

Bristol800

Book of Walks



Bristol Festival of Ideas/

New Edition 2017

 @FestivalofIdeas
www.ideasfestival.co.uk

In partnership with:



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



Walk 5: Nature in the City/

The beautiful green spaces within and surrounding the city are among Bristol's greatest assets. In addition to The Downs and Brandon Hill, which mark the start and end of this walk, there is Castle Park (see Walk 1) and Queen Square, visited on three of the other walks. Blaise Castle Estate, Ashton Court Estate and Arnos Vale Cemetery are a short bus-ride from the city centre. A little further out is the countryside of the South Cotswolds and rural Somerset.

Avon Wildlife Trust manages and cares for 3,000 acres of nature reserves in Bristol and the surrounding area, most of which are open to the public for free all year round (www.avonwildlifetrust.org.uk). The trust is a member of the Bristol Natural History Consortium, which manages the annual Festival of Nature (www.bnhc.org.uk). The festival gives people of all ages the opportunity to explore, enjoy and get close to the natural world. Another consortium member is Wildscreen, a charity that uses the world's best wildlife photographs and videos to promote a greater understanding of the natural world (www.wildscreen.org). The Wildscreen Festival is the world's most influential and prestigious wildlife and environmental film-making event. Bristol is also home to a range of organisations and companies exploring green initiatives and championing the natural environment including Sustrans, the Soil Association, the Environment Agency and the BBC Natural History Unit.

Allow at least 70 minutes for this walk. The most convenient refreshment stops are in Clifton Village. This is potentially the most physically challenging of the five walks as it entails some steep climbs and descents. The pathways and pavements are narrow and uneven in places. Steps are avoided wherever possible, but this is not possible at the point at which the route enters Brandon Hill (there are level entrances to the park elsewhere).

The Walk

The walk begins at the Merchants' Hall (1) on The Promenade on Clifton Down Road.

References to the Guild of Merchants in Bristol date back to the thirteenth century. The guild was granted a royal charter by Edward VI in 1552, which

gave its members a monopoly of seaborne trade from and to Bristol. In 2007 the Merchant Venturers joined with the Lord Mayor of Bristol and other civic representatives in signing a statement regretting Bristol's role in the slave trade (their involvement in the trade, which was abolished in 1807, is referred to in previous walks). Today the Merchant Venturers' main objectives are to: contribute to the prosperity and well-being of the greater Bristol area; enhance the quality of life for all, particularly for the young, aged and disadvantaged; and promote learning and the acquisition of skills by supporting education. They are also stewards of various buildings, open space and charitable trusts. Membership is by invitation.

The manor of Clifton – then known as Clistone – is mentioned in the Domesday book (1085). It was purchased by the Merchant Venturers in 1676. It remained a small hamlet of scattered farms and houses until the 1700s when it began to be developed to provide an escape from Bristol's inner-city congestion and pollution. Wealthy city-dwellers were attracted by its clean air and the views across the Avon Gorge and the population rose from around 450 in the early eighteenth century to nearly 4,500 in the 1801 census. Visitors were also attracted by the warm springs here and at nearby Hotwells, coming in the summer season before moving on to the more fashionable Bath spas in the winter. Clifton was incorporated into the city of Bristol in 1835.

Find a safe place to cross Clifton Down Road then turn left, keeping to the footpath that runs parallel to the road. As you head towards Clifton Village, on your left you'll have the grand mansions of The Promenade; on your right is Clifton Down (2).

In the mid-nineteenth century the Society of Merchant Venturers – the owners of Clifton Down – joined forces with Bristol Corporation to promote The Clifton and Durham Downs (Bristol) Act, which was passed in 1861. The corporation was given permission to purchase Durham Down (to the north-east) and the combined Downs were henceforth preserved as a whole 'for ever hereafter, open and unenclosed' for public use. This meant the spread of the encroaching suburbs was successfully curtailed in this part of the city and Bristol's 'green lung' was safe from development. The Downs cover 422 acres and are a Site of Nature Conservation Interest. The University of Bristol maintains the ancient right for the land to be used for public grazing by regularly grazing sheep here. The management of The Downs continues to be a joint venture between the Merchant Venturers and Bristol City Council.

Continue along Clifton Down Road. Cross Observatory Road and continue on the path that is closest to the road. You'll see ahead the spire of Christ Church. On your right, on Clifton Green, you will pass an obelisk dedicated to the politician William Pitt and a sarcophagus, which serves as a memorial to the men of the regiment of General Sir William Draper who were killed during the capture of Manila in 1763. Cross at

Beaufort Buildings and Portland Street then go up the driveway that leads to The Rodney Hotel. Stop at Number 3, Rodney Place (3), where there is a particularly attractive plaque installed by the Clifton and Hotwells Improvement Society.

This was once the home of Dr Thomas Beddoes, a leading figure in the scientific life of Bristol, a philanthropist and a political radical. His Pneumatic Institute in Dowry Square in Hotwells was a centre for research into diets, drugs and inhalable gases.

In 1798 Beddoes invited Humphry Davy to take up the post of superintendent. Davy experimented with the effects of nitrous oxide (laughing gas) and its use as an anaesthetic in minor surgery. As well as experimenting on himself, he tested the effect of the gas on friends and acquaintances, asking them to record their experiences. The Bristol-born poet Robert Southey (see Walk 2) wrote to his brother: 'Davy has actually invented a new pleasure, for which language has no name. Oh, Tom! I am going for more this evening! It makes one strong and happy! So gloriously happy!' When Davy left Bristol for London in 1801 to join the Royal Institution, Beddoes converted his institute into a charitable dispensary, the Preventive Medical Institution for the Sick and Drooping Poor. His grave is in the Strangers' Burial Ground on Lower Clifton Hill.

Continue along the driveway to rejoin Clifton Down Road. Turn right into Princess Victoria Street then right into The Mall. At Caledonia Place, cross the road to read the information board giving the history of Mall Gardens (once private, but now open to the public). It is worth making a circuit before continuing along The Mall. Opposite the entrance to West Mall is the former Clifton Assembly Rooms and Hotel, which was completed in 1811 and was later in competition with the Victoria Rooms on Queen's Road (see Walk 4). It was designed by Francis Greenway, who was transported to Botany Bay for forgery in 1814 and went on to design many government buildings in Australia. At the end of The Mall turn right and use the pedestrian crossing to cross at Beaufort Buildings then turn left, heading towards the bridge. The information board by the remains of the old drinking fountain gives further details about The Downs, including where to find the peregrine watch point. Where the path forks by the lamp-post, take the right-hand path up Observatory Hill to the Observatory and Camera Obscura (4), which is built on the site of an Iron Age camp.

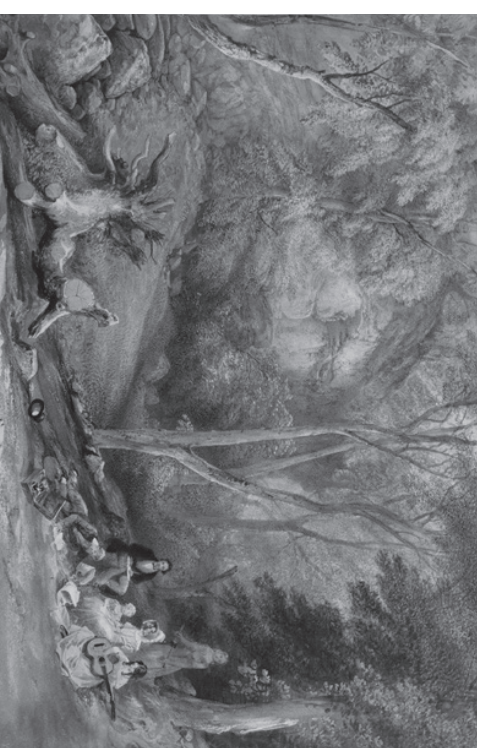
This building was originally a windmill for corn that was later converted for the grinding of snuff. It was left derelict following a fire in 1777 and was converted by William West into an artist's studio in 1828 (he was a member of the Bristol School of Artists, see Walk 4). West initially installed a telescope in the tower, but replaced this in 1829 with a camera obscura, now one of only two still open to the public in England. He also built a tunnel through to St Vincent's Cave (familiarily known as the Giant's Cave) in St Vincent's Rocks.

Clifton Observatory and Camera Obscura: Normal opening hours: Daily 10am-5pm. There is an admission charge. www.cliftonobservatory.com 0117 974 1242

Take a final look at the view from this excellent vantage point before retracing your steps back to the lamp-post. Then turn right and continue to the tablet commemorating Isambard Kingdom Brunel on the wall by Clifton Suspension Bridge (5).

In the flower bed beneath the tablet are examples of some of the rare and beautiful plants from the Avon Gorge and The Downs that make this one of the UK's top botanical sites. The information board tells the story of how Brunel took steps to save the threatened autumn squill during the construction of the bridge, an early example of plant conservation in the face of development. There is another information board giving details of some of the native flora further along the footway, overlooking St Vincent's Rocks.

Note that at the time of writing, the bridge was undergoing a two-phase deck maintenance programme with the north-side footway (the one you are currently on) closed for part of 2016 and the south-side for part of 2017. The directions that follow assume the footway is open, but be aware that you may only get so far before you need to come back and cross over to the other side. You must not cross the roadway between the piers. Continue along the bridge to the half-way point then stop to look down into the Avon Gorge (6).



Sketching party in Leigh Woods, c1830, Samuel Jackson (Bristol Culture K2761).

The steep limestone walls of the gorge provided the docks at Bristol with natural protection from the prevailing south-westerly winds, as well as from maritime invaders attempting to travel up the river from the Severn Estuary. However, among the challenges faced by ships' pilots were the Avon's unusually wide tidal range, its strong currents and the unreliable winds around the river bends. This is why newer facilities were developed at Portishead and Avonmouth (see Walk 3).

The trees to your left are part of Leigh Woods, a diverse woodland managed by the National Trust (www.nationaltrust.org.uk/leigh-woods). It was a favourite destination for the Bristol School of Artists. In his elegy on Thomas Chatterton, the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge imagined his subject roaming the wooded sides of 'Avon's rocky steep' where 'the screaming sea-gulls soar' (see Walk 2).

Continue to the end of the bridge. A little further ahead is the Clifton Suspension Bridge Visitor Centre, which is open from 10am to 5pm every day, excluding Christmas and New Year. Entry is free (www.cliftonbridge.org.uk). Cross the road and then take the south-side footway back across the bridge, stopping at the viewing point by the first pier. Look down to the row of buildings on the Portway below you, on the other side of the river. The first – the curved red-brick building with white pillars – is The Colonnade (7).

The Colonnade was built in 1786 as an addition to the visitor facilities offered at Hotwell House. The spa was already in decline by the 1790s and Hotwell House, which had contained the pump room and accommodation, was demolished in 1822. The Colonnade is all that remains of the original complex. Ann Yearsley (see also Walk 2) opened a lending library in the building in 1793. She was one of only a few working-class women of the time to gain recognition as a writer, and her success was thanks in part to the patronage of Hannah More, whose home you'll see later in this walk. Yearsley was also one of many prominent Bristol women who campaigned against the slave trade and her numerous verses include 'Poem on the Inhumanity of the Slave Trade'.

Before setting off again, look at the entrance to the Floating Harbour to the left of the river (see Walk 3). Cross the bridge and go through the old turnstyle at the far end. Take the path to your right, back in the direction of the bridge. Note the pretty balconies on the houses on Stion Hill opposite. The path sweeps round to the left and then takes you down to The Lookout (8).

While recuperating in Clifton from injuries sustained in an accident at the Thames Tunnel, Brunel learnt of a competition to build a bridge across the Avon Gorge. In 1754 William Vick, a wealthy Bristol wine merchant, had left £1,000 in his will with instructions that the money should be invested until it reached the sum of £10,000, an amount he felt would pay for the construction of a stone bridge across the gorge. The bridge would be free



Front View of Bristol Hotwells and St Vincent's Rocks, 1793 (Bristol Reference Library 393).

to travellers and would link the hamlet of Clifton and the then private estates of Leigh Woods. As the proposed bridge would seem to serve little economic purpose, it is uncertain what Vick's motive was in leaving these instructions.

By 1829 Vick's legacy had reached £8,000 and a committee was set up to decide how to fulfil his dream. It was soon realised that a stone bridge would cost in the region of £90,000. An iron suspension bridge would be cheaper, but would still require tolls to cover its cost and maintenance. On 1 October 1829 a competition was announced with a prize of 100 guineas for the winner. The judging proved shambolic, but, eventually, on 16 March 1831, Brunel was declared the winner. The foundation stone of his bridge was laid on the Clifton side of the gorge on 21 June 1831. Work was soon halted as business confidence in the city fell and it did not resume until 1836. Financial difficulties and contractual disagreements led to further long delays in construction and the bridge was not completed until 1864, five years after Brunel's death and as a memorial to him. Although built for pedestrian and horse-drawn traffic, the bridge was so ingeniously constructed that it is now capable of carrying around four million cars a year, and has become a major route to the motorway network. Brunel's original design included Egyptian sphinxes on top of the piers, but these did not make it to the final version.

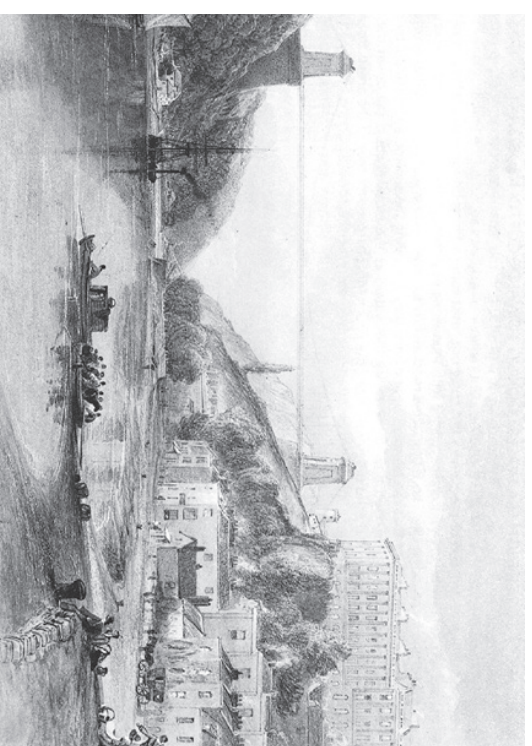
Continue towards the Avon Gorge Hotel. You will pass the entrance to the Clifton Rocks Railway, a funicular from the 1890s which closed in 1934, but can be viewed by pre-booked groups or on open days (www.cliftonrockrailway.org.uk). Next to the hotel is the entrance to the Clifton Spa Pump Room, which was built in 1894 at the request of the Merchant Venturers to exploit the warm, healing (allegedly) Clifton waters. In the 1920s it was converted to a cinema and then a ballroom. Go past the hotel and cross the road opposite the White Lion before continuing down Sion Hill (this means you'll avoid the steps down from the high pavement further on). Stop at Royal York Crescent (9).

Construction of this crescent commenced in 1791. The financial collapse linked to the Napoleonic Wars, which began in 1793, bankrupted many of the city's merchants along with the property speculators who had invested in the development of Clifton, bringing building projects like this one to an abrupt halt. Work was finally completed in 1818. In the 1840s, when Georgian architecture had fallen out of fashion, many of the houses were converted into flats. Among famous past occupants of this street is the author Angela Carter, who was a student at the University of Bristol. The crescent was designed by William Paty, whose design for Cornwallis Crescent you will see later on this walk.

If you can manage steps, climb up the flight to your left so you can walk along the pavement directly in front of the terraced houses. If you can't manage steps, you can go along the lower-level road used by cars. At the other end, either take the steps down or turn the corner to enter York Gardens (the gardens themselves are private) and walk back in the direction of Sion Hill. At the end of York Gardens the road bears to the left (note the pavement is narrow and uneven in places). At the junction with Cornwallis Crescent, Granby Hill and Windsor Place, cross over to Windsor Place which will take you to Windsor Terrace (a private road with a cobbled surface). Stop at Number 4 (10).

The writer, campaigner and philanthropist Hannah More lived at this house from 1829 until her death in 1833 (see also Walk 2). Her charitable work included providing educational, spiritual and financial help to impoverished miners and agricultural workers in Somerset. Work began on the terrace in 1790 at the height of the short-lived – and ultimately financially disastrous – building mania. Its west end is supported by a massive man-made cliff that was paid for by William Watts, a Bristol plumber, who in 1782 made his fortune patenting a new process for producing high-quality spherical shot. Construction stopped in 1793, but was eventually completed in 1811.

Go back up the hill to the junction and now take Cornwallis Crescent. Just before the crescent drops down to the right, go up Goldney Avenue (you'll need to switch to the left-hand side further up). Turn right on Regent Street to Goldney Hall (11).



The Proposed Suspension Bridge from Rownham Ferry, c1836, Samuel Jackson (Windsor Terrace can be seen on the right) (Bristol Culture K1374).

This is now a University of Bristol hall of residence, but was originally built for Thomas Goldney II around 1720. Its attractive gardens were designed by Goldney's son. In 1737 work began on a grotto decorated with rock crystal from the Avon Gorge and an assortment of fossils, shells and corals from around the world. It was developed over 25 years. The Goldneys were Quakers, but their fortune partly came from gambling, privateering (a licensed form of piracy) and the manufacture of cannons. Tours of the historic house and gardens are organised by the university's External Estates department and can be booked through the university's online shop (shop.bris.ac.uk).

Opposite the hall is a narrow green, on the other side of which is Clifton Hill (12).

Ann Yearsley's home was on Clifton Hill. She had been taught to read and write by her mother, a milkwoman who trained her daughter to follow her in the same occupation. By May of 1784 she and her family had fallen into destitution. They were rescued from near-starvation by local charitable individuals, including Hannah More. More organised the publication of a volume of Yearsley's poetry, *Poems, on Several Occasions*, paid for by subscription by her literary and wealthy friends. This was published in June 1785. Over one thousand subscribers are listed. Clifton Hill was the title of the last and longest poem in the publication.

From Goldney Hall, turn right down the very steep Constitution Hill (you'll need to cross to the left-hand side as the pavement runs out on the right). At the bottom of the hill find a safe place to cross Jacobs Wells Road then go up the steps to Brandon Hill Nature Park (14), stopping by the first information board.

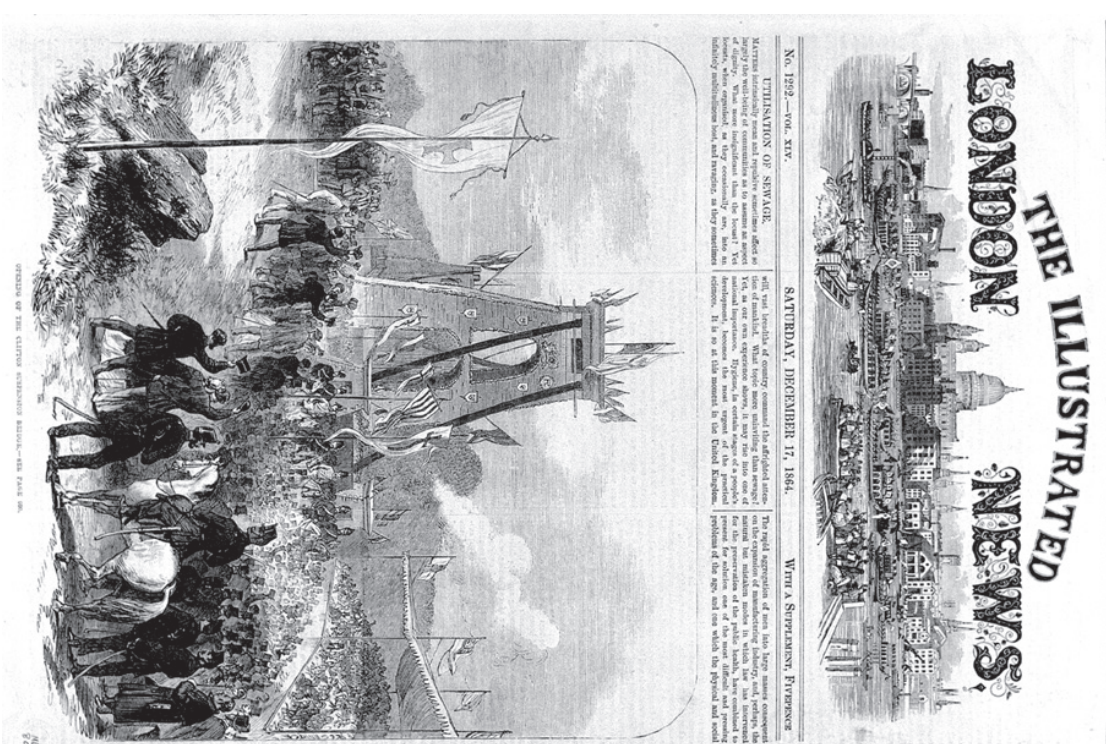
In 1980 the Avon Wildlife Trust partnered with Bristol City Council to transform five acres of urban parkland on Brandon Hill into this haven for wildlife (www.avonwildlifetrust.org.uk/reserves/brandon-hill-nature-park). Brandon Hill is a prominent green oasis that provides an essential fuelling station for migrating birds. It shelters flocks of redwings and fieldfares escaping the freezing conditions in Northern Europe in winter. In spring the wildlife pond is full of frogspawn and toads. In summer cowslips, oxeye daisies and knapweed help to attract butterflies and bees. Foxes and pipistrelle bats come out in the early evening and there are finches, tits, thrushes and warblers in the woodlands. It demonstrates the important contribution made to our environment by urban conservation projects.

Brandon Hill is thought to be the UK's oldest public park. It was given to Bristol's town council in 1174 by the Earl of Gloucester and sub-let to farmers as grazing land until 1625 when it became a public open space. Citizens of Bristol still have the right to dry their clothes here and beat their rugs. The hill was of strategic importance in the defence of the city and the remains of a fort and earthworks can be found to the west and south of Cabot Tower.

From the information board, take the right-hand path to follow the first half of the nature trail. From the board telling the story of Brandon Hill (point 3 on the trail) continue up to Cabot Tower (14).

This tower was commissioned to commemorate the 400th anniversary of John Cabot's voyage to Newfoundland and was paid for by public subscription. In Italian Cabot's name was Giovanni Caboto and in Venetian it was Zuan Chabotto. The tower was designed by William Venn Gough and is constructed from red-pink sandstone and cream Bath stone. The coats of arms on the sides include that of the Society of Merchant Venturers, with whom we started this walk. The tower was closed to the public in 2007 after cracks appeared when the supporting ironwork corroded. It re-opened on 16 August 2011 after the vital work to make it safe again was completed. The climb up the narrow winding spiral staircase will reward you with panoramic views across the city.

Cabot Tower: Cabot Tower is open every day except Christmas Day and New Year's Day from around 8am to dusk. Entry is free. www.bristol.gov.uk/museums-parks-sports-culture/brandon-hill



Cover of *The Illustrated London News* marking the opening of the Clifton Suspension Bridge (University of Bristol Library).