamentally change the external glazed facade and would undermine the architectural integrity of the existing building.

In the Society's view more research is needed in order to identify a more appropriate colour palette for the glazing. Unless such a solution can be identified we recommend that the current proposal be refused.

### 30-64 Pennywell Road: update

Bristol Civic Society commented on the pre-application enquiry for this site in February 2025. Now a planning application (25/13400/F), there has been little change in the proposals since then - essentially a two-storey reduction in the height of the tallest building resulting in fifteen fewer dwellings.

We consider this proposal crams too much accommodation on

### Temple Gate

We are pleased to see that the applicant has remained consistent with the pre-application information which we supported. It is welcome to see the applicant's proposals that will future-proof the buildings, showing good adaptability and sustainability of design. The applicants wish to move to a lower carbon energy strategy for the buildings and users is another benefit of the design.

### Princess Street, Bedminster: update

The scheme was modified in November, principally following grounds for refusal being identified due to poor living conditions, but not as a result of substantial public outcry on height and effects on the historic park. Partial mitigation results from these changes.



Princess Street-revised. Recent local planning framework rendered useless

the site and constitutes gross overdevelopment. Consequently, we strongly object to the proposal and cannot support it. The proposed density is well over twice the optimum density for sites in an inner city-centre setting, as stated in the Urban Living local planning policy document.

Right, Pennywell Road. Gross overdevelopment.



Temple Gate. Buildings will be future-proofed

The new public realm improvements, including new fencing, landscaping, tree planting along the strip of land that fronts on to Mead Street are seen as a great improvement as long as the site is maintained to a high standard, including regular waste removal.

However, having narrowed the student tower to reduce over-shading of the scheme's own flats, four extra storeys were added to the student accommodation to maintain the same number of residences. The tower is now over three times as tall as the hill comprising Victoria Park and far more widely visible. Both within the park for its users and in looking to the park from the south and north, including from conservation areas. Yet the requested Townscape and Visual Appraisals views have not been provided.

Even if permitted and not built, planning-precedent damage to the district will be considerable and the recent local planning framework rendered useless.

The proposal went to the Planning Committee on 28th January, with officer recommendation for approval. The Society maintains its objections. Historic England and local groups do so too.

**STOP PRESS: Approved**



# How do the public get involved in planning decision making?

Twenty years of the Bristol Neighbourhood Planning Network. *Alison Bromilow* explains.

Many people feel the planning system is arcane, that they are left out of the planning decision-making process and ignored when those decisions are made. Given the overwhelming need to address the shortage of residential accommodation, the need for workspaces and, in Bristol, to respond to the continuing expansion in numbers of students attending the universities development and change is inevitable. Communities need to feel that they can be heard when decisions about local development are made.

The general public mostly do not get involved in commenting on planning and development until they are directly affected by an imminent planning

application. Often, if they become aware of a planning application, it is because it has been featured in press or social media, not always a reliable source for a balanced or nuanced point of view.

Effective early community involvement in shaping development can produce more appropriate and acceptable results. At planning applications stage, community involvement can help to reduce objections as well as create greater certainty in the approval timetable for developers.

Members of the public can make representations when national, regional and local planning policy is drafted. But reading through, understanding the implications of, and responding to pages of high level planning policy is not for everyone. Funding for truly effective public involvement is limited and the programme of engagement seldom allows sufficient time for increasing understanding and meaningful discussions.

Without a clear process for effective early involvement, communities are made to feel 'done to' and this leads to disillusionment in the planning system.

## How does Bristol support community involvement in planning?

The Bristol Statement of Community Involvement (SCI), first adopted in 2008, set out the process for engaging the public and stakeholders in planning decisions. It gave specific recommendations in the form of a set of 'Ground rules' which remain in full in subsequent versions of the SCI.

An integral part of the SCI process was that developers would be expected to engage with the local community through local residents' planning groups (RPG) which are part of the citywide Neighbourhood Planning Network (NPN).

The Network Administrators support the Bristol pre-application community involvement process by helping developers identify the relevant RPGs and citywide groups to consult and in making the developer 'pre-application enquiry' information available to the relevant community groups.

A pre-application enquiry may be submitted by prospective developers to the planning authority to gauge acceptability of development proposals before the planning application stage is reached. The sharing of the information submitted with the enquiry is an essential part of the Bristol pre-application community involvement (preappCI) process. This was ground breaking when it was first adopted in 2008. In Bristol it was considered that, as the information would have to be released under a Freedom of Information request, the Local Planning Authority was able to make the information available (with some restrictions when there were issues of confidentiality).

SCI Ground Rules	SCI Ground Rules	SCI Ground Rules
Rules 1 - 4 set out best practice for the style of meetings including who is included	Rules 5 - 8 set best practice for the content of the CI discussions	Rules 9 - 10 set best practice for reporting on the CI
1. Inclusive invitation	5. Early involvement	9. Transparent records
2. Authorisation	6. Presenting options	10. Feedback on the outcome of community involvement
3. Continuity	7. Choosing between options	
4. Independent Advice	8. Consensus	



Neighbourhood Planning Network Administrators share the information to the relevant rpg together with the contact details of the developer or agent so that, if the developer does not approach the rpg, the group may make the first approach to press for consultation in accordance with the SCI ground rules 'at the early ideas stage, when significant options are still open and can be identified and while there is still potential to make a difference'

It is worth noting that, when this was first introduced, the planning agents in Bristol were, shall we say, unconvinced of the value of this consultation. However, at a follow-up meeting six months later, they agreed that, through the new preappCI process, it had been useful. They had been able to share local issues and ideas for designs to make them more acceptable to local communities. Thereby increasing certainty in the planning timetable for the developers.

The NPN group response is uploaded onto the online council consultee access portal by the NPN administrator. The planning officer can then use the group comment, along with responses

from the other statutory consultees like the Flood Risk and housing strategy teams, in their pre application enquiry response to the developer. This consultee portal is separate from the Planning Online portal which is publicly accessible.

Incidentally, ward councillors are also notified of pre-application enquiries in their wards and can sign-in to see and respond to the information. Bristol Civic Society is also invited to comment on specific cases particularly 'major' applications (where the development is of 10 or more residential units or 10,000 sq m of commercial space). (See pages 4-5.)

It is important to note that there may be many points of view in the community and the rpg will be in a good position to alert the developer to all aspects of community opinion. A rpg will not be a campaigning group representing a single point of view, particularly not a group that opposes all development. Rpg are most effective when they treat the discussions as a form of negotiation. Particularly when they can identify opportunities for improvements to the design such as creating routes through

the development site that will improve access for the wider community to shops or play areas, or preserving particular elements which have local cultural significance, or can alert developers to potential drawbacks such as underground conditions which are unmapped.

Unfortunately, the slowdown in development in Bristol in some areas has meant that a number of residents' planning groups across the city are no longer meeting and some developers, especially out-of-town developers or agents, are approaching the rpgs only as a tick-box exercise after final drawings have already been completed, removing the community's opportunity to make a difference. Social media has also impacted on the way that individuals interact with many aspects of decision-making and many community and voluntary groups are finding it more difficult to attract members.

However many Bristol NPN groups continue to report successful discussions with developers and value the opportunity to shape development in their area through the pre app process.

## Who can be part of the Bristol Neighbourhood Planning Network?

Local community groups that have a wider understanding of the planning system and who monitor proposals for development in their area have always existed in parts of the city. There are a significant number of rpgs, with a good geographic spread, who are members of the Bristol NPN.

YOU can be part of this too... There must be many local residents who would like to get involved in shaping development in their own areas, and could join an existing group, set up a new local rpg, or would like to look at Bristol wide developments with the BCS major sites group. Or

maybe you would like to help with the administration of the pre-app process with the NPN. Get in touch with us through [networkadministrator@bristonnpn.net](mailto:networkadministrator@bristonnpn.net) Alison Bromilow and Andy King Bristol NPN administrators.

# Up the Rads! 20 years of the Bristol Radical History Group

Rosie Wild explains how the Bristol Radical History Group is refocusing Bristol's history.

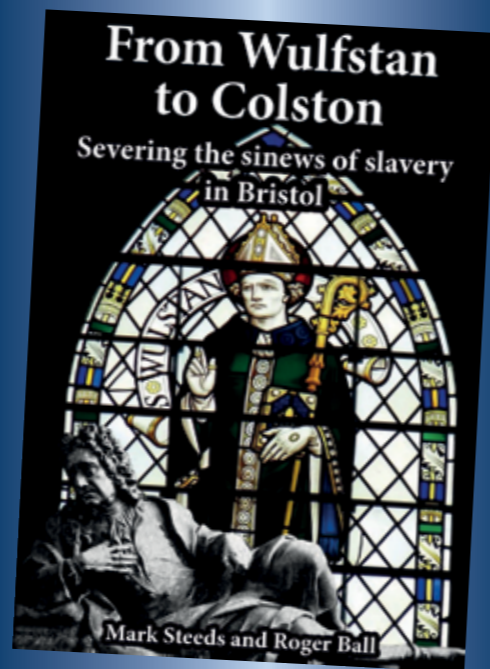
“Prince of Peace’, ‘Fairest of Ten Thousand!’ shouted the mob of ranting women as they whipped their willow boughs through the air. They surrounded the serene figure of a silent man riding a hobbyhorse up Corn Street in Bristol city centre. Marching behind them, chanting ‘England’s Freedom! Soldiers’ Rights!’, came a troop of New Model Army soldiers sporting muskets, pikes and drums. Saturday morning shoppers’ jaws dropped as the procession headed towards the Corn Exchange.”

So reads the opening paragraph of the Bristol Radical History Group’s (BRHG) report on its first Radical History week twenty years ago in October 2006. Featuring 31 events in seven venues over nine days, (radical weeks last longer than normal ones) happenings ranged from a lecture by visiting American professor Peter Linebaugh, filmed by the BBC, to raucous gigs by cider punk band the Surfin’ Turnips at the historically abolitionist Seven Stars pub. Even *Better Bristol* editor Mike Manson was involved, giving a talk on the 1793 Bristol Bridge Massacre which apparently included a written test for the audience! (*They did well! Ed*)

Perhaps the most attention-grabbing event was the recreation of radical Quaker preacher James Nayler’s 1656 blasphemous ride into Bristol, described above. Itself a re-enactment of Christ’s entry to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, it featured Easton can-can

troupe The Red Hot Frilly Kickers and an armed Sealed Knot regiment. It was to be the first of many raucous recreations – from the regicide of King Edmund in Pucklechurch in 946 to the whipping of Winston Churchill at Bristol Temple Meads train station by suffragette Theresa Garnett in 1909.

Setting the tone for future Radical History weeks (and from 2017 the annual Radical History Festival at M Shed, happening this year on 25 April), the programme made



Above, Cover of *From Wulfstan to Colston* – copyright BRHG

no distinction between academics and citizen historians, collaborated as widely as possible and offered all events for free. It was audacious, anarchic and utterly knacker. The founder members who’d paid the costs from their own pockets barely broke even. Everyone involved couldn’t wait to do it again.

The punk rock, DIY attitude that emboldened the early Radical History organisers can be directly traced to their involvement in anti-fascist sports and social club, the Easton Cowboys and Cowgirls – now known as the Easton Cowfolk<sup>1</sup>. The core Cowfolk tenets of democracy, transparency and an aversion to hierarchy and bureaucracy are the blueprint on which the Radical History Group was built and continues to operate.

Like the Cowfolk, the Radical History Group is self-funding, ingraining independence and even more importantly self-reliance in the group’s practice. That practice, best summed up in historical terms as ‘dig where you stand’, encourages public engagement with local history. BRHG aims to support anyone with an interest in history from below – that is history by, for and about ordinary people – to get stuck into their own research without waiting for permission or funding.

A commitment to history rooted in the everyday lives of local people is what unites BRHG members and enables the group to forge links with communities from which new members are drawn.

<sup>1</sup> <https://eastoncowfolk.org.uk/>

A prime example of this is the Eastville Workhouse Project, launched in 2012 after BRHG members noticed that a 100 year-old map showed a part of a Victorian workhouse burial ground underneath Rosemary Green. Though the grassy area was marked as disused by 1902, the research team established from workhouse death records in the Bristol Records Office that it still contained the unmarked remains of around 4,000 paupers from the workhouse at 100 Fishponds Road.

After leafleting the neighbourhood around Rosemary Green about their findings, BRHG held a series of community meetings that led to the creation of the Eastville Workhouse Memorial Group (EWMG). With committed support from local volunteers, EWMG was able to complete the tedious job of transcribing the workhouse death records to a machine-readable spreadsheet that could be searched and analysed. It also raised thousands of pounds to commemorate the dead men, women and children under Rosemary Green.

A stone memorial, carved by local artist Matthew Billington and partly designed by local schoolchildren was erected in 2015. The following year a plaque designed by Living Easton plaque maker Mike Baker, was attached to the only surviving part of the workhouse, a forbidding stone gateway on Fishponds Road in front of what is now the East Trees Health Centre.

The memorial group receives a steady stream of requests for information about former workhouse inmates via the BRHG website. Recent data analysis has revealed even more unmarked pauper burial sites at Ridgeway, Greenbank and Arnos Vale cemeteries. It looks like Billington better get his tools ready again.

In 2014, another collaborative project, Remembering the Real World War One, sought to challenge the assumptions underpinning the centenary of what the BRHG termed ‘a war fought for the interests of the European ruling elites whose price was paid by ordinary people’. A programme of talks and exhibitions highlighted the resistance of local people, women and conscientious objectors. They also shined a light on the forgotten contribution of Britain’s African colonial troops who died fighting for empire and were erased from history for their pains.

Right, Filming *Slaughter No Remedy* about Walter Ayles outside his house in Station Road, Ashley Down. Copyright BRHG



James Nayler re enactment. Copyright BRHG

Overseeing an exhibition about conscientious objectors in Bristol Cathedral, one BRHG member recalls a member of the public spotting a picture of their great uncle in the display. Explaining that although he knew his great uncle had been in Dartmoor prison, he had never understood why until that moment, as he was a taboo subject in the family.

Other imaginative interpretation included puppet shows by Otherstory; a short film ‘Slaughter No Remedy’ about Bristol’s most prominent conscientious objector, socialist and MP, Walter Ayles; teaching resource *Refusing To Kill* and last but not least, a Bristol Civic Society blue plaque on Ayles’ Ashley Down home. (The first of two blue plaques suggested by the Radical History Group – the other,



for Quaker feminist social reformer Hilda Cashmore, was unveiled at the Wellspring Settlement in 2023.)

Of course no history of BRHG would be complete without mentioning the group’s contribution to exposing the myth-making around slave trader Edward Colston, whose hallowed reputation as Bristol’s favourite philanthropist seemed unassailable as little as 20 years ago. This time they teamed up with activist group Countering Colston.

It seems incredible today, when Colston’s statue lies, paint-spattered, on its side in the M Shed, having been thrown in the harbour as part of a Black Lives Matter protest in 2020, to remember how much opprobrium Countering Colston faced for doggedly surfacing awkward truths about Colston’s life and remembrance. If you’d like to find out what all the fuss was about, BRHG founder Roger Ball’s and Mark Steeds’s meticulously researched book *From Wulfstan to Colston* is available to buy from the BRHG website.

With its eighth Radical History Festival planned for 25 and 26 April, the imminent publication of eight pamphlets marking the centenary of the 1926 General Strike, to add to the 73 (and six books) already published since 2008, the Bristol Radical History Group shows no sign of slowing down. Now an established part of Bristol’s cultural landscape, without itself having joining the establishment, it’s always looking for new members with new ideas, so come and join us. Up the Rads!

Find out more about Bristol Radical History Group events and join our mailing list at [www.brh.org.uk](http://www.brh.org.uk).

Mike Baker of Living Easton unveiling East Bristol Workhouse plaque. Copyright BRHG

When you walk past a building site I'm sure, like me, you are

struck by the huge amount of stuff you see going into skips. Do you wonder where it ends up? Two-thirds of all the waste in this country is generated by the actions of just one industry; construction. Some construction waste gets recycled but much goes to landfill. Even more shocking, 13 per cent of new construction material delivered to sites is sent direct to landfill without ever being used. With all the bulldozing of old buildings going on in Bristol to make way for new construction our city must be making a major contribution to this national torrent of waste. Is there another way to think about development that does not involve wholesale demolition and replacement?

The presenter of *Grand Designs*, Kevin McCloud, recently gave a lecture at the V&A Museum called *Reinventing Buildings: a manifesto for the imagination*. He put forward the idea that no building should be a candidate for demolition before it is 100 years old. He suggested that, by law, every building would be protected so that it enjoys at least a century of useful life. Interesting proposition. What would that mean for our cities? The great crusader for beautiful buildings John Betjeman offered the opinion that often it is the most recent architecture that we value least, because it can take a long time for us to understand and appreciate what the architect had in mind. St Pancras station was around 100 years old and a few days away from being demolished before a vigorous campaign managed to save it. Today the famous polychromatic redbrick façade by George Gilbert Scott is one of the architectural landmarks of the capital. Perhaps we do need to allow decades to pass to appreciate the beauty of a building. Is there a need for a safety valve to pause, take time



Former Bristol and West Tower.  
Photo: Brizzleboy

# Adapt, don't demolish

Says Peter Weeks.

and consider before we simply knock down whatever stands in the way of something new?

What are the arguments against the "demolish-and-rebuild" model of modern development? Seems to me the case can be made on two broad grounds. First, on the environmental side there is the obvious question of carbon emissions. It's well-known that the manufacture of cement, the essential ingredient of concrete, is a highly carbon-intensive process. The cement industry alone is responsible for an estimated 5-8% of global emissions (a figure incidentally which puts the UK's 1% total contribution to global emissions into perspective). Every tonne of concrete has already led to the release of 100-200kg of CO2 to the atmosphere. On top of that there are the carbon emissions of all the activities involved in demolishing and rebuilding; diesel fuel for transport and machinery, the energy and carbon used in manufacturing the steel, all the building components and so on. The construction sector is by far the largest emitter of greenhouse gases, accounting for a staggering 37% of

global emissions. Cement, steel, and aluminium all have a significant carbon footprint.

The second argument in favour of preservation and reuse of buildings is a cultural one. Old buildings makes a place what it is. Walk round a city like Bristol and you feel the history embedded in our architecture. There's a sense of variety and discovery when you explore the older areas. Bristol is built using a wide range of different kinds of stone: sandstones; limestones; Cattybrook bricks; conglomerates ... even granite in places. It's unlikely that a developer today is going to pay for expensive materials when plastic cladding or other cheap alternatives offer cost savings. And there's another side to Bristol, one that visitors don't see or else they try to ignore. Disused buildings and run-down areas are bad for the economy and send a depressing signal to people living there or passing through. When we bulldoze buildings we also destroy the collective memory, culture and identity of the communities they belong to.

So - is tearing down an old building the inevitable precursor to development?

The Bristol Digital Futures Institute. A pair of former 200 year-old industrial buildings.



In the rush to build new we often fail to consider the case for adapting and reusing what we have.

Take one local example - the former Bristol & West tower on Broad Quay. 60 metres high with 17 stories, the original 1960s design by Alec French and Partners was considered so avant-garde that it was held up as 'the future of Bristol'. After Bristol and West Building Society moved out various plans by Crosby Homes to demolish and replace it with an even taller tower came to nothing - partly because of vocal criticism spearheaded by Bristol Civic Society - and in the end the building was gutted, reclad in blue-tinted glass panels and reopened as the 176-room Radisson Blu Hotel. I like it. The glass panels in graduated shades successfully give the illusion of the tower merging into the sky. I realise that praising a building because it blends so well into the skyline sounds like a backhanded compliment, but if a tall building is to be retained and reused perhaps that is the least-worst solution. Bristol Civic Society awarded the new Radisson Blu Hotel an Environmental Award in 2009.

There are many other local examples of successful refurbishment. Here's a short list:

**The Bristol Digital Futures Institute** (see *'Better Bristol'* issue 27). A pair of former 200 year-old industrial buildings brilliantly repurposed by the University of Bristol as a research facility.

**Purifier House East** on Canons Marsh, Harbourside. A Grade II-listed building, part of a former Victorian gas works, converted by Linden Homes into flats and commercial units.

**Bush Warehouse - now The Arnolfini.** Built in two stages in 1830 and 1847 for a local iron company and later converted

Purifier House



Above left, Bush House, one of the best known buildings on the harbourside.

Above right, The Robinson's Factory in Bedminster, a multi-storey former paper bag factory.

into a tea warehouse, this building is a great example of adaptation and imaginative reuse. It was extensively remodelled in 1975 to accommodate the Arnolfini art gallery, and again in 2003-

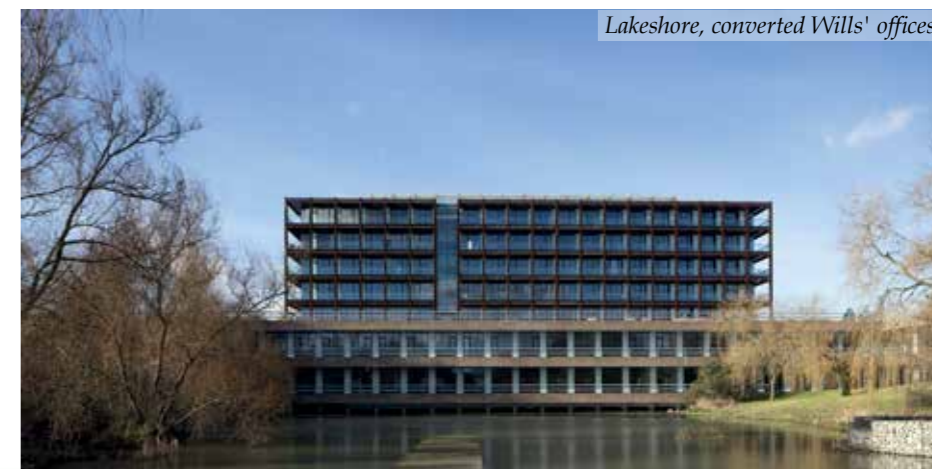
Is tearing down an old building the inevitable precursor to development?

2005 when it went through a complete interior re-build. The Arnolfini lives on as one of the best-known buildings on the Bristol harbourside.

**The Robinson's Factory** in Bedminster is a multi-storey former paper bag

factory and printing works built in the 1870s. By 2007 it was in disrepair, but a project to convert it into apartments brought the building back to useful life, preserving and showing off much of the original interior particularly the use of large cast iron structures and elegant functional brickwork. It was awarded a Bristol Civic Society Environmental Award in 2011.

**Lakeshore** is a Grade II-listed apartment building in Hartcliffe sitting over its own lake. The building was built using a Cor-Ten steel frame for Imperial Tobacco and converted by developers Urban Splash working with Ferguson Mann Architects.



Lakeshore, converted Wills' offices.

# Take a walk

Mike Manson checks out some recent developments.



The view from my bedroom window in 1979

High buildings are constantly on the Bristol Civic Society agenda. Over the years I've seen overly optimistic plans on paper and viewed the subsequent underwhelming buildings from afar. I thought I'd go and have a wander to see what they really look like. I'm not an architect or planner but just an interested observer.

In recent years there has been much high rise development in and around the Redcliffe area and across the floating harbour at Temple Back. In the 1980s I wrote a book called *Bristol Beyond the Bridge* (Redcliffe Press) about the three southern parishes of old Bristol. At the time I lived in Redcliffe Parade East and had a wonderful view (now obscured by trees!) down Welsh Back and Redcliffe Back to Bristol Bridge. I was struck by the difference between Bristol north and south of the river. To the north was genteel Queen Square (admittedly with a road cutting through it), King Street with the Old Vic and its legendary pubs – not forgetting the adjacent Granary. And then further along there was Corn Street, at that time the financial heart of the city.

Across Bristol Bridge to the south there was... well, there was very little. Apart from Bristol's first tower block, 1 Redcliffe Street, DRG's head office. But we all thought that was a one-off



Redcliffe Back in the 1980s. Run down and rat infested.

aberration. The warehouses that lined Redcliffe Back were empty and rat infested.

When I was writing my book, 40 years after the devastation of the Second World War, Redcliffe Street, Thomas Street and Temple Street were characterless and empty. Victoria Street linking Temple Meads Station to the centre was a soulless gateway to the city. There was still a bomb site right next to Bristol Bridge. Admittedly, there was a fun bit of engineering in the form of the 'temporary' flyover. But the place felt dead. Okay, there were some interesting pubs: The Cornubia; The Seven Stars; The Kings Head; The Shakespeare and The Portwall Tavern, but mostly, after five o'clock the place was a desert. Nobody lived there, nobody wanted to live there. My book *Bristol Beyond the Bridge* was born out of frustration as I knew this area had a deep and

interesting history. You only had to visit St Mary Redcliffe to become aware of that. Though my publisher, John Sansom from Redcliffe Books warned 'you realise Mike, there are no bookshops south of the river.' Thankfully that has changed.

Forty years later – can it really be forty years! – I went for a stroll to see what has altered. In places the difference is remarkable. The street pattern is the same but there are some significant new buildings. Along Redcliffe Back the crumbling warehouses have been converted into attractive waterside apartments. I was pleased to see that one of the oldest walls in Bristol, part of William Canyges' House on Ferry Street was still there. Maybe the wall deserves a Blue Plaque of its own?

The building that has been constructed between Redcliffe Street and St Thomas Street in what is now termed as *The Redcliffe Quarter* breaks the long held agreement that no building should be taller than St Mary Redcliffe (89m or 292ft). It's actually quite difficult to get a full view of the structure. Walking down Redcliffe Street from the south its stepped approach cleverly breaks up the bulk of this leviathan. I noticed that the south side on Three Queens Lane is faced with white cladding. This is the problem with large buildings in small city streets – they block out the light.

I was interested to see a new café and butchers (!) had opened in St Thomas Street.

When I wrote my book the distinctive whiff of yeast and hops hung over the area from what was then Courages Brewery. The brewery – originally Georges – owned a great swathe of land facing the harbour. In the 1980s Courages planned to demolish a long ignored row of Georgian houses along what was called Bath Street. There was muted opposition to this vandalism and in the end the brewery only demolished one third of the street, this new space to be used as a parking lot for their delivery vehicles. The façade of what is left of Bath Street terrace is still there, though it doesn't look as if any of their original interiors remain.

The brewery is long gone. What is now called Finzels Reach is an area that I hardly recognised. Now the home to bars, a micro-brewery, a food market and a Premier Inn. It seems to have a buzz about it.

And then there's the new bridge that curves its way across the floating harbour to Castle Park. It's rather



wonderful how after the tight alleyways of Finzel's Reach a vista of Castle Park opens up in front of you. It's exciting!

I then wandered over Castle Park to inspect Castle Park Tower. This looms over the park and offers a jolting view from Old Market Street. I peered through some interesting railings to a pleasing and surprisingly expansive open space – more than just a courtyard. There are signs to *Close the Gate*. The public are not allowed to enjoy this communal area.

Nearby, sandwiched between the Shot Tower (no longer operational) and Temple Way is a cluster of three

office buildings called The Assembly.

I stared through the windows and thought this looked like a nice place to work – if that's what people do in such buildings these days. These are several humorous sculptures by Alex Chinneck – bent lamp posts, a twisted telephone box – and a triangle of land covered by *Astroturf* overlooking Temple Back. I liked the look of the buildings, they felt well executed and the colours uplifting. Even the reception area smelled nice!

Building C has a club house and roof garden for its occupants. It's fantastic! Thoughtfully landscaped with prairie grasses and plants that can survive

Redcliffe Quarter



Above, Finzels Reach this hostile high-rise environment. The view is breath-taking. You can LOOK DOWN on the Shot Tower. Such a shame it's not open to the public.

But the buildings are so close that the streets below are in shadow most of the day. And there is also a wind tunnel effect. I visited on one of the warmest days of the year. I'd hate to think what it's like in winter.

These are first impressions: I don't know about environmental considerations and sustainability.

It's not the docks or Clifton. I didn't see any stag or hen parties (thankfully!). But the built environment of this part of Bristol has certainly changed. Go and have a wander. See what you think. This is the new Bristol whether you like it or not. I wonder what it'll be like in another forty years.

In conclusion I was generally impressed by the buildings and hope they're affordable and are not just for students. I don't live there myself so this is an outsider's view. I'm not sure that I'd like to bring up a family there.

PS I was amused to hear off-mic two of the latest recipients of Bristol Civic Society's Design Awards comment that their initial proposals had been rejected by the Society. Bristol Civic Society IS listened to.

# The New Bristol Centre

There were girls in grass skirts who brought on the pineapple confection for the buffet supper. There was a glitter and glow of myriad lights, an atmosphere of rich opulent intimacy warming the place in a way not to be expected. Guests were served in the South Seas climate of the Bali Hai bar, in the swish Le Club bar and by check-waistcoated bowler-hatted barmen in the Victorian bar ...!

... Said a breathless account in the local press at the grand opening of the new Locarno ballroom in Frogmore Street on May 19 1966.

Yes, a very grand occasion, and more evidence, if needed, that Bristol was booming.

The Locarno was just one part of the New Bristol Centre, a vast brick and concrete edifice poured into the middle of town by entertainment giant Mecca Leisure Ltd.

At a time when development meant concrete and clean lines, the New Bristol Centre had obliterated a number of historic buildings - though the historic Hatchet pub survived. But if sensitive souls thought it looked like some deranged dictator's bomb-proof bunker, it would sooner or later play its part in every Bristolian's social lives and leisure time.



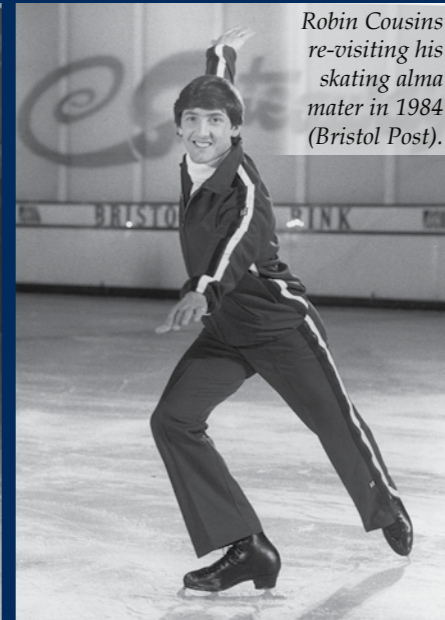
The ballroom lights were a big favourite with everyone (Bristol Post).



The Locarno ballroom, hosting a heat of BBC's Come Dancing (Bristol Post).



An evening at the skating rink, February 1967 (Bristol Post).



Robin Cousins re-visiting his skating alma mater in 1984 (Bristol Post).

**When, exactly, did the Swinging Sixties come to Bristol? Well you might argue it was in 1966 with the opening of the New Bristol Centre, an entertainment complex catering for all ages and tastes, bringing you both Jimi Hendrix and *Come Dancing*. Eugene Byrne, our man in A&E after a spin round the ice rink, reports.**

The gala opening of the Locarno was only part of the story. By the time the complex was finished there would be a dozen licensed bars, an ice rink, bowling lanes, banqueting rooms, a casino, bingo hall, a nightclub/disco, a cinema and the immense ballroom.

On a busy night it would host 5,000 customers and more. The ballroom, with its ceiling illuminated by thousands of tiny lights, could hold 2,000 people all on its own.

Mecca Leisure Ltd. claimed that their monumental investment in Bristol was the biggest entertainments complex in Europe.

"When Mecca selected Bristol for their centre, they did not just do it with a pin," said the *Evening Post*, quoting the Lord Mayor.

"They knew that Bristol deserved and appreciated the best. Mecca had shown a swashbuckling and adventurous enterprise in providing it and Bristol would support it."

Adventurous? Maybe, but there was irrefutable business

logic to Mecca's investment. Bristol was prospering, and while the number of people living within the city boundaries was in gentle decline, the population in outlying areas was growing quickly as well-to-do Bristolians and newcomers alike moved to newer homes in the suburbs and outlying towns.

And it wasn't just for "greater Bristol". The Severn Bridge would soon open, potentially bringing thousands from Cardiff, Newport and the Welsh Valleys. On weekdays there might be hundreds coming from as far away as Devon or the Midlands to see one of the big entertainment or musical acts of the day. Britain's burgeoning motorway system would bring in punters from afar. This was why the development came with a huge multi-storey car park.

The opening night was just for starters. In mid-November the Lord Mayor was there to open the magnificent £100,000 ABC Cinema at the centre.

Frank Sinatra, pop singer Tommy Steele, comedian Charlie Drake and actor Yul Brynner had all (rather optimistically) been invited to the 800-seat cinema's big opening event - a screening of David Lean's epic, *Dr Zhivago*.

Although claiming to have other, previous, engagements, all four stars did, at least, send congratulatory telegrams.

At the early stage of its history, the Locarno - "the Loccy" - became a firm favourite with Bristol's Mods, particularly on Monday nights. When The Who, not yet megastars, appeared in May 1967, the gig sold out to queues stretching round the corner with the leisure time to admire the Vespas and Lambrettas parked outside the Hatchet.

The band were late on stage and just played a 45-minute set, but nobody seemed disappointed, particularly after their trademark destruction of their equipment. Keith Moon's drum kit was destroyed by a small explosive charge.

In its heyday, though, the Locarno was never just about youth culture. On many evenings it was a traditional ballroom, and from time to time it hosted episodes of TV's *Come Dancing* and had its own house band.

The Locarno was later re-branded The Studio, but whatever it was called it was one of the most important venues in the region for seeing cult acts, or those on



The New Bristol Centre, pictured in 1997; three decades after it opened, much of the complex was due for demolition to make way for flats (Bristol Post).

the verge of becoming megastars. Jimi Hendrix played here in 1967,

The Studio closed in 1991, then had a short-lived new life as a cabaret club, and then as a bingo hall before closing permanently to make way for flats.

The ABC Cinema was popular and successful for three decades, though through this period cinema audiences everywhere were declining against the competition of TV and, later, video.

The industry fought back, sometimes with gimmicks that seem crazy nowadays. The most notorious in the ABC Frogmore Street's case was that of 1974 Hollywood disaster movie

*Earthquake*. Low-frequency speakers were brought in to emulate the rumble and vibration of a genuine earthquake at the appropriate moment ...

It caused a pregnant woman in the audience to go into premature labour.

The ABC Frogmore Street, later split into two screens, survived until 1997.

In 2000, after lots of legal wrangling and building work, the cinema re-opened as Rock, a 1,700-capacity nightclub and live music venue. Fitted out at a cost of £3m this was supposed to be Bristol's answer to the "superclubs" that had sprung up elsewhere during the 1990s.

When Massive Attack held a Christmas Party there the guests included Kate Moss, Damon Albarn, Natalie Appleton and Robert Carlyle.

But the business later failed and the venue was then bought out to become the Carling Academy, nowadays the O2 Academy.

By 1998 much of the rest of the complex had been demolished for student accommodation, though the ice rink also lived on.

The rink became as much a part of the fabric of Bristol as any music venue or ballroom.

The Silver Blades Ice Rink had opened in April 1966, and of course this is where local boy Robin Cousins was coached by Pamela Davies, who had moved to Bristol from Birmingham to teach promising youngsters. Cousins learned his trade and his Olympic figure skating win in 1980 further boosted the rink's popularity.

But the rink was also where countless Bristol romances and marriages (and divorces) first blossomed; one of the few places in town that youngsters could go unescorted with their parents' blessing of a weekend to meet up with friends.

Except for the O2 Academy and the multi-storey car park, the rest of the original New Bristol Centre is now long gone. What also surely lives on, though, are an awful lot of memories, and most of them very happy ones.

*Eugene Byrne is editor of 'Bristol Times', the local history supplement which appears in the Bristol Post every Tuesday.*

# Shaping Fairer Futures Together with Arts, Tech and Care

Martha King writes about the ground-breaking Knowle West Media Centre.

**K**nowle West Media Centre (KWMC) is a digital arts and creative technology charity rooted in a diverse working-class neighbourhood of 14,000 people in Knowle West, South Bristol.

KWMC began in 1996 as a grassroots arts residency based out of a cupboard at the back of a community health centre in Knowle West. Our focus was on photography, enabling people - with cameras in their hands - to tell their story on their terms and help create the change they wanted to see in the world.

From the very beginning, our work has been about creativity as agency: ensuring that people who are often underrepresented in cultural and technological spaces are able to shape narratives, build skills and influence the future of their communities.



Youth Collab. Image credit Scott Piggott

Today, our aim remains the same: bringing people together to make social, cultural and ecological change feel possible in their own lives and communities through creativity, tech and co-creation. We continue to work alongside residents to co-design new ways of doing things, test ideas, and explore new futures together.

Our award-winning straw-bale eco-building, co-designed with community members and young people, opened its doors in 2008. It includes a main hall for events and gatherings, a music recording studio, breakout rooms and flexible workspaces. We also have a Making Space full of digital fabrication kit, which evolved from a pop-up furniture factory created to skill up local unemployed people.

We've worked with people at all stages of their lives to grow creativity, connection, confidence and capacity for collective change-making. We deliver inclusive creative projects through digital arts, technology and making that focus on building community wealth, strengthening social and digital infrastructure and creating a fairer, more sustainable future. Each year, more than 3,500 people engage directly in our activities, with tens of thousands more reached through digital content.

Our programmes range from regular after-school social action and digital fabrication sessions for young people, to artist residencies, adult digital skills development, neighbourhood science projects and international research collaborations. We have always been a place where those most marginalised

are able to learn, develop creative skills, utilise high-end technologies and be part of everyday creative innovation. We are also proud to have hosted and incubated initiatives such as WeCanMake, a community-led housing programme that has grown into an independent Community Benefit Society and land trust.

Our work currently centres on four interconnected strands of practice:

**Inspiring Creativity and Learning** - Engaging and inspiring communities of all ages through accessible creative activities and programmes using digital arts that build learning, skills development, and problem-solving beyond traditional education and training systems.

**Digital Tech for all** - Promoting the development of creative digital skills and critical capacities. Enhancing employability and growing confidence for those most marginalised to take the lead in tech development and innovation. Creatively exploring how technologies and data influence everyday life.

**Community Storymaking and Cultural Place-making** - Activating community-led story making and cultural place-making through arts. Changing perceptions of Knowle West - centring people's experiences and aspirations, celebrating the richness of social bonds, local knowledge, culture and heritage.

**Making for Real** - Transforming ideas into tangible demonstrations of change by delivering programmes that span digital design, fabrication, and real-world construction.



Knowle West Media Centre. Image credit Bhagesh Sachania

We work in the open, sharing what we do hyper-locally, city-wide, nationally and internationally. We remain rooted in local community priorities by working closely with the Knowle West Alliance (KWA), which we co-founded alongside residents and four other local organisations in 2018. Through KWA, we work collaboratively to respond to community-identified issues, aligning our programmes with agreed priorities, including this year's focus on community cohesion and food justice.

Alongside this, we are active in international networks, particularly as a neighbourhood Living Lab for Bristol. Living Labs allow research and innovation to unfold in real-life environments rather than in isolated laboratories. They have an adaptive and collaborative methodology which places citizens at the centre of research, ensuring that new solutions are firmly grounded in real-world needs. This makes them particularly effective in addressing complex societal challenges such as climate change, urbanisation, and social inequality - issues which have no single solution and often involve conflicting interests. Being part of the European Network of Living Labs allows us to connect local knowledge and learnings in Knowle West with communities, researchers and practitioners across Europe, working together on shared global challenges; from creative street level retrofitting to citizen science as responses to the energy and climate crisis.

After nearly thirty years of being founder-led, 2024 marked a significant moment in our history as our founder retired and we moved to a new co-leadership model. This transition has been an important opportunity to ensure our internal organisational practices match how we co-create through projects, as well as creating space to reflect on our rich history. We've been looking at how to take forward the learning that continues to serve us and deciding what to let go of so that we remain relevant and purposeful in challenging times.

We are living in a context of polarising politics and widening inequalities that can cause divisions and harm within communities. In response, we are collectively redeveloping our spaces and programmes to be as inclusive, welcoming and regenerative as possible. So, we can continue to be a place where everyone can grow their



Factory Open Day For Women. Image Credit Ania Shrimpton

creativity, career options and horizons right in the heart of Knowle West.

We welcome everyone to join our free programmes that we run week in, week out. Our young people's programme runs every Tuesday and Wednesday during term time, alongside holiday programmes and work experience weeks. Together, these offer regular arts, social action and digital making sessions where young people can build skills, grow in confidence and feel connected to their community.

Creative Cuppa is our weekly adult drop-in on a Wednesday: an informal, welcoming space for residents to connect, take part in taster arts and tech workshops, and try out their own ideas in a friendly space.

Our Community x Arts x Tech Meet-Up takes place on the first Thursday of every month, bringing together creatives, technologists and community members from across the city to collaborate and spark new ideas.

Sound Wave Festival 2025. Image credit Ibi Feher



On 23 April 2026, we are hosting 'Whose Story Gets Heard & How Do We Tell It?', to explore questions like 'in a world of misinformation and growing political division, how can grassroots stories of hope and social action cut through the noise?' It will be the final event in our Foundations

for the Future series, bringing to life our exhibition which celebrates thirty years of KWMC. In May we will host 'Mayking Fest', a young people-led making festival that brings together families, residents, artists and partners.

Nearly three decades on from that cupboard in a health centre, our focus remains on ensuring that people in Knowle West and beyond have access to the tools, technologies, spaces and networks that enable them to imagine and create fairer futures together.

Further information about upcoming events and activities can be found on our website ([kwmc.org.uk](http://kwmc.org.uk)), our monthly newsletter (sign up: [tinyurl.com/kwmc-newsletter](http://tinyurl.com/kwmc-newsletter)), and via our social media channels (@knowlewestmedia). Visitors are welcome and we are happy to arrange tours of the building with advance notice. We are always open to discussing ideas for new projects or collaborations, do get in touch if you have an idea: [martha.king@kwmc.org.uk](mailto:martha.king@kwmc.org.uk) (Creative Co-Director).



The unmistakable logo, 1970s.

“To achieve that kind of success in catering you've got to know the industry,” said Aldo Berni of the Berni Inns empire that he and his brother Frank had built.

“But it's luck that enables you to hit on the right thing at the right time.”

The Berni family knew a lot about luck; before they hit the big time, they'd had plenty of the bad variety.

The Bernis, originally from a small mountain village in northern Italy, were a clan of natural-born entrepreneurs, which was just as well as they had to keep bouncing back.

Frank and Aldo's grandfather Francesco had been a partner in a circus, which was doing fine until the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-71; it got caught in the Siege of Paris, and its animals were all eaten by starving Parisians.

Francesco moved to South Wales and established a successful chain of temperance cafés selling ice-cream, sweets, cakes, tea and coffee. This business prospered, and Francesco was joined by his son, Louis. But with the First World War, the milk and sugar needed for cakes and ice cream were in desperately short supply and the firm struggled to survive.

Louis' sons Frank and Aldo, and probably also their brother Marco, arrived in Wales in the late 1920s – just before the mining communities of South Wales were hit by the Depression.

Frank and Aldo left the Valleys for Exeter where they opened a café, then one in Plymouth. By 1938 they had one in Bristol, at 68 Queens Road, a smart place for well-to-do patrons, complete

# Berni Inns

It's 70 years this year since the start of a Bristol firm which revolutionised Britain's eating habits. Eugene Byrne has a sudden craving for prawn cocktail and Black Forest gâteau.



Hort's, in Broad Street; one of the smartest restaurants in town when the Bernis acquired it in 1943.

with music licence - but no alcohol.

But when Italy declared war on Britain in 1940 Frank and Marco, who was now running his own business, were interned as enemy aliens. German bombing destroyed the Plymouth and Exeter cafés, and the one in Queens Road was damaged by fire.

Aldo, with a British passport, remained at liberty, though in lieu of military service had to work full-time at an agricultural nursery near Bristol. Somehow he managed to do this and keep the Bristol café in business until his brothers were released as no danger to national security.

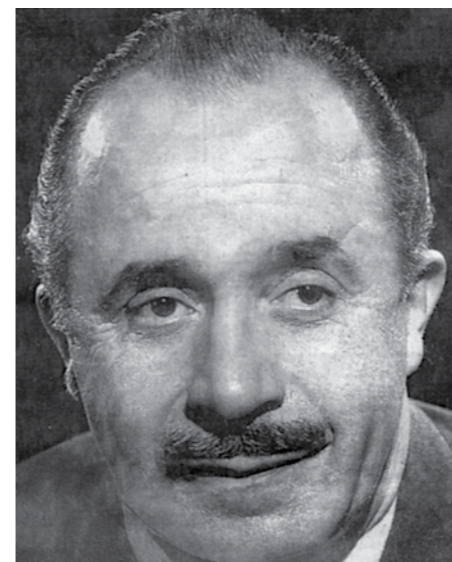
In 1943, Frank and Aldo Berni bought Hort's on Broad Street, a long-

established upmarket restaurant. They re-named their whole company Hort's in honour of this prestigious acquisition. Soon they had other restaurants in Gloucester and South Wales.

In 1947, Frank Berni went to the United States on a fact-finding tour as Bristol representative of the Caterers Association. The American food did not interest him, but he loved the efficiency of low-cost American catering.

The opportunity to try the American model came with the final end of food rationing in the mid-1950s. Then came the news that the lease on the Rummer in St Nicholas Market was up for grabs. Frank and Aldo Berni snapped it up.

The Rummer, a place where Coleridge



Frank Berni (Bristol Post).

and Wordsworth had once hung out, was Bristol's oldest pub. It showed; when the workmen were sent in to re-decorate they found themselves scraping off layers of paint up to half an inch thick.

The Rummer opened on June 27 1956 as the first in what would become Berni Inns, offering steak, chips, a roll and butter and ice cream for pudding for seven shillings and sixpence (37p).

The concept was now rolled out elsewhere. Berni restaurants had a simple set menu and the kitchens only needed a grill and a deep fat fryer. The staff didn't have to be skilled and the manager worked from a detailed operations manual known as “The Bible”.

They saved on a huge laundry bill by using place mats instead of tablecloths. They kept a very careful eye on the quality of their steaks.

Berni food was strictly controlled by weight, an idea allegedly borrowed

from the prison system. If the chef cut up the steak, it was difficult to ensure consistency, so they got their suppliers to cut it instead. Rather than ordering, say, 20lbs of steak, the Bernis ordered 40 eight-ounce steaks instead.

Until now, eating out was only for the well-off. A meal at a Berni would soon be within the means of millions. Equally important was the way in which Bernis were not intimidating; there were no snooty waiters to make people unaccustomed to eating out feel small or stupid.

By the early 1960s the firm was opening a new restaurant every month; they especially liked turning historic pubs into Berni Inns – the Llandoger Trow quickly became another Berni.

By the mid-1970s Berni Inns was the biggest restaurant chain outside the USA, employing 6,000 people serving over 20 million meals a year. Over 60% of these meals involved steak, but chicken in a basket, which Berni Inns pioneered, was popular, too.

They also revitalised Bristol's historic sherry industry by introducing their famous “schooners” – a whole eighth of a bottle, served from a big barrel.

And if you were still in a fit state at the end of that, you could end off your meal with an “Irish Coffee” laced with whiskey, or “French Coffee” with brandy.

From courting couples to business meetings, to birthday or anniversary celebrations ... a meal in a Berni Inn, on red plush seating in some characterful old English pub was an affordable special occasion.

The brothers became millionaires when the business went public in 1962. Eight years later the chain was sold for £14.5m to Grand Metropolitan, whose Schooner Inns were soon digested by the Berni brand.

Frank and Aldo remained on the Grand Met board for a while, but had effectively retired from business, and public tastes were changing. By the 1980s, Berni Inns were becoming seen as naff – prawn cocktail starter, steak

& chips main, Black Forest gâteau for dessert.

When the chain was sold to Whitbread in 1995 the inns became Beefeater Pubs and the Berni name vanished for ever.

Frank, the company chairman, had been the quiet one, the one in charge of the figures and the cost control. He retired to Jersey in 1970 with his wife Lina, who was from a Welsh Italian family.

Aldo was the more extrovert of the two, proud to call himself a Bristolian (albeit one with a distinct Italian/Welsh accent) and Bristol was where he remained, living in a modest four-bedroom bungalow in Clifton. He was a keen golfer and was often to be seen driving around town in a Bentley or Rolls Royce.

As the unofficial head of a large extended family to which he was devoted, he gave much of his fortune away to family members and to his Bristol-born wife Esme, who he had met during the war.

When she died in 1995 she left most of her £4.5m estate to the Bristol & District Branch of Animal Concern and its Holly Hedge Animal Sanctuary.

Aldo died in 1997 and Frank in 2000.

And much as a new generation might have scorned prawn cocktail and Black Forest gâteau, these two men had brought about a revolution, bringing affordable and decent-quality dining-out to millions who had rarely or never previously entered a restaurant.



“Next time you ‘eat in town’ book a table at Bernis.” – Advert for the Berni Restaurant on Queens Road, 1947 (Bristol Post).

# Herbalists Without Borders Bristol

Providing free herbal healthcare to people fleeing conflict, persecution, and intolerable living conditions. An innovative project to support migrants, refugees and asylum seekers.

**H**erbalists Without Borders Bristol (HWBB) is a local independent and volunteer-led group making herbal medicines for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in the city. Passionate about plant medicine and social justice, our group includes herbalists, plant enthusiasts and community activists. We have a herb growing allotment and rent a space in St Werburgh's community centre.

HWBB includes around fifty volunteers who believe that herbal medicine is an important and valuable healthcare



Processing fresh herbs

choice that as many people as possible should have access to as a significant part of any healthcare system, and that it can have profound effects individually, as a community, and in wider society.

Since 2017 we have been working with a range of community projects that offer support to refugees and asylum seekers based in Bristol. We take our mobile herbal dispensary to drop-in sessions at three different long standing support projects - Borderlands, Bristol Hospitality Network and Refugee Women of Bristol. Our medicines

include ready-made herbal syrups and glycerites, tea blends and skin balms focusing on a range of conditions such as insomnia, stress and anxiety, coughs and

colds, low immunity, joint pain, and digestive issues. By far our most popular medicines are a joint and muscle rub full of herbs like comfrey, wintergreen, rosemary and ginger, and a herbal cough syrup, soothing for all ages. We run public medicine making workshops to keep our stores well stocked, and we also have volunteers making medicines at home. As much as possible, we use herbs grown in our garden or foraged locally. Over the last eight years we have given out thousands of medicines to hundreds of people.

## The background

HWBB was set up in 2016 in response to the movement of people fleeing Syria and other countries, making the journey across Europe in search of safety and security. These journeys are frequently met with hostility, police violence and dire circumstances in camps along the way, not least in northern France on the route to the UK. We responded locally because at that time Bristol was a dispersal area for the immigration service. Setting up the project was an act of resistance against an unjust global

political system that has created border politics that entrench inequalities and injustices that are difficult to ignore.

Since then, it could be argued, that the UK's immigration politics have become even less humane. The asylum process perpetuates the stressful cycle of never being able to fully feel safe and secure in a new life, and never treated as equals. This political hostility has been reflected in recent times by a groundswell of strong public feeling and misinformation about the impact of migration on the lives of the current population of this island. Attention is diverted yet again from the gross inequalities between those with the money and power and those who feel they have less agency in their lives.

This 'hostile environment' has also introduced regulations that require ID checks for all patients accessing most non-emergency care. NHS Trusts are forced to assess eligibility for treatment and charge upfront those who cannot provide ID.

We believe that health is a right and not a privilege. These changes in policies have in turn created even more vulnerability and fear in migrant communities. A recent study showed a decline in refugees seeking NHS health care, for fear of this 'hostility'. We feel we are countering this when we go to the local community projects that we visit, offering support without ever talking about documentation.

We don't ask for anyone's personal details, papers or immigration status. We try to provide healthcare while treating each person with the human dignity and the respect that they deserve. We want to contribute to the dismantling of borders within healthcare. As one of our volunteers recently said, 'what we do is important, part of it is giving out the herbs but the other is turning up each month and being here as an act of solidarity'.

## How does herbal medicine help people?

Some of the challenges that people face who have fled their homes include: homelessness, unstable housing, poverty, ill health, loneliness and social isolation. In addition, there is often a constant state of uncertainty regarding someone's future and asylum status as well as the detrimental impacts of ongoing structural inequalities and racism. Living in such stressful

conditions greatly impacts health and wellbeing, creating high levels of anxiety and continued trauma. The impact of these stressors can manifest as chronic insomnia, depleted immunity leading to infections of all kinds, digestive issues, injuries that won't heal, as well as other more complex conditions.

Herbal medicine has a lot to offer in treating all of these ailments, and herbs can help build resilience to prevent future illness. We often support whole families including children and the people we meet have really welcomed our presence at the projects. Herbal medicine is a familiar healthcare choice in some of the countries that people have come from and the consistency of us being there regularly has built relationships and trust. We often exchange stories of native plants and their uses.

We also collaborate with other local community projects and run one-off workshops to enable people to make their own medicines.

We are continually learning, growing and developing as a project - reflecting and processing how we deliver herbal medicines and how best to work with different communities. For example, we have gained valuable insights by collectively reading and reflecting on 'Me and My White Supremacy' by Layla F Saad.

Everyone involved plays a crucial part in helping the project run smoothly and reliably.

We are volunteer-led and largely self-funded. We have so far always offered our medicines for free. This has been possible through the sales of calendars,

## How to get involved

- Donating medicine making supplies - apple cider vinegar, vegetable glycerine, olive oil, beeswax, essential oils - please contact us for a list
- Donating herbs (dried and processed) - please contact us for a current list
- Donating money (through PayPal via our email address [hwbb.bristol@gmail.com](mailto:hwbb.bristol@gmail.com))

- Volunteering - we have monthly steering meetings, monthly herb garden sessions, wild foraging walks through the year and monthly medicine making
- Buying books, calendars, posters and bags on our website - <https://bristolhwbb.org/>
- Following us on Instagram and Facebook for news and events

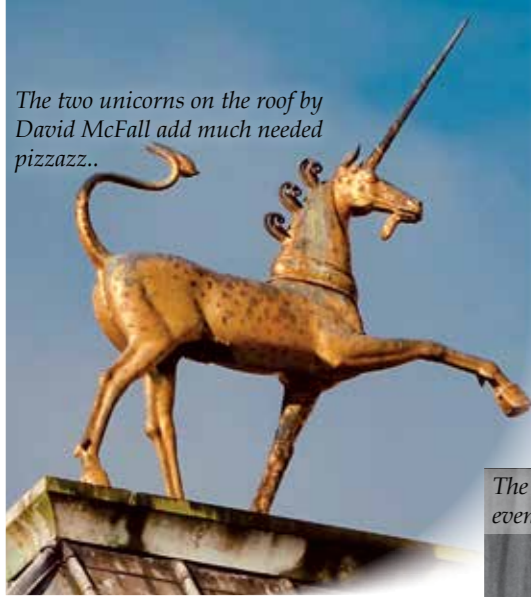


Above, Herbalists Without Borders. Our herb allotment. Below, Nettle foraging.



book and a harvesting poster and with a couple of small grants. Our 'Herbal Yearbook' is a user-friendly guide through the calendar year, giving tips on wild harvesting, growing and making medicines at home. We have just created and sold a beautiful calendar on medicinal mushrooms for 2026.

The two unicorns on the roof by David McFall add much needed pizzazz...



# Who Ordered the Unicorns?

Mike Manson celebrates the 70th anniversary of City Hall.

The Mayor's Parlour even had a coal effect fire.



The foundation stone for City Hall, then known as the Council House, was laid in 1935. The architect, E. Vincent Harris (1876-1971), had already built the County Hall in Taunton, a mini-version of what we see in Bristol. The shell of the building, a reinforced concrete frame, was almost complete when war was declared in 1939. During the Second World War (1939-45) the bare Council Chamber was used as a 'British Restaurant'; in reality a canteen for those bombed-out of their homes or not able to cook for themselves. Even after the war there were shortages and the building wasn't officially opened until 1956.

The Portland stone figure in the central archway, carved by Charles

Wheeler (1892-1974), has variously been described as a generic Elizabethan seaman or more specifically John Cabot. The wide Lutyens inspired brick exterior is imposing but bland. Nevertheless, it is a building of confidence and pride.

When the two gilded unicorns by David McFall (1919-88) arrived on site for installation nobody knew where to put them. It seems that Harris, who was on holiday in France at the time, had forgotten he'd ordered them and they weren't on the architectural plans. But once installed the glowing unicorns

add much needed pizzazz. College Green, in front of the building, provides a public space for crowds to gather at times of celebration and crisis. The shallow moat comes in useful for less peaceful occasions.

Inside, in spite of post-war austerity, the interior is rather splendid. The quality of workmanship by Bristol construction firm Cowlin & Son is superb. The walls and corridors of the entrance hall are lined with Doulling stone from the Mendips. In the foyer a clock encircled by signs of the zodiac, with its own wind dial, references Bristol's maritime past. The names of the mayors of Bristol, dating back to 1216, are carved into the stone walls of the Council Chamber. Although the semiabstract ceiling in the Conference Hall painted by W.T. Monnington (1902-76) has a Festival of Britain vibe, there is little reference to modernism in the remainder of the building. The Lord Mayor's parlour even had a fireplace, albeit with a coal-effect electric fire.

In 2012, on his first day in office, George Ferguson, Bristol's first directly elected mayor, changed the name of the building to City Hall.

From: Manson's Bristol Miscellany, Volume 1 (Bristol Books)



City Hall. Lutyen's inspired brick exterior is imposing but bland. The foundation stone was laid in 1935. But the building wasn't officially opened until 1956.

Norman at Ashton Court Mansion.



## An appreciation Norman Routledge (1957 - 2025)

Bristol Civic Society was saddened to hear of the death of Norman Routledge. Simon Birch remembers.

I first met Norman in 2019 at St Michael on the Mount Church. He had just purchased it from the Diocese and was full of plans to restore it after the disastrous fire and to bring it into use as a venue.

I was intrigued. I had seen Norman from afar when there was a local tv programme about his work at Kings Weston House, putting right the many alterations made by the police and others over the years and, unusually, creating living accommodation for family and friends. That a great concept - people actually living in an important historic building, exactly what it was built for.

I have to admit that I was immediately captivated by Norman. He didn't seem to see problems and challenges, just opportunities and "stuff to do". He appeared to be driven by an overriding mantra that life should be fun.

We used to meet up fairly regularly, often in The Clyde. Discussions typically interrupted as Norman knew so many of the regulars!

At St Michaels the low ceiling height of the crypt had been seen as a major barrier to the successful restoration of the whole building. The crypt floorspace was essential if the ground floor was to be used for functions, it would accommodate a bar, toilets and other activities. Of course, we didn't need to be concerned any more. Norman sourced a specialist lifting frame which he and his team used to lift the heavy floor slabs, enabling the vaults below to be lowered and the slabs replaced, exactly in place. Fortunately, any burials below had subsided over the years creating enough space for this

procedure to be carried out efficiently and reverently.

Unusually Norman restored The Mount Without (as it came to be called) without recourse to grants and by employing direct labour to undertake specialist jobs such as rebuilding the damaged windows and fabricating a completely new timber roof over part of the building.

Norman was very generous to the Bristol Civic Society, letting us use The Mount Without for a number of meetings, including several AGMs and other meetings. We presented a Design Award in 2022 for the restoration project.

Norman delighted in ownership of his French chateau as no conservation officers were involved in regulating its restoration. Apparently just the local Mayor.

He wanted to introduce a similar system for Ashton Court Mansion. I must confess to being doubtful that he would succeed, even with his indomitable positivity and enthusiasm. Successful building projects were one thing, changing the national planning framework was another! This was one topic where we argued amicably.

I was delighted, and relieved, when Norman turned his attention to Ashton Court Mansion. He was not deterred by earlier rebuffs and was determined to establish a trust and to persuade the City Council that the time had finally come to make a positive decision about the building's future. There had been so many previous reports and abortive proposals.

I last saw Norman at the Council's Policy Committee in October last year. He was physically much diminished but still full of life and enthusiasm for the plans. He told me that I had wanted him to sort St Michael's and Ashton Court and that he had almost completed both!



Above left, Norman at Kings Weston House. Above right, Kings Weston House. Creating living accommodation for family and friends.

# Bristol's Cinderella Plaques

**Malcolm Ravenscroft of the Blue Plaques Panel seeks out some forgotten plaques.**

Bristol Civic Society's Blue Plaque Panel regularly receives requests from people interested in having a blue plaque installed on a building to commemorate a significant person or event. Since Bristol Civic Society took over responsibility for the scheme in 2015, we have been responsible for installing about forty such plaques. These have covered such diverse subjects as the formation of the Ffestiniog Railway, a conscientious objector, a Bletchley Park code-breaker and most recently, the first flight of a box-kite aircraft on the Downs.



*Friese-Greene was the first person to create moving pictures on screen. Queens Road.*

However, in addition to the Society's blue plaques there are numerous other plaques of various shapes, sizes and colours. Some of these have been erected by well-established groups such as the Clifton and Hotwells Improvement Society (CHIS). Others have been installed by particular interest groups or by public subscription. However, there are several more obscure plaques where their origins have been lost in the mists of time. These are the so-called 'Cinderella' plaques – an expression coined from them being relatively overlooked but still containing an element of magic.

None of these are the direct responsibility of the Bristol Civic Society, but at least some are of such significance that they should be preserved and possibly refurbished to bring them into line with the established blue plaque scheme.

A good example of such a plaque is an easily-overlooked rectangular wooden panel erected on a property in Berkeley Square with the inscription that McAdam 'inventor of macadamised' roads lived here from 1805 to 1808. John McAdam was a Scotsman who in 1816 was appointed General Surveyor of the Bristol Turnpike Trust. He was responsible for over 150 miles of roads within the Bristol area. During this time, he invented a totally new way of road construction. One of his earliest trial roads was Bridge Valley Road. The process proved so successful that it rapidly became the construction method for the majority of roads throughout the country.

A further example is a rather obscure brown metal sign in Queens Road alongside the door to an underground night club and mostly obscured by plastic vines! It recognises William



*Berkeley Square. McAdam 'inventor of macadamised' roads lived here.*

Friese-Greene who is considered to be the English inventor of cinematography. After leaving Queen Elizabeth Hospital school, he was apprenticed to photographer Maurice Guttenberg who had his studio in Queens Road from 1869 to 1875. Friese-Greene built a camera that was able to record real movement and as such, was the first person to create moving pictures on screen. The emerging photographic industry held Friese-Greene in such respect that at the time of his funeral, cinemas across the country observed a two-minute silence.



*Dr William Budd was one of the country's most outstanding contributors to medical science. Park Street*

Another brown metal plaque is erected on the wall of a restaurant on Park Street. It is easily missed as it is generally surrounded with posters for various music festivals and events! It recognises Dr William Budd who was one of the country's most outstanding contributors to medical science. He was a physician at the Bristol Infirmary looking after patients suffering from typhoid, cholera and typhus. He was determined to improve the city's water

and sanitary system. When the cholera epidemic of 1866 reached Bristol, death figures were far lower than in previous epidemics. This was put down to William Budd's work.

Possibly the worst example of a 'Cinderella' plaque is that erected on the side of St Nicholas church in St Nicholas Street, in the centre of the city. It simply says that John Cabot, navigator and venturer lived on the street! In 2015, it was reported to be showing its age with cracks and paint peeling off. This has not improved over the last 10 years.

The plaque commemorates the epic voyages of John Cabot and his son, Sebastian in 1497. John was born in Genoa and his son in Bristol and they are recognised by several more significant plaques in the city. There is also a very impressive statue in the



*Possibly the worst example of a 'Cinderella' plaque. St Nicholas Street.*

docks alongside the Arnolfini. Even so, it is disappointing that such a central plaque is being allowed to deteriorate.

These are only a few examples of such plaques. The fact that we know little of their origins adds a certain poignancy to their existence. If members have any information about them or indeed, have other examples of such 'cinderellas', we would be very pleased to hear from you. [plaques@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:plaques@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk)

## Bristol Walk Fest

Bristol Walk Fest was launched in 2013 by Bristol City Council's Walking for Health team. Since then it's evolved from a one-week event to a month-long celebration, now one of the largest urban walking festivals in the UK, coinciding with Living Streets National Walking Month.

This year 74 groups have signed up to provide more than 150 walks. Including repeat walks and audio trails done in your own time. This amounts to more than 400 events in all.

Bristol is a self-contained city, perfect for navigating on foot, full of green spaces hosting nature, foraging and wildlife walks, or routes centred around landmarks and city history. The Walk Fest programme is an eclectic mix, from tasters of different walking sports to bookshop crawls, and access to sites including Arnos Vale Cemetery, Kings Weston House and Netham Park.

As a city full of cultural heritage, you can join tours of Bristol street art, poetry inspired by locations, or theatre tours from Show of Strength, this year celebrating their 40-year anniversary and their establishment of legendary venues the Tobacco Factory and the Hen & Chicken. The festival launch on 1 May at Hamilton House has an arts focus, with guest speakers from Misfits Poetry group for people with learning difficulties, and Sheila Hannon from Show of Strength, who



are also creating a special pre-event walk starting at the Hole in the Wall in Queen Square, ending at launch venue Hamilton House.

The festival aims to bring walking to the whole of Bristol. This year 80% of walks are free. Walks can be searched

**Gulliver's Travels 300 exhibition at Bristol Central Library. Monday 3 August until Sunday 27 September 2026.**

Celebrating the 300th anniversary of the book that features Bristol in the opening passages. It's a satire on Defoe's Robinson Crusoe, and the exhibition will contextualise Swift's masterpiece through Bristol Central Library's priceless collections.

Why did Swift chose Bristol? And why did he admire Somerset Buccaneer William Dampier so? Defoe had dismissed both Dampier and his Bristol privateer colleague, Woodes Rogers, as "illiterate sailors", despite using their writings...



by accessibility criteria including wheelchair access, proximity to public transport, and buggy or dog-friendly routes.

For details on Bristol Walk Fest launch event, online listings and more: <https://www.bristolwalkfest.com/>

# Book Reviews

Mike Manson reads some Bristol Books.

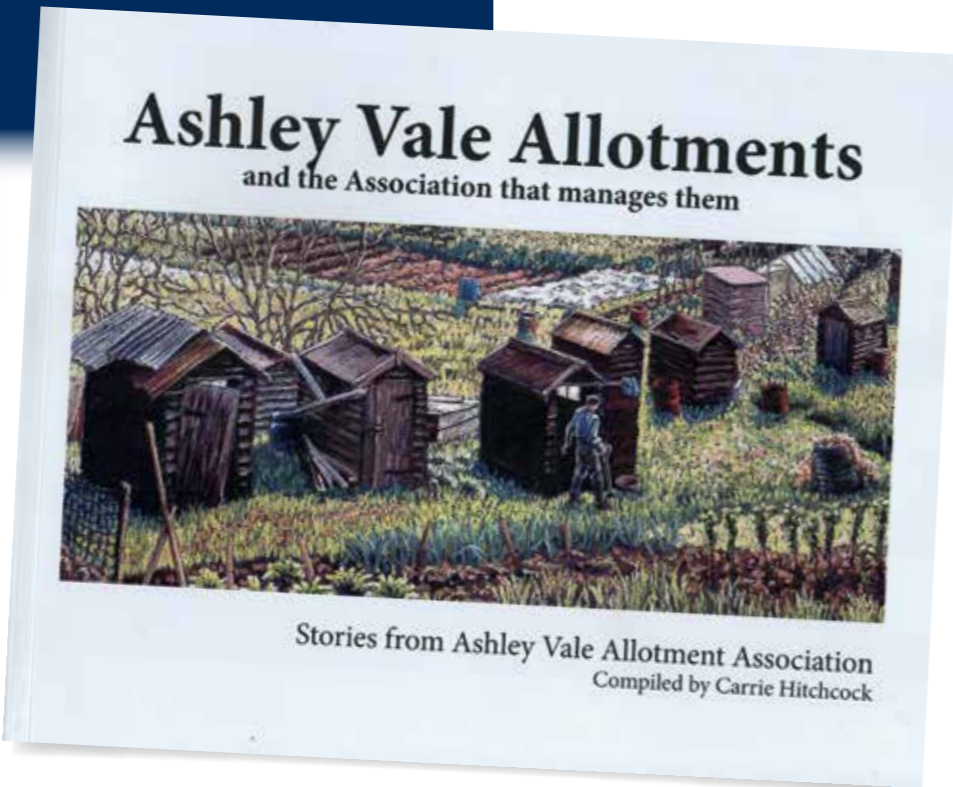
## Ashley Vale Allotments and the Association that manages them

Compiled by Carrie Hitchcock, Available from Ashley Vale Allotment Association. £12.00.

This gorgeously illustrated book came to fruition after Maggie Moss collected a considerable amount of archive material for the Ashley Vale Allotments' centenary in 2017.

Sadly, Maggie died in 2021. Her family recognised her commitment and love of the allotments with a generous donation. The allotment management committee decided that a suitable use of this money would be to create this book celebrating the allotments and the people who get so much pleasure from this facility.

This book outlines the history of the allotments and the community that benefits from it. The Allotment Act of 1908 imposed a duty on every urban authority to provide allotments where there was demand. Subsequently, Bristol City Council began to acquire land across the City. At that time Ashley Vale was mostly



underdeveloped grassland surrounded by the new suburbs of St Werburghs and St Andrews. There was a boost to allotment use during the First World War; Ashley Vale Allotment Association was founded in 1917. The famous Dig for Victory campaign during the Second World War extended the demand for allotments once again. Now, nationally, a shortage of housing is currently putting pressure on allotments.

As well as a history of the Ashley Vale Allotments there's a range of charmingly illustrated profiles of the people who use them. It's wonderful to read about the sheer joy that allotment holders experience. It's not merely about growing plants but also about looking after the hedges and ponds, pressing apples, maintaining the composting toilets and much more. An antidote to the digital age.

## The Misérables of Bristol - Soldiers and Sailors of Stapleton Prison

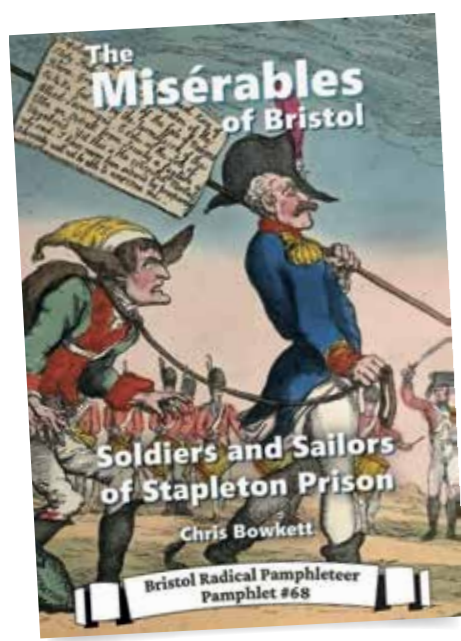
Chris Bowkett  
Bristol Radical History Group, £3.00. (Bargain!)

'Lining up for morning roll call, a sailor captured at Trafalgar strikes up a conversation with a Pole who had served in the Caribbean. They talk about the mundane – how measly the rations are, what items fetch the best price at market and what they are going to buy with the money. They overhear some Americans, just some privateers, probably planning how they are going to try and escape again. They ask each other how many died in the hospital this week, and when they can get away from this cold and wet country.'

Now known for the Glenside UWE

university campus and its proximity to Stoke Park, the sleepy parish of Stapleton was once home to around 13,000 soldiers and sailors who were interned in Stapleton Prison as prisoners of war during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. The prisoners were mainly French, but also American, Spanish, Dutch, Danish, Russian and Polish, all captured fighting Britain and its allies throughout the world between 1792 and 1814. A large contingent held in Stapleton had been captured 7,000 kilometres away in the Caribbean, having failed to reintroduce slavery to France's rebellious colony Saint-Domingue (modern Haiti).

This fascinating pamphlet tells the little known story of how thousands of prisoners lived and died in Stapleton Prison.



# Bristol Civic Society membership

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)

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

## 2026 Annual General Meeting

Save the date! Tuesday 30 June, at 7.30pm

We haven't yet made concrete arrangements for the 2026 AGM. It might be on-line (as we did during the Covid years) or in-person in a venue to be decided. But we have settled on **Tuesday 30 June**, so make a note of this date!

We will send out full details nearer the time, by email and (for those few members for whom we do not have an email address) by post.

And, as our AGMs have usually been the occasion for a social get-together, we will certainly be having such an event if the AGM is on-line.

## New Members needed for the Management Team

We have two vacancies on the management team and there may be more, so we are looking for volunteers. The usual route is to stand for election (always uncontested!) at the AGM, but we can co-opt people at any time, so don't hesitate to get in touch now if you think you might be interested.

In formal terms, nominations for election at the AGM need to be with the secretary three weeks before the date of the AGM.

If you'd like to know more about what's involved contact the chair, Sandra Fryer ([chair@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:chair@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk)), or secretary Mike Bates ([secretary@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:secretary@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk))

## Membership application to join Bristol Civic Society

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

**Please return to:** Membership Secretary, Bristol Civic Society, 17 Bathurst Parade, Bristol, BS1 6UB.  
Cheques, if not made by standing order, made payable to Bristol Civic Society.  
**Enquiries:** Tel: 0117 927 6991.  
**Email:** [membership@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk](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. 1214725

**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

Spring / Summer 2026

A stimulating and varied events programme is a major part of what Bristol Civic Society can offer to its members and supporters. Our thanks to all of you who attend, on-line or in person, and of course we are grateful to all the speakers, who give their services free, and to the various venues which invite us in. But the programme takes a lot of volunteer effort on our part, and we are struggling somewhat! See the plea for help below.

Among the highlights of the last few months have been a visit to the Knowle West Media Centre, a guided walk around town to look at Bristol's Brutalist and Modernist Buildings and a fascinating zoom talk on the ups and downs of trying to get the voice of a community - in this case, Fishponds - across to developers.

Planned visits include a return to the Bristol Beacon, with this time a chance to look behind the scenes (27 April); a look around the University's new Temple Quarter campus (no date fixed, but before the students arrive!); the refurbished Jacobs Wells Baths; and we hope to arrange a walk guided by Richard Stride to see the elegant houses built between the wars by the Stride Brothers.



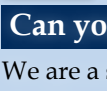
As to talks, either online or in a hall, we are planning ones on Bristol and the Film Industry, on the Clean Air Zone and air quality, and we are in touch with the Bristol Temple Quarter team for an online briefing on the plans for the St Philip's Marsh area. We also hope to focus on housing, an issue of major importance to the city - by the time you read this, we will have had a zoom talk on Densification, and related issues will be picked up in a group of



Above, Finzels Reach. Left, Wills Tower.

planned events under the provisional title of City Vision, later in the year

## Also coming up:

-  **JUNE** AGM 30 June (see notice on page 27)
-  **JULY** Design Awards ceremony: early July
-  Summer Social

## Can you help?

We are a small team, soon to get smaller, and we really need more people - partly to come up with ideas,

but mainly to do the administration follow up - emailing, phoning, booking rooms, sending out adverts - to turn them into reality. We meet briefly every six to eight weeks, but most of the work is the admin, which we do from home. If you want to know more, please email [events@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:events@bristolcivicsociety.org.uk) or button-hole one of us at an event.

## Booking

Most events need to be booked; zooms are free, there is (usually) a modest charge of up to £5 for others. Further information and booking is via the emails we send out about a month before, so do be sure that you are signed up to the mailing list (you don't even have to be a member) <https://www.bristolcivicsociety.org.uk/get-involved/keep-in-touch/>

## Bristol Walk Fest

Get your walking shoes on this May. 74 groups, 148 walks. Search on the Bristol Walk Fest website <https://www.bristolwalkfest.com/>