

Newsletter

Standing by for lift-off!

In this edition

- preparations for reopening our museums and galleries
- welcoming our new Patron
- painting the electric cranes and overhauling working exhibits
- reports on the collections of delftware, netsuke and Covid-related objects
- an assessment of the digital events programme

**June 2021
Issue 213**

From the Chairman

Welcoming Andy King as our fourth Patron

When the committee learned that because of ill health Andy King was retiring from his Senior Curator role, we began thinking about what we could do as Friends to mark his retirement, his huge contribution to the city over almost 40 years, and all the support he has given us as Friends. We felt that it would be fitting to invite him to become our fourth Patron and are delighted and honoured that he has accepted our invitation. Later in the newsletter you will find an article outlining Andy's career, and his significant contributions to the understanding and appreciation of industrial and maritime history in Bristol and nationally, and to the Friends. Andy has, as promised, returned to the museum as a volunteer the day after his retirement, and has contributed an article for us in his new role as Emeritus Curator of Industrial & Maritime History.



▲ *M Shed schools lunch room being used as a polling station for the local elections on 6 May 2021*

© Fran Woolterton

Celebrating Generosity

I am delighted to report that we have received a further £25,000 from the estate of the late Margaret Kerr, a member of Friends of Bristol Art Gallery (FoBAG) before our merger, bringing the total so far to £150,000.

You may remember that last year we also received a bequest of over £17,000 from the late Jane Biddulph, also a FoBAG member, and her cousin and executor Liz Biddulph has kindly written for us a potted version of Jane's globetrotting life.

Sad news of the death of John Hibberd

I am sorry to bring news that John Hibberd died in April, having been ill for several months. John became a member of the Friends of Bristol Art Gallery in 1998 and very soon joined the committee. He had an extensive knowledge of art in its many forms and from different periods and cultures. He was forward-looking and keen that the committee should respond to requests for new acquisitions which would extend the museum's collections. John served on the FoBAG committee for almost 20 years and his knowledge, support and kindness were greatly valued.



▲ *We thank the Hibberd family for this photo of John*

Restarting our in-person social activities after Lockdown

With optimism in the air, across the country people are beginning tentatively to plan activities that have been impossible since the start of the pandemic over a year ago. You will see in the insert that we are dipping our toes back in the water with a small number of in-person events and if those are well supported and successful we intend to build on that going forward. Our online talks have been popular and will continue for the moment so that we can reach as many members as possible with our activities. Of course our number one objective in organising events is to raise funds to enable us to support the museums, galleries and archives, and being so limited over the last year has significantly reduced our income. But we are still in a strong position financially, with healthy reserves, and the committee have been meeting monthly by Zoom, so able without interruption to continue to agree requests for funding from the service.

Sue Thurlow Chairman

Cover photo: The electric cranes lined up and ready for painting

© Bruce Davies

Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives

The Museums and Art Gallery staff were saddened to hear of the passing of John Hibberd who for very many years was a mainstay of the Committee of the Friends of Bristol Art Gallery. He was a great supporter of our activity especially with regard to the Visual Art collections and will be sadly missed.

The museum and archive sites are seeing a considerable amount of new activity. The closure to the public has allowed us to carry out repairs, redecorations and rehangings of some of our collections in addition to de-rigging old temporary exhibitions and preparing the new ones. By the time you read this Bristol Museum & Art Gallery and M Shed will have reopened to the public with prior booking required and social distancing in line with government guidelines. Visitors to BMAG will see The Bristol Photo Festival exhibition which forms part of a citywide event this year. In addition, we have rehung paintings on the central staircase and moved the Rammohan Roy portrait from the rear staircase to pride of place in the main art galleries.



▲ Photo Festival exhibit – *Too Many Blackamoors (#9)*, 2015
©Heather Agyepong

◀ Photo Festival exhibit – *Cookie in the snow*
© Chris Killip



◀ A framed oil painting on canvas, showing a full-length portrait of the renowned Brahmin scholar, *Raja Rammohan Roy* (22 May 1772 – 27 September 1833), who died at Stapleton in Bristol, by *Henry Perronet Briggs*
© Bristol Culture

A major new initiative for us, delayed from 2020, is the loan of a great many of the Bristol School of Paintings to an exhibition in Bordeaux. To loan so many paintings from just one non-national museum and art gallery is very unusual and a wonderful example of European cooperation (regardless of your views on Brexit). We see considerable benefits from such a partnership in terms of the international recognition of the significance of our collections. Furthermore the gallery in BMAG will show in place of the normal paintings the fruits of local collaboration with community art networks, part of our ongoing work in the city led by our Participation team.

Bristol Archives should by now also have reopened to the public for three days a week under the same rules as we previously opened in 2020.

At M Shed we now have both the Street Artists exhibition on the top floor and also the display of the statue of Colston which will be used to invite the public to offer their thoughts on how the city moves forward with regard to this controversial item.

Access along the quayside to M Shed from the Prince Street Bridge will be restricted for a while as the electric



▲ **William James Müller, *View of Bristol from Clifton Wood*, 1837, oil on canvas (Bristol School), now on loan to the exhibition in Bordeaux**

© Bristol Culture

▼ ***St James's Fair* by Samuel Colman (Bristol School), currently also in Bordeaux**

© Bristol Culture

cranes are repainted. During lockdown much progress has continued to be made in the maintenance of the steam locomotives and the historic boats – for more detail of that see Chris Ecclestone’s article elsewhere in the newsletter. It may prove possible to offer public rides again later in the year but that will depend on the situation with regard to Covid and especially social distancing.

One other piece of work that has continued throughout the Covid emergency has been the constant support of the Committee of the Friends, especially in providing funding, as we have continued to add items to the collections which have appeared at auction over the last months. In this way we have been able to acquire historic items of great significance to the city but also to commission new art works from contemporary and ground-breaking artists and to support the conservation and care of items in our existing collections. Our sincere thanks to the members of the Committee and to all members of the Friends for enabling this work to continue.

As we all hope that society can start to return to a more pre-Covid-like situation, we are planning to reopen Blaise Museum in June, and Red Lodge and Georgian House from September. Behind the scenes, preparing for reopening of our sites is complicated and involved. Buildings need to be cleaned, gallery staff refreshed in their training, new staff recruited to fill gaps and new ways of working explored so that more of the back of house team can return in a phased way. Are we able to hold meetings where some staff are home working and others in offices, for example, and what technology do we need to allow



that to happen? For some staff, recruited during lockdown, this period will be the first time they will have met some colleagues outside of a ‘Zoom’ meeting. So, all in all, it feels like there is a sudden burst of energy to get things moving again and we fervently hope that the progress with vaccination and the way we manage the Covid-19 virus allows this to progress fully.

Ray Barnett Head of Collections & Archives

Culture at Home

Learning from our lockdown digital programme

Some of you will recall reading about the digital strategy put in place to deliver a new online offer whilst in lockdown (FBMGA Newsletter, Issue 210). Of course, none of us could have known when we began that we would still be delivering workshops, lectures and events online over 12 months later. Nevertheless, with over 120 events under our belt, the team has definitely learned a lot.

Prior to the pandemic there were no registrations for online digital engagement activities because they simply did not exist. How different things are now. In 2020 (April -December) we achieved more than 5,000 registrations spread across a wide variety of event types, and at the time of writing there have already been over 3,500 registrations for 2021 and counting. We began to gather audience data by issuing a questionnaire to talk attendees. Amongst other things the results showed that:

- 14% of respondents had never visited any of our sites before.
- 96% were satisfied/very satisfied by the quality of the talk.
- 89% said they were interested in attending online events after lockdown was over.

In short, we were providing a high-quality experience, attracting new audiences, and there is clearly a desire for what we have produced online to continue in the future. Reactions were encouraging:

'Very good and helpful to attend events like this during lockdown. Keeps the old grey matter ticking over.' Online talk: Murder on the Middle Passage: The Trial of Captain Kimber 28/01/2021

'I find the programme rich and varied. I spend hours on it. Thank you.' Late lunch talk: Highlights of the Chinese Collection 18/02/2021.

As we began to provide different forms of engagement on various digital platforms, e.g. live dance classes on Facebook and recipes on Instagram, we also began to tailor our evaluation questionnaires to gather more specific data about how they had been received. This helped us to learn more each time we presented something digitally. We need more analysis, but we can prove the digital programme has been hugely popular and has been attractive to people from overseas as well as Bristol and different parts of the UK. There have been other bonuses too. Almost all of our events have been offered free of charge but have encouraged donations to be made through our website, with the amount being donated growing month by month.

Our audience evaluation suggests we should be offering a blended offer of digital and physical events in the future and there are many advantages in doing so, especially as online activity has proven to be both cost effective and efficient. Significantly, it has also been shown to have enabled those with particular accessibility needs to participate where they could not do so before. We keep the profile of the physical museum spaces and access to exhibitions alive by publishing online 360° museum experiences of the art galleries, Georgian House and Red Lodge, as well as new online exhibitions. We have encouraged people to sign up to our regular electronic newsletter, so they get notified when the museums and temporary exhibitions re-open, and we have seen an increase in subscribers and consistently strong rates of opening the newsletter and clicking through to further content.

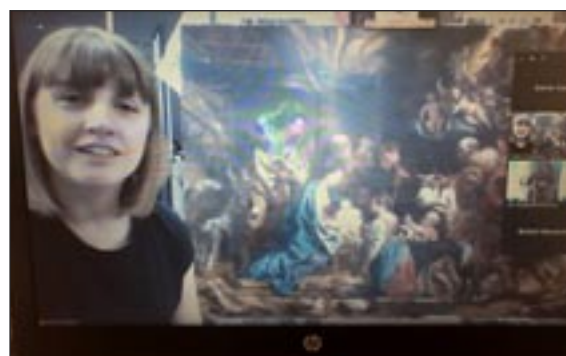
The digital events programme has also proven to be an excellent example of the social value of museums – audiences both appreciated and clearly wanted to keep in touch with museums, archives and staff at events. Organisationally we were also able to both collaborate with and support the work of local community groups, artists and creatives through the delivery of innovative and ambitious events, as well as through the commissioning of content. Thank you to all of you who have taken part by attending events and supporting in other ways.

Delivering the programme whilst working remotely has certainly not been without its challenges but, from a staff perspective, the programme has been a highly productive and positive experience, that has enabled people to adapt their work in creative and innovative ways, whilst acquiring new skills, knowledge and understanding of an ever-changing digital landscape – all of us would say, however, that we probably still have so much more to learn. Please let us know if you have any further feedback about the digital programme, gail.boyle@bristol.gov.uk.

Gail Boyle Senior Curator, Archaeology & World Cultures



▲ Advertising flyer for a 'Brizzle Week' panel event
© Bristol Culture



▲ Conservator Helen Dowding presenting a Late Lunchtime Talk
© Bristol Culture

Meet our new Patron, Andy King

Many of you already know Andy and the tireless work he has done to further the cause of Bristol's industrial and maritime history in the 40 years he has worked for the museum. The FBMGA have particularly strong links with him through the working exhibits. These were the original catalyst for the foundation of the Museum Friends (originally known as Bristol Magpies) in 1977. Andy has been responsible for bringing these back to life since he arrived in late 1981. For as long as I can remember, Andy has given very active support to our Friends' events at M Shed, often moving exhibits and furniture to accommodate us. Without his pragmatism and kindness those events could not, in some cases, have taken place at all, let alone be as successful as they have been. Our links with Andy are today even stronger now that he has agreed to become Patron alongside Sir George White, Max Hebditch and Francis Greenacre.

Some of the impact Andy has had here in Bristol is summed up in Andy's his own words in this extract from a message he sent to his large team of volunteers at M Shed as he announced his retirement:



▲ A recent picture of Andy King, our new Patron
© Andy King

Dear volunteers and friends,

Just before Xmas I learned that my health has deteriorated further. I have therefore very reluctantly decided to retire after just over 39 years in Bristol. I will finish officially on 8 March but will be working from home very sporadically meanwhile.

That won't be the end of my involvement, as I intend to return as a volunteer on 9 March, continuing to tie up loose ends and finishing projects.

I am immensely proud of everything I've been involved with over four decades, none of which would have been possible without the support and active involvement of hundreds of volunteers. I'm always credited as the person who restored three boats and four and a half cranes, put on up The Feeder, took the Grenville steam carriage on the London to Brighton, masterminded the closure and decant of the Industrial Museum, took Pyronaut to London and managed the Crane Dance, but that's far from the truth – it's always been a huge team effort in which my role has usually been little more than to say 'Yes' (and to guarantee that it will probably rain if I'm involved!).

I wish you all the very best for your futures. I hope I get the chance to see some of you later in the year.

Andy

On top of his outstanding work with the volunteers and the working exhibits, Andy is widely recognised for his encyclopaedic knowledge and understanding of Bristol's maritime and industrial heritage – and his willingness to share it freely with individuals and groups at whatever level of complexity or simplicity his audience needs. Until very recently he was a trustee of Underfall Yard and a committee member of BIAS (Bristol Industrial Archaeology Society). Many of you will own copies of his very readable books, and he has been a key contributor to many more.

Beyond Bristol, Andy has been vice-chairman of the Association of British Engineering & Transport Museums and has led the UK Maritime Curators Group. He has contributed to national standards for both groups, driving best-practice in museums across the UK.

After leaving Warwick University with a degree in history in 1977, Andy did not plan to become a curator but found himself, almost by accident, working at Wheal Martyn China Clay Museum in Cornwall doing a mixture of research and practical work. He loved it, and the die was cast. He moved on to a curatorial role in Bradford and, in 1981, came to Bristol Industrial Museum (BIM) which had opened three years earlier.



▲ Andy cleaning the Boxkite in the front hall at BMAG in 2015. The Boxkite is normally suspended thirty feet up so has to be winched to ground level for cleaning.
© Amber Druce



▲ In L Shed, Andy talking to a visitor about Concorde at Doors Open Day 2012

© Lee Hutchinson



▲ Steam crane maintenance (with rollup) c1988

© Unkown

▼ Andy demonstrating the Linotype during one of the regular Print & Pack weekends at the Industrial Museum in 1995

© Unkown



▼ Andy helping a young visitor control an electric crane at Docks Heritage Weekend 2015

© Ibolya Feher



At BIM, where M Shed is now, Andy worked for curator Paul Elkin at a time when many local manufacturing firms were going out of business, so that collecting significant objects from them was a large part of his first 10 years on the job. The first of what were to become 'the working exhibits' was *Mayflower*, a Bristol-built steam tug from 1861 which arrived back in Bristol 120 years later in a very sorry state. It was clear that if he was to achieve the vision of getting it back to a working condition for the public to enjoy, he was going to need help. That is when he started to recruit his ever-evolving team of volunteers. After six years of dismantling, cleaning, mending, restoring and reassembling, *Mayflower* – the oldest Bristol-built ship afloat, and the oldest steam tug in the world – was back together and steaming again.

Over the years other major restoration projects followed for Andy and his team of volunteers – diesel tug *John King*, fire float *Pyronaut*, the 1878 Fairbairn steam crane, steam locomotives *Portbury* and *Henbury*, the electric cranes, the paper bag making machine, the linotype typesetting machine and many more. The Friends – plus local businesses and charitable foundations – were often able to help with some funding, for example to restore the power supply to the electric cranes, and most recently to buy new firebars for *Mayflower*.

Of course Andy has also been responsible for many high-profile public events. In 2000 he went with the Grenville steam carriage (the oldest car in the world still working) and a small team of volunteers on the London to Brighton veteran car run and completed the course with just minutes to spare. Many of you will remember the following year the collaboration with the Bristol Old Vic which saw several of the working exhibits and the volunteers (including some of our members) appearing in a spectacular production of *Up The Feeder, Down the Mouth and Back Again*, ACH Smith's play about life in the port of Bristol's 1950s heyday. It was a sell-out, with 4- and 5- star reviews in national broadsheets. In 2012 Andy and a handful of volunteers took fire boat *Pyronaut* to London to take part in the parade of national historic ships up the Thames for the Queen's Diamond Jubilee.

It was another collaboration that led to the jaw-dropping Crane Dance performances in 2015, and Andy's work with the Underfall Yard Trust and the *SS Great Britain* gave rise to the annual Docks Heritage Weekend celebration of Bristol's maritime past.

Andy has also made major contributions to the behind-the-scenes work at the museum. One example would be his planning and the careful use of volunteers in 2006 to relocate all the objects in the Industrial Museum and the western end of the stores in the adjacent L Shed to places where they would be safe from harm while the new M Shed museum was being created. While Andy has collected many large objects over the years he has also been in a minority of curators – across the world I suspect – who has been committed to reviewing his collections to identify where objects would be more appropriately homed elsewhere. So as part of the movement of objects in 2006 Andy took the opportunity to give some entirely new homes: for example, the Grenville steam carriage now in pride of place at the National Motor Museum at Beaulieu and the Bristol Sycamore which is at the Helicopter Museum in Weston-super-Mare.

I have been one of Andy's volunteers for over 30 years: it has been a real eye-opener and given me a love of industrial and social history and opportunities I would never have dreamt of. I am delighted that he has agreed to be one of our Patrons.

As promised, Andy is now working as a volunteer, and is looking forward to the further loosening of Covid restrictions which will allow allowing him to be a regular at M Shed.

Sue Thurlow Chairman

Soap making in Bristol

Plans for the redevelopment of Broad Plain have been in the news in the past few months, and much of the debate has centred on the flamboyant soap works building until recently occupied by Gardiner Haskins.

Bristol has laid claim to several firsts in English history and one of those is soap manufacturing. In the 1190s a monk by the name of Richard of Devizes wrote: 'In Bristol there is no one who is not, or has not been, a soap boiler'. (The monk's chronicle is laced with caustic humour, and it seems safe to assume that this claim was something of an exaggeration). Historian Thomas Fuller, in his 1662 *Worthies of England*, expressed a view that before the 1500s 'the land was generally supplied with Castile [soap] from Spain, and Gray-soap from Bristol...much the cheaper.'

The industry flourished in Bristol until 1632, when King Charles I granted a monopoly to the Society of Soap-makers of Westminster, giving them the exclusive right to manufacture a standard soap at a cost of £4 per ton produced, payable to the crown. The Society was given authority to regulate soap production and by 1636 Bristol's output had been limited to 600 tons per year representing a cut of up to 70%.

In the mid-1700s two notable soap manufacturers emerged in Bristol: Farrell, Vaughan & Co. in 1743; and in 1745 Samuel Fripp & Co. who expanded to Broad Plain in 1783. By the 1820s, Bristol was one of the leading soap manufacturers with annual output of approximately 3,600 tons, surpassed only by Liverpool (8,500 tons) and London (15,000 tons).

In 1841 Fripp & Co. merged with a firm of soap and candle makers to become Thomas, Fripp & Thomas. Originally Fripp & Co. had specialized in soap for personal use made with olive oil ('toilet soap'), the Thomases in soap for household use made with tallow. They produced both types at Broad Plain, though the household variety was their main product. When Edward Bowles Fripp Jr retired in 1855 the company became known as Christopher Thomas & Brothers. Soap duty and various soap-manufacturing regulations were scrapped in 1853 leading to what has been described as the Thomases' 'golden years', from 1856 to 1889.

With business booming, from 1865-67 the Broad Plain soap works underwent extensive redevelopment. In 1881 Charles Thomas, the youngest of the Thomas brothers, had visited Florence and was captivated by the city's architecture. On his return he had the buildings recast in the Florentine style. This included the addition of chimneys that looked like corner turrets and a crenelated parapet on the top of the pan building (where the soap was boiled). These features emulated the design of Florence's town hall – the spectacular Palazzo Vecchio.

In the later 1880s profits began to decline. Their main competitors were the Bolton-born Lever Brothers who had an exceptional product in Sunlight soap. This was the world's first packaged and branded laundry soap, made with glycerine and vegetable oils. In many homes it was used as a 'one soap for all'. The Thomas brothers attempted to see off the competition and in 1898 they launched a similar product – an olive-oil based laundry soap called Puritan. But their profits continued to decline and in 1912 they sold out to Levers.

By 1914 Levers were producing almost a third of the country's soap at their Port Sunlight works. They modernised the works at Broad Plain and continued to produce Puritan under the Thomas name, as it had a healthy share of the market in the South West.

When the country was struck by the 1918 flu pandemic, Levers promoted their soaps as disinfectants to help tackle the virus. Their adverts claimed that Sunlight would place people on the 'Highway of Health', while Lifebuoy ensured 'antiseptic cleanliness' against the 'influenza scourge'.

Through the 1920s Levers bought many of their British rivals. By 1921 they were producing more than 70% of the soap sold in England. After William Lever's death in 1925, further amalgamation took place to create Unilever in 1929, in terms of market value the biggest company in Britain. It continued to expand across the world with familiar brands such as Sunlight, Lifebuoy, Lux, Monkey Brand, Pears', Rinso, Surf and Persil.

In 1953 Unilever resolved that it was 'uneconomical to undertake the necessary modernisation' at Broad Plain, and in 1954 it closed the factory, bringing to an end centuries of large-scale soap production in Bristol.

Lee Hutchinson Curator of History



▲ **Christopher Thomas & Brothers' soap works at Broad Plain, about 1951.**
© Bristol Culture

If you would like to read the full version of this potted history you can find it (and suggestions for further reading) in Lee Hutchinson's blog on the Bristol Museums website:
<https://www.bristolmuseums.org.uk/blog/>.



▲ **Double bar of Puritan soap, made by Christopher Thomas & Brothers, 1920s.**
© Bristol Culture

Geological news

The geology collections have yielded another discovery new to science. Researchers have identified a new species of the humble 'harvestman' which was alive over 400 million years ago! You may have seen their modern relatives, spider-like creatures: long legs with a round body suspended in the middle. The fossil was identified on a thin section of rock called chert from Rhynie, Aberdeenshire, a very famous and important fossil site. When new species are discovered they are usually named after a particularly shaped body part or the habitat or place in which they occur. Just occasionally they are named after people and so it is quite an honour that the researcher who discovered this new species in our collections named it after a colleague. *Devonopilio hutchinsoni* has been named after Deborah Hutchinson, Curator of Geology – not something that happens every day!

Deborah Hutchinson holding the slide containing *Devonopilio hutchinsoni* suspended in a thin section of chert (enlarged below)
© Bristol Culture



Jane Biddulph

(5 June 1937 – 6 February 2017)

In our September 2020 issue we reported that Jane Biddulph, a member of FoBAG who sadly died in February 2017, had left us just over £17,000, which has been added to our fund ring-fenced for Art.

Liz Biddulph, Jane's cousin and executor, has kindly put together this summary of Jane's life to give us an insight into the life of the person behind the generous bequest.

Jane was born in Salisbury UK, and lived with her parents in Cameroon, West Africa, (the first of her adventures!) until World War II intervened and they all returned to England.

The family migrated to Sydney, Australia, in the mid 1950s and after finishing school Jane completed a nursing course at a leading Sydney hospital. Midwifery in London was next, and her accounts of that time would fill many an episode of "Call the Midwife"!

While working in UK, she was infected with the travel 'bug' by an aunt whom she accompanied on many short vacations to various European countries, enjoying and learning as they went from cathedrals to museums, to art galleries to markets.

In the early 1960s Jane spent 9 months in Malta and was joined there for a working holiday by her brother John, a medico; apparently for a short while babies named 'Jane' or 'John' were quite common! Back to the UK, next was an extensive Health Visitors' Course at London University, with a climb up Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania during a break from study and work.

Itchy feet took Jane to Canada in the late 1960s, working with premature babies in Ontario, then Vancouver, before returning to Australia, working as a Bush Nurse (surprise – that included being a vet!). There was a small fee for clinic attendance, and Jane tried hard to explain to official auditors that chickens, baked bread, vegetables and meat was the normal currency. Officialdom lost. In the early 1970's Jane joined the Australian Department of Public Health, working with Aboriginal communities for three years.

Jane returned to UK in late 1972, staying in Wantage with her sister Sally, who was there with family on a working holiday. In December 1972 Jane was appointed as Liaison Health Visitor at Southmead Hospital, and she moved to Bristol, staying with Southmead Hospital until August 1979 when she started work with Bristol Health District as a health visitor. Yes, Jane finally 'put down her roots' in Bristol, working there until her retirement.

After Jane retired she continued to travel with friends, from Central Asia to sailing up the Alaska coast (or on her own to Australia catching up with family and a wide circle of friends every two years). Back in Bristol she immersed herself in interests including Friends of Bristol Art Gallery, the National Trust and especially One25. Jane was also very committed to her faith, and supported Redland Parish, her local Church. With no children of her own, Jane took great interest in her nephews and nieces, as well as her many godchildren, but was also a wonderfully thoughtful and caring relative to her elderly great aunts, aunts and uncle and cousins.

On 6th February 2017, Jane died in her sleep, having spent the previous evening with friends. She was farewell-ed by family and friends at Redland Parish Church on 1st March 2017 and later laid to rest in Devon with close family.

Joining the Cultural Team

I am delighted to have joined the Bristol Museums team as Project Curator, Delftware. This exciting two-year post has been funded by Arts Council England and will raise the profile of Bristol's extraordinary collection of delftware which, at over 2,100 pieces, is one of the largest in the UK.

Delftware is the name used to describe earthenware covered with a glaze containing tin oxide, which gives the buff clay body a white appearance. Although the technique originated in the Middle East, the name derives from the Dutch town of Delft which became renowned for its manufacture. Delftware was made in England from the 16th century and during the following century the industry flourished. Leading centres of production included London, Bristol and Liverpool. Delftware was made in large quantities as functional, domestic objects and also fashionable display wares that were more affordable than expensive Chinese porcelain. Bristol's collection includes important objects made in these cities as well as the world's leading collection of delftware made in Bristol and Brislington, representing some of the best produced in the UK.

As a curator with a background in applied arts, I am thrilled to have the opportunity to work with this exciting collection and develop my expertise within this field. I graduated from the University of Buckingham in 2015 with an MA in Decorative Arts and Historic Interiors, and have since worked with various collections and museums including the Royal Collection, The Chitra Collection; a private collection of historic teawares, and, most recently, Burgh House in Hampstead.

This project will take the lead in delftware studies in the UK. We will bring Bristol's collection to life by capturing knowledge from experts around the country and by undertaking new research into archaeological finds from Bristol delftware kiln sites at Redcliffe, Lime Kiln Lane, Brandon Hill and Brislington. An online catalogue of Bristol's delftware will provide an important and accessible resource for the study of this material and the gallery displays will be improved. An exciting array of events will stimulate the exchange of knowledge between museum and heritage colleagues in the UK and abroad, and a programme of events for local residents and students will open up the collection to a wide audience.

So far we have been busy photographing the objects on display in the gallery in preparation for their digitisation and I have included a couple here for you to enjoy. The dish above right is thought to be the largest known English delftware example, measuring 59.6cm in diameter. The dish was most likely made in Bristol and demonstrates a high level of technical skill, both in manufacture and decoration, which features intricately painted chinoiserie scenes including figures, garden landscapes and buildings. The base (right) is marked W H M/1703. The initials are most likely for a husband and wife and the piece may have been commissioned to commemorate their marriage. Despite the significance of the object, the couple have not been identified. The project will attempt to resolve questions such as who owned this dish.

Scenes depicting a couple walking in a hilly landscape, such as those on the jug (facing page), are associated with the potter John Bowen who was apprenticed at the Limekiln Lane pottery in 1734 and later worked at other factories. The designation 'Bowen style' is based on an illustration of a large dish decorated with a similar scene and inscribed on the back 'ye 1st: Sept. 1761. Bowen. Fecit'. The illustration appeared in the book *Two Centuries of Ceramic Art in Bristol* by Hugh Owen, published in 1873. Sadly, the dish itself was most likely destroyed in a fire while being exhibited at the Alexandra Palace, London, that same year. Variations of this



◀ **Amber Turner**
© Bristol Culture



▲ **The largest known English Delftware dish**
© Bristol Culture



▲ **The base of the dish above**
© Bristol Culture

fashionable scene decorated numerous wares such as this puzzle jug. This unusual object was intended as an amusing game in which the drinker would attempt to consume the contents of the jug without spilling any. This could only be achieved by drinking from the single functioning nozzle, while covering up the other two and a hole hidden underneath the handle to create a vacuum.

These pieces are on display in the ceramics gallery and I would encourage you to visit and enjoy them. I look forward to sharing more fascinating objects from the collection with you and I would be delighted to hear about any interesting delftware you have come across.

Amber Turner Project Curator, Delftware



▲ *Side image the Bowen jug*
© Bristol Culture



▲ *Front image of a jug associated with John Bowen, working at the Limekiln Lane pottery, showing a couple walking in a hilly landscape*
© Bristol Culture

News from the Events Group

As restrictions are due to ease, at the time of writing, we are putting in place some local events for you to enjoy. However, we shall not be arranging any coach trips at this stage as there is no certainty that they can go ahead. We may start them again in the autumn, depending on the circumstances at that stage.

Enclosed with this newsletter is a sheet listing the events we have organised for the next quarter, a couple of which are rescheduled trips from last year. Booking forms are enclosed, where appropriate.

As social-distancing is still in place in the museums, we shall continue to run the programme of monthly Saturday afternoon talks via Eventbrite and Zoom, probably until the autumn. If you wish to take part in these talks, do please ensure that we have your up-to-date email address and send it through to the membership secretary, Richard Avery, on rchrdrvry@gmail.com. We have been notified that a number of emails were not delivered for the talks which have taken place.

Mary Bailey Events Group

Railway, Boats and Cranes operations

As we go to press, it is still difficult to make firm plans for public operations of the working exhibits outside M Shed. In 'normal' times running the exhibits requires complex risk assessments to ensure the safety of our staff, volunteers, passengers, visitors and the general public, so that everyone has a positive experience. With Covid restrictions added that becomes even more of a challenge, and of course we are dependent on there being enough volunteers who feel they are ready to come and run the exhibits. The situation is under constant review and it may well be that we can resume operations only once the government decides that all legal limits on social contact can be safely dropped, as I write due after 21 June.

In the meantime, we have been able to make good progress on maintenance and, since relaxation of restrictions on 12 April, have been able to allow volunteers to work together more effectively.

One high-profile project which should be well under way by the time you read this is the repainting of the four electric cranes (shown on the front cover). This is a vital part of their preservation as the painting prevents the ravages of corrosion attacking their construction. Before we can start, the cranes need to be moved to the Prince Street end of the quay with the area closed off to the public to protect them and to allow sufficient space for the contractors to operate safely. This also requires moving the *Lord Nelson* sail training ship and the railway platform – so a big and very visible undertaking. The repaint is expected to take about 10 weeks, so will hopefully be finishing in mid-July. Thank you to those of you who contributed to the crowdfunding appeal that has enabled the work to be done.

As well as the electric cranes we have a smaller more mobile rail-crane which, thanks to volunteer Rodney Earnshaw, has been completely rewired over the last few months, helping to get it through an insurance lifting test. Although it is more than 60 years old it is not an accessioned museum object, and it does not play a part in public operations – it is a workhorse which enables us to do many vital lifting and towing jobs across the site and would be very hard to manage without.

Steam tug *Mayflower*'s overhaul is making good progress, and as we go to press the firebars – which the Friends kindly funded – are due to arrive and be fitted very soon. The outstanding painting jobs will be easier once the weather gets warmer.

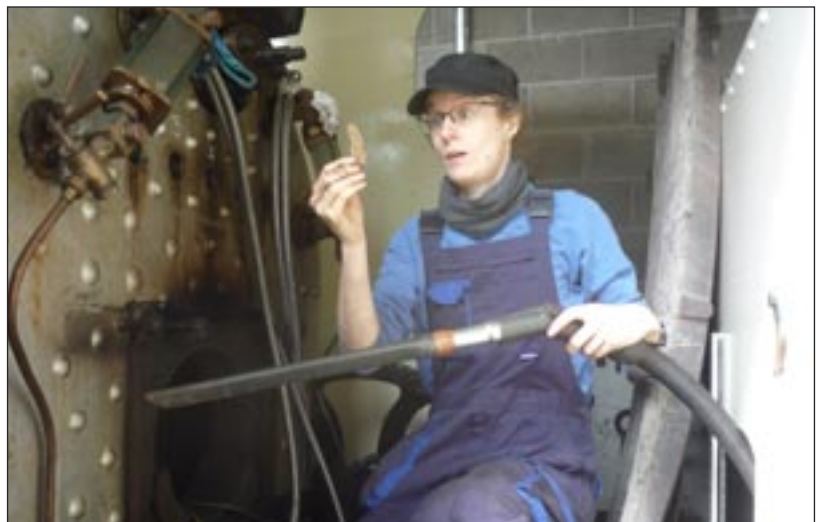
Locomotive *Henbury* is fast coming together after a major overhaul which has seen her out of service for 7 years. By the time you read this both she and *Mayflower* will hopefully have passed their steam tests, along with loco *Portbury*. With *Henbury* freshly painted, *Portbury* looks very work-stained – just as she would have done in her life as a working engine at Avonmouth.

We are looking forward to welcoming you – and the rest of the public – back to the working exhibits as soon as we can, hopefully later this year, depending on the need for social distancing.

Chris Ecclestone Operations Manager, Working Exhibits



▲ *Portbury and rail crane outside the shed*
© Bristol Culture



▲ *Volunteer Amelia Gardiner hoovers out scale debris from inside the boiler before an insurance exam on Henbury*
© Chris Ecclestone

▼ *Machining new parts is ongoing to keep the working exhibits in good order – another job for skilled volunteers*
© Chris Ecclestone



Covid Collecting

In March 2020, we did a call out for objects, stories and photos of Bristol's response to Coronavirus. We had plenty of feedback, especially at the start, and the insights were really useful. Since then, I have also approached various people, recorded observations, and done call outs for stories on social media. You can find the results of this on our Covid Collecting Blog.

Collecting objects was put on hold for much of the year, whilst we worked under Covid restrictions, and mostly from home. Instead, I concentrated more on gathering stories and digital photos. I started investigating Bristol's response to Coronavirus including health and wellbeing, arts and culture, Covid denial, and funerals, for example.

Personal accounts are particularly useful so I was really interested to hear about Stephen's experience of online yoga as a wheelchair user. It was a reminder that some of our experience of the past year should inform how we want to reshape the future. Another fascinating insight came from Dee, an independent funeral celebrant. It was really useful to visit her business and see how she had adapted to the pandemic. She, too, was thinking about what positive changes might come out of doing things differently.

When we came out of Lockdown 1, the first thing I collected was some hand sanitiser, made by Psychopomp Micro-distillery. I loved how they had adapted so quickly from making gin, their sense of community, and how their business had evolved in 2020.

The Art of Kindness is a one man project that makes messages to put around Bristol, with the simple aim of cheering people up. I loved meeting Julian, whose idea it was, and he donated a selection of messages to illustrate what he had been making in 2020.

The Heart to Heart campaign encouraged people to make pairs of felt hearts for patients in intensive care, and their families. We collected a pair made as part of a street's collective effort.

We are not planning an exhibition about Covid at the moment (it feels too soon), but the stories are all available online and ready to use in the future. It feels really important to record Bristol's response to Coronavirus, starting whilst we are still being affected by it. Insights we are particularly interested in at the moment are religious services online, vaccinations, local businesses, and people's experience of Covid itself. We would love to hear from you if you would like to add your own story, amber.druce@bristol.gov.uk.

Amber Druce Curator of History

For those of you who have never used a blog before – this is your chance! Open the Museum website in your browser. Look along the top menus to find Blog. Click on this. A list of current blogs will appear. There are lots of interesting blogs to sample but start by scrolling down the list to find 'Covid Collecting'. Throughout the blog you will see blue links. Click on any of these and other articles will open which flesh out the narrative above.

An Art of Kindness flag flying in Totterdown ▶
© Sam Edwards



▲ **Stephen Lightbown's online yoga practice**
© Stephen Lightbown



▲ **A cheery message from the Art of Kindness project**
© Nicky takes photos



Netsuke

Miniature masterpieces from Japan

A mythical water-sprite with a love for cucumbers, (N6275), a racoon transforming itself into a teakettle (N6041), and an elephant-like creature that devours your nightmares (N6283) are just some of the many delightful characters you can meet in our Eastern Art Gallery display of Japanese netsuke until 5 June next year.

Netsuke are finely carved miniature sculptures that are around 3 cm to 7.5 cm in size and usually made of wood, ivory or horn. They were developed in Japan during the Edo period (1603-1868) as a practical solution to traditional clothing without any pockets: netsuke were used as toggles from which small items such as pipes or pouches were suspended from men's sashes, as external pockets.

The military dictator or Shōgun at the time issued sumptuary laws that banned people from owning expensive goods above their class. Despite this, or perhaps as a rebellious response to these edicts, the small and easily concealable netsuke often flouted the rules and showed off the owners' good taste and wealth. There are many fine pieces, some inlaid with precious materials such as coral, gold, and mother-of-pearl. An example of this is the beautifully-inlaid Hotei, a Japanese god of happiness and abundance, asleep in his treasure bag (N6156) and a fine lacquered wooden box inlaid with silver and gold (N6304).



▲ **N6275:** Kappa (water sprite), ivory, signed Masakazu 1800-1900, bequeathed by N Cooke-Hurle, 1960
© Bristol Culture



▲ **N6041:** The Lucky Tea Kettle, sperm whale ivory, signed Dōraku 1880-1900, bequeathed by N Cooke-Hurle, 1960
© Bristol Culture



▲ **N6283:** Baku, narwhal tusk ivory, unsigned, about 1800, bequeathed by N Cooke-Hurle, 1960
© Bristol Culture



▶ **N6304:** Congratulations, wood, lacquer, gold, silver, metal, unsigned, 1800-1900, bequeathed by N Cooke-Hurle, 1960
© Bristol Culture



▶ **N6156:** Hotei sleeping, ivory, red coral, maple wood, gold paint, abalone shell, signed but illegible, bequeathed by N Cooke-Hurle, 1960
© Bristol Culture



◀ **N6303:** *Myriad Treasures, walrus tusk ivory, signed Tomotoshi, 1870–1900, bequeathed by N Cooke-Hurle, 1960*

© Bristol Culture

One netsuke can take months to make and craftsmen often went above and beyond in showing off their carving skills. Take, for example a hollowed netsuke of treasures carved like lace (N6303), or a small gourd with a top that pulls apart to reveal an interlinking chain to which three tiny monkeys cling (N6155).

These examples show how netsuke are tactile things that were intended to be appreciated from all angles. With this in mind, our 3-D Designer Simon Fenn has created a stylish display that maximises the viewing experience. Each netsuke is suspended in its own individually-lit mirrored recess that has been crafted by our in-house technician team. Brass mounts have been custom-made for each piece by freelance mount-maker Nathan Jones and painstakingly hand-painted by Objects Conservator Amelie Drewdun, giving the netsuke an illusion of floating in the air.

The red, turquoise and orange colours assigned to each theme evoke the neon-laden streets of the bustling Shinjuku district in Tokyo, and give a 1960s vibe that is complemented by the display cases in the Eastern Gallery that date to a similar period. The five themes—lucky animals, mythical creatures, gods and demons, marvellous tales, and daily life—explore various aspects of Japanese history and popular culture at a time when Japan will feature in the news with the upcoming Tokyo Olympics.

Amy Raphael Project Curator Japanese Ceramics

We look forward to welcoming you back to the museum. If you would like a sneak preview, visit the digital version of the exhibition here: exhibitions.bristolmuseums.org.uk/netsuke/



▲ **N6155:** *Gourd with monkeys, sperm whale ivory and jet, unsigned, 1850–1900, bequeathed by N Cooke-Hurle, 1960*

© Bristol Culture

The design for the netsuke display in the Eastern Art Gallery. ▶

© Bristol Culture



Recent acquisition

A single line working staff from Bristol Harbour Railway

With funding from the Friends we have acquired an important piece of equipment unique to the Bristol Harbour Railway goods line which closed in 1965. This 'single line working staff' was a vital component for controlling the safe movement of trains in the tunnel beneath St Mary Redcliffe.

The Great Western Railway brought trains to Bristol Docks in 1872 via the Bristol Harbour Railway. You will have read in the March newsletter that just a few months ago we acquired – again thanks to the Friends – a commemorative shovel relating to an earlier, failed, attempt to do the same. The GWR route ran as two tracks from the goods yard at Temple Meads via sidings at Redcliffe (now the site of the DoubleTree by Hilton hotel on Redcliffe Way) before becoming a single-line section in the tunnel beneath St Mary Redcliffe churchyard, emerging close to the Ostrich pub. Thereafter it reverted to two tracks after crossing a bascule bridge on the site of the current footbridge. Very little other than the tunnel entrance by the Ostrich can be seen today but the route is clearly visible on the Know Your Place website.

The time-honoured way to control trains on single tracks is to have a unique staff or token without which no train is permitted to proceed on that section of the line. With only one staff there can be only one train on the line, eliminating the risk of collisions. Often these staffs were elaborate but for industrial lines a simple distinctive piece of wood could suffice. The BHR token is typically utilitarian, and is charred on the back where, perhaps, it hung against the firebox on the locomotive.

This unprepossessing item is therefore unique and highly relevant to the site near M Shed. It will join a number of other items in our collections related to the route, including the engine which powered the bascule bridge at Bathurst Basin.

Thanks to the generosity of the Friends we have been able to take a further step towards strengthening the Bristol focus of our extensive railway collections.

Andy King

Emeritus Curator of
Industrial & Maritime
History



▲ Locomotive emerging from the railway tunnel under St Mary Redcliffe churchyard
© Bristol Culture



▲ The railway tunnel entrance as it is today
© Sue Thurlow

▼ Single line working staff
© G.W. Railwayana Auctions



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**Bristol Museum &
Art Gallery,
Queen's Road,
Bristol,
BS8 1RL**

Tel: 0117 922 3571

**bristol museums@bristol.gov.uk
www.bristol museums.org.uk**

FBMGA committee

Patrons

Sir George White Bt
Max Hebditch CBE
Francis Greenacre
Andy King

Chairman

Sue Thurlow
07836 693589
sue.thurlow@outlook.com

Secretary

Katherine Martin
07891 547624

Membership Secretary & FBMGA website manager

Richard Avery
0117 329 6656
rchrdrvry@gmail.com

Treasurer

Robert Walters
0117 9682639

Events Group Chairman

Mary Bailey
0117 942 1944
berry.bailey@icloud.com

Members:

Clive Burlton
01934 832113
Gary Gostelow
0117 971 1323
Muriel Harrison
0117 962 9983
June Hibberd
0117 962 4872
Shirley Hodgson
0117 962 4771
Carol Lear
0117 942 3610
Toby Pinn
01934 830111

FBMGA website

www.friendsofbmga.org.uk

**Newsletter designed and
edited by Tim and Ann Wood**
tim-wood@blueyonder.co.uk
07917 331810

The opinions expressed in this
newsletter do not
necessarily represent those
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**Next issue: copy deadline
24th July 2021 for early
September publication**