

Newsletter

A groundbreaking acquisition

In this edition

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- dementia-friendly work at the museum
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- new artwork commissioned in response to the Black Lives Matter campaign
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◀ Rolinda Sharples, *The Cloak-Room, Clifton Assembly Rooms, 1818*, oil on canvas
© Bristol Culture

From the Chairman

Once again, the newsletter brings you some fascinating articles written by professional museum and archives staff. Following last quarter's story of the Pre-Raphaelites exhibition scuppered by lockdown we have a piece about preparing for another exhibition that did not happen as planned. One difference here, though, is that the beneficiaries of the exhibition were to have been the good people of Bordeaux rather than of Bristol! And there are still hopes that this exhibition – on the Bristol School of artists (two examples shown here) – will be delayed rather than cancelled. There are also pieces about work that is carrying on to improve the interpretations of collections and to make them more accessible, and about some new acquisitions that we have funded as well as other news from the museum

Stay in touch with online talks

One of the bonuses of the lockdowns is the growth of live online talks by cultural organisations across the world, accessible from anywhere with an internet connection. Of course they are not a complete substitute for meeting in

person, but they make it possible to see and hear talks in the comfort of our own homes that we would have found impractical or impossible to get to in the real world. The museum began free online public talks in the early summer and is now delivering a lively program of regular talks and more immersive workshops. You can find all the information you need to join them on the museum's What's On pages which are frequently updated as new events are unveiled. I have been to many of the talks and found them very enjoyable. At the start the host invites attendees to say where they are joining from and I have seen locations listed from as far away as Canada, Japan and New Zealand.

I am delighted that in January we started running online Friends talks ourselves as part of our Events Group's fundraising programme. The first speaker was Pete Insole on the subject of Bristol's Homes for Heroes, the council house building programme started in 1919. It was easy to sign up for the talk and to join on the day and provided much food for thought, as well as ideas for walks once we have a bit more freedom. I am really getting a taste for online talks – every attendee is in the front row, can adjust their own sound so they can hear the speaker clearly, can fidget if they want without disturbing anyone, even nod off briefly without fear of embarrassment. And it is lovely to feel a little more connected with real people, especially when it is people we know.

We are publicising the Friends talks by email and if you are on email but have not heard about them, it probably means that we do not have your address or we do not have your permission to use it to let you know about events. If

Cover photo: The ceremonial spade used to lay the first rail of the Bristol & North Somerset Railway in 1863

© Martel Maides Auctions



▲ *William James Müller, View of Bristol from Clifton Wood, 1837, oil on canvas*
© Bristol Culture

that is the case you can email our Membership Secretary, Richard Avery, on the address you will find on the back page and he will add you to our database so you get to hear about our future online events. As you would expect, we will treat your email address as confidential and will never pass it on to third parties.

Andy King, Senior Curator for Social, Industrial and Maritime History

You will read in the Museum Report the sad news that Andy King is resigning on grounds of ill health. Ray gives a necessarily summarised account of Andy's massive contribution over almost 40 years, and throughout that time Andy has always been a particular friend of the Friends. For as long as I can remember he has given very active support to our events at M Shed, often moving furniture, equipment and large museum objects to accommodate us. Without his pragmatism and kindness our events could not in some cases have taken place at all, let alone have been as successful as they have. We send him our thanks and very best wishes

British Association of Friends of Museums (BAFM)

Vacancy for South West Regional Co-ordinator

Each year (lockdowns permitting) BAFM holds an annual conference, but for the rest of the year the member museums are connected by a team of 12 Regional Co-ordinators. BAFM are currently looking to recruit a co-ordinator for the South West and would love to hear from you if you would like to learn more about the role. The only



▲ *Andy King*
© Bristol Culture

qualifications required are access to email and an enthusiasm to support like-minded people across the region working hard to save our heritage for future generations. The size of the role is dependent on how much the individual chooses to do, and reasonable expenses – including for travel – are paid. If you are interested to hear more about the role please contact me on the email address on the back page.

Sue Thurlow Chairman

Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives

Service-wide developments

A lot seems to have happened since I wrote my report for the December newsletter. The November national lockdown closed our sites to the public again although work continued behind the scenes. The Council took the decision to announce that it would keep all its museums and archives closed to the public until at least 1 February 2021 but as we all know the Government soon after announced a new stricter national lockdown, more akin to that of spring 2020. As a result we now anticipate that it may well be April before we re-open museums and archives.

In the new 2021 lockdown from early January, much of our back of house activity has been curtailed, unlike in November, but not quite as comprehensively as in spring 2020. For example, in the autumn we took over responsibility for the Create Centre housed in B Bond alongside the Bristol Archives. As it provides space for certain businesses to operate it has remained open to support their function and prevent them going to the wall.

Another part of our operation working through the lockdown supports those providing meals to the isolated and vulnerable in the city. Aardman Animations are supplying meals which are taken on Thursdays to M Shed where they can be refrigerated and so collected by drivers for distribution across the city. Some of the Culture Team staff have been redeployed to assist in the council-wide operation to support the most vulnerable in the city at this time of unprecedented need.

In the meantime, work also goes on to provide a virtual museums and archive service, to protect the city's cultural assets from deteriorating, and to prepare for better times ahead.

Staff news

In the past few months both Zak Mensah and Philip Walker have left to take up permanent posts elsewhere, Zak to Birmingham Museums Trust, as reported in the last Newsletter, and Philip to Gloucester City Council Culture Team. As a consequence, Hannah Sturman has been appointed on a short-term contract as Head of Transformation to replace Zak while Phil's responsibilities remain shared around the rest of the Senior Leadership Team.

Very sadly I also have to report that Andy King (Senior Curator History) has tendered his resignation on the grounds of ill health. Andy joined the museum service over 39 years ago as Assistant Curator Industrial & Maritime History before moving up as a Senior Curator from the mid-1990s. Anyone who knows anything about the Industrial Museum and its successor M Shed will know just what a huge contribution Andy has made over the years to the success of that site and the whole of the museum offer. His knowledge is probably second to none on the industrial and maritime



▲ New signage going up at the Museum & Art Gallery, ready for reopening.

© Sue Thurlow

history of this city and he has always been free with his advice and support to all involved in understanding our history. He will be sorely missed.

Amy Raphael has joined the staff as Project Curator for the Japanese Ceramics on a two-year contract and Amber Turner will start in March as the Project Curator for the Bristol Delftware Ceramics again a 2-year externally-funded project. Mary Milton joins the team as Archives Assistant in January, bringing the team back up to full strength.

Bristol Museum and Art Gallery

The most recent lockdown now means that the Magic exhibition has closed. The future programme of temporary exhibitions and other significant projects such as the loan of many paintings from the Bristol School to Bordeaux depends upon when we can reopen the sites to the public and progress in getting back towards some semblance of normality with regard to Covid-19.

Blaise Castle House Museum, Georgian House Museum and Red Lodge Museum

We are still hoping that in the spring we will be able to reopen the three site museums which remained closed throughout 2020. Exactly when will depend upon how the



Henbury – splendid in its new paintjob – is reassembled with the help of the dockside cranes and a group of volunteers. The work was completed before lockdown. The volunteers – from left to right, Chris Ecclestone, David Martin, Bob Edwardes, Amelia Gardiner, Bill Drewett and Bruce Davies

© Bristol Culture



pandemic and the vaccination programme develops in the next few months.

Positive steps are being taken in collaboration with the Parks department and the police force to combat the anti-social behaviour experienced during 2020 at the Blaise estate and which has led to temporary boarding of the museum windows. We hope we will soon have art works on the boards.

Working Exhibits

The Working Exhibits did not turn a wheel or propeller for the public in 2020 due to the Covid situation. However a small team volunteers were allowed back to work – under strict social distancing rules – and successfully returned *Mayflower's* boiler to the boat. With the funnel now on we await the delivery of the new firebars kindly funded by the Friends, for which we send our thanks.

Henbury also has been reassembled following a heavy overhaul and returned to the engine shed for completion. It is hoped we will be able to steam test in March ready for public operations when permitted.

The painting of the four electric cranes is planned in the next few months, and our rail crane, vital to any significant track repairs we do, is undergoing a service and repair following isolation for four years at A Bond.

Museums and Archives Volunteers – Thank You!

With only very limited numbers of people allowed on-site, we would like to say a thank you not just to those volunteers who have been asked to work but also to the much larger number who have been asked to stay away. I appreciate that can be frustrating, but it is the best way to keep everyone safe and ensure that we can return to something like normal as soon as possible.

Ray Barnett Head of Collections & Archives

Fluttering Though History

Butterflies are aerial ambassadors which enrich the lives of us all but act as very visible gauges as to the health of our own environment. If butterflies are not doing well then it is likely that other groups of less well known creatures are also fairing badly.

On 4 February 2020 Bristol declared an ecological emergency. Bristol City Council's One City approach provides an opportunity to come together and take positive action to secure a nature-rich future for Bristol and do everything in our power to avoid further ecological collapse. The One City Ecological Strategy published in September 2020 identifies establishing a 'Bristol Wildlife Index' to provide baseline data and track change towards 2030 as one of three immediate actions the city must take. Bristol's natural history collections provide a unique source of historic data stretching back over 200 years – a window to the past that can help inform a future city where wildlife and people thrive. However to do this requires digitising the collection to release its biodiversity data, i.e. date, locality and habitat in which each specimen was found, its species and collector.

We are delighted to be supported by Ferox Security Chief Executive Officer, Solomon Gilbert, who is an avid butterfly enthusiast. After visiting our collection he has pledged his support to help us raise just over £30k to employ an individual to digitise butterflies in our collection with a focus on local species threatened with extinction. If you wish to support this initiative please visit Just Giving, enter Solomon Gilbert and scroll down.

We aim to combine this crucial historical data with recent information from Bristol Regional Environmental Record Centre (BRERC). This helps show that four species of butterflies have been lost to Bristol in the latter half of the 20th century and beginning of the 21st century. The Silver-studded Blue and Adonis Blue were lost by the 1980s. The Pearl-bordered and Duke of Burgundy may have become extinct recently as neither has been seen in the last 17-20 years. The Marsh Fritillary is just hanging on in just two sites. The Small Heath has declined significantly in numbers in the last thirty years, and the loss of sites this century is marked. Other species are now restricted to a very small number of remaining sites where their particular requirements are met and they are in an extremely vulnerable position; these include the Grayling and Chalkhill Blue. Tragically, in the last 17 years the Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary has been contracted to one area.

Bristol's natural history collection is invaluable in piecing together the early distributions and abundance of butterflies in Bristol and beyond, providing us with clearer avenues for understanding general threats to biodiversity and pathways to conservation. Many rare butterflies have not always been rare.



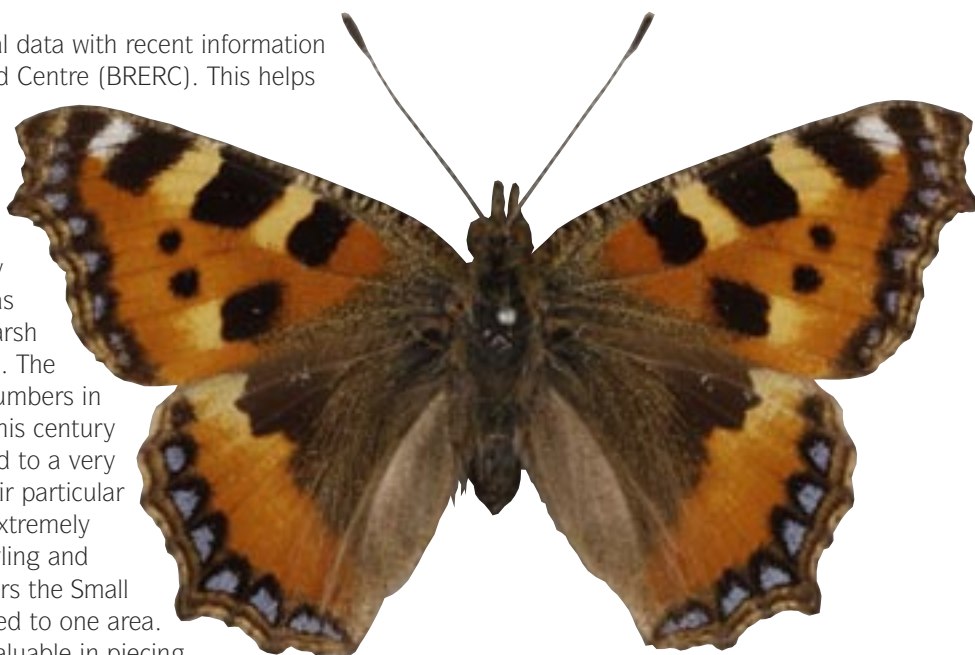
There are many individuals of the same species in these cabinets, amalgamated over 200 years by various past collectors. Each is unique and was collected at a different site and time, providing an insight into the changes we see today. We no longer collect butterflies from the wild in Britain – most are recorded by sight or photography with the information being compiled and processed by BRERC.

© Bristol Culture



▼ A Peacock Butterfly (*Aglais io*)

© Bristol Culture





▲ **Orange-tip Butterflies** (*Anthocharis cardamines*) – male upper wing and male underwing
© Bristol Culture

Some were very abundant until the last few decades, when global habitat loss and climate change etc. have relegated each species to minuscule land parcels. We also expect to find butterflies in our collections from places in our city that have now been built over or are wildlife-poor – but could be part of the city’s planned nature recovery network.

At present this information is contained in and on the specimens and labels and not in the public domain. Digitising and releasing this data will also aid future research, as others have done recently. For example when Natural History Museum, London, released some of their data a researcher had the opportunity to measure butterflies from the images and found that the adult butterflies were reducing in size over the decades due to climate change. The time series data will also show if the flight seasons are getting earlier due to climate change. Once researchers know what is in the collection then it opens up other research possibilities. At Bristol Museum we have recently had visiting scientists checking pollution residues on our bird skins, for instance. Researchers can also investigate pollen grains or measure isotopes to work out their migratory routes and breeding grounds, and determine whether this has changed. The possibilities are almost endless. Essentially we want to unlock this treasure trove so that everyone, including citizen scientists, researchers and data analysts, can access it.

▼ **A Large Blue Butterfly** (*Phengaris arion*)
© Hannah Vijayan

Bristol Culture cares for one of the most significant natural science collections in the UK but of 1.35 million specimens only 4% are databased (and far fewer imaged), which severely limits accessibility and reach. This project would help us to embed modern digitisation that meets the needs of researchers and other users. This is something the natural science team have been working hard to upgrade over the past few years and have secured advice and equipment for, but need further resource, including a dedicated post, to realise.

Isla Gladstone Senior Natural Sciences Curator &
Rhian Rowson Natural History Curator



Preparing for Bordeaux's Bristol School Exhibition

For the last couple of years Bristol Museum has been preparing for a huge loan to the Musée des Beaux Arts in Bordeaux, consisting of 65 paintings, drawings and prints, as part of its exhibition 'Absolutely Bizarre, a strange story from the Bristol School (1800-1840)'.

Preparing for a loan on this scale does not simply mean packing up the works and shipping them off while we raise our glasses of Bordeaux wine and wish them a bon voyage, (although wouldn't that be nice?). In fact, it takes a variety of specialisms, including transport agents, registrars, curators, technicians and conservators to ensure the smooth transportation and safety of the works. I joined this project at the beginning of the year as part of the conservation team.

It is the conservators' job to make sure that the works going on loan are safe to travel. This means being able to withstand extra movement, for example vibration caused by transport, as well as physical handling of the works. Loans are also an opportunity to carry out any necessary aesthetic work such as cleaning and retouching, as well as re-fitting and mounting.

The works on paper range from a large-scale watercolour to small oils. Our paper conservator needed to assess all the works then formulate a plan for stabilising them and framing them for exhibition. The group of works that required the most amount of conservation treatment was our paper conservator's favourite – Müller's paintings of the Bristol Riots. These small oil paintings on paper had been previously stuck down onto board and required careful removal from what were now acidic backings. The oil paint had to be stabilised and then protected with padding while the painting was worked on from the back. Mechanical removal of the acidic board was done using a surgical scalpel and then the remaining adhesive was swabbed away with spit (enzymes in spit are particularly effective at breaking down animal adhesive). It was during this process that more artworks were discovered. Two sketches, a pencil drawing of what appears to be a ship's mast as well as a charcoal sketch of a river and waterwheel, were uncovered on the back of two of the paintings as the layers of board and adhesive were removed. Discovering new works is always exciting and these two drawings

▼ *Paper conservator carrying out conservation treatment on a Müller watercolour*
© Jon Craig





◀ *Conservation of a Sharples frame.*
© Jon Craig

provide an excellent opportunity to look at different drawing methods. All the paintings were then mounted in new conservation grade mounts and framed ready for display.

Luckily, the majority of the paintings going on loan were in good condition, as 31 of the 33 were on display in the galleries and had been treated in recent years. Therefore, the paintings conservator carried out minor treatments including surface cleaning, retouching of losses and distracting cracks in the paint, and stabilisation of any loose paint flakes. A condition assessment of each painting was taken with photographic documentation. This provides an invaluable record in case any works are damaged during transit.

The frames needed a little more treatment. As the frame protects the painting, it is often the frame that is subject to the most damage. It has been my job to ensure the frames are fit for loan. Treatments ranged from stabilising flaking gilding to making structural repairs. The majority of the frames in this group of paintings are 19th century and have applied composition ornament. This is a mixture of primarily glue, rosin and chalk, which is then pressed into decorative moulds and applied to frames. This kind of ornamentation is prone to shrinking and can often become cracked and loose, or lost all together. One of my major tasks was to replace large losses of ornament. This included working on the frame of Sharples's painting, *The Stoppage of the Bank*, where large sections of ornament were missing. To replicate the lost pieces I made casts from existing areas of ornament. I then made plaster copies, which I shaped to fit the losses and any gaps were filled with gesso putty (a mix of rabbit skin glue and chalk). My next step was to oil-gild all the new additions. These then needed to be toned to match the original, as the new gilding was very shiny and stood out. These kinds of treatments are very rewarding as it means the frame can once again harmonise with the painting.

The loan to Bordeaux was due to leave Bristol in April. With a large amount of the work complete and a month from the finish line we could not have predicted that a pandemic would stop its progress! Alas, Bordeaux will have to wait in anticipation until next year when, hopefully, this loan will finally go ahead.

Liza Nathan Frames Conservator



▲ *Replacement of loss – before the gilding was toned*
© Bristol Culture

Read more about this exhibition at
<http://www.musba-bordeaux.fr/en/article> and
search on absolutely bizarre exhibition

Mary Carpenter's Album of Watercolours

Last year the Friends helped us to acquire at auction a fascinating piece of Bristol's cultural history: an album dated 1838 and containing 20 watercolours. It was compiled by none other than Mary Carpenter (1807-1877), campaigner and leading female advocate for deprived children in mid-19th-century England, and founder of the Red Lodge Reformatory School.

The leather-bound album indiscriminately brings together works by professional and amateur artists. Ten of the watercolours were painted by Carpenter herself and were made between 1832 and 1838. Other second generation Bristol School artists contributed the rest, presumably giving them as gifts or in exchange for her works. These include George Arthur Fripp (1813-1896), James Johnson (1803-1834), A. Needham, Anna Russell [née Worsley] (1807-1876), Samuel Jackson (1794-1869) and Nathaniel Neal Solly (1811-1895), the biographer of Bristol-based artist William James Müller. Four others are unattributed but probably by a slightly later hand.

The album allows us to better understand Carpenter's own standing as an accomplished watercolourist, but also how art was collected, shared and consumed in Bristol during the 1830s beyond exhibitions at the Bristol Institution. It highlights the openness of the Bristol School as a creative group. Through her own works in the album Carpenter emerges more prominently as another female within the Bristol School alongside Rolinda Sharples, who died in 1838.

At the time, compiling albums like this and copying existing works were important tools in teaching drawing and painting outside the academy, instructing the student in the handling of composition, lighting and colouring. Watercolour painting had been a valued part of middle- and upper-class (male and) female education since the 18th century. And although they were educated to go into service, Carpenter seems to have extended this practice also to the girls in her care at the Red Lodge.

The range of subjects in Carpenter's images, both her own and those by her friends and acquaintances, allows us to locate her interests in the picturesque and the topographical, as it would have been described in the early 19th-century. There are views from Britain, Greece, the Alps and possibly the coast of Africa.

In the majority of cases these views were copies of established compositions widely circulated as prints. For example: relatively few



▲ The Acropolis by James Johnson



▲ Marathon by Mary Carpenter



▲ Bolton Abbey by Mary Carpenter



◀ Swansea Works by
Mary Carpenter

Photos © Bristol Culture

tourists visited the young state of Greece in the 1830s, but images of classical sites were very popular and had become instantly recognizable through illustrations – the album includes a view of the Athenian Acropolis and the nearby temple of Jupiter by James Johnson and one of the landscape at Marathon by Carpenter. They can both be traced to popular images published a few years previously.

It would, however, be exciting to find out if there is an additional influence at work in this particular case. One of the most prominent early travellers to Greece also had a special link with Bristol: the architect of the Bristol Institution and friend of the Harford family, Charles Robert Cockerell, had visited the country before it became independent from the Ottoman Empire. Had he shared his experience with audiences in Bristol at some point?

Other views in the album such as one of the Hemlock Stone, Nottingham, and another of Bolton Abbey reveal Carpenter's taste for the romantic and sublime. Interestingly, this appreciation of the awe-inspiring also includes a dramatic moonlit view of the industrial landscape of the Swansea Works with its many smoking chimneys.

There is still so much to discover about the album and its watercolours and we will keep you posted on any new findings and will digitise it as quickly as possible. For now, just imagine Mary Carpenter looking through this album on an autumn afternoon, letting her mind be taken to all the wonderful places depicted in front of her – maybe something we all relate to even more easily after so many months of having to make most journeys in our minds only.

Jenny Gaschke Curator of Fine Art pre-1900

Events Programme

Our plans to re-start the events programme came to a shuddering halt with the arrival of the new mutation of Covid-19, giving Carol Ouvry yet more administrative headaches. We have abandoned the gallery tour of the Being Human exhibition and are postponing the art gallery tour of Diversity in Art with Jenny Gaschke until we can be certain that access is possible. The tour of the Wildlife Photographer of the Year exhibition with Roz Kidman Cox arranged for 25 March is being delayed until late April. For the present, Carol is not arranging any further Behind the Scenes visits until there is more certainty that they can take place.

To compensate, we have started a programme of online monthly talks via Zoom on Saturday afternoons – when we would have been enjoying talks in M Shed followed by tea and cake. Unfortunately this does mean that those without access to the internet are unable to participate, which is regrettable but unavoidable. Invitations to take part in these talks are sent out via Eventbrite to all those members on our email address list, so please look out for them.

We hope that we shall soon be able to have a programme of physical events, even if on a small scale initially.

Mary Bailey Events Group

Joining the Museum's Art Team

I have recently been appointed to the position of Project Curator, Japanese Ceramics. I will be working on an exciting project to catalogue and interpret the Irene Finch collection of Japanese porcelain at Bristol Museum & Art Gallery. This two-year post has been funded through Bristol Museums Development Trust, thanks to generous funding from an individual patron.

On graduating in November 2019 with an MA in History of Art/Archaeology of East Asia from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, I returned to my hometown Bristol and began volunteering at Bristol Museum & Art Gallery. I work-shadowed Kate Newnham, Senior Curator, Visual Arts, and helped to curate a display of Japanese China dolls exhibited in the Schiller Gallery in January 2020, and I was involved with object selection, documentation and research of objects, and object layout for the upcoming Japanese netsuke display.

I am delighted to be joining the Bristol Museum team, and am excited by the opportunity to work with the legacy of Irene Finch to build my expertise in Japanese ceramics.

Irene Finch (1918-2019) was a scientist, lecturer and writer with a passion for collecting and researching Japanese ceramics. She was particularly interested in the hundred years between Japan's two great export periods (from 1720 to 1820), a period she termed the 'Lost Century'. She was the author of three books on the subject: *The Lost Century*, *Japanese Shonsui in Evolution*, and *Evolution of the Spiral Fuku* and *Coloured Shonsui in Japan*. She published articles and gave lectures on her research. Pieces from her collection have been exhibited at the National Museums of Scotland, the Museum of East Asian Art in Bath, and the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge.

The Finch collection at Bristol Museum & Art Gallery consists of over one thousand pieces of porcelain, dating from the 17th to the 20th centuries. I have selected two pieces to introduce the collection:

This unusual creature in figure 1 is an East Asian unicorn called the kirin. Perhaps you have encountered this creature before as it appears on the logo of Kirin Ichiban Beer. It has the head of a dragon, the body of a deer, the legs of a horse, and the tail of a lion. It is thought to personify gentleness and goodness and is considered a lucky omen that appears in our world at times of good governance. The arabesque pattern along the rim of the plate is called 'tako karakusa' and translates literally to 'octopus Chinese grass' as it is thought to resemble the suckers of an octopus' tentacle.

The plate in figure 2 is decorated with the so-called 'Deshima Island' pattern, and has a two-tone wave border. This plate was a popular piece also made for the European export market. As implied by the name, it was thought that this scene was a view of Dejima Island, a Portuguese and Dutch trading post located in Nagasaki Prefecture in Japan. However, it is now thought that this design is decorated in the style of the delft pottery decorator Frederik Van Frijtom (1632-1702), and the landscape is more likely to be a scene of Holland.

I look forward to sharing more pieces from the Irene Finch collection with you in a future exhibition.

Amy Raphael Project Curator, Japanese Ceramics



▲ Amy Raphael
© Amy Raphael



▲ Figure 1, plate with dragon design
© Bristol Culture



Figure 2, 'Dejima Island' plate with figures in landscape ▲
© Bristol Culture

Black Lives Matter Commission

On June 7th Bristol city centre saw a major demonstration following the killing of George Floyd by police in America. The event began with a rally and demonstrators were invited as an act of remembrance to take the knee for the nine minutes a policeman's knee was held to Floyd's neck. The demonstration was one of several solidarity marches in the UK and many internationally. In Bristol the march culminated in the contentious statue of Edward Colston being toppled by demonstrators.

Shortly afterwards the museum was contacted by a long-time supporter and donor who said that he wanted to support a new art work to mark the movement. Many Friends will know Simon Baker, who, among many other things, has supported the publishing of the Guide to the Art Galleries, and the catalogue for the Being Human sculpture exhibition. Simon was keen to respond to the tragedy of Floyd's death by commissioning new work from an artist of colour which would respond to the themes of the Black Lives Matter campaign in a positive way – considering issues such as representation in art and culture. The commission would fulfil several aims at once: to address and support the campaign, to create a new work for the collection and to support an artist's practice.

It was agreed that the commission would be by open submission, where artists would be invited to make a proposal. In the summer we put out details to our many partners and stakeholders in the city, from Rising Arts and Black South West Network, to Knowle West Media Centre and Rife magazine. This was in addition to a social media campaign on Twitter and Instagram and on our website.

The response was healthy, with 17 applicants. The selectors were Simon, Dorothy Price, the Professor of Art History at the University of Bristol; Shawn Sobers, film-maker and lecturer in film and photography at University of the West of England; Nosipho Ledwaba-Chapma, from the museum's Young Collective, who developed a podcast on the Egyptian mummy for the Uncomfortable Truths project; and, internally, Fran Coles, head of Conservation; Jackie Winchester, Head of Participation; and myself. We spent a stimulating afternoon discussing the proposals and whether they addressed our brief, how strong they were as artworks, what was distinctive about them and how they considered the theme of representation.

Curators will tell you that commission by open submission is an exciting way in which to find an artist because you will find artists you have never encountered before. There was a feast of talent on show and I was very pleased to get to hear about the practice of the individual artists. But the panel were absolutely unanimous on the selected candidate, Jasmine Thompson. Jazz

may be familiar to users of the museum's website as she has illustrated the Bristol Black History web pages. She is currently also working on designs for the rebranding of Colston Hall for its new identity as the Beacon. So it feels particularly timely to be working with Jazz, she is on the cusp of great things and Bristol Museum & Art Gallery will be part of that. Crucially, the museum will be acquiring the commission, so the project will actually go towards better representing Black art practice in the collection as we are already doing with recent acquisitions such as the Rivington Place Portfolio, drawings by Barbara Walker (as discussed in the last Newsletter and which was supported by the Friends), John Akomfrah, Yinka Shonibare and more.

The commission will be designed for the Front Hall where we hope it will have maximum impact. Watch out for Jazz's work this year: we are discussing what shape it will take and making plans about when to launch it as I write...

Julia Carver Curator, Modern & Contemporary Art



▲ *Here to stay*
© Jasmine Thompson



▲ *Willow*
© Jasmine Thompson



▲ *A mural for The Royal Shakespeare Company*
© Jasmine Thompson

To find the Bristol Black web pages put Bristol Museums Stories into your browser – scroll down to find Bristol's Black History

A Groundbreaking Acquisition

Thanks to the generous financial support of the Friends, the museum has acquired a highly ornate silver and mahogany spade used ceremonially to lay the first rail of the Bristol & North Somerset Railway in 1863.

During the mid-19th century there was a flurry of railway schemes in Bristol in an attempt to break the stranglehold of the GWR on the city and improve rail links to the centre and to the docks. None was successful.

The Bristol & North Somerset Railway was one of these schemes, which even went so far as ceremonially laying track at both ends of the proposed line in 1863. The railway was eventually built, in co-operation with the GWR, but not in its entirety. The section to the docks was never built, and it was 1873 before the quayside was connected to the national network.

The significance of the spade is the proximity to M Shed of the site of the ceremony at which it was used. The Lady Mayoress will have wielded it just opposite where the steam crane stands now, in the midst of what are now our sidings.

Along with the spade there are copies of articles in the *Illustrated London News*, dated 17 October 1863 stating that there were two similar spades manufactured, one used by a Mrs Milward for turning the first turf at Clutton, the second used by Mayoress of Bristol, Mrs Elizabeth Hare, for laying the first rail alongside the Floating Harbour. The spades were exactly alike and the work of Messrs. Mappin Brothers of London Bridge. Each was accompanied by a similarly ornate wheelbarrow, the whereabouts of which are sadly unknown.

The *Illustrated London News* description of the ceremony paints a vivid picture of the excitement on the day: *'The ceremony took place on a piece of ground on the towing path behind St Raphael's church, where a platform had been erected for the accommodation of invited guests. The shipping was also well filled with spectators, and from Mr W Terrell's ropewalk to the edge of the water, with the exception of a small space reserved by the police, was one dense mass of human beings. Rows of flags from various buildings, the rigging of the vessels in the floating harbour, and, in fact, every salient point, imparted animation to the scene. The company was welcomed to the spot by the cheery strains of the artillery band and the merry peals of glorious old St Mary Redcliffe. The work allotted to the Mayoress – which consisted of the filling of a highly ornamental barrow with earth, lifted with a silver spade, and wheeling it along a plank and overturning it – was efficiently performed, and was completed amid the applause of the large assemblage which the event had brought together. A large party afterwards adjourned to Mr Hyde's sail-loft, which had been decorated for the occasion, and where an elegant déjeûner was served, and several speeches were delivered.'*

We are hoping that the spade – which as I write is en route from the auctioneers in Guernsey – will make an interesting addition to the railway displays in M Shed Places gallery.

Andy King Senior Curator for Social, Industrial and Maritime History



▶ The ceremonial spade used to lay the first rail of the Bristol & North Somerset Railway in 1863

© Martel Maides Auctions

▼ Laying the first rail at a spot very close to where the Steam Crane now stands on Princes Wharf

© Martel Maides Auctions



▶ The site as it is today.

© Sue Thurlow

Create Centre news

You will read in the Museum Report that the Culture team has recently taken over responsibility for the Create Centre, housed in B Bond alongside the Bristol Archives. While it will be outside the scope of the activities which the Friends support directly, closer links with the museums and archives will bring benefits to all involved.

Michelle Scoplin, Senior Create Officer, explains here how The Create Centre works:

The Create Centre is Bristol City Council's environmental hub. We provide flexible workspaces to sustainable organisations and charities, encouraging integration and collaboration in an open plan setting. Our dedicated support and competitive rates enable new businesses to establish strong foundations in a landmark known for advocating sustainability. We are currently home to 29 organisations ranging from waste and environmental consultants to cycling charities and education providers. Bristol's Sustainable City team and construction apprenticeship provider, On Site Bristol, are also residents at Create.

Another aspect of the Create Centre is its conference and events facilities. There are four meeting rooms of various capacities and a purpose-built 70-seat lecture theatre, which on occasion has been referred to as our 'hidden gem'. We also have exhibition spaces and a 1000sqft gallery, where artists and activists can highlight environmental issues while showcasing their talents. In recent years the gallery has hosted several art sale fundraisers, including Dancing With Demons for MIND, and Art For Nature for the World Land Trust.

The Ecohome is our permanent exhibition. Demonstrating real life sustainable construction and living principles, it serves as a great resource for our education programme. Since opening, the Ecohome has been used to pilot a number of innovative technologies. Most recently, the council's Smart Homes team installed a state-of-the-art lighting and heating system, a storage battery, and two new kitchen appliances, which can all be controlled remotely via the internet and have the capacity to communicate with the National Grid. Surrounding the home is a garden full of features allowing us to offer volunteering opportunities to conservation groups and members of the public.

The Create Centre aims to promote sustainability, help ethical organisations thrive and support Bristol's like-minded community wherever possible.



▲ **The Create Centre**
© Michelle Scoplin

▼ **The Eco Home**
© Michelle Scoplin



Two new online catalogues



▲ **Village scene in Burma (Myanmar)**
© Bristol Archives, BECC

We are pleased to announce our new online catalogues, full of information about archives relating to Bristol and material in the British Empire & Commonwealth Collection (BECC).

Bristol Archives holds almost two million items documenting the history of the city and surrounding area from the 12th century to the present day. These include minutes, letters, diaries, maps, photographs and films created by many organisations and people. Compared to our previous site, the new catalogue offers users a much improved searching experience, as well as new content and browsing options to cater for all levels of research need. We have also added a further 1,000 digital images from Bristol City Council's Housing department, showing improvements to existing council houses from the 1950s to the 1970s.

The BECC collection, based at Bristol Archives, consists of objects, photographs, films, papers and sound archives reflecting the occupations and interests of mainly white British people living and working in many parts of the former empire during the late 19th and 20th centuries. The new catalogue makes more material available for people worldwide to examine difficult, forgotten or hidden histories from their own perspectives. We have added an initial 15,000 entries, over 7,000 digitised images and (online for the first time) over 200 film clips.

One album of photographs now online contains images by Felice Beato (1832-1909), a commercial Italian-British photographer who spent time in East Asia. He took the photographs in Burma (now Myanmar), probably as the British Army's official photographer in the military campaigns of 1891/92.

The new catalogues are an exciting development and we will be adding more content and audio-visual material as we go. We welcome any feedback at: archives@bristol.gov.uk.

Jayne Pucknell (Archivist) **Malcolm Boyns** (Archivist)

Dementia Friendly Work

Bristol Museum and Art Gallery had just started a new season of Creative Cafés, our pop-up dementia friendly cafés for people living with dementia, their carers and their family members, when the Covid pandemic began in the UK.

At Creative Cafés, participants are supported to visit the galleries, meet curators and artists, and engage in creative activities that encourage communication and new experiences. We have also created ArtBox, an activity box that draws on the sessions in the Creative Cafés and can be taken out to those in care homes and hospital wards who are unable to visit.

When lockdown happened, we collectively asked 'how can we respond?' We had mainly been working with care homes and hospitals that now found themselves at the centre of the crisis, so initially we wanted to send 'gifts' to support and promote conversation in these settings. We ran online workshops for artists and staff to make hangings for windows using origami and words. After checking with our Creative Café participants that they would be able to receive these safely, we packaged them up and sent them to care homes and individuals signed up to the project.

The response was positive, so our next question was: 'What might the next stage of delivery be when the crisis is past its peak?' We then worked with artists to devise projects that could be delivered by post. We also consulted with carers, activity coordinators and hospital staff via Zoom about how to do this in accessible ways.

The result is *Being Human Moves*, a series of seven postcards suggesting movement and dance activities in response to sculptures from the *Being Human* sculpture exhibition and the World Cultures collection. These were created in collaboration with two local dance practitioners and are currently being sent out.

We will print 1,400 postcards to send out to our contacts, on request, and use for outreach workshops. We also hope to draw on our experiences of creating ArtBox and work with Bristol's City Poet Caleb Parkin to create some Being Human poetry packs, which will have a hand-made gift quality and include word and poetry activities and games.

It has been essential to have a creative and collaborative approach where museum staff, carers, artists and volunteers work together to create physical and digital resources that can be sent out into the community. We hope to involve front of house staff and volunteers in making up the packs.

We have lost so much of what is valuable to participants and staff in the Creative Café model, but we are keeping in contact and supporting people living with dementia and carers as best we can – and using our creativity to find solutions to this end.

Ailsa Richardson Engagement officer for older people at Bristol Museum and Art Gallery



▲ Hospital staff exploring the contents of ArtBox, Photo by Polly Garnett
© Bristol Culture

▼ Paper origami cranes included in the packages sent to care homes
© Bristol Culture



To find out more type into your browser: Bristol Museum Creative Cafés

**FRIENDS
OF BRISTOL
MUSEUMS
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ARCHIVES**

**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

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 of the FBMGA or Bristol Culture

**Next issue: copy deadline
24th April 2021 for early
June publication**