

# Bristol800

## Book of Walks



**Bristol Festival of Ideas/**

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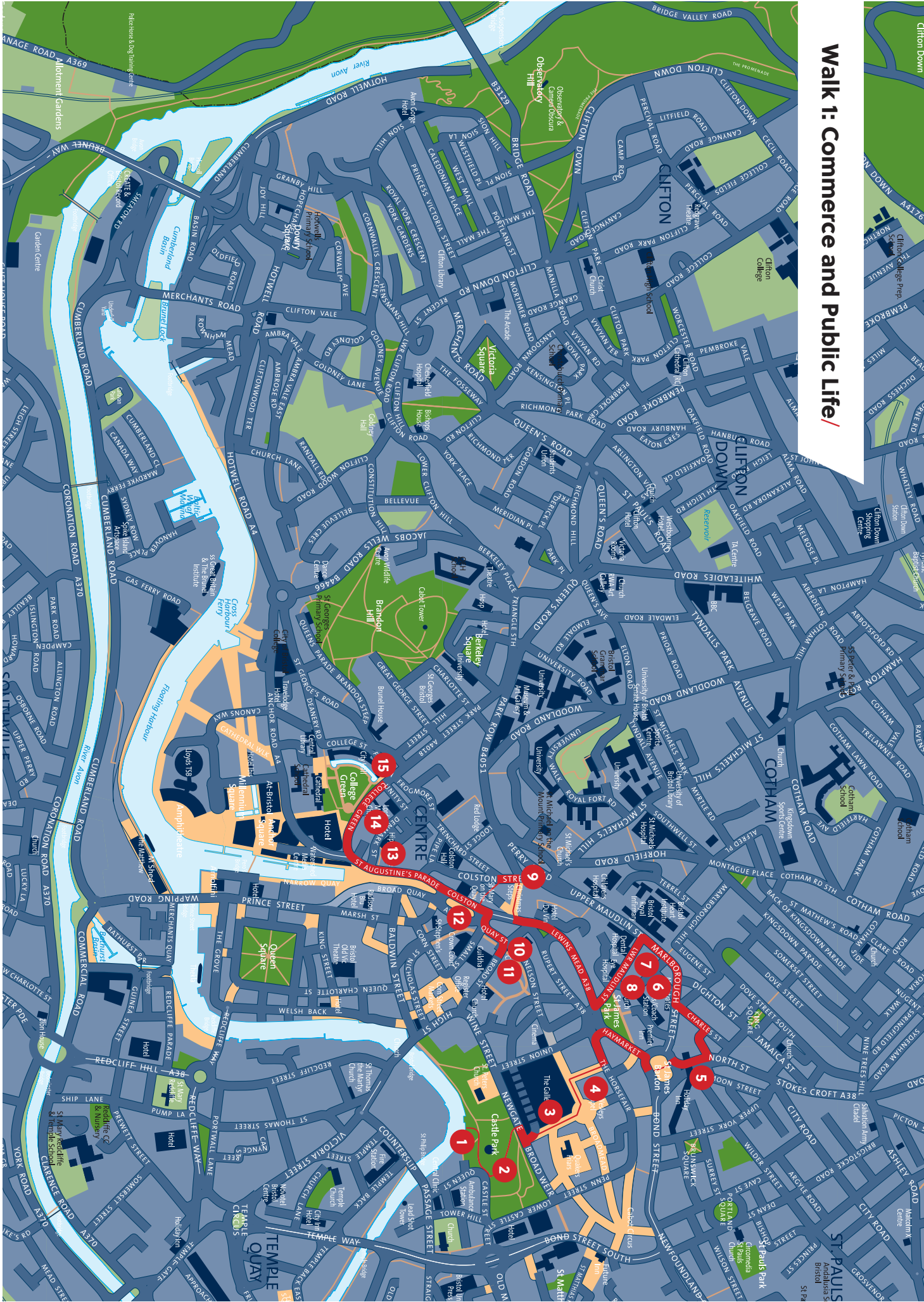


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Walk 1: Commerce and Public Life



## Walk 1: Commerce and Public Life/

Bristol was originally established hundreds of years ago to serve as a trading centre for the region. Throughout this walk you will learn about Bristol's trading past and the influence of trade and commerce upon the city, as well as visit sites connected to local politics and civic and public life. It features architectural points of interest dating from the twelfth century to the present day.

The walk begins and ends on level ground with a number of hills to climb up or down along the way. There is an optional section for those who are able to manage steep steps. Most of the pavement surfaces are of good quality. Allow at least 45 minutes, not including stops for refreshment or for visitor attractions.

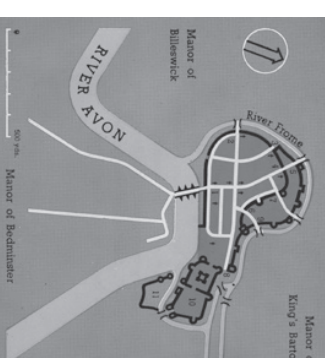
## The Walk

***The walk begins at the lamp-post at the top of the ramp to the ferry landing in Castle Park (1), looking out across the water.***

Bristol came into being as a trading centre because it was perfectly situated on a well-drained and easily defended knoll on a navigable waterway. It was built at the junction of the Rivers Frome and Avon; was within reach of abundant grazing and agricultural land; building materials and fuel; and enjoyed a generally mild climate. It was close to the old Roman roads of the Fosse Way (linking Lincoln to Exeter) and the Via Julia (from London to the port of Sea Mills via Bath), and to the post-Roman defensive Wansdyke earthwork. Bristol was originally known by the Saxon name of Brictstowe or 'Place of the Bridge'.

Around 1240 a major engineering project was begun to divert the course of the River Frome. This was to increase the number of quaysides and provide deeper berths for trading vessels, and took seven years to complete. The first significant extension to the town took place around 1248 when the existing wooden bridge across the Avon was replaced with a stronger stone one and the area south of the river – the direction you are looking now – was incorporated. Since 1809 the river at this point has been non-tidal and part of William Jessop's Floating Harbour (see Walk 3).

Goods imported to Bristol in the early thirteenth century included cloth, tin, timber, wool and madder (a plant used in dyeing). Fish would have come



Maps showing Bristol's city walls and the changing course of the Frome c1200 and c1248 (from *English City: the Growth and the Future of Bristol* published in 1945 by J S Fry and Sons Ltd). The bridge across the River Avon is also shown.

from Iceland and wine from Northern France. By the early sixteenth century, Bristol merchants were trading further afield, including Northern Europe, Spain, Italy and the Middle East, and beginning to explore the possibilities of what was then termed the New World (North America and Canada). You'll learn more about the city's international trade on other walks.

***Go up the slope to the main path and turn right. You will pass on your left a bronze drinking fountain by Kate Malone decorated with images of the cod that were once caught by local fishing boats. John Cabot, the Venetian explorer, navigator and cartographer who sailed from Bristol in 1497, hired crews who already had experience of venturing far out across the Atlantic in search of fishing grounds. His ships were fitted out by Bristol merchants. By travelling west rather than east Cabot had hoped to find a profitable alternative route to the commercial riches of Asia, but instead he 'discovered' Newfoundland. The path you are following runs parallel to what remains of the southern wall of Bristol Castle. Continue to the Bristol Legible City Castle Park map board (2).***

There was a castle at Bristol by 1088, built on the orders of Bishop Geoffrey de Montbray who had been awarded the manor of Barton Regis (which included Bristol) by William the Conqueror. It was strengthened and extended between 1122 and 1147 by the Earl of Gloucester – William's illegitimate grandson. Gloucester supported the Empress Matilda, the daughter of Henry I, in her long-running struggle for the British throne with Henry's nephew King Stephen and the castle was the headquarters of her campaign. When Matilda's son Henry became king on Stephen's death, he claimed the castle as his own; his son, John, later made the people of Bristol pay for its upkeep. Among its many prisoners was Princess Eleanor of Brittany who died here in 1241 having been held captive for 40 years. King John feared she or her heirs would claim the throne.



In later years the castle's military significance was greatly reduced and it fell into disrepair. It was partly restored during the Civil War (1642-51) – as the second biggest city in England at the time, the control of Bristol was a prime objective for both the Parliamentarian and Royalist forces – but was dismantled after the war, along with the city's defensive walls, on the orders of Oliver Cromwell. The land on which it once stood was used for housing. Following the destruction caused by the Bristol Blitz in the Second World War, there were ambitious redevelopment plans for the site, but it remained largely derelict until this park was opened in 1978. A few remnants of the old castle can still be seen.

**Take the path that passes the bandstand to exit the park at Newgate. Cross at the pedestrian crossing on your right and go straight ahead into Merchant Street. Continue to The Merchant Tailors' Almshouse (3) on your left.**

The Guild of Merchant Tailors received its charter in 1399. By 1604 the guild was using tenements on this street (then known as Marshall Street) as an almshouse for its impoverished members. The building you see before you replaced the old tenements and was completed in 1701. The guild closed in 1824 when its last surviving member died. The building is currently used as a restaurant.

During the medieval period, craftspeople could only practise their trade if they were a member of a guild. It usually took seven years of apprenticeship before a person was received as a journeyman and if he wished to set up his own business he had to submit a test piece (or 'masterpiece') for appraisal by the guild officers' panel. Across the country, the decline of the old guild system was hastened by the Industrial Revolution when mechanisation replaced some forms of skilled labour and mass production developed. However, Bristol was slower to industrialise than other major cities (like Birmingham and Manchester), partly due to the conservatism of the local merchants who preferred to focus on traditional trading for as long as it remained profitable.

**Continue up Merchant Street. To your left is the Galleries Shopping Centre, which forms part of Bristol's Shopping Quarter, along with Broadmead and Cabot Circus. Before the destruction of the Second World War, Bristol's shops were still concentrated on the medieval heart of the city around Corn Street, Broad Street, Wine Street and High Street (see Walk 2). Turn left on Broadmead to reach John Wesley's Chapel, The New Room (4) on your right.**

This is the world's oldest Methodist chapel. It was completed in 1739, but was considerably extended and partially reconstructed in 1748. John Wesley, a Church of England minister, had been invited to Bristol to preach to the poor by George Whitefield. The large gatherings were initially held out of doors. Wesley organised his followers into religious 'societies' that would meet in each others' homes for Bible study and prayer. He decided an

indoor meeting place was needed to avoid the disapproving attention of members of the Anglican church, including the Bishop of Bristol. A new worldwide religious movement was born; one that particularly appealed to the poor, working class, though many were put off by its strict rules of behaviour. The New Room was also used as a dispensary and school room.

**The New Room:** Visitors welcome. Normal opening hours: Mon-Sat 10am-4pm. There is no admission charge. There is a retiring collection for the Friday lunchtime concerts. [www.newroombristol.org.uk](http://www.newroombristol.org.uk) 0117 926 4740

**If The Arcade is open (on your right) you can take this to The Horsefair where you cross the road and turn left. Otherwise continue along Broadmead and turn right into Union Street. From the bottom of The Horsefair bear round to your right to St James Barton Roundabout. Go down the slope to the subway. Go straight across The Bearpit and exit by the opposite subway (headed Stokes Croft, Kingsdown). Turn left then right up the slope to the Bristol Legible City board. Follow the road round to your left, under the building that was once used as offices by the now disbanded Avon County Council, and into Stokes Croft (5).**

Unofficially referred to as The People's Republic of Stokes Croft, this was a once thriving inner-city suburb, which suffered from decades of neglect and poor planning decisions. In recent years, it has re-emerged as an unconventional cultural quarter noted for its street art (much of which has been authorised by the buildings' owners, if not always by Bristol City Council) and its independent shops. As is often the case, there is a fine balance in meeting the needs of all residents – new and old – including those seeking a less idiosyncratic form of regeneration, those wanting a radical alternative and those at risk of being priced out of their rented homes as property values increase.

**Turn left into Cherry Lane and then right up Barton Street. Turn left into Charles Street (look out for number 4, once home to Charles Wesley, the Methodist minister and writer of hymns, and younger brother of John) and right into Marlborough Street. Cross Marlborough Street at the pedestrian crossing and stop by the University of Bristol Dorothy Hodgkin Building (6).**

Among the Nobel Prize winners who have studied or worked at the University of Bristol is Dorothy Hodgkin, who won the Nobel Prize for Chemistry in 1964 for her work on X-rays. She was the university's chancellor from 1970 to 1988. The university was officially founded in 1909 when it received its royal charter, but it had its origins in a number of pre-existing colleges including the Merchant Venturers' Technical College dating from 1595. Winston Churchill was appointed the university's third chancellor in 1929, a position he held until his death in 1965. Winifred Lucy Shapland was appointed registrar in 1931, making her the first female registrar of a British university. Both

the University of Bristol and the University of the West of England play an influential role in the development, economy and culture of the city.

**Marlborough Street becomes Upper Maudlin Street. Continue to The Old Building of Bristol Royal Infirmary (7).**

This is one of the oldest infirmaries in the country. It was founded in 1735 with the support of Paul Fisher, a wealthy merchant. Throughout the city you will see evidence of public acts of charity on the part of local business people from a time when there was no state provision for the poor, the unemployed and the sick. Our reaction to this benevolence is influenced by present-day judgments on how some of their wealth was acquired – views that were rarely shared by their contemporaries. Much of the economy of the city in the eighteenth century, for example, was dependent upon slave labour in the colonies (see Walk 3).

Opposite the Old Building is a newer building opened in 1912. The fundraising campaign was led by Sir George White, who had been elected president of the infirmary in 1906. Bristol has been an international centre for aviation since 1910 when White's British & Colonial Aeroplane Company opened its first factory here. British & Colonial was later known as the Bristol Aeroplane Company and was a major local employer. White was also the chairman of the Bristol Tramways & Carriage Company. In 1895, under his guidance, Bristol became the first city in Britain to have electric trams that were approved by the Board of Trade. In addition he introduced Britain's first motor taxi service to Bristol.

**Turn left down Lower Maudlin Street (a steep hill), passing the University of Bristol Dental Hospital and the Bristol Eye Hospital, and turn left into Whitson Street for the West Entrance of St James Priory (8).**

This former Benedictine priory is the oldest surviving building in Bristol. It was founded in 1129 by Robert Fitzroy, Earl of Gloucester, whom we encountered earlier on this walk. The Benedictine monks who lived here in the medieval period cared for the poor and the sick. The priory was a major landowner and had a significant influence upon the city's commercial affairs, as well as its parishioners' spiritual well-being. The week-long St James Fair was held every Whitsuntide in the churchyard and was one of the most famous in the country. The last took place in 1837, by which time the trading component had been eclipsed by entertainments deemed unsuitable by the church. The priory was dissolved during the reign of Henry VIII and many of its buildings were demolished. Only the west end survived as a smaller parish church, and this is still used for worship today.

**St James Priory:** Normal opening hours for visitors: Mon-Fri 10am-5pm. There is no admission charge, but donations are welcome. There is a café on site. [www.stjamesprioryproject.org.uk](http://www.stjamesprioryproject.org.uk) 0117 933 8945

**Return to Lower Maudlin Street and continue walking down the hill. For a closer view of the exterior of the church either go up the steps to your left and along St James' Parade or follow the road round to your left and take the sloping path up through St James' Park. Then return to the bottom of Lower Maudlin Street and, using the pedestrian crossing, enter Lewins Mead. Head towards the city centre.**

**If you are unable to manage steep flights of steps, continue through Centre Gate Passage and as far as the pedestrian crossing that will take you across the road to the front of Electricity House, the large Art Deco building. Otherwise, turn right up Christmas Steps. Until 1669 this was an unpaved path and until 1774 it went by various names, including Knifemiths' Street because of the many cutlers who worked here. Turn left on Colston Street to Foster's Almshouse (9).**

Here is another example of a building associated with philanthropy. The almshouse was founded in 1483 by the merchant John Foster, who served as a mayor of Bristol. With the exception of the fifteenth-century chapel dedicated to the Three Kings of Cologne (on the left), the original building was demolished and rebuilt in 1702. It was rebuilt again between 1861 and 1883, at which time the chapel was restored. In 2007 the building was sold by Bristol Charities for private development with the money raised paying for a new purpose-built property in Henbury that provides retirement, sheltered and almshouse accommodation.

**Continue a little way along Colston Street and go down the steep and narrow stairway on your left. Cross the road and take the next flight of steps down (Zed Alley) to Colston Avenue. Use the pedestrian crossing to your left to cross to Electricity House, formerly used as offices and showrooms for the South Western Electricity Board and recently converted into apartments. Its designer, Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, also designed Battersea Power Station and the iconic British red telephone boxes. This is where you will rejoin the walk if you missed out Christmas Steps. Bear round the side of the building and into Quay Street. Look out for more examples of street art. Cross to St John's-on-the-Wall (10) on your right.**

This is the only survivor of five medieval churches that were built over the gates in Bristol's defensive walls. The church was founded in the late fourteenth century by William Frampton, another merchant and Bristol mayor. His effigy lies on his monument in the chancel with a sculpture of his dog at his feet. No longer used for regular worship, the building is run by the Churches Conservation Trust. It is opened regularly by volunteer stewards throughout the year, but please call the Bristol office on 0117 929 1766 before your visit.

**Go through the arch under the church and up Broad Street for a look at Edward Everard's Printing Works (11), on your left.**

Bristol was once famous for its glass and soap manufacture, its pottery, its wine merchants and its brewers. Tobacco, sugar-refining and chocolate – on which much of the city's eighteenth-century prosperity was built – continued to play an important role in Bristol's economy well into the twentieth century. By the early 1900s newer businesses in metalwork, printing and packaging and boot and shoe manufacture had developed. Before you is the colourful façade of the printing works owned by Edward Everard, which was completed in 1901 (the works themselves were demolished in the 1970s). It is in the flamboyant Art Nouveau style. The figures depicted on the marble tiles are the printers Gutenberg (misspelt) and William Morris, the Spirit of Literature and a woman holding up a lamp and a mirror to represent Light and Truth. Significant contributors to Bristol's economy today include aerospace, the arts, media and technology companies, 'green' businesses, higher education and legal and financial services, but what many feel makes the city special is its diverse range of self-employed individuals and independent businesses working outside of the mainstream.

**Go back down Broad Street and retrace your steps to the pedestrian crossing on Colston Avenue. Turn left and go down the avenue until you are opposite The Cenotaph (12).**

Around the city there are many memorials – including crosses, tablets and plaques – commemorating those who were killed during the First World War, but Bristol was among the last major cities in Britain to build a civic monument to the dead. The Cenotaph was unveiled before a crowd of 50,000 people on 26 June 1932. In the preceding years there had been considerable debate about what form a memorial should take: whether it might be of practical benefit to the living, like a hospital, or a structure designed for remembrance ceremonies. There were also debates about where it should be located. Under pressure from the local British Legion, a fundraising campaign backed by the local press raised sufficient money to pay for this monument. A design contest for local architects was launched in January 1931 and won by Harry Heathman and Eveline Blacker.

Among those who had protested against the war was Walter Ayles, the Independent Labour councillor for Easton and founder member of the No-Conscription Fellowship. He was imprisoned for refusing to serve in the military. He was released from prison in 1919 and elected MP for Bristol North in 1923. A blue plaque for Ayles is on his home in Ashley Down.

**Note that at the time of writing it was not possible to cross over for a closer look at the Cenotaph because of the construction of the new MetroBus system. If this work has been completed then find a safe place to cross before coming back to this side of the road again to continue your walk along Colston Avenue. You will pass St Mary-on-the Quay, begun in 1839 and designed by local architect Richard Shackleton Pope, who worked with Isambard Kingdom Brunel (see Walk 3). As its name suggests, it would have originally been set close to the dockside when**

**the waters of St Augustine's Reach (to your left) had yet to be covered (see Walk 2). As you continue down the avenue note the statue of Edward Colston, merchant, MP, philanthropist and slave-trader (see Walk 4) on the traffic island to your left. Colston Avenue becomes St Augustine's Parade (13), where protesters once marched in support of the Bristol Bus Boycott.**

After the Second World War thousands of people from around the Empire and Commonwealth were encouraged to come to Britain to fill the many jobs needed to rebuild the country. When the state-owned Bristol Omnibus Company refused to employ non-white drivers and conductors – with the connivance of local trade unionists – a bus boycott was organised by Paul Stephenson, Bristol's first black social worker. The successful campaign helped to end employment discrimination on racial grounds by the bus company and to pave the way for the Race Relations Act of 1965. Stephenson was made the first black Honorary Freeman of the City of Bristol.

Among the boycott's supporters was Tony Benn, who was first elected Labour MP for Bristol South East in 1950. In November 1960 his father died and, as his heir, Benn became Viscount Stansgate. As a hereditary peer, he could no longer be an MP. A by-election was held in May 1961 and he was re-elected, even though he was officially disqualified. On 31 July 1963 the Peerage Act gave hereditary peers the right to renounce their titles. Benn was the first to do so and won a new by-election on 20 August 1963. He held the Bristol South East seat until June 1983 when the constituency was abolished. There is a bust of Benn in City Hall.

**Go past the Hippodrome (see Walk 4) and into College Green. Stop at The Lord Mayor's Chapel (14).**

This chapel is all that remains of the Hospital of St Mark, which had been founded in 1220. The hospital provided food and care for the poor until the dissolution of the monasteries in 1539. It was then purchased by Bristol Corporation (the forerunner of the city council) for the use of Queen Elizabeth Hospital School for Boys. It was later occupied by Bristol Grammar School and in 1885 the Society of Merchant Venturers established its School and Technical College on the site. From 1687 to 1722 the chapel was used as a place of worship by Huguenots who had fled persecution in France. When they moved to a new building in Orchard Street, the corporation decided to make the chapel its official place of worship, having fallen out with Bristol Cathedral. It became known as the Mayor's Chapel.

Bristol has had an elected mayor – rather than a royally appointed one – since 1216, albeit that those citizens eligible to vote were few in number for centuries. The first mayor whose name is engraved in the wall of City Hall is Roger Cordwainer, but he is likely to have been appointed by King John. The first to be elected was probably Adam le Page. The mayor was Bristol's leader and represented the city to national government. In 1899



Queen Victoria granted Bristol special privileges and its leader was then referred to as the Lord Mayor. The Lord Mayor is elected annually by the city's councillors. The Lord Mayor's official residence is The Mansion House in Clifton Down.

Since 2012 Bristol has also had a mayor directly elected by the people. The Lord Mayor carries out civic and ceremonial engagements and chairs council meetings, while the elected mayor heads the city's government. Bristol's first female Lord Mayor was Florence Brown, a former tobacco stripper and shop steward at the Wills factory, who was elected in 1963.

**The Lord Mayor's Chapel:** Normal open hours for visitors: Wed-Sun 10am-noon and 1pm-4pm. [www.lordmayorschapel.org.uk](http://www.lordmayorschapel.org.uk) 0117 903 1450

**Continue past the chapel. Cross Unity Street. Go past the pedestrian crossing for a view of the artwork by Banksy on the wall to your right (see illustration on page 69) then return to the crossing to reach City Hall (15).**

This is Bristol's fourth Council House (renamed City Hall in 2012). The decision to replace the third one (which you will see on Walk 2) was first made in 1897. Construction began in 1935, was interrupted by the Second World War and was completed in 1952. The gilded unicorns on the roof feature on the city's coat of arms, along with the castle and a sailing ship. The city motto is 'By virtue and industry'.

Bristol became an independent county in 1373. This was in part in return for money paid to King Edward III by local merchants and other wealthy citizens to support the war against France. From this point Bristol could have its own law courts, stronger local government and a clearly defined boundary that remained largely unchanged for 450 years. Bristol was formally granted city status in 1542 when it was made a Bishopric.

Since the 1850s the city's population has grown dramatically. This is not only because of people moving here, but also because former independent villages and suburbs like Clifton and Bedminster have been absorbed within the spreading city boundary, and new housing estates have been built on the outskirts, including Hilfields and Hartcliffe. The current population is around 449,000. A recurrent topic of debate is the extent to which Bristol should work regionally with the neighbouring local authorities of Bath & North East Somerset, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire. A devolution for the West of England was agreed by three of the four councils in July 2016.



Detail from Joris Hoefnagel's plan of Brightstowe, 1581 (Bristol Culture M5277).