

**March 2025
Issue 228**

BAFM comes to Bristol this Autumn

In this edition

- the Protest Exhibition at M Shed
- the acquisition of the 1866 plans for the Assizes in Small Street
- the Friends' visits to the Lord Mayor's Chapel and John Wesley's New Room
- news of upcoming exhibitions and events
- the rewards and benefits of volunteering



From the Chair

Council funding for the opening of the Historic Houses and Archives Search Room

I am sure you are all aware of the very difficult financial situation that local councils all over the country – not least in Bristol – find themselves in, with significant budget shortfalls and costs rising considerably faster than income. Over the last few months there has been much public discussion locally over an initial draft 2025/6 budget proposal by the Council to mothball the Historic Houses; Blaise Castle House Museum, The Georgian House and The Red Lodge. The Council's plan was to then find an alternative operating model which would allow the Houses to reopen, but community-led, without them being a cost to the Council. Fortunately, ahead of taking that proposal to the full council for a decision, the Strategy and Resources Policy Committee recommended it be deferred for a year to allow for a review to take place. That is good news in the short term but not a reprieve, merely a stay of execution for one year. There will be much work to be done over the coming months to try to find an acceptable way forward.

The re-think on the Houses seems at least in part to have been due to a clear expression by voters of their opposing view, and an online petition set up by Mark Weston, councillor for Henbury and Brentry, and long-standing supporter of Blaise House, was signed by well over 3,000 people. I have heard it said that 'the Council never listens'



▲ *Blaise Castle House Museum will remain open for 2025 at least*

© David Seaman

Cover photo: Coronation Time: The Flood-Lit Tower of Bristol University, Clifford Hanney (1890–1990)

© Bristol Culture. We have used a crop of this image as the front of our new leaflet.

but that is most definitely not the case, and the deferral by a year of the decision on the Houses should remind each of us that when something important is at stake we should be prepared to stand up and be counted because sometimes it really does make a difference.

In the Council's draft budget document there was also a proposal to save a relatively small amount of money by reducing the public opening of the Archives search room to 3 days a week. We have issued a media release making clear our concerns about the reduction of public access by 25% to achieve a relatively insignificant saving but, sadly, although both Labour and Conservative councillors voted against it, the cut was voted through. Those of you for whom we have email contact details were sent information about this in time for Bristol residents to make your views known to your local councillors.

Sad News

Since our last issue we have learned of the deaths of two people who many of you will remember with fondness: Michael Lear, a longstanding and much-loved member; and John Williams, City Archivist from 1988 to 2012. You will find a short appreciation of each of them later in this issue.

New Membership Leaflet

You may already have seen our new membership leaflet incorporating our 2025 subscription rates and a refreshed cover image to differentiate it from any remaining copies of the old leaflet. We have chosen a striking picture on public display at M Shed, Coronation Time: The Flood-Lit Tower of Bristol University 1953 by Clifford Hanney, a Bristol-based artist who was born near Pensford – and we have used the same image on the cover of this Newsletter.

Volunteers needed to help the Friends to thrive

We are still very much in need of volunteers to help organise and run our events. Sally Dore, one of our most recent recruits, encourages more to join her in a short piece later in this issue.

Michael Lear

Former members of FOBAG will be sorry to hear of the sudden death of Michael Lear. He contributed so much to the conviviality of meetings at BMAG. Michael supervised the informal bar at events, serving drinks with a smile and a friendly word. He continued to be an active member of the combined Friends group. Our thoughts are with his widow, Carol, whom many of you will know.

Susan Hibberd



▲ *The BAFM Conference dinner venue – the rear hall of Bristol Museum and Art Gallery*
© Martin Dabek

British Association of Friends of Museums (BAFM) Annual Conference 2025 – in Bristol

Plans for hosting the BAFM 2025 Annual Conference here in Bristol, at M Shed, on Friday 3 to Sunday 5 October are well under way. The theme of the 2025 Conference will be 'Who do we represent? Diversity and inclusion in Friends groups and in the heritage we support'. The dinner on the Saturday night will be in the spectacular venue of the ground floor halls of Bristol Museum and Art Gallery, and our guest speaker will be a well-known expert from BBC's Antiques Roadshow. We will include full details and a booking form in our June issue.

We are looking for some volunteers to help us on Friday, Saturday and on Sunday morning with greeting BAFM members from across the country, helping them find their way, answering their questions and making them feel welcome in our lovely city as well as generally supporting the smooth running of the conference. If you would like to be involved as a volunteer, you can find an expression of interest form enclosed.

An Audience with the Pope

In January Katherine, our Secretary, and I accepted an invitation from the World Federation of Friends of Museums

(an organisation which claims, through affiliations like our Friends, 2 million members) to join a group of about 80 delegates from around the world at a special audience with the Pope in the Vatican. As it turned out we became two-thirds of the British delegation, along with Dan Calley, Chair of BAFM. In many ways the experience was rather different from what we had expected but even as a non-Catholic I felt it was a privilege to be there and to see and hear the Pope, who means so much to billions of people across the globe. There were many other groups at the audience, including about 2,000 Italian Scouts, but it still felt significant to hear the Pope name our group – 'La Federazione Mondiale degli Amici dei Musei' – in his closing benediction.

A generous bequest

We have recently received a significant bequest, for which we are very grateful, from the estate of Brian Toms, who lived in Clifton Village. I believe he was a member of the Friends of Bristol Art Gallery, but as required by the Data Protection Act the FoBAG records have been deleted. If you knew Brian, do please get in touch as I would love to know a little more about him.

Sue Thurlow Chair

Bristol Museums, Galleries and Archives

Staff News

We bid a sad farewell to Gail Boyle, Senior Curator of Archaeology and World Cultures, at the end of last year, after 39 years of tireless service. Gail was instrumental in the imagining of M Shed and led on many exhibitions during her time here. Her contribution to the service cannot be overstated and she will be missed by us all. She is well known in the museums world for having many strings to her bow, many both locally and nationally related to her speciality of archaeology, so she will have no trouble keeping herself busy. Among her continuing posts, Gail is Chair of the Board of Trustees for the Council for British Archaeology, and she will be working as a freelance Museum Archaeologist and Heritage Consultant.

Meanwhile, in the Fundraising team we have hired a new Fundraising Officer who will focus on generating income from corporate supporters and events. Rachel Myles joined us in February, having previously held a similar role at Bristol Zoo.

Historic Houses and other savings proposals

As I write this, we have just learned the outcome of the Bristol City Council's Finance sub-committee's meetings to determine which cost-saving measures will be taken forward as part of the 25/26 budget. The sub-committee meeting in January recommended deferring the option to introduce savings in the Museums Service by closing Blaise Museum, Red Lodge and the Georgian House. The option to reduce the amount of funding in the Cultural Investment Programme, administered by the museums service, was also deferred for a year. The proposed deferral would be for 12 months to enable officers and councillors to work with the city to identify alternative options for these important aspects of Bristol's cultural landscape. This means that all three of the historic houses will be opening as usual in April, following their winter closure, and we look forward to welcoming you to them.

However, the proposal to alter the Archives search room opening times from four days a week to three was taken forward and the final decision made at full council on 25 February to implement the cut.

Kings Weston Roman Villa

In October 2024 a car lost control and crashed into the protective wooden building that covers the mosaics at Kings Weston Roman Villa. Staff were alerted to the accident and arrived on site to find the Police Traffic Team recording and documenting the incident. After a long day, the car was removed and the building and fence made secure. Luckily, the only archaeological damage was to a small section of the Roman walls and the driver is expected to make a full recovery.

The protective wooden building and the fence were damaged however, and Kate Iles, David Singleton and Ali

▼ *The knot garden at the Red Lodge. The house and garden will open as usual this year as Bristol City Council proposals to close it have been deferred for a year*

© David Emeney



▲ *The kitchen of the Georgian House Museum, which will be open to the public again this year due to the deferral of Bristol City Council proposals to close it*

© Bristol Culture

Shohrati have been collaborating with multiple agencies to get the site back to a state that will allow us to welcome visitors, including schools, in the late spring.

Celebrating the Learning Team

The Bristol Museums Learning team has had an incredible 2024! The dedicated team delivers sessions that make the most of our extensive collections and expertise, allowing

children to handle real and replica objects that bring history to life.

In 2024, we welcomed over 40,000 children to our museums, inspiring them to imagine, create, and learn. We held over 400 workshops across three museums, covering a wide range of topics from Ancient Greece and Ancient Egypt to Ships and Sailors, and World War II.

In addition to our in-museum sessions, we provided loan boxes to schools, enabling children to explore historical objects in their own classrooms. We are also proud to have launched a variety of new sensory boxes, specifically developed for children with Special Educational Needs. Our online resources catalogue grows with each year, and last year we introduced a new session on Rocks, Fossils, and Dinosaurs to celebrate the Mary Anning exhibition held at Bristol Museum & Art Gallery in April 2024.

Thanks go to our Learning Sponsor 2024–26, Clifton College.

Caroline Booth-Morris and Beth Cutter
Co-Development Managers

Events and Exhibitions

Bristol Photo Festival: Dreamlines

M Shed until 20 April

This display is a collaborative project showcasing Bristol through the eyes of local photographers, including works inspired by images of the past, such as historic brass band parades at Two Mile Hill in east Bristol and the membership of Shirehampton Men's Social Club from 1951.

Bristol Photo Festival: Hashem Shakeri – Staring into the Abyss

Bristol Museum & Art Gallery until 20 April

Staring Into the Abyss is the debut solo UK exhibition by Hashem Shakeri, an award-winning Iranian artist, photographer and filmmaker. Shakeri's images capture an atmosphere of uncertainty and ambiguity as ordinary Afghans deal with numerous restrictions and violence reintroduced after the Taliban's return to power in 2021 after 20 years of conflict. He arrived in Afghanistan after the international news media had largely moved on to other stories, and the country's diplomatic isolation had intensified. His images focus on how communities survive in the wake of global history. Afghanistan is currently the only nation where secondary and higher education is forbidden to girls and women, affecting 1.4 million Afghan girls, according to UNESCO.



Wildlife Photographer of the Year

Bristol Museum & Art Gallery until 20 April

Celebrating its 60th year, this incredible show features 100 stunning images on wildlife photography, with thanks to the Natural History Museum in London. These photos capture the amazing diversity of the natural world, showcasing fascinating animal behaviour and curious species. Through powerful storytelling and captivating visuals, the exhibition inspires visitors to appreciate the natural world.

With nearly 60,000 entries from over 117 countries, the winning images are selected by international experts for their creativity, originality, and technical brilliance.

'Those that do not smile will kill me': Decolonising Jamaican Flora

Bristol Museum & Art Gallery until 27 July

Since summer 2023 Jessica Ashman has been working with Bristol Museum & Art Gallery's collection, researching archives from the British Empire and Commonwealth Collection and exploring specimens in the Natural History collection. This new multi-disciplinary installation is a result of that work.

Ashman has been researching the collections of two 18th-century biologists whose herbaria and archives are held in the museum. Arthur Broughton (1758-1796) accumulated flowers and plants in Jamaica in the 1780s and '90s and this herbarium (the restoration and conservation of which was partly funded by the Friends) is a resource for study of the botany on the island. John Lindsay (1729 -1788) settled in Jamaica in 1758 and produced an illustrated manuscript depicting local flora and fauna. Both men relied on the knowledge of Africans enslaved on the island to develop their understanding and to aid in the collecting itself.

The title comes from a proverb that tells the danger of the Jamaican fruit, Ackee, part of Jamaica's national dish Ackee and Saltfish. If the fruit is not ripe, i.e. does not split and 'smile', it is poisonous.

'Those that do not smile will kill me' invites you to challenge perceptions around nature, botanical knowledge and who owns the rich natural resources on Earth.

▶ **Another image from
Jessica Ashman's
installation 'Those
that do not smile
will kill me':
Decolonising
Jamaican Flora**
© Jessica Ashman



Bristol Rocks! 2025 Volcanoes!

An exciting family day filled with a variety of activities for all ages.

Bristol Museum & Art Gallery Saturday 5 April

Volcanoes are an incredible force of nature which affect many lives around the world today. Visitors will be able to explore their amazing power, learn how experts study them and discover how volcanoes affect the communities around them.

Activities include a light-up floor that simulates the effects of a volcanic eruption beneath your feet, and a chance to meet experts from The University of Bristol to find how to become a volcanologist. Experts from the Centre for Observation and Modelling of Earthquakes Volcanoes and Tectonics will be there to talk about their work and answer questions.

There will also be family-friendly hands-on activities including being able to handle real volcanic rocks and minerals. Your family can also learn about now-extinct volcanoes that once erupted in the landscape around Bristol millions of years ago.

Visitors can sign up on the day for short trips behind the scenes to the geology store, with a volcanic theme. Please note there is no step free access and recommended age is 7+.

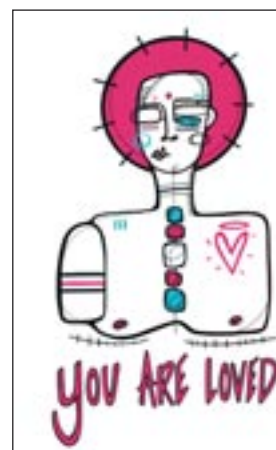
Gender Stories

Bristol Museum & Art Gallery, 31 May—12 October

The Gender Stories exhibition will sensitively examine the fluid, multifaceted world of gender across cultures, eras, and personal experiences. It will explore the intricate connections between sex, gender, sexuality, and identity and examine how these ideas have been mythologised, stereotyped, expressed—and sometimes concealed—through art, history, politics, and daily life over time.

This compelling display brings together objects and artworks from Bristol Museums, National Museums Liverpool, and Brighton & Hove Museums. By combining community stories with insights from gender theory, Gender Stories highlights both the joys and struggles of gender identity.

This collaboration was made possible through the Museums and Galleries Network for Exhibition Touring (MAGNET), a network of 12 museums and galleries that are joining resources to share their collections with diverse national audiences. MAGNET aims to share collections more widely, with exhibitions being seen by many more people. It also addresses the unsustainability of 'single use' exhibitions.



▲ An artwork from the Gender Stories exhibition
© Mister Samo

▼ An artwork by Mister Samo from the Gender Stories exhibition. Mister Samo is a Portsmouth-based trans artist, public speaker, and activist who focuses on the interaction of our different identities — such as gender, race, religion, class — and community
© Mister Samo



◀ An artwork from the Gender Stories exhibition
© Mister Samo

Volunteering

Sally Dore, a recent volunteer, writes:

I joined the Events Group, steered by Mary Bailey, 18 months ago and have enjoyed helping to create and implement the programme of fascinating events that the FBMGA organises for members. The events lie at the heart of the Friends' fundraising programmes, and it is very satisfying to know that I have helped to facilitate events which raised hundreds of pounds. This money enables our museum service to pay for all sorts of extras that they would not otherwise be able to afford – as you read about in every newsletter. Joining this committee seems like the perfect blend of enabling enriching events of the kind I appreciate myself and raising funds way beyond anything I could personally contribute.

The FBMGA has a strong membership and very supportive members who flock to events. But I have observed myself that we do now need more people to volunteer for a range of roles such as the Events Group. Otherwise, there is a real danger that, without members coming forward to help with such roles, the Friends will not be able to continue much longer. And besides, the more people who volunteer, the less each of them has to do!

If you are able to help, please contact Sue Thurlow on sue.thurlow@outlook.com to arrange a chat.



▲ **Sally Dore**
Photo © Mark Russell

▼ *Dyrham Park where Sally has provided guided tours for our members*
Photo © Sally Dore



Godwin's Assize Plans acquired for Bristol Archives

Thanks to generous funding from the Friends, Bristol Archives successfully purchased a bundle of plans and elevations for the proposed new Assizes court on Small Street at auction earlier this year. Dating from 1866, they comprise 9 drawings in ink, pencil and coloured wash.

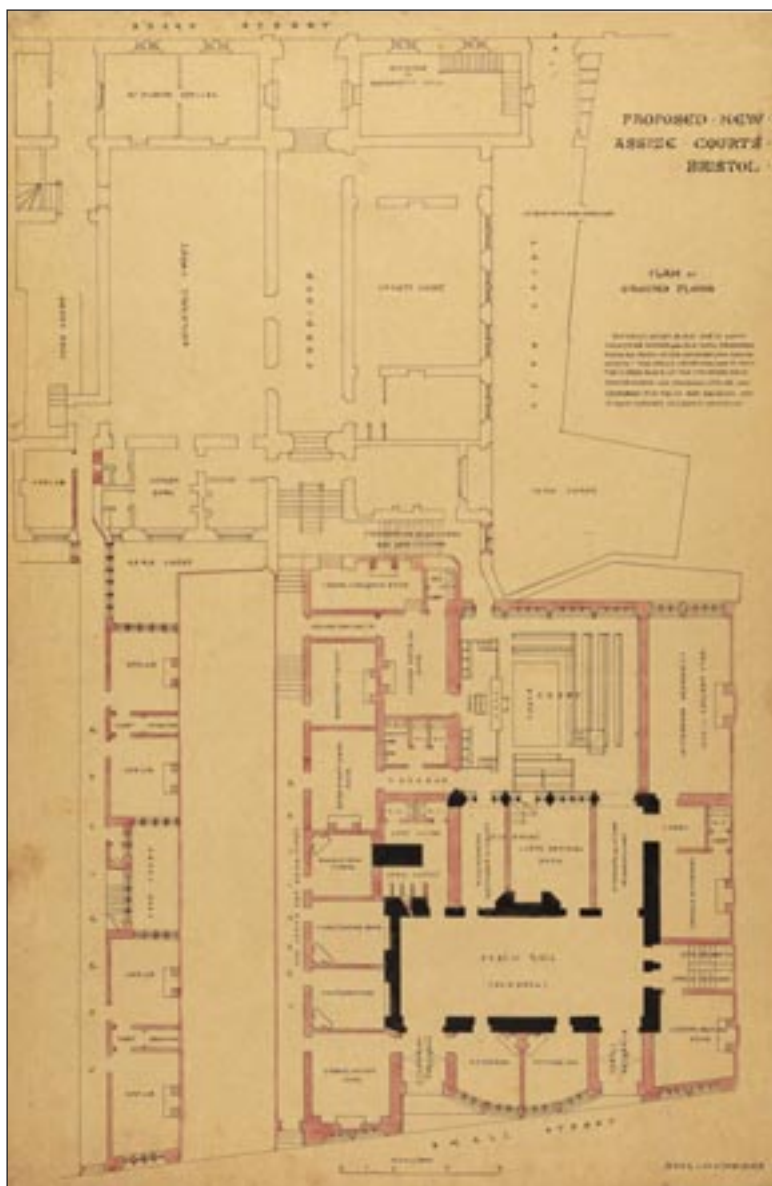
Given that the court building ended up being built to a different set of plans entirely, it might seem a bit odd for us to want to add them to our collections, but they tell a very interesting story in relation to both the building and the architect.

The person responsible for these drawings was Edward William Godwin. He was born in Bristol in 1833, trained as an architect, and established his own practice in 1852, winning commissions for churches, schools and civic buildings around the country including town halls in Northampton and Congleton.

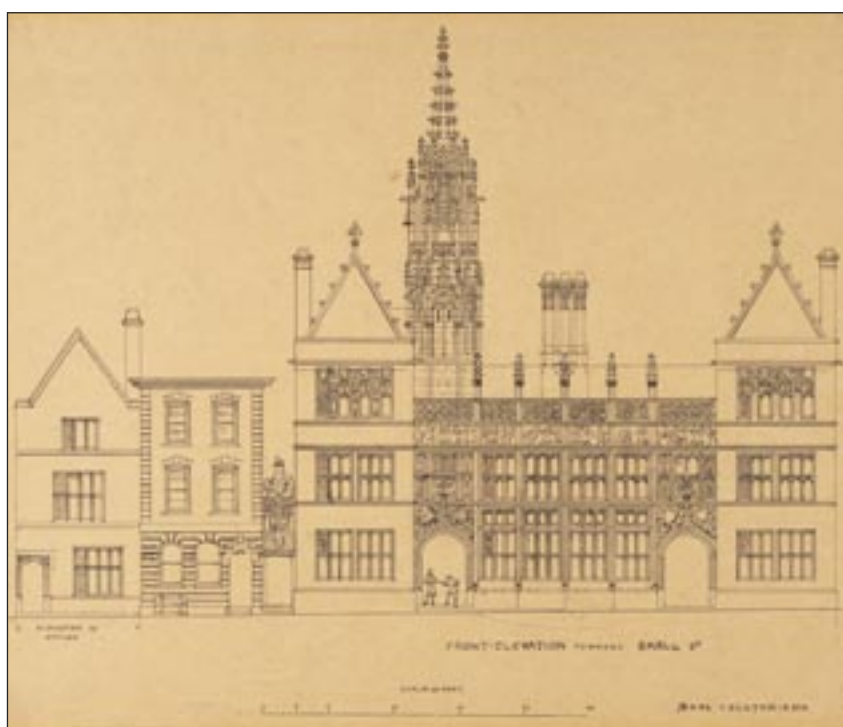
He later moved to London, was widowed, and then had two children out of wedlock during a six-year affair with the noted actress Ellen Terry, who had separated from (but not divorced) her second husband. Their children, Edith and Edward, went on to work in the theatre as both directors and designers.

This relationship probably explains his interest in designing theatre sets and costumes in addition to his architectural work. He also went on to design furniture, textiles, wallpaper and ceramics, some of which were sold at Liberty of London. He is seen as a pioneer of both the Aesthetic Movement and what became known as 'Anglo-Japanese' furniture.

The archives already hold some Godwin material,



▲ Floor plan as part of the 'Ades Colstoniana' proposal
© Bristol Culture



◀ Front elevation from Small Street as part of the 'Ades Colstoniana' proposal
© Bristol Culture

including his 1861 plan for St Philip and Jacob School; correspondence with the Canynoges Society; notes relating to the old Abbey of St Augustine; and a couple of later American exhibition catalogues which featured his work. The museum collections include several examples of his furniture including chairs and sideboards.

Material is also held at the Victoria & Albert Museum as part of the Royal Institution of British Architects collection, including his design sketchbooks, examples of his furniture and plans of the house he built for himself and Ellen Terry in Hertfordshire. In addition, the University of Bristol Theatre Collection holds papers relating to his son Edward.

So that is the architect, but what about the story? In 1866 the council held a competition for the building of the new Assize Courts on Broad Street. The anonymised designs submitted by Godwin and his partner Henry Crisp won first second and third places, but the council decided to order a second competition. This was won by Pope & Binden, with Pope being one of the regular City Surveyors already and well known to the committee members. Unsurprisingly, Godwin was not too pleased about this, and several professional magazines made allegations of corruption in the selection.

Around the same time, he was also publicly critical about George Edmund Street's report and plans for the restoration of the nave of Bristol Cathedral, his strong opinions being based on his own knowledge from his previous historical investigations relating to the layout of the Abbey of St Augustine. Our former City Archivist Julian Warren wrote an article with Jo Bettey about this disagreement for *The Regional Historian* in 2010.

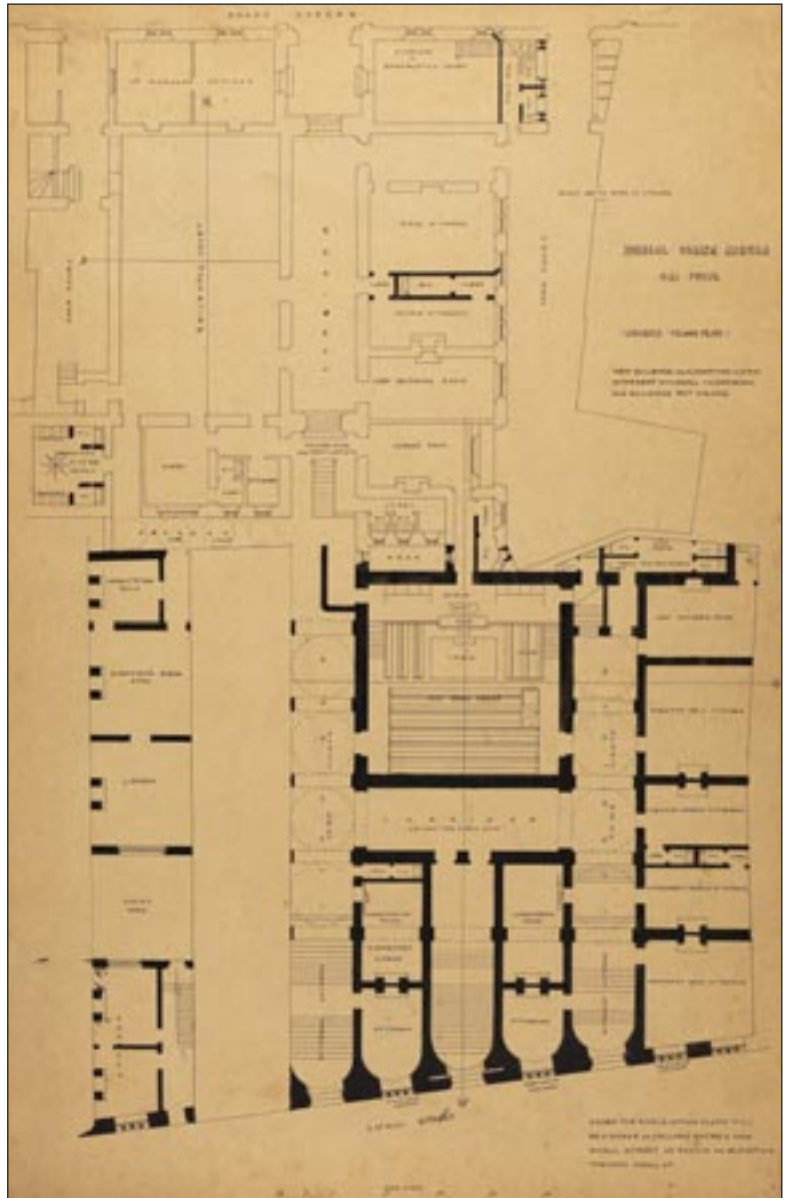
All in all, these drawings come from a turbulent and important time in his rising architectural career, where he was clearly an important player, annoying some people with strong ideas, but also with cause to feel cheated.

Usually with architectural plans, the ones that survive are the ones that end up being built, so it is unusual to have so many plans for a single building that was open to competition (well technically two competitions!)

The plans are nicely mounted onto paper and roughly 50cm x 80cm. Five of them are referred to with the title or pseudonym 'Nisi Prius' (a term for civil cases transferred from central courts in London) and four as 'Ades Colstoniana'.

They both show the existing Guildhall court buildings on Broad Street, and similar footprints for the new building, but with variations in exactly how the numerous required areas – such as holding rooms for witnesses, retiring rooms, clerk's offices and toilet facilities – could be arranged. Different colours are used to identify existing buildings, alterations and new construction, paying respect to what is already on the site. There are also detailed front elevations, giving a very exact indication as to the frontage with ornate windows, friezes, and motifs.

We look forward to using these to complement the Godwin material in both the archives and the museums, and to help to better publicise the story of Edward Godwin as an architect and designer in Bristol and beyond.



▲ Floor plan as part of the 'Nisi Prius' proposal

© Bristol Culture

Graham Tratt Archivist



▲ A view of the chapel showing the pulpit in the foreground and the balcony

Photo by Sally Dore

John Wesley's New Room

Wednesday 4 December 2024

A visit to a Christmassy Charles Wesley's House had been arranged, only to be scuppered at the last minute by a leak which required the property to be closed. As an alternative, we were offered a visit and talk at John Wesley's New Room. Many thanks to Carol Ouvry for her valiant work in changing the arrangements at the last minute and managing to contact us all!

The New Room, now surrounded by the Broadmead shopping centre, is the first purpose-built Methodist building in the world, a place of global historical importance here in Bristol. As well as the chapel, it houses the original rooms in which John Wesley lived with his family, and where visiting Methodist ministers and others were put up. In 2017, the museum upstairs was renovated and an extension built at the rear for a café, shop and archive. We were able to visit the museum part of the building before or after our excellent talk by a volunteer in the chapel about the origins of Methodism and the New Room. These rooms on the upper floor now tell the story of Bristol in the 18th century and the advent of Methodism, with John and Charles Wesley's involvement, in a clear and imaginative way. They are very well worth visiting.

John Wesley was a remarkable man. He was one of 19 children - 10 of whom survived. His mother Susannah had a strong belief in education that stood her children in good stead. John was ordained in 1725 and he and his brother Charles both followed George Whitfield, one of the founders of Methodism, in the belief that not enough was being done to reach the poor and marginalised with the message of

Christianity. Initially horrified by the idea of open-air sermons, John realised how powerful they could be when he saw Whitfield preaching to the miners of Kingswood.

Over his life John travelled more than a quarter of a million miles on horseback and delivered over 40,000 sermons, mostly composed in advance and written out in longhand. The gatherings in Bristol took place initially in a room in St Nicholas Street but, when the floor there collapsed, John said that they needed a 'New room'. This led to the construction of the current building in 1739, which was rebuilt with more accommodation added in 1748. The building was subject to physical attacks (which is why there were no windows on the ground floor) particularly because of Wesley's abolitionist views; these brought him into conflict with supporters of the transatlantic trafficking of enslaved Africans, which provided a key source of income in Bristol.

The New Room incorporated a chapel, deliberately built with a very simple and plain design that allowed all visitors to feel they were welcomed in and offered fellowship and hope. It was not unusual for five thousand people to attend a service at 5 am before work.

We were offered mince pies and munched on them while listening to the guide's talk, which concluded with the singing of Hark the Herald Angels Sing. This is perhaps the most famous of the many thousands of hymn lyrics (possibly nearly 9,000) written by John's brother Charles and was first sung right there in the New Room.

Sally Dore



▲ *The Friends hearing about the life and work of the Wesley brothers*

Photo by Sally Dore

▼ *One of the rooms in the museum*

Photo by Sally Dore



New displays at M Shed: Protest

A year ago at M Shed we opened two new displays, made possible by the generous support of the Friends of Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives, and of Bristol Museum Development Trust. These are permanent displays in the Bristol People gallery and extend our existing displays on the theme of Protest. They focus on protest against the climate emergency and against racial injustice.

The climate emergency section focuses on the rally at which Greta Thunberg spoke in February 2020, Bristol's largest ever protest. It includes material on the Youth Strike for Climate, including placards created by young people for the rally. The display makes use of objects, images and interpretive videos collected

as part of our recent temporary exhibition, Think Global: Act Bristol. We are trying to embed this kind of 'recycling' of content wherever possible, to ensure that our temporary exhibitions have an enduring legacy in the museums. This will allow us to incorporate fresh material into our permanent galleries, and to get the most value from the time and resources which go into creating our temporary exhibitions. One new and quite striking piece in the display is a sculpture by local artist and activist Doug Francisco. Three mannequins represent members of the Red Rebel Brigade, a climate protest group which started in Bristol and has since spread around the world.

The section on protest against racial injustice focuses on the protest during which the statue of Edward Colston was toppled in June 2020. The display follows on from the 2021 survey in which the vast majority of the 7,000 Bristolians who responded agreed that the statue should be displayed in a museum in Bristol. We then worked with a group of local academics, artists, activists, historians, and community leaders to create a set of guidelines and main messages for the display. The key intention was to create a space where visitors can consider different perspectives on the toppling of the statue and reflect on the bigger picture in which this one incident sits. A large timeline fills one end of the gallery, charting protest against racial injustice over the last 400 years in Bristol and around the world. Visitors can add their own cards to the timeline, to fill gaps and to look to the future and imagine what might come next in this long story.

As soon as the displays opened we saw a spike in visitor numbers to M Shed, and they are continuing to prove a draw for visitors from both Bristol and across the globe. The displays are prompting conversations among visitors, as we hoped, and many people have contributed thoughtfully to the timeline. We are proud to have produced displays on two very sensitive topics which draw people together in discussion rather than further divide people. The displays would not have been possible without the funds provided by the Friends, and we are very grateful for your support and trust in us in tackling these tricky subjects.

Helen McConnell Simpson Senior Curator, History



▲ *The statue of Edward Colston which was toppled in June 2020*
© Bristol Culture



- ▲ The timeline charting protest against racial injustice over the last 400 years in Bristol and around the world. Visitors can add their own cards to the timeline, and are invited to imagine what might come next in this long story
© Bristol Culture



- ▶ A sculpture by local artist and activist Doug Francisco, representing members of the Red Rebel Brigade, a climate protest group which started in Bristol and has since spread around the world
© Bristol Culture

The Lord Mayor's Chapel

23 January 2025

The Lord Mayor's Chapel is at the bottom of Park Street across College Green from the Cathedral which was formerly St Augustine's Abbey. The chapel is one of only two churches in England owned by a city corporation. It is a fantastic building, with far more space and many more nooks and crannies than one would imagine given its small size. It is packed with curiosities of all sorts including statues and tombs dating from the 1200s to more current times; stained glass from all periods and locations; hatchments (wall-mounted diamond-shaped panels bearing the coats of arms of 18th & 19th century lord mayors, originally made for their funerals); a rather romantic window of Thomas à Becket; a spectacular Tudor ceiling; and a separate chantry, the Poyntz Chapel, floored with ancient Spanish tiles.

Our guide, Barry (a historian who provides tours along with his volunteer colleague Oliver), told us the story of the chapel. The building was begun in 1220 by Maurice Gaunt, a member of the Berkeley family who themselves also founded the Abbey. The Green was originally the burial ground of the Abbey. Initially the chapel was built not as place of worship, but as a refectory to feed 100 paupers daily. It was then known as Gaunt's Hospital (a place offering hospitality). Among the effigies lie the founders Maurice and his nephew, Robert de Gournay, in full chain armour with their feet resting on a small dog and a lion.

Later, the refectory changed to become a more spiritual building and in order to decorate the window at one end, an assortment of European glass acquired from sales of important collections was slotted together almost willy-nilly. In a later transept there is a rather fine complete window of Victorian glass. In 1772, after a dispute with the Cathedral over seating, the Mayor and Corporation took over the building, renamed it the Lord Mayor's Chapel and made it the compulsory place of worship for all councillors. Eventually, the chapel was also used for worship by Bristol Grammar School, Queen Elizabeth's Hospital School and Red Maids School.

The Chapel is open to the public on some days of the week, so you do not need to be a Friend to go. We are grateful to Sally Dore for arranging our visit.

Robert Walters



▲ *The tomb of Sir Maurice Berkeley of Uley, died 1464, and his wife Ellen, in the chancel*

Photos by Sally Dore



◀ Guide Barry sharing some of the history of The Lord Mayor's Chapel with the first of the Friends' groups to take the tour



▶ Volunteer guide Oliver telling the second group about the history of the original Spanish floor tiles in the Poyntz Chapel. We were asked not to step on the tiles ourselves, and Oliver took off his shoes and stood on them in his socks to avoid causing any damage



John Williams, former City Archivist

John Williams, former City Archivist and later one of the Deputy Directors of Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives, died suddenly at home near Bridgend, South Wales, on 27 December 2024. He was 68.

He came to Bristol in 1983 as Senior Assistant Archivist and in 1988 he became City Archivist.

John was always a 'man of the people' and liked to cite his no-nonsense Welsh roots as the basis for this. He took Bristol Record Office from another, rather reserved, era and propelled it into the modern age. He wanted everyone to feel able to consult their archival heritage. To achieve this he took staff and users along with him by his easy manner, enthusiasm, integrity, great ideas and, crucially, utter reliability. During his time in post, he inspired loyalty and affection in all who knew him.

He saw the value of partnership working, particularly with our sister service, the City Museum, and early on negotiated to have a representative of its education team based at the Record Office in order to promote the use of archives in schools. Later, he also dedicated staff to work on the archives content of M Shed. When the Record Office became part of BMGA in 2004, he was pleased to come under the umbrella of the Friends and a good relationship quickly bloomed.

John and Bristol Record Office were synonymous for a quarter of a century or more, from the mid-1980s until 2012, just as the first great champion of Bristol archives, Elizabeth Ralph, and the Record Office had been synonymous between the 1930s and 1970s. Those who come after might be said to be standing on the shoulders of these two giants.

Richard Burley Senior Archivist then Archives Manager,
Bristol Record Office, 1988 – 2014



▲ **John Williams**
© Richard Burley

FRIENDS OF BRISTOL MUSEUMS GALLERIES & ARCHIVES

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