

Bristol800

Book of Walks



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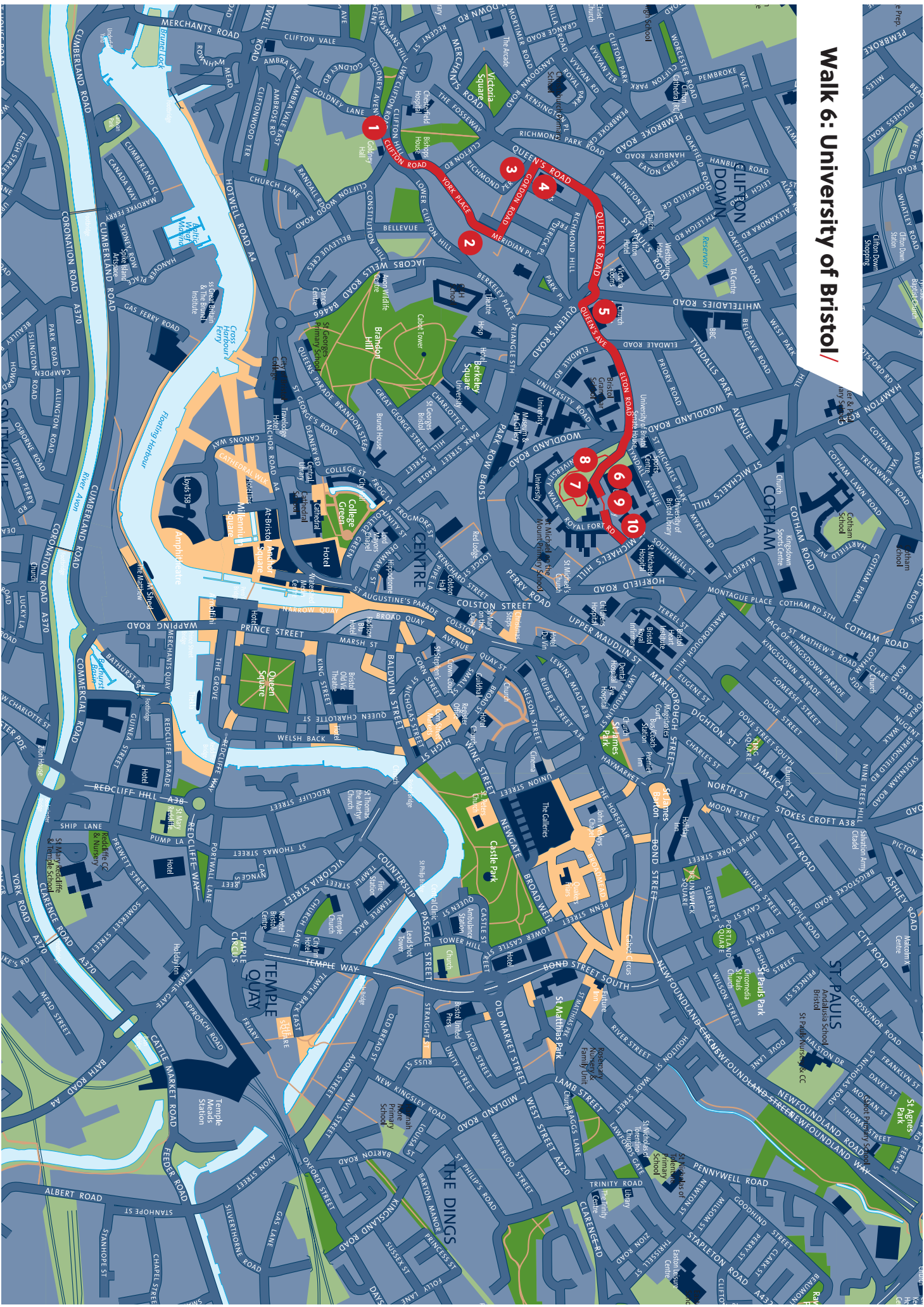
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Walk 6: University of Bristol



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This walk of around one-and-a-half miles provides a relatively level route from Clifton Village student accommodation through to some of the university's academic buildings on the outskirts of Cotham. It starts and ends at sites associated with the English (more accurately, British) Civil War, picking up on significant periods of human development and events along the way.

The Walk

The walk begins outside Goldney Hall (1) on Clifton Road.

Much of this area was razed to the ground in the early years of the Civil War (1642-1651) as it lay outside Bristol's defences. These ran from the river through Brandon Hill up to the Royal Fort and onward to encircle the city. Prince Rupert's scorched-earth policy aimed to cut off the supply of food. Consequently, the area was created anew after the war and allowed the establishments of 'garden houses' on the hillside away from the sights, sounds, smells and some of the diseases found in the busy city-centre.

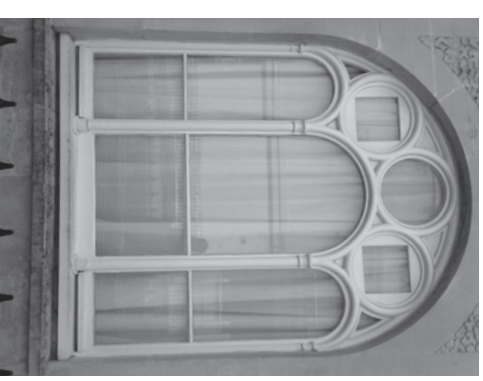
Goldney House was occupied from 1694 by the Goldney family (see also Walk 5). The original house was partly demolished to make way for a new building in the 1720s. This was gifted to the university in 1953 and opened as a hall of residence in 1956. The hall frequently hosts weddings, conferences and special events and regular tours are provided during the summer months. It is worth looking out for opportunities to visit its garden, which displays a number of features belonging to the iron industry including a tower which used to house a Newcomen engine to pump water. The famous grotto incorporates iron slag as decoration in its tunnels, as well as tiles fired in the furnace of Coalbrookdale. If you are unable to enter you will catch only a glimpse of the imposing house and trees that entirely screen this hidden jewel, which has been used as a film location for dramas such as BBC's *Nannia: Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, *Love Actually* and *Sherlock* (for Watson's wedding).

Passing over Constitution Hill, but remaining on Clifton Road, every care should be taken for this busy and complicated junction. You will see the front of Clifton Hill House below you on the lower road. This Palladian villa completed in 1750 was designed by Sir Isaac Ware, the main proponent for the Palladian theory and publisher of A Complete Body

of Architecture (1756). It was home to the nineteenth-century 'man-of-letters' John Addington Symonds and his daughter Katharine Furse, who became the first director of the Women's Royal Naval Service and the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts.

As you continue along Clifton Road, you will pass Richmond House, a c1701 Grade II-listed building with a Georgian frontage concealing its true origin. Recent works to remove unsecure render revealed the tall narrow windows and timber lintels of the original structure. Such changes to the façade of buildings are quite common in the city. Turn right into York Place where you can see on your right the ornamental gardens that surround Manor House, which dates from c1730, and Manor Hall (2), our next stop.

Manor Hall was designed by George Oatley and opened in 1932 as a women's hall of residence. Here you will see a magnificent horse chestnut isolated in its own island of retained ground next to steps that descend from York Place to the entrance to the hall. Unfortunately, horse chestnuts are under threat from leaf miner and bleeding canker so its future is uncertain. If you can take advantage of any open days or tours you will see the ornamental garden, laid out by Pro-Chancellor Hlatt Cowles Baker (a botanist), which follows a geometric plan that echoes the angular elevation of the hall. The gardens have mostly been replanted in recent years with low-maintenance shrubs and herbaceous borders. The warden has also introduced a number of fruiting trees such as medlar and plums. However, two tulip trees are original to the Baker planting and layout.



Above: Richmond House on Clifton Road and window on York Place (author's photo).

As you proceed down York Place, take the opportunity to look around you as the entire road is lined with listed buildings, but remember to turn left into Gordon Road. Near the end of the road is the former Richmond Spring Public House, now The White Rabbit (3).

The original name of this pub appears to indicate an earlier date than the actual c1910 construction. Names associated with the drovers' roads, leading to and from pasture land, were frequently noted for watering places such as wells or pools and this may have been a place with a natural spring. The Grade II-listed limestone building in the Edwardian Baroque style has a pantile hipped roof and if you venture inside you should note the panelled interior.

At the end of Gordon Road you will see opposite you the Buckingham Chapel (1847) and as you turn right into Queen's Road you cannot help but feel the presence of the imposing Richmond Building (4).

This is not a listed building... yet. In fact, bus tour guides used to be heard to claim it to be 'the ugliest building in Bristol'. But following a refurbishment programme it has not only improved its 1965 looks but, more importantly, its usability. The Department of Film and Television and the Students Union occupy the main building while the café and swimming pool are both open to the public. The 1,200-capacity Anson Rooms are occasionally open for concerts, including past performances by The Smiths, Amy Winehouse, Radiohead and Massive Attack. The green roof of the swimming pool (not visible from the street) carries over 350 square metres of species of plant that can be found within 500 metres of the site, acting as a stepping stone for invertebrates moving between the calcareous grasslands of the Downs and Brandon Hill (See Walk 5).

Leaving Richmond Building behind you, cross over the junction of Richmond Hill. It is recommended you then use the pedestrian crossing on Queen's Road that leads towards the ocean-liner shaped Queens Court, a seven-storey brick-built row of flats and shops completed in 1937. Continue to walk along the north side of Queen's Road. As you cross over Westbourne Place, glance down the road and note the 1852 terrace where the first-floor balconies have cast-iron brackets and bowed railings. These Grade II-listed buildings were constructed c1852 by Pope, Bindon and Clarke who are also likely to have been the architects who built the Lido in Oakfield Place. Walk past the Victoria Rooms, home to the university's Department of Music (see Walk 4) and cross over Whiteadies Road towards the Royal West of England Academy (RWA). The building to the right of the RWA is Beacon House (5).

Since opening in 1854 as Queen's Hotel, this Grade-II listed neoclassical building became the main retail showroom for Gardiners ironmongery in the 1930s; a Debenhams department store after World War Two; and more recently a branch of Habitat, which closed in 2011. Beacon House was converted into a new student study centre for the university that was unveiled in 2016. The information lobby and café are open to the public.

Turning left into Queen's Avenue and, with another university property, Howard House, to your right, make a mental picture of this road as this was the start of the main drive which used to run up to Royal Fort House. Here stood two enormous stone gate-pillars and cast-iron gates, which still exist, in a different location, and through which you will pass shortly.

Cross Elmdale Road and keep straight ahead into Elton Road, which takes you past the Bristol Grammar School, with its Great Hall to the right and Victorian villas to the left. When you reach Woodland Road you will see ahead Senate House, in front of which are a number of mature trees that survived from an early university botanic garden (a new botanic garden can be found on Stoke Park Road, Stoke Bishop). Cross Woodland Road by the pedestrian crossing then cross the bottom of Tyndall Avenue and enter the Royal Fort garden through the aforementioned gates. As you walk up the drive the H Wills Physics Laboratory (6) is on your left.

The architect of this building was George Oatley, whose work you previously saw at Manor Hall and who also designed for the university the Baptist College on Woodland Road, Wills Hall in Stoke Bishop and most notably the Wills Memorial Building at the top of Park Street (see Walk 4). The Physics building, which was completed in 1929, was built to last. No expense was spared by the funder, Henry Herbert Wills, who insisted the materials used require no maintenance for at least 50 years.



Map showing the original layout of Royal Fort House (reproduced with kind permission of Yale University).

At the top of the drive, after you pass under a very old yew tree and London plane tree, stands Royal Fort House (7).

This was originally the home of Thomas Tyndall and his family. When first built between 1758 and 1761, the house would have had panoramic views of the city and, in turn, would have dominated the skyline where it stood on top of the hillside. This aspect is the reason why during the Civil War the site was occupied by fortifications. Prince Rupert once held the defences, hence the fort's royal title.

If you visit in summer you may see the annual wildflower meadow in front of the house. Walk down as far as Prince Rupert's gate then retrace your steps and turn at the corner of the house – the Royal Fort House sign will be on your left – to take a circular walk of the garden (8) at the building's rear. Note the different architectural styles – Baroque, Palladian and Rococo – on the three façades you will pass.

The Royal Fort garden was laid out by Humphry Repton in 1800, effecting repairs following a previous failed development scheme. Repton, adhering to principles laid out in his traditional Red Book, used the gardens to screen what were considered undesirable views of the time (for example, the rear yards of Berkeley Square) whilst framing more pleasing aspects. Repton also introduced a 'curtain wall' to both retain the grounds of the garden and provide a barrier to the general public. The local community had access to the remaining meadows in the grounds, which flowed down to Park Row and Park Street at that time.

Within the current garden you will find two public artworks: 'Hollow' and 'Follow Me'. 'Hollow' is discreetly located in an annex, which you should be able to see to your left-hand side as you walk down the path with Royal Fort House behind you. Created by artist Katie Paterson in 2016, the work is described as a 'compendium of the world's forests'. It brings together samples of over 10,000 unique species including petrified wood fossils from trees that emerged more than 390 million years ago.

As you proceed around the garden you will see the pond, which is a hive of activity for biodiversity. It attracts a range of birds as well as amphibians, including palmate newts, and invertebrates and there is also a bug hotel and toad abode.

Past the pond you will see a maze of stainless steel mirrors. This is 'Follow Me', which was created by Jeppe Hein in 2009 to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the university being granted its charter. Hein was inspired by the university as a place of learning and self-discovery and was also responding to Repton's eighteenth-century design.

If the weather is dry and you can manage walking up grassy slopes, you can go directly up the embankment from 'Follow Me' towards the front of Royal Fort House. If the weather is inclement or you are otherwise

unable to manage the slope, then you can also return to the front of the house by continuing along the path and coming back up the driveway. From here you can follow a path through the new landscaped area, Life Sciences plaza. You will pass on your left a free-standing archway known as Ivy Gate (9).

This once stood on the boundary of an earlier property called, not surprisingly, Ivy Cottage before becoming the entrance to the kitchen gardens of Royal Fort House. It is Grade-II listed and noted for, among other things: its distinct architectural presence as an important surviving mid-eighteenth-century garden structure; its quality of material and monumental scale, indicative of its original owners' wealth and ambition; and its positive contribution to the landscape of this part of the campus.

If you are able to manage steps, then follow the path ahead of you to the rear of the Life Sciences building and descend a wide flight down to St Michael's Hill. Turn back to look up at the four-storey high living wall (10) built into the side of the building. Alternatively you can reach this viewing point by taking the path to your left out to Tyndall Avenue then turning right down St Michael's Hill.

The wall is full of living plants that depict the stages of mitosis, a type of cell division. It also contains bat and house sparrow boxes. House sparrows are a species recognised by the Bristol Biodiversity Action Plan as needing support.

Looking down St Michael's Hill, imagine the buildings stripped away and that you could see all of Bristol and the river laid out in front of you like a map. This vantage point is the reason why the site was occupied by fortifications during the Civil War. On 10 September 1645 Prince Rupert surrendered the city to Lord Fairfax, the commander of Parliament's New Model Army, and the fort walls were almost entirely demolished ten years later.

This concludes our walk. From here you can march down into the 'defended' city centre or amble up to shops on St Michael's Hill, where a number of buses can assist your onward journey.