

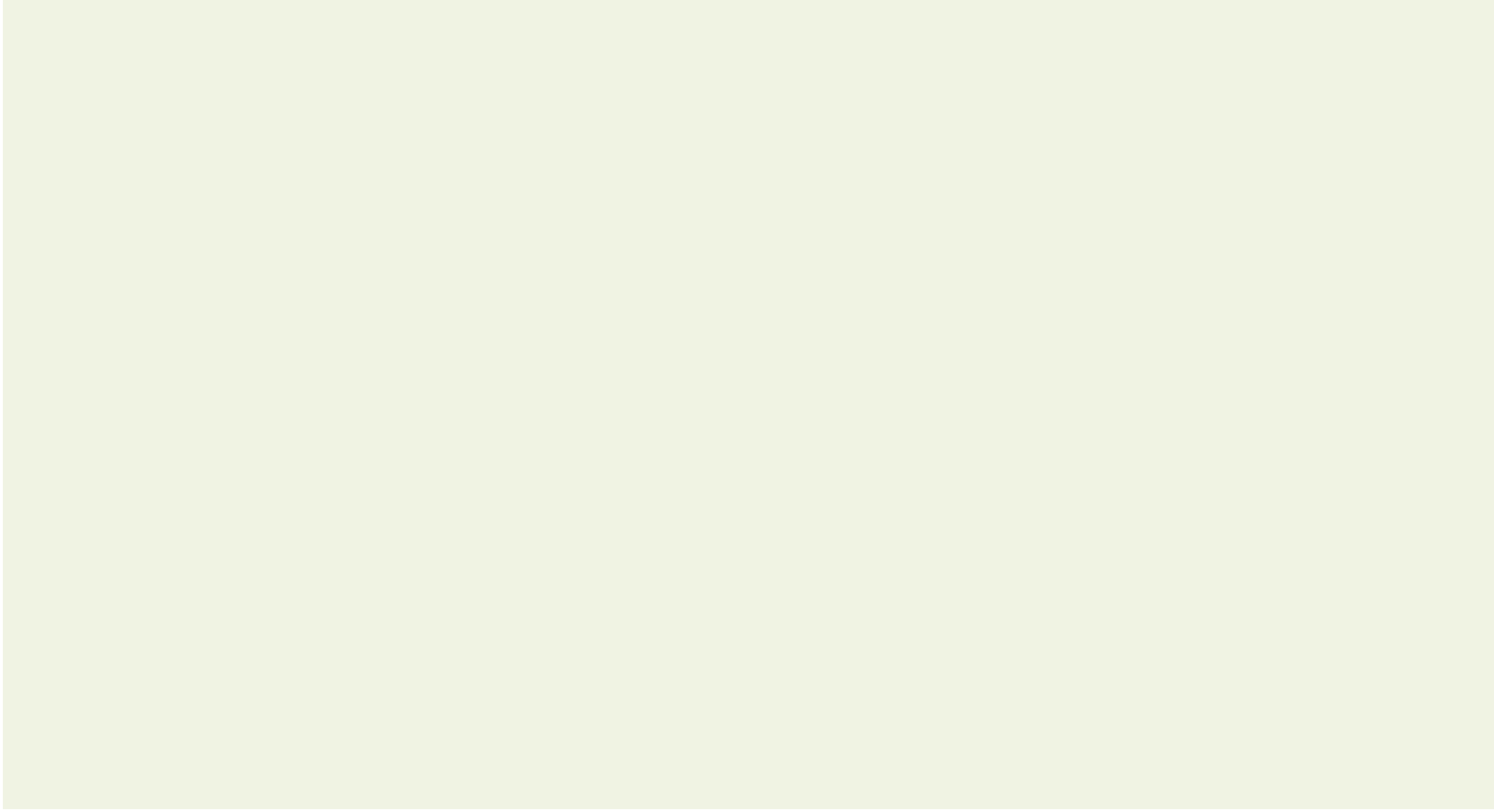
# The Day of the Triffids

The Great Reading Adventure 2004  
Evaluation Report

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*An initiative of Bristol Cultural Development Partnership*





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## Introduction

On 8 January 2004, something sinister was stirring at the Wildwalk botanical house in the heart of Bristol. Following reported sightings of a seven-foot tall homicidal plant, scientist and broadcaster Adam Hart-Davis, award-winning author Helen Dunmore, Bristol's Lord Mayor, and pupils from Severn Vale School wound their way through the steamy interior to investigate. There, beneath the tropical canopy, they encountered a terrifying triffid puppet and stacks of John Wyndham's science fiction classic *The Day of the Triffids*.

And so began Bristol's second Great Reading Adventure.

The Great Reading Adventure is an annual initiative that seeks to bring people together and to raise standards of literacy by encouraging everyone in the city to read the same book at the same time. It is the largest citywide community-based reading project in the UK. Figures from the Learning and Skills Council have shown that 25 per cent of 16 – 60 year olds in Bristol have not reached basic literacy standards as defined by the accomplishment of an average 11 year old. The Great Reading Adventure, which involves a wide range of people across the city and which makes reading stimulating and fun, has an important role to play in addressing this problem.

The central component of the Great Reading Adventure is the distribution of thousands of free copies of the selected book to schools and colleges, libraries, the business community and members of the general public. Readers' and teachers' guides, written especially for the project, are also given away. Film screenings, talks,

competitions, puppet shows and artists' workshops are organised, and, for 2004, the Bristol *Evening Post* ran a 12-part comic version of *The Day of the Triffids*, commissioned from a local artist. There is also a project website giving additional background information on the book.

The first Great Reading Adventure, which used Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, took place in March 2003 and was part of the build-up for Bristol's bid to be European Capital of Culture in 2008. Although the bid was ultimately unsuccessful, as a short-listed city Bristol is now one of five Centres of Culture in the country. The second Great Reading Adventure was organised by the Bristol Cultural Development Partnership (BCDP: Arts Council England South West, Bristol City Council and Business West), which aims to deliver as much of the proposed 2008 programme as possible.

The key objectives of the Great Reading Adventure are:

- To promote Bristol as a centre for literature.
- To be part of the delivery of the Bristol 2008 programme.
- To encourage debate and learning about Bristol.
- To help develop standards of literacy.
- To create new art inspired by literature.



Severn Vale School pupils with Andrew Kelly (BCDP), Adam Hart-Davis and the Lord Mayor



Helen Dunmore

John Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids* was chosen as the book to read in 2004 because as well as being an enthralling story it could be used to promote Bristol as a place for science and innovation, creativity, and green initiatives. At the launch event, Adam Hart-Davis told the local media:

*It is a true classic of British science fiction. Since it was published just over 50 years ago, The Day of the Triffids has been thrilling generations of readers. It is a superb book. I was a teenager when I first read it: I loved it then and those seven-foot killer plants still send shivers down my spine. It is really frightening, but in a sensible way. I thought it would be very tired when I read it again, but it was brilliant. Wyndham was really ahead of his time when it came to science and the environment.*

Helen Dunmore, who had also been a supporter of the 2003 project, commented:

*Last year's Great Reading Adventure was a huge success. I just love to see children with a book in their hand, feeling excited about their reading. I think The Day of the Triffids is a great choice and will appeal to a whole cross-section of people.*

Speaking on behalf of Bristol City Council, one of the partners in BCDP, the Lord Mayor, Councillor Bill Martin, said:

*We want all sorts of people to get involved in the Great Reading Adventure, particularly young people. This book will be great. I have just started reading it myself. Lots of issues can be dug out of this book, including genetics, ecology and the planet.*

The 2004 Great Reading Adventure ended officially on World Book Day, 4 March, although the reading of the book, and some classroom and library activity continued after this date. Founder and director of the project, Andrew Kelly, said:



Adam Hart-Davis  
interviewed by BBC

*We have been astounded by the success of the second Great Reading Adventure. We thought Treasure Island worked, but Triffids has been amazing. The books went quickly, many more schools took part, and more businesses were involved.*

*To know that over 6,000 people were reading the book in March is gratifying. We have also distributed nearly 10,000 guides: last year 8,000 guides were sent out. The website has also been popular. We've had a national impact too – we know that other places look at Bristol's success with envy as they now want to have their own reading adventure.*

This report presents a summary of findings from the evaluation of the project. It combines statistics collected by the organisers and their partners with qualitative data compiled from feedback from sponsors and supporters, correspondence with participants, and self-completed questionnaires.



## Key statistics

- 4,100 copies of the Penguin Classic edition of *The Day of the Triffids* and 10,000 of the special readers' guide were distributed free of charge along with 1,000 simplified versions and 500 picture books.
- 3,618 requests for a copy of the book and/or guide were received from members of the public.
- 73 education packs were distributed to schools and colleges.
- Over 1,000 people borrowed the Penguin edition of *The Day of the Triffids* from the Bristol library service during January and February.

• The comic serialisation in the Bristol *Evening Post* is estimated to have had a potential readership of around 216,000 people a day.

- All ages and all socio-economic groups participated in the project across the Bristol city-region.
- The project website had a total of 10,699 views between January and March.
- The project was the topic of 14 national media stories, including BBC Breakfast News, *You and Yours* and Radio Five Live, widespread trade and professional media coverage, over 25 picture stories in the Bristol *Evening Post*, local radio and television items, and features on *The Guardian* and BBC websites.
- Nearly 99 per cent of those who expressed an opinion thought citywide reading projects were an excellent or good idea, and over 98 per cent would consider participating in future events.

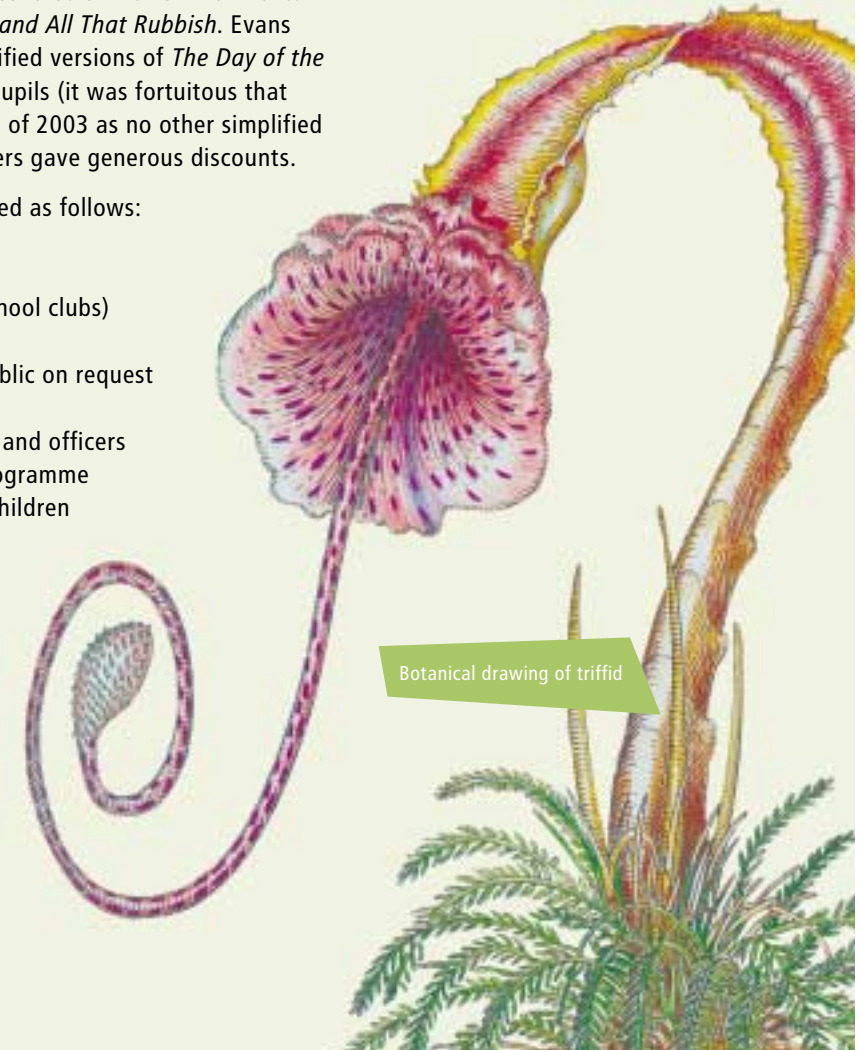
## Distributing the books

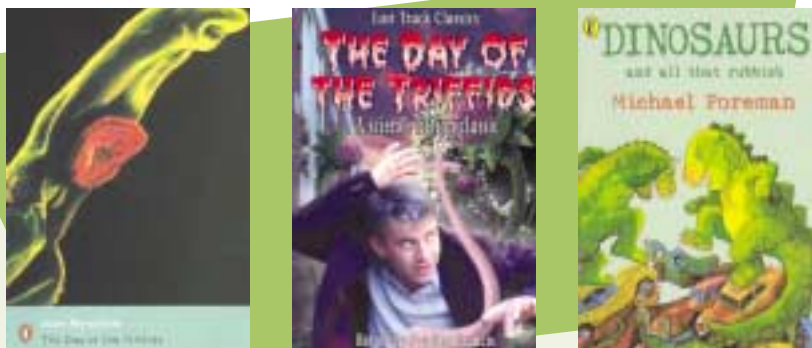
Penguin Books Ltd supplied 4,100 copies of the Penguin Classic edition of *The Day of the Triffids* along with 500 copies of a picture book chosen for younger readers that covered similar environmental themes: Michael Foreman's *Dinosaurs and All That Rubbish*. Evans Publishing Group supplied 1,000 simplified versions of *The Day of the Triffids* suitable for Keystage 2 and 3 pupils (it was fortuitous that this book was published in the autumn of 2003 as no other simplified versions were available). Both publishers gave generous discounts.

The bulk of these books were distributed as follows:

### *The Day of the Triffids* (Penguin)

- 1,010 to libraries (including after school clubs)
- 320 to schools and colleges
- 1,989 to members of the general public on request
- 500 to the business community
- 150 to Bristol City Council members and officers
- 30 to At-Bristol's Citizen Science programme
- 15 to Social Services Looked After Children
- 50 at launch event





Covers of the books used in the 2004 Great Reading Adventure

***The Day of the Triffids* (Evans):**

- 100 to libraries (including after school clubs)
- 800 to schools and colleges
- 15 to Social Services Looked After Children
- 50 at launch event

***Dinosaurs and All That Rubbish:***

- 100 to libraries (including after school clubs)
- 350 to schools and colleges
- 15 to Social Services Looked After Children

Penguin also supplied five sets of John Wyndham’s other key works, which were given away as competition prizes. The Bristol Library Service purchased 12 DVDs, 15 Cover-to-Cover audiotapes and one Spanish language edition of *The Day of the Triffids*. There were no large print or community language editions available. Fifteen copies of *The Midwich Cuckoos* Cover-to-Cover tape and 30 sets of Penguin’s other Wyndham books were also bought. These purchases supplemented Wyndham material already kept in stock.

## Publicising the project

As with *Treasure Island*, promotional material produced for the project featured an eye-catching image of Wallace and Gromit that was created by Aardman Animations, a Bristol-based company. This was used on:

- 13,000 promotional postcards (1,890 of which were sent to those on the Great Reading Adventure mailing list, based on registrations for the 2003 project).
- 12 large-scale six-sheet posters displayed at Adshel sites.
- 40 posters displayed on bus shelters.
- 3,000 small posters for display on notice boards.

All the promotional material, along with the guides and website, were designed by Qube Design Associates. Following evaluation of the impact of publicity material used in 2003, less material was printed for 2004 but it was used more effectively.

Publicity was also achieved through extensive media coverage, particularly in the local press and on BBC Radio Bristol, and through personal contact by members of the BCDP team and the project partners. In addition, 7,000 brochures, designed by Qube, were distributed to publicise the Great Science Fiction Weekend. Watershed, the venue for the talks and film screenings, devoted two pages of its February programme to this event (18,000 of these were printed).



Wallace and Gromit image used in promotional material



## Public response

A total of 3,618 requests for the book and/or the guide were received from members of the general public (this compares with 1,650 received for *Treasure Island*). Stocks ran out in six days: 1,989 people received a book and a guide, 1,629 received a guide only.

- Around 55 per cent of requests were sent on coupons printed in the *Evening Post*.
- 23 per cent of requests came from those registering by email via the website.
- 16 per cent from people using the reply slip on the postcard.
- Four per cent by telephone.
- Two per cent in person.

Although most requests came on an *Evening Post* coupon, less than half of these were received in time to be sent a book. There was a substantial increase in the number of people registering electronically compared with the previous year when only six per cent of requests came as emails. In 2003, 47 per cent of requests were by telephone, prompted by announcements about the project on the local radio. There was less radio coverage in 2004, which may explain the reduction in calls this year (this was deliberate as BCDP has only limited staff resources and answering the phone is particularly time consuming).

In March, a random sample of a thousand of those who had requested a copy of the book were sent a questionnaire asking them what they thought about the project. Additional questionnaires were distributed via the schools and colleges, and Business West. At the time of writing this report, there has been 235 replies, a response rate of around 23 per cent (160 questionnaires were received for *Treasure Island*). The number of responses is disappointing, especially as pre-paid envelopes were provided for the replies. Further effort must be made next year to encourage participants to give feedback.

Despite the limited response, it was useful that nearly all the questionnaires returned were completed fully with few questions left unanswered. Of those who replied, 53 per cent had first found out about the project from the local press, 19.5 per cent from local radio or television, 8.6 per cent from the postcards and five per cent from posters in the library. The rest had learned about it from the on-street posters, personal contact, their school or college, and the Internet.

Requests came from all over Bristol and from neighbouring cities, towns and villages. This included Almondsbury, Alveston, Ashley Down, Ashton Gate, Backwell, Bath, Bedminster, Bishopston, Bishopsworth, Bitton, Bradley Stoke, Brentry, Brislington, Bromley Heath, Broomhill, Cadbury Heath, Chard, Chew Stoke, Chippenham, Chipping Sodbury, Clevedon, Clifton, Clutton, Coalpit Heath, Combe Dingle, Congresbury, Cotham, Crewkerne, Downend, Dursley, Easton, Eastville, Emersons Green, Filton, Fishponds, Frampton Cotterell, Frenchay, Frome, Hanham, Hartcliffe, Headley Park, Henbury, Hengrove, Henleaze, Horfield, Keynsham, Kingsdown, Kingswood, Knowle Park, Lawrence Weston, Little Stoke, Lockleaze, Long Ashton, Longwell Green, Malmesbury, Mangotsfield, Montpellier, Nailsea, Oldland Common, Patchway, Paulton, Pill, Portbury, Portishead, Redfield, Redland, Saltford, Sea Mills, Shirehampton, Sneyd Park, Soundwell, Southmead, Southville, St Andrews, St Anne's Park, St George, St Paul's, Stanton Drew, Staple Hill, Stapleton, Stockwood, Stoke Bishop, Stoke Gifford, Thornbury, Totterdown, Uplands, Warmley, Westbury-on-Trym, Weston-Super-Mare, Whitchurch, Wick, Winterbourne, Wraxall, Yate and Yatton.

There were also requests from further afield including Belfast, Bognor Regis, Brighton, Cardiff, Chepstow, Exeter, High Wycombe, Inverness, Leeds, London, Newport, Northumberland, Swindon, Taunton, Truro and Wells. Some of the requests from outside the city were prompted by a reference to the project on a website publicising free gifts: most of these were received after the supply of books had been exhausted.



Triffid puppet with staff at Bristol International Airport on launch day

This is something to look out for with future Great Reading Adventures. It would be preferable to only send books to those within the BS postcode area.

Using the ACORN classification system, it has been possible to ascertain the socio-economic backgrounds of the majority of those who requested a copy of the book. This is based upon a postcode analysis that identifies particular household types. Postcodes of 2,564 of those in the Bristol (BS) area who submitted a request were analysed. Table 1 provides details.



Table 1: ACORN postcode analysis of requests

Category of household	% of book requests received	% of Bristol population as a whole
1: <i>Wealthy achievers</i> (wealthy executives, affluent greys, flourishing families)	20.66	5.4
2: <i>Urban prosperity</i> (prosperous professionals, educated urbanites, aspiring singles)	13.04	28.9
3: <i>Comfortably off</i> (starting out, secure families, settled suburbia, prudent pensioners)	33.92	20.7
4: <i>Moderate means</i> (Asian communities, post industrial families, blue collar roots)	20.50	19.3
5: <i>Hard pressed</i> (struggling families, burdened singles, high rise hardship, inner city adversity)	11.56	24.9
6: Unclassified	0.32	0.9

Source: BCDP/Bristol City Council

A different classification system had been used to assess the background of those participating in the first Great Reading

Adventure so it is not possible to make a direct comparison between the two years. However, the distribution of requests seems broadly similar.

All groups were represented in the age analysis of respondents to the questionnaire. The greatest concentration was among those aged 46 – 55. Table 2 provides details.

Table 2: Age of questionnaire respondents

Age Group	Percentage
Under 10	0.9
11-14	10.0
15-18	2.8
19-25	4.0
26-35	13.5
36-45	11.5
46-55	19.5
56-65	16.0
65-75	14.0
Over 75	7.8
Total	100.0

Source: BCDP

There was a significant increase in the percentage of those in the 11-14 age group who returned questionnaires compared with the *Treasure Island* response (10 per cent compared with 2.2). Just over 28 per cent of the *Treasure Island* respondents were 65 or older; this fell slightly for *The Day of the Triffids* with around 22 per cent in this age group.



There would seem to have been more requests for books from women than from men. A random sample of 2,000 of the requests indicated a male:female split of 33:67. Around 96 per cent of respondents who described their ethnic origin were white.

## Reading *The Day of the Triffids*

The main focus of the Great Reading Adventure was encouraging people of all ages to read *The Day of the Triffids*. There was some initial resistance to the choice of book, mainly from those who assumed they would not like it because it was classified as science fiction. Having read the book, there were still those who were unimpressed, finding it dull, far-fetched or dated. However, most of those who expressed an opinion enjoyed it. Typical of those who were won over by the book were the following:

*I would never have chosen this book normally but it was excellent. The narrative was like you were there with Bill every step of the way. Brilliant.*

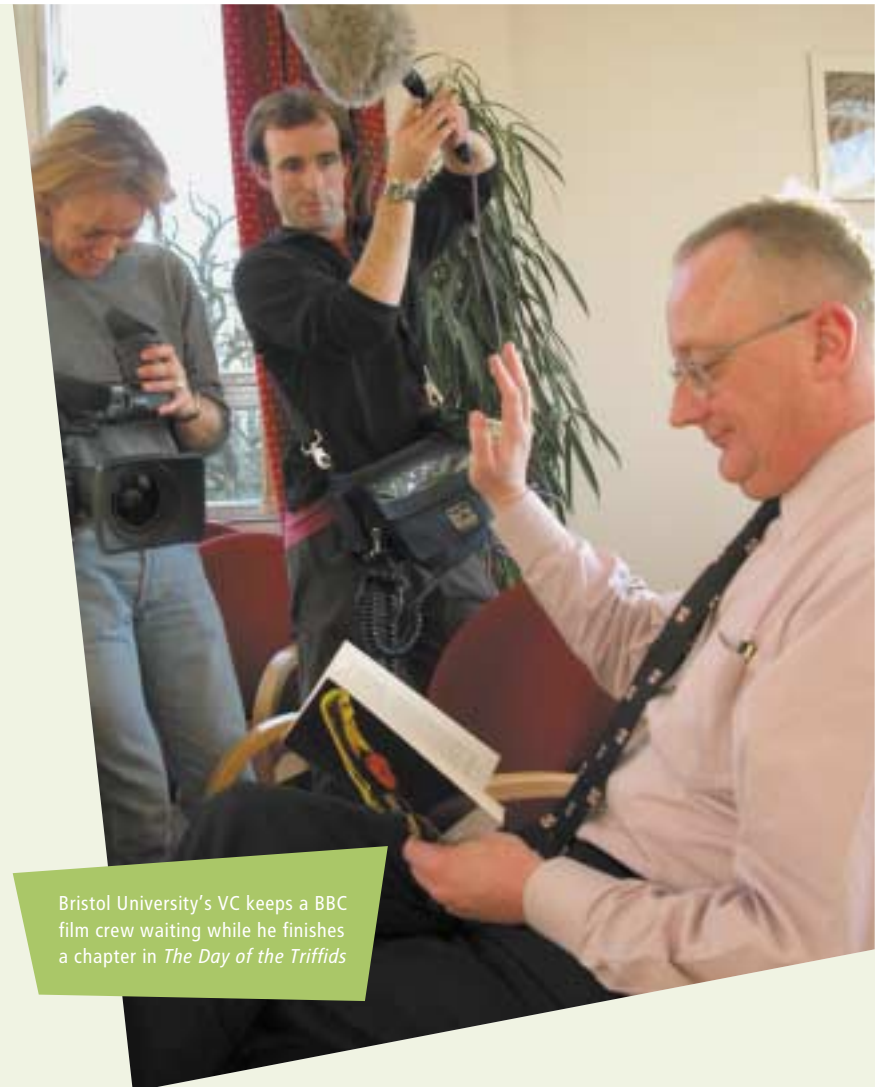
*Very good. I don't usually read science fiction but I think I will read more of Wyndham's books now.*

*I had never read a science fiction novel and had no intention of doing so. However, when this book was chosen as the 2004 Great Reading Adventure, I decided to give it a try. To my surprise I really enjoyed it and found it a real page turner. The story was so well written and, in view of recent scientific developments, only too credible. Some serious points were made in a way that was never heavy.*

*An exciting read. I was more horrified by the thought that everyone in the world had gone blind than I was by the actual triffids. I would not have read a book I perceived to be sci-fi unless I had been given a free copy and seen it promoted.*

*I thoroughly enjoyed it, although I am not usually keen to read science fiction. It was different to how I imagined it would be, as I thought more of the story would be centred around the triffids.*

*I was impressed. It is a genre that I would not normally try but it was well written. I have recommended it to others.*



Bristol University's VC keeps a BBC film crew waiting while he finishes a chapter in *The Day of the Triffids*

*The Day of the Triffids was not a book that I thought I would enjoy – however, once I started on it, I couldn't put it down. Made me realise not to judge a book by the cover, so to speak.*

*I enjoyed the book. I am not a big fan of science fiction, but it made me change my mind. It was a gripping book and I wanted to keep on reading it to find out what happened.*

By contrast, one respondent, who described herself as 'a SF fan since childhood', found the book 'slow and rambling' 'very hard going' and 'couldn't keep my interest'. This is perhaps indicative of the popular notion that Wyndham is a writer who wrote science fiction for those who do not like science fiction.

Other comments from the reader questionnaires included the following:

*Gruesome and great.*

*It was great, really imaginative and well written.*

*A great story that has aged well. Still very haunting, relevant and thought provoking. Read by all four in the family, including children aged 14 and 11.*

*Fantastic. I'd seen the TV programme as a kid but didn't get all the social statements. It was quite sobering.*

*I found it hard to get into, but then I found it very different from usual books I read and really enjoyed it. Excellent.*

*Excellent. Compulsive and thought provoking. You know it's a good book if you find yourself thinking about it the next morning at work.*

*I found the book to be enthralling. It held my attention far more than many of the newer books out today. It has certainly encouraged me to read more books by the same author. I passed the book around my family for them to read.*

*Only one word would describe it – Excellent!*

*Excellent book. Well worth re-reading. Really made me think what I would do in a disaster. Very well developed characters. Gripping stuff.*

*Brilliant. I adore my garden but this book made me think of plants in a totally different light.*

*A spookily realistic view of a possible apocalypse. Gripping and scary.*

*It was brilliant. I was drawn into the story. As if I was really there!*

*The book was a good adventure story, well written providing plenty of food for thought.*

*A good choice for a project of this nature. Accessible and easily readable.*

*Brilliant! What's the next book in the Great Read?*

What many readers commented on was the relevance of the book to current concerns regarding the use of new technologies and the potential collapse of civilisation, themes explored through the readers' guide and website. Among the comments received were the following:

*Excellent book – very relevant to the world today, which surprised me. As the book was written as sci-fi in the 50s it is almost frightening how some aspects became reality.*



*Very good and as relevant today as it was in 1951. Enthusiasts for GM crops should be forced to read this.*

*It was dated in places but it is still very poignant and scary. It's quite easy to see how even in this day and age something like that could happen, especially when we are having GM crops thrust upon us whether we like it or not.*

*It made me realise the havoc that could be wreaked if man was to experience an unexpected threat. Once I had turned the first page I found it hard to put the book down.*

*The book was thought provoking, and very alarming when the realisation dawned (on me) that civilisation COULD degenerate at a rapid pace if the majority of the population were blinded.*

'Thought provoking' was one of the most commonly used phrases to describe the book

*The Day of the Triffids* did not have the same degree of nostalgic value as had *Treasure Island*, which many older readers remembered fondly from their childhoods, but, of those who returned a questionnaire, around 37 per cent had read the book before. Among the comments from those re-reading the book were the following:

*I thoroughly enjoyed re-reading the book. I thought it was as thought provoking as previously and possibly more so in this age of potential catastrophe due to terrorism.*

*I was mad on Wyndham in the 70s and have always loved this book and was glad of the chance to revisit it with older and post Cold War eyes – an interesting experience.*

*Enjoyed it more as a mature reader. I was better able to appreciate the moral dilemma posed by the disaster. The opening scene is one of the best I've come across in my wide reading. A master storyteller who writes well.*

*I read it with possibly more interest than my first reading of it, as time has moved on, other developments, such as genetically modified food experiments come to mind, and the various experiments by oil companies for alternative fuels. Most interesting.*

*I read all of John Wyndham's books as a teenager (nearly 25 years ago). It was great to re-read, and I certainly read it in a very different light – both as an adult, more politically aware, and with change in Cold War situation.*

*I really enjoyed re-reading *The Day of the Triffids* – classic books, like cars, hold their own enchantment. Chocky, another book by John Wyndham, was a great read – superb writer. Thanks so much. It was a joyous experience to receive a new book through the post.*

*I enjoyed re-reading *The Day of the Triffids* after so many years. Even today the story seems quite plausible and was extremely thought provoking, as well as an entertaining read. It reflected well the attitudes of the era it was written in.*

Nearly 88 per cent of respondents who expressed an opinion felt the Great Reading Adventure and its associated activities had enhanced their experience of reading *The Day of the Triffids*. This is comparable to the *Treasure Island* project. Around 32 per cent were inspired to read other books by John Wyndham during the course of the project, including the novels *The Midwich Cuckoos* and *The Chrysalids*. A number were already fans and had read other books by Wyndham prior to the project: others intended reading more by him in the coming weeks. Respondents devoted an average of 4 – 6 hours a week to reading for pleasure, though many added a note that they would like to spend more.

## Support material for readers of *The Day of the Triffids*

An illustrated readers' guide was produced for the 2004 Great Reading Adventure, which was sent out with copies of the book and also distributed through libraries and bookshops. The guide gave a summary of the plot of *The Day of the Triffids*, analysis of its principal characters, and information on the life and work of John Wyndham, the science fiction genre, and the environmental and political issues raised by the book. In addition, it provided suggested topics for discussion and a brief bibliography.

Of those who returned a questionnaire, around 55 per cent had used the guide (a decrease from the *Treasure Island* project when the figure had been 68.5) and, of those who expressed an opinion, nearly 97 per cent found it useful or very useful. Some preferred to read it after they had read the book rather than before so they could make their own mind up first about the issues raised. Comments received included the following:

*As a child the book was driven by the storyline – fear of blindness and triffids. As an adult, understanding provided by the guide made me consider the book in a totally different light. The guide is very attractively presented.*

*It had lots of great visual ideas/ illustrations which made it easy to use in class to embellish or establish meaning of what was happening in the book.*

*Excellent! Gave you a great insight and understanding of the book and added to the pleasure of reading the book.*

*Excellent way to encourage reading. Would have found such guides very useful as a child/ student.*

*Very impressed, high quality. Can tell a lot of thought and care has been put in to producing it. Very informative and great illustration. Plenty of detail on the book and author and background.*

*Glossy, luxurious feel. Enjoyed reading about the background to the book and seeing the different covers used by different countries.*

*I felt it complemented the book extremely well and gave the sort of information I might otherwise have had to search for.*

*Well produced and fascinating – feel that it will be very useful for giving teenagers a picture of the period that the book comes from, and lead them on to the history of post-war Britain, which is where they come from.*



Staff of J W Arrowsmith Ltd with Adam Hart-Davis at the launch

One complaint was received from someone who had been too late to receive a copy of *The Day of the Triffids* and was instead sent a guide with a covering letter suggesting she borrow the book from her local library. She wrote that more copies of the book could have been bought if money had not been wasted in producing such a glossy guide. In fact, the printing of the guide was part of the sponsorship in kind provided by J W Arrowsmith Ltd and was therefore produced at minimal direct cost to BCDP. In addition to providing background material for the project in an attractive format, having a guide is of benefit as it can be used to encourage companies to sponsor future Great Reading Adventures by demonstrating the high quality of the project.

A PDF of the guide was included on the Great Reading Adventure website. The site provided further information on Wyndham and the issues raised by *The Day of the Triffids*, an extensive bibliography, links to relevant websites, details of the Great Science Fiction Weekend, news of other project events and competitions, the PDFs of the teachers' guides and comic serial, and a discussion page. In 2003, the *Treasure Island* web game had been popular with those who had played it, but these had been few in number. It was decided that the cost of producing a web game for the 2004 Great Reading Adventure could not be justified.

With the *Treasure Island* website, there had been limitations on the amount of text that could be included on each page. This had meant, in effect, that little additional information was made available to that already contained in the printed guide. The 2004 website had more space and a more user-friendly format. Therefore, it was considered to be more effective as a means of providing support to the project. It was chosen as website of the week by *The Guardian* who described it as 'sparky'. The Royal National Institute for the Blind tested the site for compatibility with its JAWS speech output system. All the text could be 'read' with the exception of the PDFs: for future Great

Reading Adventures, Word versions of documents will also be used to overcome this problem.

The website had 4,564 visits in January, 3,797 in February and 2,338 in March with an average visit length of 5:51, 3:57 and 7:05 minutes respectively. Of those who returned a questionnaire, 24 per cent had visited the website (for the *Treasure Island* project, the figure had been 17.5). Nearly 98 per cent of those who expressed an opinion found the site easy to navigate and 69 per cent felt it had helped in their enjoyment and understanding of the book. Few comments were received about the website but they included the following:

*It was helpful and it was where I got a lot of info.*

*Definitely complements the book and gives added interest.*

*Another good source to widen the reading perspective.*

Two children whose stories had been posted on the site wrote to say that it was good to see their writing on screen. One respondent apologised but said she found the site repetitive and 'amateur'.

Although the quality of entries to the two main competitions featured on the site were generally high, they were disappointingly few in number: only five schools submitted children's paintings and 13 short stories were received. Both competitions had generous prizes and had received additional publicity via letters to the schools and colleges, and coverage in the local press. It was also disappointing that no comments were received for the discussion page: this had been introduced as one of the recommendations from evaluation of the *Treasure Island* project.

The URL [www.bristolreads.com](http://www.bristolreads.com) will be used for all future Great Reading Adventures, with the sites from previous years available in an archive.

## The Great Reading Adventure and school activities

To help teachers organise classroom activities that would enable children to join in the Great Reading Adventure, education packs were distributed to 73 local schools and colleges across the city. These ranged from nursery age to 18-plus, covered the private and public sectors, and included special schools, the Bristol Hospital Education Service and the Learning Resource Centres of the City of Bristol College.

The packs contained:

- A teachers' guide for *The Day of the Triffids* and/ or *Dinosaurs and All That Rubbish* providing background information on the author, the story and the issues raised by the book, and suggestions for class work (100 each of these guides were given away, which were printed free of charge by Mail Marketing International Limited).
- Multiple copies of *The Day of the Triffids* in an edition most appropriate for the students (Penguin Classic or Evans) and/ or *Dinosaurs and All That Rubbish*.
- Posters, postcards and readers' guides.

In 2003, there had been an attempt to engage schools and colleges in the project by working with staff at Bristol Education. This had been unsuccessful and led to teachers being given little notice about what was planned and insufficient preparation time. In addition, packs had been sent to all schools and colleges in the city, irrespective of whether or not they wished to take part, which meant that some books were wasted, as they were not used. It was decided that for 2004 only those institutions that wanted to be involved would be given the material, thereby making a more effective use of resources.



Pupils at Fair Furlong Primary School

Order forms were sent by BCDP to schools and colleges in September 2003 to ascertain which books were required. A reminder note was sent in November and an individual copy of the chosen book or books sent in December. The packs containing multiple copies of the books along with the relevant support material were distributed in early January (a van and driver took three days to deliver these, making a considerable saving on postage). Some late requests came in after the launch day: some of these could be accommodated but others had to be disappointed as, by that time, all the books that had been purchased for the project had been given away. An update letter was sent to all participants in early February, which included details of the children's art competition and other related activities.

The order forms had also asked what kind of additional support the schools and colleges would like. A number of teachers requested an artist or writer in residence. As a result, Fiona Hamilton and Claire Williamson were appointed to the project to lead a series of half-day workshops for pupils: Fiona focused on art and Claire on writing. Table 3 lists the schools that they visited.

Table 3: School workshops

Name of School	Artist
Avonmouth Primary School	Claire Williamson
Begbrook Primary School, Stapleton	Claire Williamson
Fair Furlong Primary School, Withywood	Claire Williamson
Florence Brown Community School, Knowle	Fiona Hamilton
Knowle Park Junior School	Fiona Hamilton
Red Maids Junior School, Westbury-on-Trym	Fiona Hamilton
Sea Mills Infant School	Claire Williamson
West Town Lane Junior School	Fiona Hamilton
Westbury-on-Trym Primary School	Fiona Hamilton

Source: BCDP

Reflecting on her involvement with the project, Fiona Hamilton said:

*I liked the freedom and flexibility I was allowed. I could come up with my own fresh ideas: workshops go best when I feel inspired and am not just following instructions. The project is great: it generates lots of interest across the city and the books are enjoyed by adults and children. It is motivating to know lots of people are reading the same book as you and to experience books in different ways using art etc. Both of the books chosen for 2004 [The Day of the Triffids and Dinosaurs and All That Rubbish] stimulated lots of workshop ideas and were engaging for a range of readers. Both had themes which were interesting to explore and that people felt a connection with. The reaction from children was very enthusiastic. Lots of imaginative artwork was created and it was an enjoyable process with animated discussions. The staff got ideas for other things to do later.*

Fiona thought that more time should have been allowed for preparing for the workshops (BCDP had budgeted for a half-day in total) and that it would have been useful if schools had completed a booking form giving all the necessary information about the size of class, support available and special requirements. She also recommended widening the scope of the workshops to include, for example, drama or photography, having a budget for purchasing art materials that the schools could not provide and finding ways for the pupils to share their work. For her part, Claire thought 'there seemed to be some confusion as to what would/ could be provided' but that 'it was wonderful to see the kids genuinely turned on by the books... The children and staff were fantastically warm and friendly and interested in writing!'

Throughout the course of the project, emails and telephone calls were received from teachers asking for additional information and further support material for their activities. In March, a questionnaire was sent to all those who had received education packs asking for details of what had taken place and what the pupils' reactions had been.

There was some criticism of the limited material produced that was suitable for infants and special needs children, the lack of media coverage and publicity for *Dinosaurs and All That Rubbish*, and the quantity of books that were provided. Some teachers also found their pupils were not interested in the broader themes of evolution, the environment and the collapse of civilisation, which the project had hoped to explore. However, all those who responded said that their pupils had, in general, enjoyed reading the selected book and wanted to be included in future Great Reading Adventures.

There was an interesting range of classroom activities described, a selection of which are summarised here.



Speedwell Nursery School was among those that used *Dinosaurs and All That Rubbish*. A teacher wrote:

*I have a very young class, mostly only just three, and they liked the dinosaurs. We are an Eco School with lovely outside play facilities including a wildlife garden and woodland. Recycling and care of the environment was a big issue.*

Although some of the issues raised by the book 'went over their heads' as they were so young, the teacher said: 'This didn't matter as I was able to expand on their observations and ideas about the environment.' The teachers' guide had provided 'good background reading and helpful websites to visit, giving ideas to use in a nursery setting'. The class made a big dinosaur out of recycled materials, which was included in measuring, music and storytelling activities before being recycled again into individual models. The teacher thought that the project was 'well managed with helpful advice'.

St Bernadette Catholic Primary School chose the Evans simplified version of *The Day of the Triffids* and sent in an impressive selection of pictures that the children made, one of which was printed in the *Evening Post*. One pupil entered the short story competition: the teacher who completed the questionnaire commented that the competition was 'useful for [the] extension of more able children'. Although the story did not win one of the main prizes, it was an enjoyable read and the boy was sent £50 in book tokens in recognition of his hard work. Asked what her pupils had liked about *The Day of the Triffids*, the teacher provided an extensive list: the only thing they had not liked was Josella getting married. The teacher wrote: '[The] children thoroughly enjoyed this novel. Really brought reading alive for them. Please include us again.'

Fair Furlong Primary School holds a Book Week each year, which aims to develop a love of books among pupils, parents and staff. Each class focuses on a different book and work is displayed in an

exhibition on the final day. For 2004, the Year 5 class chose the Evans' edition of *The Day of the Triffids* as their book. They enjoyed reading the story and were inspired to create 3D triffids, botanical sketches, news reports and short stories. The *Bristol Evening Post* published pictures of the pupils with their art work, and some of the stories produced in a workshop with Claire Williamson appeared on the project website. The literacy subject leader commented that the resources provided by the Great Reading Adventure team 'had made a difficult book both accessible and enjoyable'. Overall she thought the project 'was fabulous, especially the writing produced after the author visit and the high profile achieved following the photo in the paper'.

Bishopsworth Church of England Junior School used the Evans edition as part of its Book Week, which coincided with World Book Day. This was a whole-school activity. Different classes chose different writing activities including writing a diary, newspaper reports on triffids and science fiction stories. The pupils also acted out scenes from the book, painted triffids and made triffid models. The readers' and teachers' guides were used to give teachers a more detailed knowledge of the book, its themes and issues, and as a source for activities and websites. A teacher said of the book: 'The children thought it was exciting and that they could imagine themselves being placed in the same situation. They didn't want it to end!'

Bristol Grammar School received copies of both the full text and simplified versions of *The Day of the Triffids*. Pupils created triffid-inspired board games in workshops. One Year 7 English class took part in a writing competition, describing the triffids, reviewing the book and saying why it was relevant today. At the Lower School, pupils produced what the headmistress described as 'some great creative writing and super 2D and 3D art work.'



Plant sculptures created at Red Maids Junior School in a workshop led by Fiona Hamilton

At Elmfield School for Deaf Children, the Evans' edition of *The Day of the Triffids* was used to encourage reading skills. This included drawing and visualisation work, completing question sheets and writing analyses of the characters. In creative writing, pupils watched an extract from the film version showing the attack on the farm, and then imagined what would have happened if the school had been attacked in a similar way (a computer generated picture of the school under attack was on the website). Older pupils considered what would have happened if the people in the book had become deaf, rather than blind. This led to discussions and 'a little bit of politics' on who would cope best, who would be in charge and what would change. A spokesperson said: 'It was a great choice of book because of the level of originality in the triffids and the action of much of the narrative, but many of the issues/ themes underlying the narrative didn't really grab the kids' interest.'

One of the most inspiring responses came from Bristol Gateway Special School where the Evans' edition was used. This was featured on the website and was the basis of picture story in the *Bristol Evening Post*.

*I am the Literacy Co-coordinator at Bristol Gateway School, a school for students with behavioural and learning difficulties. We have been really impressed with the response of the students to the story. Normally they are very reluctant to read (or even listen to) pieces of extended prose but they have all listened to, read and discussed the story with great enthusiasm. It has been a real pleasure working on the story and they have arrived at lessons desperate to carry on reading. For our students, this is a major achievement. They particularly like the idea that the book is being studied across Bristol and they are part of a big project.*

*At the moment we are doing some clay animation, making models of the triffids... which we will then animate with the sting shooting out and killing someone.*

*We have read the shortened version (I read most of it to most of them but there was lots of students who read in small groups or one-to-one with adults which is a big step for them). We have so far made lists of equipment that they would need if the world went blind although their chances of survival are minimal. We had a twenty minute discussion as to why trying to put a triffid in a head lock would not be a great idea and why there are better ways to kill them than trying to over-water them!... Next we are going to look at what rules we would adopt in trying to develop a new post-comet society. Loads of issues have been raised and it's been great fun...*

*We are watching the 70s BBC serialisation... It's a bit dated but the kids love it despite thinking the triffids don't look real enough. I have to drag them away from the lessons. The comic strip in the *Evening Post* is popular as it gives a lot more atmosphere that you don't get in the shortened version. The kids aren't entirely happy with the depiction of the triffid but this allowed us to discuss issues of personal interpretation, which was interesting. The description of a triffid from one of the guides has been really useful and we have used this to draw what they think the triffids look like. It's great that they are engaged enough to care or even have an opinion on the subject.*

*It's been a great choice of book as far as we are concerned with loads of issues and death to get disinterested boys on-board.*

*Thanks again for your hard work and the quality of the resources. I hope it is going well citywide.*

Speaking at the end of the project, BCDP's director Andrew Kelly said:

*We have been very impressed with the work in schools – whether it is the paintings we have received, the film made, the stories written, the game produced, the sculptures created. It is clear that this has been a fun learning experience.*

Bristol Gateway Special School



## The Great Reading Adventure and Bristol libraries

One of the aims of the Great Reading Adventure is to encourage people to make more use of their local libraries.

Bristol Library Service has been involved with the initiative from the outset. For the 2004 project, the service monitored loans of all editions of *The Day of the Triffids* across the city before and during the project. Table 4 provides details of loans prior to January 2004.

Table 4 Loans of *The Day of the Triffids* January – December 2004

Format	January - June 2003	July - December 2003
Full text	14	21
Audio tape	2	0
Video	2	2

Source: Bristol Library Service

With additional copies in circulation and widespread publicity for the project, there was a marked increase in the level of interest at all library sites. Table 5 provides details of loans from January to March 2004.

Table 5 Loans of *The Day of the Triffids* January – March 2004

Format	January	February	March	Total
Full text	757	338	194	1,289
Simplified	83	44	31	158
Video	8	11	10	29

Source: Bristol Library Service

The highest level of loans were at the Henleaze, Central and Stockwood sites. There were a total of 120 loans from the seven Learning Resource Centres of the City of Bristol College, one of which, Lawrence Weston, is jointly run with the Bristol Library Service. The Cover-to-Cover audio edition did not arrive until mid-February and a total of 20 loans were recorded by the end of March.

In addition to these figures for *The Day of the Triffids*, other Wyndham titles were also popular as is shown in Table 6 below.

Table 6 Loans of other Wyndham titles

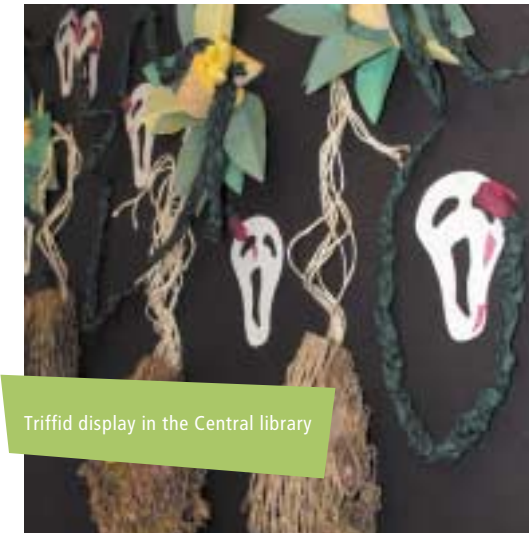
Title	January	February	March	Total
<i>Chocky</i>	12	15	8	35
<i>The Chrysalids</i>	17	21	23	61
<i>Consider Her Ways</i>	14	11	14	39
<i>The Kraken Wakes</i>	17	17	14	48
<i>The Midwich Cuckoos</i>	16	23	18	57
<i>Trouble with Lichen</i>	10	19	18	47

Source: Bristol Library Service

There were a total of 18 loans of the *Midwich Cuckoos'* Cover-to-Cover audio version and over 170 loans of *Dinosaurs and All That Rubbish*.

Commenting on the statistics a spokesperson for the Library Service wrote:

*We have had almost the same number of issues for The Day of the Triffids project as we had for Treasure Island, although we had half the number of Penguin editions – 1,000 instead of 2,000 – which shows the reduction in copies did not prove to be a problem... After two years I've got a good feel for which sites shift the copies best and reckon we can do even better next time.*



Triffid display in the Central library



The triffid puppet at Henbury library on launch day

She had been involved with planning both Great Reading Adventures. Reflecting on the project she said:

*It's wonderful to be part of such a real celebration of reading. Wherever I went, at work and outside, people were keen to tell me how much they had enjoyed the book, and how many pictures of the triffid they had seen in the paper. It is also really good to work with other organisations on a big project – I hope the benefits are mutual.*

The Day of the Triffids *appealed to a wide cross-section of the public – from those who had read it when it first came out in the 50s through to young people. It was one of the first books to be borrowed at the new St Paul's library when it opened in February. The opportunities to link with green issues were really good, and it had a very good creative dimension – children produced some amazing craft items on a triffid theme...*

*We had much better coverage of the launch event [than last year]. The comic strip in the Evening Post and the photos of the triffid kept the interest going. And the model triffid turned out to be a real winner... The only slight problem was a launch so soon after the Christmas break – some of our suppliers close down over the holidays and it was a bit of a scramble to get everything in place for the day.*

During half term week in February, children aged four to ten visited libraries in Central Bristol, Bishopsworth, Clifton, Horfield and Stockwood to see the puppet show *Mavis and the Green Space Monster* by the Tallulah Swirls Puppet Theatre. The show was linked to the science fiction theme of the Great Reading Adventure. A total of 143 children attended.

Fiona Hamilton and Claire Williamson, the project's artists in residence, held Sunday afternoon workshops at libraries in Central Bristol and Redland where they encouraged children to write noisy poems, draw pictures, create collages and build wire sculptures.

Speaking of the project in general, Claire commented:

*I think the Great Reading Adventure is a fantastic idea and it was wonderful to see the kids genuinely turned on by the books. I am a huge fan of encouraging young people to read and write, and I think the Great Reading Adventure does this beautifully... I think the Triffids as a book is challenging, but the activities abounded. Dinosaurs is a wonderful book with lots of potential activities.*

A total of 66 children took part in the library workshops (numbers were restricted because of the limited space available). The following story and song were written with Claire in the Central library:



Children's workshop at the Central library



### Pie in the sky

There once was a little boy called Jim and a little girl called Katie. They wanted to own the moon and live there (and possibly eat it, because it is made of cheese).

So they decided to build a spaceship. The spaceship was to be made out of glass, so they took glass from shops, bottles, windows and, when that wasn't enough, they heated the sand on the beaches and made glass out of the beaches!

They built their giant spaceship and went up to the moon. Brrrrrr! Off went Katie and Jim. Bye!

Meanwhile, back on earth, the seas took advantage of the fact that there were no beaches and came ashore. The seas covered the houses, the hotels, the trees, Disneyland, Legoland and all the islands. All the sea creatures came ashore too. The penguins were eating fish from the hotel freezers. The whales were in the cafés sniffing the sugar bowls. Dolphins were playing on the roller-coasters at Legoland. The sharks said, 'Stop! Let's put the beaches back where they should be.' So they worked together to get sand from the seabed and make new beaches. The whales used their blow-holes to blow the sea back to where it came from.

When Katie and Jim arrived on the moon, they saw it was all white and bare (and wasn't made of cheese after all). They were so disappointed, they turned straight round and flew back to Earth. Bye!

Hello! When they arrived back on Earth, the penguins (who had taken over the management of the hotels) said, 'Don't ever take the glass and sand away from Earth again!'

'Sorry', said Katie and Jim, 'We thought we wanted to own the moon. But we realised that it wasn't made of cheese and that what we had on Earth was already fantastic (and tasty)!'

'Good' said the penguins

'Let's keep it that way!' They chorused. 'Hooray!'

### It is for Everyone!

Chorus:  
It is for everyone!  
The earth is for everyone!

For dinosaurs and people  
Trees higher than a steeple  
For snakes and the mice  
We've got to keep it nice

Chorus:  
It is for everyone!  
The earth is for everyone!

For alligators, crocodiles,  
Let's make T-Rex's smile  
For butterflies and birds  
Come on, have you heard?

Chorus:  
It is for everyone!  
The earth is for everyone

Comparing the 2004 project to *Treasure Island*, Bristol Library Service's children's librarian said: 'It's different in that it stands alone and is not part of a big bid. However, it has proved that the Great Reading Adventure concept has a future.' She was responsible for acquiring copies of all three books for children's homes and foster carers in the city. She said: 'Looked after children and their carers are sometimes marginalized by cultural initiatives and they appreciated being included.'



Children's workshop  
at the Central library



## Bristol Evening Post coverage

For the 2003 Great Reading Adventure, the *Evening Post* ran a 51-part serialisation of the whole of *Treasure Island* with colour illustrations sent in by children.

Because of copyright issues, *The Day of the Triffids* could not be serialised in the same way. However, with the permission of the John Wyndham Estate Trust, local artist Simon Gurr was commissioned to adapt the novel as a 12-part full-page comic, which the paper ran from 12 January. Around 30 per cent of those who returned questionnaires had read the serial. Comments received on the value of the adaptation included the following letter sent to the editor:

*I have been very impressed with the Post's Day of the Triffids serial and look forward to reading it each night. The story line is gripping and easy to follow and the artwork is superb. Some people might think that using a graphic novel to promote the Big Read [sic] campaign is just dumbing-down literature. After all, teachers wouldn't dish out comic books to children in schools. Maybe, but I disagree with this view. Any strategy that encourages adults and children to read is good. Look how the film The Lord Of The Rings has encouraged thousands of people world-wide to read Tolkein's books. If the Triffids serial encourages even a few kids to put down their Playstations and read John Wyndham's book, then the Post has achieved something.*

Echoing these sentiments, some schools reported that they had found the comic of benefit in getting pupils interested in reading the book, particularly since the involvement of the *Evening Post* gave the project credibility. At the City of Bristol College, teachers used the comic with students learning English as a foreign language.

Staff at the *Evening Post* thought the comic worked well and eagerly awaited the delivery of each new installment. It inspired a number of

them to read the book. Some wondered if it would have had stood out more in colour: the black and white looked good in the original artwork but could be missed when readers flicked through the pages of the paper, particularly as the serial did not appear on the same page each night.

BCDP was keen to use the Great Reading Adventure as a way of supporting local artists. For Simon Gurr, involvement in the project was valuable experience, as he explains below:

*I was very pleased to be given the opportunity to translate The Day of the Triffids from novel to comic strip serial. John Wyndham has been a favourite author of mine for years, and this particular story is one I remember vividly from childhood. I hoped that the serialisation would awaken readers' interest in the book and its author. Upon re-reading the novel I was delighted by how fresh it seemed and also by how it reflected many contemporary issues.*



First episode of comic serial published in the *Evening Post*

*The biggest challenge was to condense more than 200 pages of text into a 12-page comic. I was greatly helped in this by a simple piece of advice from Mike Stafford, the Design Editor at the Evening Post, who suggested always ending with a cliffhanger. This allowed me to find the critical moments in the narrative and I was able to build the serialisation around that framework.*

*The condensation of the text was one of the most rewarding parts of the project, but other personal highlights involved working for the first time to a daily publication schedule, researching and designing the look of the triffids themselves, and having the opportunity to design a comic strip for the large pages of a newspaper, more than twice the space available in most comics.*

*Delivering the work to the Bristol Evening Post was a very good experience. The staff were very helpful and supportive and their enthusiastic response to the work was highly motivating. I also enjoyed their coverage of the project and promotion of the strip in their pages, and it was extremely gratifying to read positive feedback from readers in their letters page.*

*I am extremely grateful to BCDP for entrusting me with the project and for continued encouragement, feedback and advice. The readers' guide was a vital tool in my adaptation of the book, although we all agreed that I should see a text-only version of the guide so I wouldn't be influenced by the reproductions of other artists' visualisations.*

*It is always difficult for an artist to make an objective assessment of the success of a comic. While the feedback from others has been very good, I can never avoid seeing things in my work that could be improved. However, there were no major errors and the tight deadline helped me to preserve the energy of the drawings: there was no time to make them too laboured! I am most pleased with the narrative clarity in both the drawing and the page design, and I am*

*satisfied that I was right to spend so much time attempting to do justice to Wyndham's narrative before I went on to draw it.*

*It's no exaggeration to say this project has been an entirely positive experience for me, both personally and artistically, and I am very glad I had the chance to do it.*

In addition to the serial, the *Evening Post* carried regular picture-stories on the Great Reading Adventure, including a two-page spread of entries to the children's art competition, and provided a dedicated reporter as a point of contact for news items, Catherine Hole. Catherine said:

*Anything works well if you have a strong team working together. Kate [from the PR company] and I drew up a plan for the coverage. We both worked in similar ways, which made it easier. Access to people involved in the project was excellent and there was never any hassle about getting information. I held a meeting with other staff at the paper to discuss the plan and because everyone knew what was happening we managed to keep the stories running even when I was away. Continuity is the key. Next year it would be better if the reporter was brought in at the initial planning stage of the project and it would be nice if they could get more involved in the schools' activity. Other than that, it worked extremely well.*

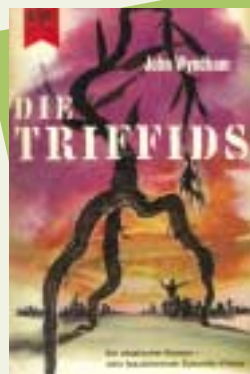
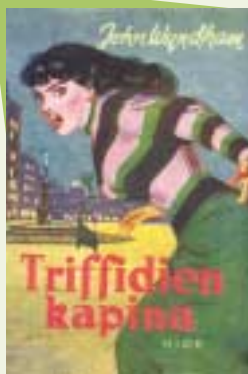
Nearly 53 per cent of those who returned a questionnaire had read some or all of the articles. Commenting on the paper's involvement, a spokesperson for Arts & Business South West said: '*Bristol Evening Post's* support for the Great Reading Adventure was a model of good practice, and other regional evening newspapers should take note.'

## The Day of the Triffids and bookshops

One of the disappointments of the *Treasure Island* project had been the limited involvement of local bookshops. In an attempt to rectify this for the 2004 Great Reading Adventure, all bookshop managers were contacted by BCDP in July 2003. The letter told them which book had been selected for 2004 and invited the shops to take part in the activities. None of the managers responded. Instead, the area sales representative for Penguin visited the shops with car stock and publicity material at the beginning of the year.

Considering how quickly the supply of free books ran out and how requests were still pouring in, it was surprising how few books were sold during the course of the project. Blackwells, who had sold over 300 copies of *Treasure Island* in 2003, only sold 12 copies of *The Day of the Triffids*. With 1,000 copies in circulation in the library system, there perhaps still remains insufficient motivation to purchase a copy of the selected book. However, BCDP will continue to work with local bookshops and has had talks with Borders about running literary events there in 2005 as part of the next Great Reading Adventure.

Selection of book covers used as illustrations in readers' guide



## The Great Science Fiction Weekend



Publicity still for *Village of the Damned*

On the weekend of 21-22 February, a selection of classic science fiction films and television programmes were shown at Watershed Media Centre, interspersed with talks and discussions on the work of John Wyndham. This was a more ambitious programme than had been devised for *Treasure Island*.

Tickets could be bought for individual events and a weekend pass was also available. Most sessions were held in the Waterside 3 area (capacity 100) with the exception of *Village of the Damned* and Wyndham on Television 2, which, for technical reasons, needed to be shown in Cinema 1 (capacity 200). Table 7 provides audience figures based on the number of tickets issued.

Table 7: Audience Figures for the Great Science Fiction Weekend\*

Date and time	Title	Audience
21 February 10.30	<i>Village of the Damned</i> (1960)	124
21 February 12.15	The Life and Work of John Wyndham: David Ketterer and Andy Sawyer	39
21 February 14.00	Wyndham on Television 1: <i>The Day of the Triffids</i>	100
21 February 18.00	Wyndham and the Next Generation: Christopher Priest	33
21 February 19.45	Wyndham and the Cosy (and Not So Cosy) Catastrophe: Brian Aldiss	71
21 February 21.00	<i>The Day of the Triffids</i> (1963)	80
22 February 12.00	Wyndham on Television 2: <i>Tonight, Out of the Unknown, Spine Chillers</i>	35
22 February 14.00	Wyndham and Women: Maureen Kincaid Speller	32
22 February 15.30	<i>Them!</i>	54
22 February 17.15	Science Panel	40
22 February 19.30	<i>The Day the Earth Caught Fire</i>	46
22 February 21.30	<i>The Day the Earth Stood Still</i>	56

\*figures include 13 weekend passes

Source: Watershed

The only change to the published programme was the Science Panel on the Sunday afternoon. John Durant, Chief Executive of At-Bristol, and Professor Kathy Sykes, of the University of Bristol, had sent their apologies, as they were unable to attend. Professor Simon Conway Morris from the University of Cambridge also withdrew. Robin McKie, science editor of *The Observer*, was still able to come and science communicator Malcolm Love joined him on stage for a discussion on the relationship between science fiction and science fact. The only comment received about the change in programme came from an audience member who said that although she was disappointed that some of the original panellists had not been there, she had enjoyed the session and found it thought provoking.

It was a tight schedule and for future events longer gaps may need to be provided between sessions, particularly to give the audience and speakers enough time to get a meal and drink. No formal evaluation took place, but from the reactions of the audience, the sessions were well received, enjoyable and informative. One of the speakers wrote after the event:

*The Great Reading Adventure No 2 meeting was pure Triffid oil without a single sting.... [We] had great fun, enjoyed Watershed, enjoyed City Inn, enjoyed the company and in particular enjoyed your care of your visitors... Oh, and we enjoyed Bristol. It's a long while since I used to broadcast from the BBC in Whiteladies Road. Clearly, the city has hauled itself up by its bootstraps. We reflected ruefully that Oxford needs a rendezvous like Watershed – it's a great amenity.*



## Other activities

A range of other activities were also inspired by the Great Reading Adventure, a sample of which are summarised here.

- The triffid puppet commissioned from local artists Gynormous Rawkus made a tour of the Galleries, Bristol International Airport, Henbury library and the BBC TV newsroom on launch day. It was borrowed by schools and libraries during the project, and featured in a Valentine's Day promotion organised by Bristol Tourism and Conference Bureau. A request was also received from a Wyndham fan at the University of Adelaide in Australia who had seen photos of the puppet on the website and wondered if it could be sent to her at the end of the project. The puppet was a good investment, as it made an eye-catching focus for media coverage. Dee Moxon of Gynormous Rawkus said: 'We enjoyed the commission and would be interested in similar work in the future.'
- At-Bristol invited Keystage 3 pupils reading *The Day of the Triffids* to attend a free half-day workshop on March 18 entitled *Science Fact or Fantasy?* Participants were encouraged to become critics and share their ideas with others in the group on the issues covered in the book. The event was part of At-Bristol's Citizen Science programme. Around 20 pupils from Fairfield High School attended.
- A scout troop in Fishponds was sent multiple copies of the full text and simplified versions of the book, which were used as part of obtaining Book Reader and Librarian badges. The troop includes both boys and girls. The scoutmaster had fond memories of reading the book while a child growing up in Africa.
- Arnolfini ran a programme of talks, tours and events as part of *Wonderful: Visions of the Near Future*, a major new project investigating science within a broad cultural and philosophical

framework. Of particular interest to the Great Reading Adventure was a group event on 21 February that discussed various works by artists, scientists and novelists, including extracts from *The Day of the Triffids*. Writer and artist Andy Smith produced a visual and textual response to the day's discussions to be distributed across the city.

- *The Day of the Triffids* was used by a number of Bristol reading groups, 12 of which obtained their copies through the Bristol Library Service. Jenny Hartley of University of Surrey Roehampton who has written about reading groups and referred to the Great Reading Adventure on Radio 4's *A Good Read* said: 'I think the Bristol initiative is really exciting, and that you are to be congratulated on a scheme which is obviously generating interest.' The librarian at HMP Bristol wrote to say that 'having had the intention of setting up a book group in the prison for some time, the gift of multiple copies of *The Day of the Triffids* gave us just the impetus we needed to get started'. She continued:

*We found a group of interested readers, issued the books immediately and met two weeks later for our discussion. The simplified version was helpful for those struggling with the complete novel and the reading guide added extra interest for us all. Since then we have met regularly in the library to discuss a variety of books, all chosen by the group.*

Although the project has officially ended, the reading continues. On 20 May 2004, Bristol North Primary Care is planning a group discussion of the book as part of a Learning at Work event linked to debates on emergency planning and accessibility: 30 to 35 people are likely to take part. A spokesperson said: 'Both myself and my manager with whom I am organising Learning at Work Week are very excited about this and look forward to reading the book!'





## Media coverage

During the course of the project, there were over 25 stories on the Great Reading Adventure in the Bristol *Evening Post*, in addition to the 12-part comic serial. Most stories were linked to the activities in schools, libraries and reading groups, and the Great Science Fiction Weekend. Local broadcast coverage included launch day features on BBC Points West, HTV and BBC Radio Bristol.

The national media campaign for the project resulted in 14 stories including items on BBC Breakfast News, Radio Five Live, Radio 4's *A Good Read* and *You and Yours*, and *The Guardian*. In addition, there was widespread trade and professional coverage including references in *The Bookseller* and *Arts Professional*. The project was also mentioned on the websites of *The Guardian* and the BBC.

It is estimated that over 7.4m people had opportunities to see coverage of the project. The estimated number of radio listeners was over 7.2m.

Grayling PR managed the media campaign free of charge as sponsorship in kind for the project. The team assigned to the project worked a total of 194 hours, valued at £12,000. In a feedback session at the end of the project, team members said it 'was very time consuming but worth every minute'.

*The Day of the Triffids* was considered to be 'a perfect book' for promotional purposes as it was 'gripping', tackled 'serious issues that are current and contemporary' and which 'get people talking', and had strong visual imagery. Having a celebrity draw like Adam Hart-Davis at the launch was a major asset: with his enthusiasm, local connection and scientific background, he was an ideal person to talk to the media. The botanical house as the launch venue was also 'spot on for the context of the book'. It was thought that a similar media-friendly event should have been arranged for the official end of the project 'to wrap it up'. The relationship with the *Evening Post* worked well. For future Adventures, it was recommended that the contact



Collier's illustration used in readers' guide

journalist be involved in the project planning meetings right from the start and that a list of stories is drawn up at least four months before the launch. In addition, some of the individuals who spoke to the media were found on an ad hoc basis. It would be better if 'a bank of people' were on board well before the media became interested who were geared up ready to talk (for example, a reading group who had read the book in advance).

Reflecting on the company's involvement, the managing director of Grayling wrote:

*The Day of the Triffids' project has been a huge success and we were delighted to be involved on a pro bono basis, communicating its value in Bristol and beyond through PR. Our team was truly passionate about promoting this unique initiative, to get people across the city reading and talking about the same book, and this commitment and enthusiasm has been translated into excellent print and broadcast media coverage, both locally and nationally.*

*What is more, our contribution in kind enabled the Bristol Cultural Development Partnership to seek additional matched funding from Arts & Business – which meant more copies of the book were available for schools and the community.*

## Sponsors and supporters

The Great Reading Adventure received funding and sponsorship in kind from Aardman Animations, J W Arrowsmith Ltd, Arts & Business, Arts Council England South West, Bristol City Council, Bristol *Evening Post* and Press Ltd, Business West, City Inn, Grayling PR, Mail Marketing International Limited and University of Bristol (further details of some of the support given is provided below). Sponsor logos were featured on the printed material and the website. Around 38 per cent of questionnaire respondents said they recalled some sponsors: Bristol *Evening Post* had the highest level of recall. A number of companies were wrongly identified as sponsors, including GWR, Waterstone's and Orange.

J W Arrowsmith Ltd printed the readers' guide, postcard, Great Science Fiction Weekend brochure, readers' questionnaire and some of the promotional posters free of charge. The total value of this support was in the region of £12,000. The Bristol-based company was celebrating its 150th birthday in 2004 and wanted to contribute something to the local community to mark this significant milestone. Arrowsmith is often approached for sponsorship but there is rarely a suitable fit to their line of business. The company liked the Great Reading Adventure because 'it definitely linked to print'. The technical difficulty of producing the foldout flaps on the readers' guide had caused some headaches, but, overall, the partnership had been 'good fun and enjoyable'. A spokesperson said: 'We were very pleased to help, and it has been a good start to our 150th.'

Arts & Business provided matching funding through its New Partners scheme linked to the support from Arrowsmith, Business West and Grayling PR. A spokesperson said: 'Arts & Business considers the Great Reading Adventure to be a model of good practice in bringing together businesses, the cultural sector and the wider community in pursuit of a shared goal.' The choice of *The Day of the Triffids* 'made for a good contrast with *Treasure Island*' and was 'a cracking read'. Arts & Business would like to support the 2005 Adventure 'in any way

that... can be useful' but there is concern that with 'a reduced regional budget for 2004/05, the panel will not be persuaded to invest for a third successive year'. Arts & Business is not able to provide ongoing revenue support.

Arts Council England South West is a partner in BCDP. There was no specific support provided for the Great Reading Adventure, although the project was recognised as being 'an important aspect of the overall BCDP programme'. An application for additional funding was made to the Arts Council's Grants for the Arts, which was unsuccessful. A spokesperson said that it was not a bad application and there was nothing wrong with the project itself, but a more compelling case needed to be made to show how the Great Reading Adventure worked with other Bristol initiatives. Competition for funding is high and the Arts Council gives preference to projects that demonstrate connections to wider strategies. An application, therefore, needs to be 'more than a good idea in its own right'. It was felt that the Great Reading Adventure 'struggled to find common ground... in the wider cultural infrastructure' of the city. On the more



Members of the Council Cabinet  
with *The Day of the Triffids*

positive side, the 2004 project achieved considerable coverage and *The Day of the Triffids* was seen as an unusual choice but a good one as it 'captured the flavour of current concerns'. In future years, it will be 'a little bit more difficult... to maintain momentum... [and] to ensure that people are just as enthusiastic' as they have been to date. Each Great Reading Adventure 'needs a new angle' for funding purposes.

Bristol City Council, a partner in BCDP, provided support for the Great Reading Adventure through the donation of staff time within the Bristol Library Service and the purchasing of some additional books and library material. A councillor wrote:

*I am delighted that the Great Reading Adventure has proved such a success this year. I believe The Day of the Triffids was an inspired choice as it appealed to adults and children alike. Being able to draw triffids fired the imagination of so many children in our schools and they enjoyed linking the story to current issues like the concern over GM foods. Many people read the comic version in the Bristol Evening Post and in these days of global terror would have seen the book in a new light. The Great Reading Adventure is now embedded as a thoroughly enjoyable annual event in the city.*

Bristol *Evening Post* and Press Ltd donated 12 full pages for the comic serial, valued at £36,000 in terms of lost advertising revenue. The paper also provided a dedicated reporter to write regular news stories based around the project. A spokesperson said the paper has been approached for support for other literacy initiatives but 'we've yet to find one as good as the Great Reading Adventure... It is in the premier division'. The *Post* likes to 'become involved with our readers rather than just reporting what's happening' and the Great Reading Adventure is a 'great way to be actively involved in a tremendous project'. The 2005 Adventure, which will use Helen Dunmore's *The Siege* as a basis for encouraging reminiscences about war, is ideal for

the *Post* as it will engage older readers but also be relevant to today and to the young. BCDP has 'got to keep improving the project each year and making it interesting' and the *Post* would like 'to be involved at the early stages to try new things and bounce off ideas'.

Business West is a partner in BCDP and provided £6,000 in funding for the Great Reading Adventure. It also contributed sponsorship in kind through the work of its employee, Melanie Kelly, who researched and wrote the material for the guides, brochures, website and evaluation report; liaised with schools and colleges in the city on the educational activities, including the artist workshops; and co-managed the Great Science Fiction Weekend. In addition, administrative staff at Business West registered the requests for books and helped in sending out the material. Business West supports the Great Reading Adventure because 'education is at the top of our concerns and we welcome innovative approaches to bringing reading into the minds of people'. Both the *Treasure Island* and *The Day of the Triffids* projects 'were good fun and worth doing'. Business West 'would want to go on giving practical support and, where possible, support for buying reading material'. A spokesperson said he would 'like to see more continuity' throughout the year. 'At the moment it feels like we've had two different goes at it... We need to seek some way of making it seem like a membership club that has an annual cycle of events.' Embedding it more firmly into the consciousness of people will make it more secure, particularly when competing with other one-off literacy initiatives.

City Inn, Bristol provided six rooms on the Saturday night of the Great Science Fiction Weekend free of charge and favourable rates for the remaining accommodation required for speakers. The guests were impressed with the high quality of the service they received at the hotel. City Inn's manager said: 'We were pleased to have been able to support the event and look forward to working with you again.'

## Budget

Mail Marketing International Limited printed the two teachers' guides and some of the promotional posters free of charge. A spokesperson said: 'It is important to give the next generation as much encouragement as possible and what better way than to get them reading.' *The Day of the Triffids* was thought to have been an excellent choice as 'children like something a little "far fetched" and, of course, the older generation will remember the book and probably the film, thereby bringing the two generations together'. Although 'finance is always a factor', the company would like to help with future projects, if possible.

The University of Bristol provided some of the images used in the readers' guide and on the website free of charge. A spokesperson wrote:

*The University is bound to support an initiative that encourages reading, questioning and discussion – they are parts of our stock in trade. But beyond this, the Great Reading Adventure is one of the ways in which Bristol distinguishes itself from the rest, strengthens its identity and generates a sense of common purpose. These all help to make the city a better and more interesting place, and we are keen on anything that has that effect.*

The choice of book was felt to have been 'slightly off the wall... [but] inspired', the support material was 'of an exceptionally high quality... and helped to communicate the fact that this was a serious endeavour' and the project 'attracted a good deal of positive media attention – some of it highly imaginative'. The university has 'complete faith that the 2005 project will be run with all the commitment and professionalism one has come to expect from the team concerned' and the only limit on future involvement will be 'a familiar one of seriously over-stretched' resources.

The first Great Reading Adventure cost just under £68,000 to run. Table 8 provides details of the expenditure and income for the 2004 project.

Table 8: Great Reading Adventure 2004

Expenditure	Amount
Management and evaluation	13,000
Marketing	
• Design/writing	4,428
• Posters and postcards	4,500
• Distribution	250
• Media work	12,000
Launch event	2,000
Website	2,760
Books and readers guides	14,156
Education	
• Guides	2,800
• Artists in residence	2,000
Comic artwork	2,440
Great Science Fiction Weekend	4,694
Postage and telephone	4,845
Prizes	1,500
Miscellaneous	500
Total	71,873
Income	71,873

It should be noted that some of these cost items – for management and evaluation, the writing of the guides and web pages, the printing of much of the promotional and support material – were provided free of charge by BCDP and its partners.



## Did the project meet its objectives?

The second Great Reading Adventure was generally deemed to have succeeded in providing an opportunity to enjoy and be stimulated by an entertaining, thought provoking book. However, we also need to examine if it met its original key objectives

- **To promote Bristol as a centre for literature**

Having run two successful Great Reading Adventures, which have attracted local and national interest, there is growing awareness of the value of literature to the city. It is unlikely that Bristol's reputation as a *centre* for literature has been enhanced at this stage and, in any case, this objective is probably too ill defined to evaluate effectively. However, the 2005 Great Reading Adventure will focus on local author Helen Dunmore as part of a yearlong celebration of creativity in the city and can only help to enhance Bristol's reputation in terms of literary output.

- **To be part of the delivery of the Bristol 2008 programme**

The 2003 Great Reading Adventure was the highest profile public event of the build-up for Bristol's bid to be European Capital of Culture. The project impressed the judging panel for the way in which it engaged with the community and raised awareness of the submission campaign. The 2004 Adventure built on this success and has been the largest event organised so far under the banner of Creative Bristol, the name given to BCDP's initiative to deliver as much of the 2008 programme as possible.

- **To encourage debate and learning about Bristol**

References to Bristol as a centre for innovation and green initiatives were included in some of the support and publicity material produced for the project as a link to the environmental and scientific themes of *The Day of the Triffids*. However, initial

ideas about exploring this connection through debate and learning were not developed. Although this opportunity was not fully exploited on this occasion, *Treasure Island* had provided a useful tool for delivering information on the city's seafaring past and it is intended that the 2005 project will be a vehicle for promoting and debating Bristol's creativity, as well as reminiscing and learning about Bristol's wartime experience.

- **To help develop standards of literacy**

A single project cannot hope to have a measurable impact upon standards of literacy, as this is a long-term process involving many different factors. However, the Great Reading Adventure made a work of fiction a newsworthy item and succeeded in getting people talking and thinking about a book, as well as reading it. It demonstrated that reading can bring communities together. The success of the comic serial in the *Evening Post* and the quality of the support material produced helped to engage a broad range of participants, and some of the feedback from schools suggested that reluctant readers were among those keenest to take part.

- **To create new art inspired by literature**

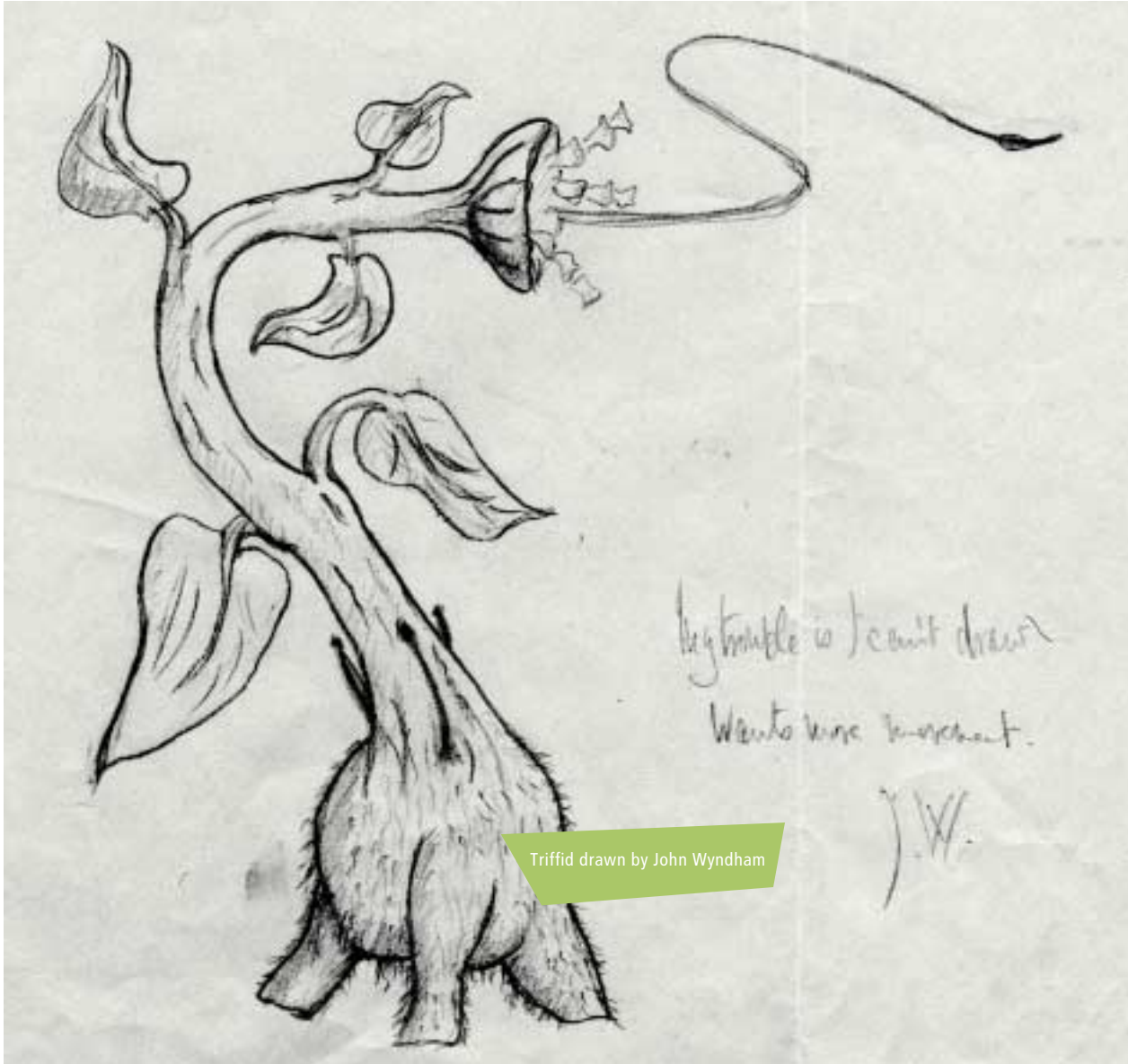
The artist workshops held in schools and libraries, and the arts activities organised by teachers showed how a fictional book can inspire other forms of creativity. The range and quality of the work produced by the children were impressive. In addition, the specially commissioned graphic serialisation of the book by Simon Gurr was widely acclaimed as was the puppet triffid created by local artists Gynormous Rawkus.

In Wildwalk botanical house on launch day





## Conclusions and recommendations



Once again the Great Reading Adventure demonstrated that Bristol is able to run a citywide project that engages a wide range of people in a classic book, inspires discussion and debate, encourages reading, writing and artistic creativity, and enhances social capital through the building of networks across the community. As with *Treasure Island*, *The Day of the Triffids*' project was also fun for those involved. Nearly 99 per cent of questionnaire respondents who expressed an opinion thought citywide reading projects were an excellent or good idea, and over 98 per cent were interested in participating in future projects.

The Great Reading Adventure is now an annual event and provisional plans have been made up to 2007, with titles suggested to fit the cultural theme agreed for each year: Bristol Creativity in 2005, Brunel 200 in 2006 and the abolition of slavery in 2007. From the evaluation of the 2004 Adventure, the enthusiasm and commitment of many of the participants and partners are already in place.

Many of the recommendations made following the evaluation of the 2003 Great Reading Adventure were implemented for 2004. These included:

- Providing more books suitable for younger readers.
- Reducing the number of full text editions given to libraries.
- Reducing the quantities of printed promotional material.
- Involving schools and colleges earlier.
- Having greater involvement from artists.
- Using Watershed Media Centre for events.
- Expanding the website to include discussion and news pages.
- Sending out questionnaires to readers at the end, rather than the beginning, of the project.

Among the recommendations that were not implemented was setting up a book-crossing scheme. This would have involved producing bookplates that encouraged readers to pass their free books on to

## Acknowledgements

family and friends, or to leave them to be picked up by strangers. It was decided that this was too expensive.

The key recommendations following the 2004 Great Reading Adventure are:

- **Book distribution** Find a more cost-effective means of distributing books to the general public that still entails keeping a register of interest but does not incur postal charges. Restrict the distribution to the BS postcode area.
- **Publicity and media coverage** Involve the *Evening Post* from the outset in planning the next Adventure; have a bank of people set up in advance ready to speak to the media; and arrange some event to mark the culmination of the project.
- **Support material** Include Word versions of documents on the website in addition to PDFs.
- **Education** Get material to teachers before the Christmas break and ask teachers who want a workshop to complete a booking form giving all contact details and a specific description of what they require.
- **Libraries** Get material to the libraries before Christmas and more data about users.
- **Events and activities** Allow for additional preparation time for artist workshops in the budget and allow longer breaks between sessions during the weekend of films and talks.
- **Funding** Have a membership scheme by which companies donate £250 in return for packs of books and guides.
- **Evaluation** Add a question on the gender of the respondent to the self-completed questionnaire and consider offering a prize draw as an incentive for returning the form.

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