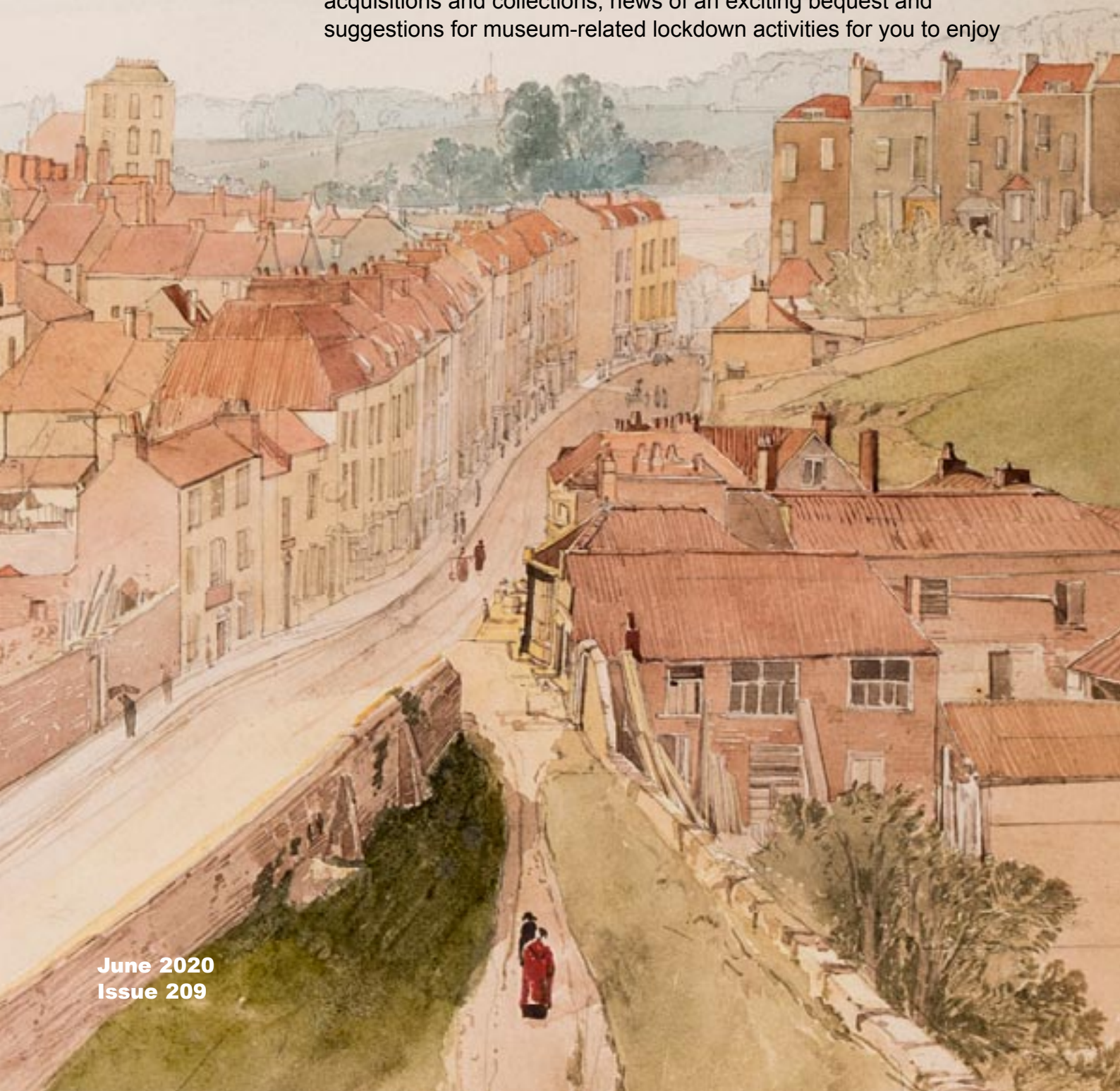


# Newsletter

**The Friends help to buy a fascinating watercolour**

## **In this edition**

- pre-Covid-19 reports of trips to Tortworth and the River Exe and a behind-the-scenes tour of the Wildlife Photographer of the Year exhibition at the Museum
- backstage glimpses of Bristol's museums, galleries and archives during the pandemic lockdown
- articles by our patron Francis Greenacre and museum curators about acquisitions and collections, news of an exciting bequest and suggestions for museum-related lockdown activities for you to enjoy



## From the Chairman

I hope that this newsletter finds you and your families well, and experiencing some positives in the unprecedented situation we find ourselves in. As a result of the coronavirus pandemic I have discovered a new kindness and warmth among my neighbours and I have had many more friendly conversations with strangers, at a safe distance of course! I do hope that this togetherness can be sustained once the restrictions begin to be relaxed and we find out what the new 'normal' feels like. We offer our best wishes to all Friends, to our friends in Bristol Culture, and to all museums' Friends Groups in the UK, and indeed around the world. BAFM (British Association of Friends of Museums) helpfully created a page on their website with links to some key sources of Covid-19 information for UK Friends groups.

There was some discussion amongst those of us who produce the newsletter as to how we should reflect these strange times, and indeed whether we could produce and distribute a printed newsletter at all. It did not take us long to decide that we could find a way around any difficulties, so, for example, we would normally have a working party to collate and envelope the newsletter and instead we are paying to have that done commercially. As for content, we invited Francis Greenacre, one of our patrons, to contribute an article, and from the museum Jenny Gaschke and Kate Newnham have written pieces especially for us. We hope you enjoy the end result.

Perhaps the first thing you noticed when you opened your envelope was that there is no A3 calendar and no application forms for events. That is because the nature of our events brings people together, and whatever legal restrictions are in place over the next few months we would not want to encourage our members to take unnecessary risks with their health. Mary Bailey has written about this in more detail. Of course this will hit our income, but it is the only responsible approach for the foreseeable future.

## Margaret Kerr Bequest

With our income from events evaporating overnight, it was a particular delight to discover that the late Margaret Kerr, a longstanding member of the Friends of Bristol Art Gallery, had left us

a very generous bequest. I never met Margaret, but having learned a little about her life from her honorary nephew and from a few members who remember her I really wish that I had – she clearly lived life to the full. How wonderful that she entrusted her hard-earned savings to us to use wisely on her behalf.

## Museums, Galleries and Archives collections online

For those of us with access to the internet, the isolating effects of the lockdown are much less than they would have been a decade or two ago. Many of us are able to stay in contact with family and friends through video-conferencing, watch live broadcasts of plays and operas, get inspired by exercise videos – the list is seemingly endless. Do visit ArtUK.org, where you can find images from all the public art collections in the UK – including Bristol's. For those of you who miss our art talks I recommend the National Gallery talks on YouTube. Most larger museums – and many smaller ones – have similar fantastic resources on their websites and YouTube.

At [Bristolmuseums.org.uk](https://bristolmuseums.org.uk) you can see the collections, experience virtual exhibitions and read about much of the work that is not obvious to museum visitors. For those of you who are interested in Bristol's history, visit *Know your Place* at <https://maps.bristol.gov.uk/kyp/?edition=> and get drawn into the wealth of fascinating historic information that is accessed through the maps.

**Sue Thurlow** Chairman



**Cover photo:** James Johnson, Lower Berkeley Place from Bellevue, Clifton, c. 1828

© Bristol Culture

▲ The Being Human Exhibition Bristol Museum. Exhibitions can still be visited online. Just type Online Exhibitions Bristol into your browser

© Bristol Culture



◀ *Bristol's streets and its Museums, Galleries and Archives are deserted during the pandemic lockdown as shown by this view of The Museum and Art Gallery from Queen's Road*

Photos by Martin Bailey riding his bike, for his permitted exercise wearing protective clothing and observing social distancing

▼ *M Shed from Museum Square*



## Volunteer needed – Membership Secretary

June Hibberd has been our membership Secretary since 2004, and feels that the time has come to hand over to someone else. Could that be you?

This role would suit someone who is familiar with using a database and who enjoys interaction with people, in particular making new Friends feel genuinely welcomed as soon as they join. It does require a significant commitment, although there are some aspects, such as helping to co-ordinate the distribution of the quarterly newsletter, which could be picked up by a second person.

In summary, responsibilities include:

- Maintaining the membership and Gift Aid database (currently in Microsoft Access, but could be converted), reconciling with subscriptions paid, and supplying Gift Aid data to the volunteer making the claim, currently Peter Newley
- Welcoming new members, entering them on the database and dealing with payments and Gift Aid declarations
- Membership of the Executive Committee, including reporting membership data
- Annual reminder to cheque payers, and follow-ups if needed
- Distribution of membership cards to paid-up members
- Helping to co-ordinate the quarterly collation and distribution of the newsletter, which includes enclosures for events, the Annual Meeting, and messages for individual members about the payment of their subs.

June will be a hard act to follow, but whoever takes on the role will find everything very well organised and documented. June will provide training and support to get our new Membership Secretary started.

If you would like to learn more, please contact Sue Thurlow or June – contact details are on the back page.

## Events Group

Prior to mid-March the group had been working hard as usual in putting together the programme of events for members' enjoyment during the rest of the year. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, we then had to spend time cancelling the events remaining in the programme and we dare not schedule any events for the foreseeable future while government advice is that everyone should stay at home and keep at a safe distance from others when out. Because we have to work several months ahead, October will be the earliest we could plan for an event and there is no certainty that will be possible. Once social distancing ceases to be mandatory we can start re-scheduling events for our programme. Until then, we shall all have to take what pleasure we can from virtual museum and gallery tours and talks. However, we very much hope to be able to meet members again before too long.

The one date which is scheduled is the Annual General Meeting on Thursday 24 September at 6.30pm at M Shed. This may be the first chance we have of getting together, if it goes ahead, so put it in your diaries now.

**Mary Bailey** Events Group Chairman

# Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives

Writing this in late April it is hard to think back to a time before the Covid-19 emergency. The last few weeks have been a bit of a whirl in adapting to the new way of life (and work) we are all experiencing. Before the lockdown, work was continuing as normal on the expected exhibition programme including our extensive loan of the Bristol School of Artists' works to Bordeaux, the Street Art exhibition to feature at M Shed and the Pre-Raphaelites exhibition for Bristol Museum & Art Gallery. All such things are now on hold awaiting news of when we will be allowed back to work and the ramifications of the shut-down on all concerned – internationally in the case of the loan to Bordeaux.

All museum sites have been closed to the public since 18 March and all office-based staff were sent home from 24 March. To many it might be imagined that with no public galleries or Search Room to work in, and public events postponed, that Culture & Creative Industries staff would have nothing to do but stay at home drinking coffee, but the reality is very different. As well as juggling home schooling or shielding vulnerable household members from possible exposure, staff have been using the digital resources available to them (often their own) to continue to work for the service in a huge variety of ways. In addition, a small number of staff have been employed to continue to visit all our sites to ensure the security of the city's heritage assets – not just in terms of preventing burglary or theft, but to protect against leaking pipes or other threats to the physical care of our collections.

For some it has been an opportunity to catch up on vital documentation and record keeping, and for others to plan what we do in various scenarios when the lockdown is lifted. Ironically working from home in this new way has proven to be quite intense as suddenly all activity and contact is made sitting at a desk with no or few opportunities to have breaks as would normally happen in walking to other offices or indeed sites. Consequently, a new discipline is needed to ensure we have a walk around and breaks regularly.

Some staff have been seconded to assist the Council in working elsewhere in the city (although often still remotely) helping to coordinate the City's response to the emergency in supporting vulnerable people.

Arts Council England (ACE) have worked hard to try to alleviate, where they can, the financial strain and pressure on cultural organisations caused by the lockdown. As part of the City Council we are at present less dramatically affected than some within the city. But that does not mean we are immune to what is happening. We were therefore pleased that ACE decided to extend the current funding round for Non Portfolio Organisations (NPOs) like ourselves for an additional year. This funding accounts for about 25% of our annual budget but was only secured until 31 March 2022. In the normal run of things, this coming winter we would have been preparing a bid for funding from April 2022 for a further 4 years. As it is, ACE have guaranteed our current funding level for an additional year until 31 March 2023 giving us, and the other NPOs, time to recover from the current situation before having to prepare a new application.

It is clear that the financial impact of the emergency on the world economies will be very significant. We therefore are looking very carefully as to what this may mean for the Culture & Creative Industries team in the future, or at least considering likely scenarios. I am sure it will mean that the fundraising by organisations such as the Friends will continue to be hugely important to us, if not more so.

**Ray Barnett** Head of Collections and Archives

## Staff news

We were sad to hear of the recent death of Brian Stickney, who retired some years ago from his role in charge of front of house staff. Brian was a popular member of staff and will be missed.

Sue Giles moved into retirement whilst under lockdown on 31 March and so a leaving party is on hold until better times permit! Meanwhile Sue is now volunteering her help to us which is most welcome.

Samantha Boyle from the Archives team also left on 31 March but had already made it back to Northern Ireland where she starts her new post.

By contrast Ann Lovejoy began her employment with us during lockdown – starting her new role as Senior Archivist reporting to Allie Dillon in April. Ann is no stranger to the Archives, having worked closely with the team in her research for Bristol Old Vic and Bristol Cathedral.

Suzi Wright is another new starter, having joined us on 24 February as Engagement Officer – Young People.

## Benin Bronze

Filmed shortly before the Covid emergency, the BBC Inside Out West programme broadcast on 26 March included a piece about the Benin Head owned by the service. Benin bronzes like this one have long been controversial items with calls for them to be returned to Benin (in present day Nigeria) as the majority were plundered by the British in a 'punitive' raid on the city of Benin in 1897. Bristol Museum & Art Gallery displays this bronze in the Curiosity Gallery on the ground floor, where it is used to stimulate debate about the ethics of either retaining such things in western museums or returning them to their country of origin, and about the unpalatable aspects of the British Empire. Current media interest stemmed from our new 'Uncomfortable Truths' podcast trail around the museum, where you can listen to blogs from young people who feel strongly about particular items on show. As a result of all this we are opening up a new dialogue with Benin and the authorities in Nigeria.

## Creative cafés

Creative Cafés are pop-up cafés at Bristol Museum & Art Gallery for people living with dementia as well as their carers



◀ *Bronze head from Benin  
Nigeria*  
© Bristol Culture

## Cultural Enterprise Awards

Both the new M Shed Guidebook and the Bristol Tattoo Gift Range were shortlisted at the start of the year in the Cultural Enterprises Awards 2020.

## And Finally

The staff of the Culture & Creative Industries Team send their very best wishes to all members of the Friends in a difficult time for everyone. Stay safe and well.

and family members. They aim to improve the health and wellbeing of the participants through creative activities and by exploring the wealth of objects and paintings at the museum.

The first of a new series of nine cafés – funded by Bristol Museum Development Trust – took place in early March. We had a lovely session with lots of new people and enthusiastic responses. Kate Newnham (Senior Curator of Visual Arts) gave a fascinating talk about the Japanese Doll exhibition (see last quarter's newsletter) which gave rise to lots of detailed observations and questions.

One participant's comment at the end of the café was: 'I was told I was coming out for a surprise this morning, but 'surprise' isn't the word for it, it's mind blowing!'



▲ *Poetry café with Caleb Parkin  
– part of the Creative Café  
series– in pre-Covid days*  
Photo © Polly Garnett



◀ *A lone staff member working in  
Gallery 3 in the Museum  
during the lockdown*  
Photo © John Seaman

## A new acquisition

The Friends have provided the funding for the museum to make a fascinating purchase. James Johnson's watercolour of about 1828, *Lower Berkeley Place from Bellevue, Clifton* (1), adds significantly to knowledge of a previously unrecorded corner of Bristol. The city may already be the best visually documented in the country, but collections should build upon their strengths and this acquisition does just that. It also adds to our understanding of an important Bristol artist.

Patience is needed to unravel the topography. On the right is a corner of the green slopes of Brandon Hill on which the long castellated building of Queen Elizabeth's Hospital School was soon to be built, just off picture. The distant green, open area is Tyndall's Park, today dominated by Bristol University. Just visible, immediately below and right of the large trees, is the new elevated road (later Queen's Road), connecting with Whiteladies Road and Gallows Acre Lane (later Pembroke Road), but not yet directly with Clifton. It was almost a viaduct running along the north side of a triangular nursery, later developed into The Triangle. Further right is the back of Upper Berkeley Place climbing Brandon Hill. Today, that terrace is immediately opposite the multi-storey car park built on the remnants of the buildings depicted to the left of the road. From Ashmead's map of 1828, we know that here were some 80 small houses, built around dark courts. This dense 18th-century development backed onto Honeypen Hill quarry, which rose high above it and was bounded by the new Strangers' Burial Ground, whose entrance wall can be seen in the left foreground.

This aspect of Clifton is otherwise unrecorded. We are much more familiar with the merchants' mansions and the fine terraces. Here, rising above these houses and breaking the skyline is the end-of-terrace house of Park Place, still incomplete in 1829. The road in the foreground (now Lower Clifton Hill) was still the main route up to the grand houses surrounding Clifton's original parish church at the top of the hill behind us. The church was damaged and later demolished in World War II. Jacob's Wells Road, running down the hill is out of sight, obscured by the houses on the right and little more than a lane at this time.

There was a steeper route up to Clifton by Granby Hill and James Johnson drew that too (2). The watercolour is similarly incidental and informal in the choice of view point. It is good to see the outline of Dundry broken only by the church tower. The water meadows at the centre of the view still survive. But beware, for one of our mayor's options for his Western Harbour development drives a dual carriageway across them. Knowledge of any location's visual history should enhance our pleasure in that place, but also add to the care we take of it.



▲ James Johnson, *Lower Berkeley Place from Bellevue, Clifton*, c. 1828, watercolour; purchased by Bristol Culture, funded by the Friends, 2020.

Go to <https://maps.bristol.gov.uk/kyp/?edition=>  
Click on and drag the modern map to find where Jacobs Wells Road joins Lower Berkeley place. Drag the central white square to the right to reveal the streets as they were in 1828.

James Johnson, *Granby Hill, Bristol*, c. 1828, watercolour; collection of Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Fund





▲ James Johnson, *View across the Floating Harbour to Bristol Cathedral, 1823*, watercolour; Braikenridge Collection

© Bristol Culture

Both watercolours are unfinished and not formally composed, unlike the *View across the Floating Harbour* (3). Here, the foreground is carefully enlivened by the children in the rowing boat. This group is lifted directly from W. H. Pyne's *Microcosm*, a series of picture-books specifically published for the use of landscape artists, showing figure groups pursuing every possible trade and activity. I suspect the foreground still-life of the anchor, ropes and rather unlikely lobster pot may come from the same source. The activities on the far bank, the reflections in the river and especially the gilded prow bring movement into the scene from the left. Johnson is consciously composing a picture, breaking up the strong horizontals of the scene and bringing life to the viewpoint, which is just to the west of M Shed. It is one of the masterpieces of the Braikenridge Collection. But perhaps it lacks the striking immediacy and freshness of the views from Granby Hill and Bellevue Place.

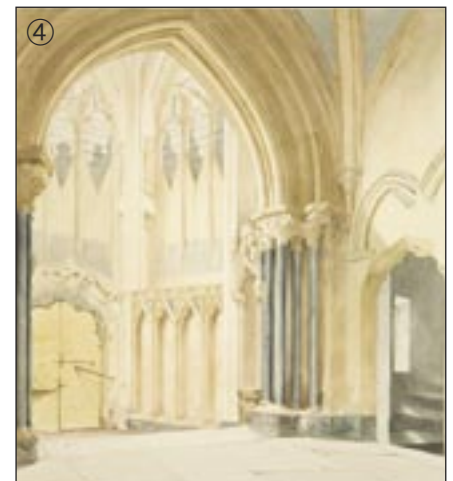
James Johnson was an outstanding architectural draughtsman and his interiors of St Mary Redcliffe executed in 1828 are of wonderful quality. His view of the *Interior of the North Porch* (4) confidently describes a most unusual sequence of very different spaces and the subtlest variations of light. There is an almost obsessive control of the architectural detail, notably the extraordinarily complex fluting of the Gothic arch. On the right, he deliberately includes the staircase up to the Muniment Room, up which Thomas Chatterton would have climbed to look at the mediaeval manuscripts stored there. James Johnson would have been well aware of Chatterton's death and the controversy over the poet's forgeries was still raging in the 1820s.

There was a fragility to Johnson's genius. He was the son of a publican at Downend and he suffered intermittently from a severe mental illness. He was to die aged 31, after throwing himself from the window of an asylum in Bath. When his friend, Francis Danby, heard of his death, he wrote: 'Of all the young men I ever knew, he had the most honour, love and feeling'.

Johnson was strongly influenced by Francis Danby, even following him briefly and unsuccessfully to London. That influence is most clearly seen in Johnson's oils and best of all in his painting of *The Entrance to Nightingale Valley* (5). This small, delightful work has recently been privately offered for sale to the Museum and Art gallery. I very much hope that the Friends will support its acquisition, which has been inevitably delayed by the pandemic. The painting underlines the social and artistic coherence of the Bristol School of Artists. Works by Danby and Samuel Jackson and many other Bristol artists of Leigh Woods and Nightingale Valley emphasise the enclosed, detached nature of the woods, which were often a springboard for imaginary landscapes. Johnson's large, ambitious and Romantic oil painting in the Tate Gallery, *The Tranquil Lake, Sunset seen through a Ruined Abbey*, takes its inspiration from the Avon Gorge and Leigh Woods. *The Entrance to Nightingale*

▼ James Johnson, *Interior of the North Porch of St Mary Redcliffe, 1828*, watercolour; Braikenridge Collection

© Bristol Culture



## EASTERN ART

*James Johnson, The entrance to Nightingale Valley, 1825, oil; Private Collection*

*Valley*, however, is an emphatically contemporary scene. In the far distance, Bridge Valley Road, completed in 1822, can just be seen curling up the gorge to the treeless Downs. Beyond the ladies and their scattered sketchbooks, stool, and bonnet are the slack sails of a vessel resting on the mud at low tide. Today, you can embrace the calming intimacy of this scene in the very same spot; just beware of the cyclists on the towpath.

**Francis Greenacre**



## Netsuke

### Miniature Masterpieces from Japan

Our plan was to install a selection of netsuke from Bristol's collection in time for Easter in three cases in the Eastern Art Gallery at Bristol Museum & Art Gallery. Whilst that is on hold, here is a bit about them to whet your appetites.

What are netsuke? They are small carved toggles that were used by men in Japan as personal accessories from the late 1600s to the late 1800s. Men did not have pockets in their gowns so they hung their personal belongings such as tobacco pipes and pouches from their belts, using a netsuke to secure them.

Under the strict laws of the Shogunate government, which extended to rules on what people in different classes could wear, a netsuke was a discreet item of dress through which men could show their taste, aspirations and sense of humour.

There are over 300 netsuke and related carvings in the museum's collection, many of them bequeathed in 1960 by philanthropist Norah Cooke-Hurle (née Fry). Carved mainly in ivory and wood they depict lucky animals, gods and demons as well as scenes from folk tales and daily life. We will be showing 75 in the new display and are excited to share these exquisite mini-sculptures with you all. In the meantime we are looking at ways to show them on the museum website.

**Kate Newnham** Senior Curator Visual Arts



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



◀ *Crab on lotus pod, boxwood, 1800-1900, bequeathed by N Cooke-Hurle, 1960*  
© Bristol Culture



◀ *Rabbit, ivory with red coral, 1800-1900, bequeathed by D M W Bullock, in memory of Ellen Eliza Bullock, 1918*  
© Bristol Culture



▲ **The east Window**  
Photo by Catherine Dixon

## Tortworth Church

Tuesday 10 March 2020

The heavy rain of the morning had eased off but boy, it was blustery as we set off for Tortworth. Overhead gantry signs on the M5 warned of strong winds. Before we knew it, the coach was dropping us off at The Farmers' Table – basically for a 'comfort stop'. Some forgot that we would be returning there for tea and started buying delicious food in the farm shop. Outside, the roadside banks were covered in primroses. Then a short coach ride to St. Leonards Church, where we were met by our guides led by the Church Warden.

I was especially happy to visit this church because my father had attended it in 1941 after his almost-around-the-world voyage home from the Far East. After two weeks leave he was posted to Tortworth Court, at that time a Royal Naval land-based ship *HMS Cabbala*. He and Mum were billeted on a farm owned by the Earl of Ducie.

We were split into two groups, one hearing the history of the area and church, the other seeing the amazing trees. My group had the history first. We learned that the Manor of Tortworth was mentioned in the Domesday Book. By the 16th century it was in the possession of the Throckmorton family. Bess, from the Devon branch of that family, became a lady-in-waiting to Queen Elizabeth I. She later married Sir Walter Raleigh and they named their son

Damerie. Damerie is the hamlet next to Tortworth. Is that just a coincidence? Sir Robert Ducie, Lord Mayor of London, bought the Manor in 1631 and it is now the 7th Earl who lives locally in Cromhall.

The church was originally built to its present design between 1460 and 1490 and it is thought the mediaeval walls were painted. The font is probably from the very first church but the lid is Stuart and the ironwork Victorian. Originally a lock prevented the theft of holy water – did people really do that? The reredos depicting the crucifixion in the centre panel was carved in 1886.

Over the tombs in the Chapel of Peace is pre-Reformation stained glass showing Edward IV. His wife may have put this here after the Battle of Evesham. It was re-leaded just 2 years ago. Peter, John and Jacob are represented in windows on the north wall, and Simon, Judas and Matthew on the south wall. I queried 'Judas' with the Rev. Sue, who sent me an email the next day saying she had done a bit of digging and thinks it is actually Jude (Thaddeus) who reputedly sat between Simon and Matthew at the Last Supper.

We did not have long to see the Throckmorton Tomb and wall tablets before the second group came in and we headed outside. Here we found the Preaching Cross around which markets were held in the 14th century. Bargains struck on its steps – or in its shadow – were legally binding. Nearby a commemorative seat and archway to Julia, Countess of Ducie is said to be haunted. Primroses grew around graves and in the pathways.

We moved on to see the trees. The tree most folk know about is the famous Tortworth Chestnut – which in 1800 was reputed to be 600 years old, and back in 1791 was measured at 44 feet and 4 inches in circumference. This Spanish chestnut still sprouts each year and branches have taken root around its trunk. Many other lovely trees can be found here including a tulip tree, a silver lime (linden) tree (the largest of its kind in England), a tanbark-oak, Cretan maple, black walnut, and even an American hickory (I was given a nut from it).

Our time up, we drove back to The Farmers' Table for a delicious tea with scones, cream and jam and time to buy in the shop! If you have never been to Tortworth, when this dreadful time of Covid-19 is over, do go but allow yourself plenty of time just to sit and look at everything in the Church, learn more of the family history (I could have done with hours there) and wander past the beautiful trees and the old Parish Rooms. It was a shame that Pat Walker, who had organised the trip, was unwell and not able to go with us, but thank you to Gary Gostelow for stepping in.

**Ceri Addis**



▲ **The churchyard**  
Photo by Jan Packer

▼ **The Tortworth Chestnut – designated in June 2002 during The Golden Jubilee as one of 50 Great British Trees**  
Photo by Pat Walker



## Margaret Kerr bequest

Some of you, I hope, will remember Margaret Kerr, a longstanding member of the Friends of Bristol Art Gallery, who died in July 2018 at the age of 97. At her request, the funds from the collection at her funeral were donated to the Friends, and we learned some time later that she had left very generous bequests to us and six other charities. In April we received the bulk of our legacy amounting to an exceptional £100,000, which has been added to our funds raised for the benefit of the Museums, Galleries and Archives. We have no immediate plans for it but are hoping that a substantial portion might benefit the Applied Art collections, her particular interest.

It is some years since Margaret had been active in FoBAG, and I never met her. My thanks go to Nick Rushby, her honorary nephew and executor who has shared a little of her story.



▲ Margaret Kerr as a young woman

Margaret Kerr was born in Sheffield in 1920, the second of three children, and went to Sheffield High School for Girls. Her elder sister Grace was tragically killed in her early 20s, in a fall from a train.

Margaret trained as a teacher at the Froebel Educational Institute, from which she graduated in September 1941. We think that her first teaching post was in Scotland at a boys' school where, among other things, she taught football and cricket. She told me that she enlisted a boy from the sanatorium who was recovering from appendicitis to be her coach and tell her the rules as she went along.

1946 saw her at Bredenbury Court, the preparatory school for Cheltenham Ladies' College. Then she was at Rachel McMillan Teacher Training College in Deptford, where one of her ex-students recalls her as one of the youngest and most forceful lecturers on the staff. 'Miss Kerr was a strict disciplinarian, who demanded high standards of commitment, and although as 18- to 21-year-olds this was not always appreciated, we definitely respected her. Students were always pleased to have her as a supervisor of teaching practice. Her practical experience of teaching in schools gave her an edge over other lecturers, as did her insightful advice and help.' At one time she was teaching at Camberwell School of Art and Design, now part of London University of the Arts. Many years later, she went on a trip with the Friends of Bristol Art Gallery to Camberwell, which was disrupted when the word went around students and staff that Margaret Kerr was coming and work stopped while they all greeted her.

A short while after her retirement from full-time teaching, Margaret moved to Westbury, where she and her younger brother John bought a house in Alfred Street



◀ Margaret Kerr in 1992

and there they lived, in apparent total harmony, until John's death in December 2017. She realised that she could not cope in the house on her own and her final move was to Trowbridge Oaks Care Home.

There is evidence that Margaret travelled widely in her earlier life. There were banknotes from Iran, Romania and Canada. She certainly visited St Petersburg and the Hermitage Museum, Spain (Extremadura) and Taiwan. Remember that

this was at a time when relatively few tourists went to Eastern Europe and the Middle East and even fewer of them were single ladies! But what was she doing with an Occupational Force Travel Permit for Vienna in 1950? Vienna then was an occupied and divided city. She leaves behind many unanswered questions.

Margaret survived cancer at a time when survival rates were very low, and made a remarkable recovery from a stroke a few years ago. To the end, her mind and her sense of humour were unimpaired.

**Nick Rushby**

Margaret Kerr's honorary nephew



▲ Margaret Kerr as Friends knew her in later life

I have heard one other story about Margaret, that on a FoBAG trip she produced a valuable de Morgan tile from her handbag and passed it round for everyone on the coach to have a closer look at, trusting all her fellow members – whether she knew them or not – to take as much care of it as she would.

**Sue Thurlow**

Photos © Nick Rushby

# Wildlife Photographer of the Year

*A tour of the 2019 exhibition led by the chairman of the judges Rosamund Kidman Cox in M Shed*

Thursday 13 February 2020

We were very lucky once again to have a tour of this exhibition of the largest wildlife photography competition in the world. Roz Kidman Cox is herself a photographer, and was editor of BBC Wildlife magazine for 24 years. She has been chairman of the judges for nearly 40 years, yet her enthusiasm remains undiminished.

The judges had to sort their way through an incredible 48,130 entries, from 130 countries and 100 nationalities, in 15 categories of subject, and 3 age categories for the younger entrants. All this had to be reduced to just 100 winners. Roz was able to fill us in with fascinating details of the winners and their experiences in obtaining their often stunning photographs. Hours, days, even years of waiting for that all important shot. And in one case loss of toes from frost bite as a result.

These photographs are works of art, and as Roz pointed out, it is not just the photos that are important. The displays, lighting and arrangement of photos in the exhibition are also vital and require curating with a truly artistic eye. All the winners are invited to London for the prize giving. For many it is a chance to leave their country for the first time. To receive their prizes is an exciting experience for all.

The overall winner, chosen from all the category winners, was a stunning photograph of a Tibetan fox startling a Himalayan marmot as it emerged from its burrow at the end of its hibernation. The expression on the marmot's face is never to be forgotten! (Roz was able to tell us that the fox killed the marmot, but it was food for its family). This photograph was taken by a Chinese entrant Yongqing Bao. Another Chinese entry I loved was a herd of male Chirus (Tibetan antelopes) approaching an oasis of sand on a snow covered plateau on the Chinese-Tibetan border. It is a simple yet stunning image. Apparently the Chirus have a very dense inner fur layer for warmth which is treasured by Westerners for the shawls that can be made out of it.

Of the photographs by young artists, the overall winner was a jewel-coloured bigfin reef squid by Cruz Erdmann age 13 from New Zealand. I particularly liked Thomas Easterbrook's entry (UK, 10 and under!) of a Hummingbird Hawkmoth with its proboscis inserted in a red salvia flower.

The exhibition ended on the 4 May. Make sure you do not miss it next year. Thank you very much to Carol Ouvry for organising this event.

**Sue Black**



▲ *Snow-plateau nomads by Shangzhen Fan, China – Winner 2019, Animals in Their Environment*

Photo © Shangzhen Fan

▼ *The moment by Yongqing Bao, China – Joint Winner 2019, Behaviour: Mammals*  
Grand title winner, Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2019

Photo © Yongqing Bao





▲ View of Bristol Cathedral – by William James Müller. The painting is currently on display in the Picture Room at Blaise Museum

© Bristol Culture

## Finding Tranquility in Art

Until recently William James Müller's atmospheric paintings of Bristol, such as his *View of Bristol Cathedral*, seemed to me to conjure an entirely Romantic vision of the city. Arguably, their artistic point of interest was precisely that, unlike the young artist's sketches of the 1831 Bristol Riots, they deliberately did not document or comment on any social realities. Yet recently they have acquired a strange new relevance.

In his *View of Bristol Cathedral* Müller shows us the aspect of the cathedral with the city beyond from the south bank of the Floating Harbour, looking across Canon's Marsh. The water in the foreground is completely still and reflects the bright fair-weather sky like a mirror. Two heavily loaded craft accentuate the scene to the right, their masts reaching vertically towards the sky. To the left two more boats are moored by the shore. Only a small number of figures populate the vessels, more colour accents than actual sailors. The overall sense is one of intense stillness rather than an impression of a bustling, noisy working harbour.

When Müller painted this picture in 1835, he had just returned to Bristol from a seven-month sketching tour on the Continent with fellow artist, George Arthur Fripp. The suggestion has been made that his visit to Venice influenced Müller in this depiction of Bristol, but – unlike in his views of Venice – there is no golden sunset here. If anything, the scene takes place in the morning with clear light coming from the East, so topographical details remain legible: the truncated west end of the cathedral is clearly seen; its nave was not built until later in the 19th century. The trees seen in front lined a rope walk (a long pathway used during the making of ropes).

But there is no life here – Bristol was a fast-growing city, full of tension, but also attractive for visitors from all around the world. Despite being a landscape artist, Müller could have chosen to emulate the older artists of the Bristol School, such as Edward Ripplingille or Samuel Colman, and added an element of everyday life or genre to his scene, even if he did not want to offend his patrons with gritty social realism. Instead, he set out to create an ideal of timeless beauty according to the aesthetic rules of the Picturesque, a way of looking at art and nature that was fashionable in the early 19th century. Even ordinary buildings become elegant and no bustle of human work threatens to disturb the careful balance of the picture. You could argue that this in itself is a political statement, especially when you compare *View of Bristol Cathedral* with Müller's Riot images, which show his fascination if not sympathy with the event.

Browse the Museums websites and collections at : [www.bristolmuseums.org.uk](http://www.bristolmuseums.org.uk) and [www.bristolmuseums.org.uk/collections/](http://www.bristolmuseums.org.uk/collections/)



▲ *The same view as it is today. The Cathedral is no longer visible from the spot chosen by Müller to execute his painting. Thanks to Covid-19, the modern scene has even fewer people in it*

Photo by Sue Thurlow

But if we approach this picture for a moment without (art-) history in mind, the absence of life suddenly makes the *View of Bristol Cathedral* a poetic image of our time now, illustrative of a Bristol in lockdown where we have to restrict our movements in order to protect others and ourselves; when an early morning brisk walk or run around the harbour (or close to wherever we live) is the only time we spent outside the house and our streets and the places where we socialise are empty. Some of us can enjoy the world outside only through images, including Müller's work. There is a general recognition in and beyond the museum sector now that art has a very valuable role to play in strengthening people's mental well-being.

Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives already have a track record of providing art and well-being projects, such as the Art Shed: Museums as medicine at M-Shed or Yoga sessions in the Old Masters gallery at BMAG. The current situation is a new challenge, but maybe Müller's pictures provide a good opportunity for you to self-medicate by visiting our websites and indulging yourselves in our online collections and blogs.

**Jenny Gaschke** Curator of Fine Art pre-1900

## Wild Birds on the Exe

Saturday 22 February 2020

After one of the wettest months, we actually set off for our trip on a dry, if cold, day. The journey to Exmouth was uneventful and we arrived in plenty of time before the boat was due to sail. Some of us gravitated to the warmth of the nearby pub, while braver ones went for a brisk walk around the Marina.

Once on board we were introduced to the very knowledgeable ornithologist who made the trip so memorable. There was a heated enclosed lower deck, but most of us gathered on the open top deck to view the River Exe at its best.

As we meandered slowly up the river, we were gradually introduced to more and more birds. Extensive inter-tidal flats are a feature of most estuaries. They are formed from sediments brought down by rivers and washed in from the seas. The fine silt is carried into the inner parts of the estuary to form mud flats. The ebb and flow of the tides determine when the birds have access to their food as, at high tide, this is out of reach.

Just upstream from Exmouth lies one of the major feeding areas for waders and wild fowl. The central part of the estuary around Powderham Park attracts dabbling ducks, especially mallards, teals and wigeons. We were also introduced to diving ducks such as grebes and shorebirds that included waders such as dunlins, oyster catchers, knots and avocets amongst many others. We were told the area was good for sightings of peregrines, but no such luck today. We had been given a list of birds we might see and binoculars were most certainly extremely useful.

One of the greatest joys for me, however, was the sight of two lovely seals basking in the sunshine, blissfully unaware of our presence. The hot pasties and soup we devoured after our adventure were very welcome and concluded an unforgettable encounter with the wild birds of the River Exe.

**Wendy Snelson**



▲ *An avocet on the prowl*

Photos by Jan Packer

▼ *Godwits feeding on the shore*



## When Coal in your Fireplace Stands in for Welsh mountains

### Playmobil and Bristol's art collection

For the last few weeks I have been posting photos of Playmobil toy figures re-enacting paintings from Bristol's art collection on my Twitter feed and BMAG social media outlets have been spreading them further. It seems they are making people smile. Here is the background story:

The Coronavirus lockdown has simultaneously turned me into a home-curator and a home-school-parent, so pacing the house in search of something to do that filled both those briefs was naturally going to let me stumble across my daughter Ada's Playmobil figures.

Also, we wanted to do something fun together – we had dabbled before in setting up little tableaux with the eternally-smiling figures and their abundance of paraphernalia. This was how Playmo-Art was born. It works a little bit like the Getty Museum's invitation for people to put themselves into recreations of their favourite pictures. Ada (aged 10) describes the simple process of recreating a picture like this:

'You need to have a painting in mind. Go through your (I hasten to add: your children's or grandchildren's...) Playmobil and try to find characters and objects for the picture out of what you have. Set up everything carefully to look like the picture. Finally, take a photo and post it on Twitter alongside the original painting. Recreating art out of Playmobil is fun because sometimes you find out which art you really like. You sometimes also find bits of Playmobil which you forgot you had – and that is interesting'.

I can vouch for that – we found my original 1970s Playmobil workmen set, complete with their van and a crate of beer. I have to ask Julia Carver about appropriate 20th century social realism pictures to restage with those guys!

I am fascinated by how many pictures Ada has thought about. It turns out she is a great fan of Vermeer and of Turner: 'My favourite piece of art we made was JMW Turner's *Fighting Temeraire*, but my mum wants me to do paintings from Bristol Museum & Art Gallery's collection'.

That is true because I found that our pictures are a great way to unlock the museum's collection in a light-hearted way that still makes us and our audiences not only smile but also understand things about the art itself, such as composition and visual story telling. Making these little photographic comparisons allows us to shout about what treasures Bristol's art collections hold and, hopefully, may even draw people to the



▲ Lucien Pissaro The Turkeys



◀ Edmund Blair Leighton – Signing the Register



wonderful content the Museum Service has on its official website – all there despite the lockdown – <https://www.bristolmuseums.org.uk/>.

So far, we have, amongst others, made recreations of Pissarro's *The Turkeys*, Burne-Jones' *The Garden Court* and Rolinda Sharples' *The Artist and her Mother*. A real challenge has been to create the setting for Danby's *The Precipice* – we ended up staging the scene in our front room fireplace. Our greatest reward has been that when we posted Edmund Blair Leighton's *Signing the Register*, someone sent us their own wedding photo with the painting in the background in return. There is certainly an art and well-being element to this (you could also call it addiction) – Ada complains: 'She (i.e. me) also sometimes does them by herself!' Yes, sorry – and hopefully other people will too?

### Jenny Gaschke

Curator of Fine Art pre-1900

▼ Edward Burne-Jones  
*The Garden Court*



► Francis Danby –  
*The Precipice*



▲ Rolinda Sharples *The Artist and her Mother*



All paintings © Bristol Culture  
All photos © Jenny Gaschke

If you have not tried Twitter before  
you can dip your toe in by  
investigating the Museum's Twitter  
account. There is lots to see and  
you do not have to sign up:  
<https://twitter.com/bristolmuseum>

To the Friends of Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives from Sue Giles

Dear Friends

I was 11 or 12 when I decided that I wanted to work in a museum, although at that stage I had no idea what that meant or even what a curator was. I just loved the museums I was taken to every school holiday.

I came to Bristol in 1973, as an undergraduate studying history. At some point I visited the museum next door and wrote to the Director to ask about work possibilities. As I was studying history and had been on a couple of archaeological digs the previous summer, I was passed to the archaeology department and invited in to discuss further. David Dawson, then Curator of Archaeology, took me on and I started as a volunteer in my second summer vacation. It was in the basement of the museum that I discovered the ethnography collections, and found what I wanted to do in museums – work with collections from around the world.

After graduating, I continued volunteering, and got paid employment as an archaeological illustrator. Then, when one of the museum assistants left, I applied for their job and got it. In January 1977 I was employed by the museum on the curatorial staff, at a pay rate of £1.01 per hour. As the others left I took on their hours until finally I was working full-time as a museum assistant.

In time I became Assistant Curator, then Curator of Archaeology, then Curator of Ethnography, and Senior Curator Ethnography, ending up as Senior Curator British Empire & Commonwealth Collection, possibly the longest job title in the museum.

I can't reflect on my time here without again thanking the Friends, and before them the Magpies and the Friends of Bristol Art Gallery, for the support given to the collections. I asked for money so many times, and I think you always gave it, to the enrichment of the Numismatics, Ethnography, Egyptology, Historic Maps and Militaria collections. Thank you for that help.

I have worked on countless exhibitions and projects here with hundreds of colleagues and volunteers, created a website, met researchers from around the world, linked into a network of colleagues and made friends. I've also done filthy jobs, cleaned more glass than I care to think about, and cried in frustration sometimes. It is impossible to pick the best bits. Even the worst have some merit, but I still think the Egypt gallery looks good and works (classic design doesn't date), and I am proud of the work we've done on Bristol and slavery, although we also need (as I said 20 years ago) to build a world gallery that shows the knowledge, artistry and cultures of Africa, and not just focus on the negatives of the slave trade. After 42 years (44 counting the voluntary work) it will be strange not to be employed here. But I plan to come full circle and return as a volunteer, to catch up with the work on the collections I haven't done over the decades, as e-mails, meetings, exhibitions and the like took up the time. It will be a luxury to have nothing but the database and the objects, and to finish what I started in 1975.

Best wishes, Sue Giles



▲ In Mexico, last February, chatting to a seller of religious dolls. I bought a St Jude. I was there with Lisa Graves in connection with the Adela Breton collection. The Friends helped to fund the trip.

The full version of this letter can be found on the Friends website. Visit [www.friendsofbmga.org.uk](http://www.friendsofbmga.org.uk)

**FRIENDS  
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The opinions expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily represent those of the FBMGA or Bristol Culture

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