

Newsletter

History in action

In this edition

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- behind the scenes at the TV programme *A House through Time*
- painting the famous dockside cranes
- in lockdown making the collections more accessible online

**September 2020
Issue 210**

From the Chairman

Once again, the Newsletter looks rather different from what we are used to, and reflects the fact that we have had a quarter with no Friends events taking place. The Executive Committee have been meeting by Zoom each month, and the Events Group have conducted their business by phone and email. As restrictions are eased and heritage sites begin to open we are now starting to organise some visits for the programme, beginning with Behind the Scenes events. We shall see how these go before progressing to a broader programme, as there is always the possibility that they may have to be cancelled at short notice. As you will read in the Museum Report, it is hoped that some of our own museums' sites will be opening in September, with appropriate precautions in place.

Friends Volunteers

I am pleased to tell you that Richard Avery will be taking over from June Hibberd as our Membership Secretary, and has already had a handover from June ahead of us formalising his appointment at the AGM. He will also continue as our Website Manager.

The hard work and commitment June has put into being our Membership Secretary for 16 years has been impressive, with 600 – 800 members on our books throughout that period and an average of over 50 new members a year. Thank you, June.

Some of you will already have heard the sad news that Wendy Aldridge-Morris, a stalwart of the Events Group for more than 10 years until her retirement in 2018, died in May after a long illness. You can read more about Wendy's contribution to the Friends elsewhere in the Newsletter. She will be very much missed.

British Association of Friends of Museums

The BAFM Annual Conference, which I was looking forward to attending in Dundee in October, has very sensibly been postponed until 2021.

This Newsletter, and the FoBAG Bulletin, have several times either won or been runner up in the annual BAFM awards. Not only is that a well-deserved accolade (no false modesty here!) but it brings with it a small cash prize which is a welcome addition to our funds. This year BAFM have carried out a long-planned review of their awards structure and have decided that their Newsletter Award is no longer a good fit with their objectives. Details of what will replace the award have yet to be announced.

Celebrating Generosity

In April we learned that Jane Biddulph, a member of FoBAG who sadly died in February 2017, had left us a very generous bequest of just over £17,000, which has been added to our fund ring-fenced for Art. I was hoping to include a tribute to Jane in this Newsletter but have so far been unable to learn a lot about her beyond the fact that she was quite chatty with other members on trips – but without revealing much in the way of personal details – and had wide-ranging interests beyond Art. I have not given up, and if you can tell me more about Jane, or send me a photo of her, I would love to hear from you. My contact details are on the back cover.

When we had to postpone the June Bordeaux holiday we faced making a significant loss on unrecoverable payments already made to French suppliers. These losses have been largely offset by the generosity of many of the members who were booked to go on the trip and who offered to donate to the Friends the value of all or part of their deposits. We all owe a big Thank You to those members.

My third story concerns joint members who bought a rather obscure-looking art book at our November sale last year. When they got home they researched their purchase online and realised it was worth considerably more than the £1 they had paid us for it. They put the book up for sale in a specialist auction in Edinburgh, and in April enjoyed watching the bidding live online. They have now very generously sent us a cheque for the net proceeds of £160.



Cover photo: A diver watches as Edward Colston's statue is craned out of the water
© Bristol City Council

▲ The Newsletter Committee meeting on Zoom
Photo Ann Wood

Our Annual General Meeting

The Executive Committee have decided that for the safety of our members this year's AGM we will take place online via Zoom, rather than in person at M Shed. You will find all the relevant details elsewhere in the Newsletter. This approach is supported by the Charity Commission, and has been adopted by many other volunteer organisations such as the National Trust. The museum will help us run our online AGM, so we'll use their professional Zoom licence and Ray Barnett will host the meeting for us to ensure things run smoothly. We understand that meeting online will exclude some of our members, and if that includes you I am sorry. On the other hand, it will allow participation by some members who can join online but do not normally come to a physical AGM in the evening at M Shed, be that by necessity or by choice.

In almost all other respects the AGM will run as it normally does, with the formal business kept as succinct as possible and followed by short informative and entertaining presentations by members of the museum team. However it will be up to you to provide your own wine and nibbles (which Gary Gostelow would have organised had we been in M Shed) – or whatever sustenance you choose.

If by any chance we do not achieve a quorum of members attending we will continue with the meeting and entertainment as planned. The Charity Commission, in this year's special circumstances, will allow the elected committee to later ratify any business as though the AGM had been quorate.

I hope that you will be able to join us on Zoom.

Sue Thurlow Chairman



Wendy Aldridge-Morris

1 October 1945–24 May 2020

Wendy's keen interest in the arts – theatre and visual arts particularly – plus her wide-ranging librarian's knowledge made her an excellent candidate for membership of the Events Group of FBMGA. Her trips were renowned for their interesting and varied content, the excellence of the hotels and the generally relaxed atmosphere throughout, underpinned by her patience and ready sense of humour. All this was the result of careful thought and planning before each event, especially for the holidays, for which she did substantial research. Despite this, she confessed to being anxious during each event in case things went wrong but one would never guess this from her manner: smiling, warm, unruffled and good-humoured. Memorable holidays include overnight stays at Ironbridge and Aylesbury (the latter for contrasting visits to Bletchley Park and Waddesdon Manor) and her successful week-long holidays to Liverpool (her old stamping ground), London, Stratford-upon-Avon and West Sussex. Equally memorable were the day trips to lesser-known places and, thanks to the contact she made with Dr Steven Blake from Cheltenham, the visits to many noteworthy churches in Herefordshire, Worcestershire, Gloucestershire and Somerset accompanied by plentiful supplies of tea and cake.

Wendy joined the Events Group in January 2007 not long after joining FBMGA and was soon organising events for us. Her first trip was to Swansea in October of that year, with the focus on the new National Waterfront Museum. Always ready with suggestions for destinations and exhibitions to visit, she was a pleasure to work with as part of the team and we missed her hugely when she retired from the Events Group in June 2018 after being diagnosed with the blood cancer myeloma. After a brief period of remission Wendy's health deteriorated earlier this year and she died on 24 May. Because of Covid 19 only a small funeral was allowed so the family is planning to hold a memorial event for Wendy in 2021, once restrictions are eased. In the meantime donations may be made to Myeloma UK in her memory.

Mary Bailey

Annual General Meeting

Thursday 24 September 2020 at 4.00 pm,
on Zoom

Enclosed in this newsletter you will find notice of the AGM, which this year will be held online by Zoom. You will also find a nomination form for committee membership and a copy of our annual report. Following the formal business (which will be kept as succinct as possible) there will be short presentations from museum staff about current items of interest, including the research for *A House Through Time*; acquiring, conserving and exhibiting the Colston statue; and the watercolours by the social reformer Mary Carpenter which were included in an album purchased this year with money from the Friends.

Do please join us at the AGM as this is an opportunity for you to express your views. New members are especially welcome. If you think you might like to come, please email Katherine Martin on: secretary@friendsofbmga.org.uk, putting 'AGM link' as the subject – it will not matter if you later find you are unable to make it on the day. The link to the Zoom meeting, and joining instructions, will be sent out soon after 7 September.

Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives

Staff began a phased return to back-of-house working at Bristol Archives from late June and at Bristol Museum & Art Gallery from early July. Similarly, staff have begun returning to back-of-house operations at M Shed and at the Bristol Regional Environmental Records Centre (BRERC) offices at Blaise Museum.

The first public facility to reopen has been the M Shed café from 10 July. As we go to press, we plan to open Bristol Museum and Art Gallery, M Shed and Bristol Archives to the public from early September, subject to Covid-19 restrictions. It remains unlikely that the other museum sites will be able to open this year.

Over the last six months events have moved rapidly and so it has been difficult to plan ahead with certainty and this remains the case. However, the team have adapted well and developed an exceptional online offer, reacted to external events such as the protests around the Colston statue and the BLM movement, coped with the arts and events impact across the city and also managed to carry on with much of the day job. You can read more about some of these activities elsewhere in the newsletter. In addition, some staff have been redeployed to assist with the Council's response supporting the vulnerable around the city.

Staff news

Fiona Francombe, Site Director Bottle Yard Studios, left the Bristol Culture team in July to move to be CEO of the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School. Having established The Bottle Yard Studios as a major force in TV and film, bringing much new investment into the city, Fiona will be sorely missed as a member of the Culture & Creative Industries Senior Leadership Team. With Phillip Walker on secondment to Gloucester City Council until November, that leaves the Senior Leadership Team as Jon Finch, Zak Mensah and Ray Barnett. Two interim appointments have been made to cover different aspects of Fiona's role.

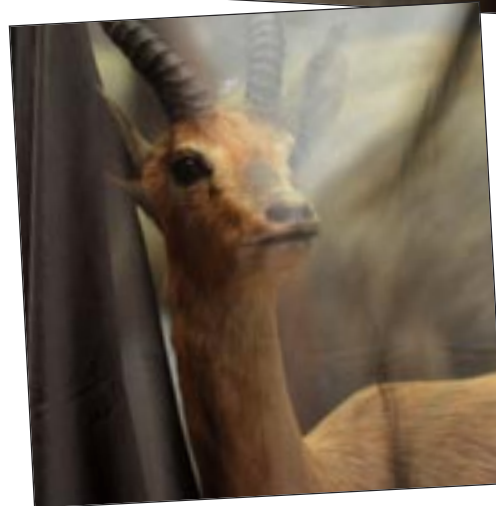
Bristol Museum & Art Gallery

The new BMAG Guidebook has been published during lockdown and we await the opportunity to sell copies to visitors to the site from September.

Extinction Voices was the intervention undertaken from the summer of 2019 in the World Wildlife Gallery which saw species in danger of extinction covered by black veils. This extremely simple but highly effective visual intervention was picked up on and copied by other organisations in the UK and abroad. This display has been shortlisted for the Museums &



▲ **The new Bristol Museum & Art Gallery guide**
© Bristol Culture



▲ **The Extinction Voices intervention is shortlisted for a Museums & Heritage Awards prize**
© Bristol Culture

Heritage Award 2020 – *Limited Budget Project of the Year* alongside 4 other competitors.

These same awards see the 'Leonardo da Vinci: Life in Drawings' touring exhibition, organised by The Royal Collection and which included Bristol Museum & Art Gallery as one of the venues, shortlisted in the Temporary or Touring Exhibition of the Year category. The awards ceremony is usually held in London but this year will be an online event on 22 September.

M Shed and Working Exhibits

Unfortunately, as lockdown eased so M Shed was targeted for some vandalism and graffiti. The release for people who had been cooped up for weeks was no doubt partly to blame, and we have removed and repaired any damage.

This autumn we anticipate we will be able to have the electric cranes repainted, a specialist task which is required every so often to ensure they retain their resistance to the effects of sun and rain year on year. You will find more details elsewhere in the Newsletter. *Mayflower's* boiler should also be reinstated, and work pick up again to get *Henbury* up and running as our other steam loco even though it is unlikely we will carry any fare-paying passengers in 2020.

Ray Barnett Head of Collections and Archives



▲ Uniform of orphans

▼ Photograph of some orphans playing



▼ Photograph of the Infirmary



The George Müller Museum

Monday 16 March 2020

The recently-opened (2019) George Müller Museum at Ashley Down, north Bristol, celebrates the incredible story of how evangelist George Müller cared for and educated thousands of orphans in Victorian Bristol. The museum features multi-media and interactive exhibits, original artefacts, and archive replicas of some of the orphan records.

The museum itself is in one of the original five 'Müller Orphanage Homes' envisioned by George Müller and created between 1849 and 1870. On a lovely sunny March afternoon a group of us were able to visit and learn all about Müller's life, his good works and the transformational work he did for his orphans.

On arrival we entered the lovely bright and airy reception foyer, before being escorted into another light, bright side room for an Introductory Talk given by two young museum guides: Joel and Sarah. Our guides explained that five Ashley Down 'Müller Orphanage Homes' had originally been constructed in the mid-19th century, and had been created by the Prussian visionary philanthropic evangelist George Müller to show the world that 'God not only heard, but answered, prayer'.

We learned that Müller was a man of great faith, and it was interesting to hear that his reasoning behind the Orphanage 'concept' was born out of the dreadful cholera outbreak that ravaged much of early Victorian society during the 1830s. Most interesting was to hear that Müller never made any appeals for money, but simply prayed to God for all that was needed.

During his lifetime he received £1,500,000 in money and gifts in kind - today this would be the equivalent of £100m! It was completely fascinating to learn also that, between them, the five Müller houses held 2,050 children at any one time and ultimately some 17,000 passed through their doors before the buildings were sold to Bristol City Council in 1958.

Once our introductory talk was over, we were free to wander around the rooms of the museum looking at original artefacts including Müller's desk and bible (complete with his own notes). Other fascinating exhibits included replicas of orphan uniforms (to try on...if we wanted). It was also possible to look at some replica archive orphan records, to see what a typical day in the life of an orphan was like, including what school was like for them and where they moved on to after leaving the homes.

The afternoon was a complete delight and we left feeling we owe a great debt of gratitude to Mr Müller and his great work. This treasure trove of an *Ideal Victorian Orphanage* was brought to life for us only due to the sheer diligence and meticulous record keeping insisted upon by Müller, without which we would know so little. Our parting thoughts were that the philanthropic work of this inspirational man served the spiritual wellbeing of thousands of Victorian children. Without him, goodness knows what would have become of them. Our thanks to Carol Ouvry for organising this visit.

Karen Zold

Photos by Catherine Dixon and Karen Zold

Find out more at: <https://www.mullers.org/>

#BlackLivesMatter

Documenting and conserving Bristol's history as it happens.

The Black Lives Matter protests and the toppling of the Edward Colston statue marked a significant moment in our history as a city. Watching the news coverage that day I was aware that it was likely the team would be asked to support the conservation and documentation of items from the protest as part of our contemporary collecting programme.

The first call we got was to help retrieve bin bags full of placards and banners that had been deposited at City Hall after they had been cleared from the protest site.

This had to be done in a COVID-secure way, which added to the challenges, particularly as we had all been home-working for the past 3 months. Luckily Ellie, our paper conservator, and Linda, our Documentation Officer, were able to come in to M Shed to support the curator Amber assess and document the objects.

Working in the Studios it quickly became apparent that a large portion of the placards were damp and needed to be dried out. They were also very smelly. It was important to dry them as quickly as possible to prevent mould developing and causing further issues. This was done by propping the placards against chairs and using paper towels to absorb moisture from particularly saturated examples. As this was being done the placards were also photographed and catalogued to ensure we were able to document this significant day in our city's history. In total the team dried and documented over 550 placards over 2 days.

Then came the decision from the Mayor's Office that the statue of Edward Colston would be removed from the harbour and needed to be stored securely and stabilised. So after a very early start, Linda and I arrived at the harbour to document the removal of the statue and ensure all material which came up with the statue was kept.



▲ Some of the collected Black Lives Matter placards drying out

© Bristol Culture

▼ The Titbits magazine as it was found inside the statue

© Bristol Culture



◀ The Titbits magazine found inside the statue unrolled and dried

© Bristol Culture

▼ Hand-written date on the concealed magazine

© Bristol Culture



Once the statue had been delivered to a secure store I was able to assess it for damage and undertake the first of what will be a number of stabilisation stages. After discussions with Amelie, our objects specialist, we decided that the mud and residues from the harbour could put the statue at risk of long term instability.

Despite only being in the water for a few days, mud had filled the inside and obscured the evidence of what had happened during its journey into the harbour. We spent the morning removing mud from its inside with a hose and extendable brush and gently washing the outside surfaces. The painted graffiti was particularly at risk from the cleaning so this was done very carefully to ensure it wasn't washed off.

The condition, losses and additions tell the story of the protests and what that day meant to the communities that participated. The symbolism of his graffitied statue has been preserved and the significance it has for us is an important story to tell.

We also ended up with two surprise additions. Firstly a bicycle tyre which emerged from the harbour caught on the statue, and then the discovery of a clue to the people who fabricated the statue in Shropshire: an 1895 magazine rolled up inside the folds of his remaining coat tail.

After careful cleaning and drying we found someone had handwritten the names of those who originally fabricated the statue and the date of completion on the inside pages, adding another story to that of the statue: that of the men who made it.

Conservation treatment is ongoing. As the statue has dried the wax coating applied to the statue as part of its maintenance has become brittle and is lifting from the surface in areas. The added paint, too, is cracking and lifting in places. For several weeks the statue was housed in a temporary 'tent' to try and slow the drying and therefore reduce the paint loss.

July saw some of the team return to our conservation studios. Amelie undertook a full condition assessment and created a treatment plan to prevent further deterioration. The next stage of the statue's preservation is underway. We must stabilise the flaking surface layers first, to ensure the statue can be moved without causing any more damage.

Frances Coles

Conservation & Documentation Manager

Colston statue after the first stage of cleaning ▶

© Bristol Culture



Conserving M Shed's cargo cranes

Perhaps the most iconic, and certainly the largest, objects in Bristol Museums' collections are the four electric cranes standing outside M Shed, overlooking the old City Docks. Built in the 1950s, the cranes have borne witness to over a half century's worth of change to the area. Far from the cultural and leisure destination it is today, the Harbourside then was a bustling port trading with the world.

There were once eight cranes serving L and M Sheds, and over 40 across the floating harbour. Built by Stothert & Pitt in Bath, these four cranes (along with the Fairbairn steam crane) are the last survivors and they offer a tangible link to the city's 1950s trading heyday. Stothert & Pitt were pioneers of the use of electricity to drive cranes and came to specialise in dockside models like these – at one time, almost every port in the world had Stothert & Pitt cranes.

The cranes were used to lift cargo weighing up to three tons on and off ships to and from the transit sheds. Goods varied widely but often included condensed milk, barrels of Guinness, butter, bacon and cabbages. M Shed's cranes were the last to work with regular cargo before the closure of the City Docks to commercial traffic: they helped to offload the very last Baltic trader which visited the port in November 1974. Shortly after, the power to them was cut and they became industrial relics.

After the closure of the City Docks the remaining cranes were sold for scrap. Recognising that the cranes were an important link to Bristol's past, the pressure group City Docks Ventures was formed to buy back two of the cranes, and Bristol City Council bought the remaining two. All four cranes passed into the care of Bristol Museums in 1989, as part of Bristol Industrial Museum.

In 2001, the museum's volunteers began a restoration project, getting Crane 31 ready to 'act' in the quayside performance of the play *Up The Feeder, Down The Mouth And Back Again*, an open-air musical charting the history of the docks. But it was not until 2011, over 35 years after their power was cut, that all the cranes would move under their own power again. The Friends kindly supported this restoration of the cranes, both financially and in volunteer hours, including a substantial donation to restore the electricity supply that enables them to operate. On each of the cranes the entire cab was rebuilt, window frames were replaced and the machinery underwent major refurbishment.

Since then, the cranes have been part of the working exhibits at M Shed. Over the past few years they have hosted thousands of visitors, including newlyweds. They have danced for the people of Bristol and they even talk to each other! Ordinarily they would be running throughout weekends across the summer, offering rides on the cranes and giving visitors the opportunity to discover the vital part they played in the working life of the dockside. While the Covid-19 pandemic has meant that the cranes have remained immobile so far this summer, it also offers a window of opportunity to preserve them so they can run for many years to come.

The team of volunteers at the museum put in thousands of hours each year in restoring the cranes, keeping them in working order, and sharing their enthusiasm with members of the public both in the cab on visiting days, and on the ground below. However, there are some jobs they simply cannot undertake and it is becoming apparent the cranes need a full repaint in order remain operational in the long term.

Frances Coles, our Conservation & Documentation Manager, has recently undertaken an inspection of the cranes and her report confirms that the cranes are showing significant signs of deterioration that requires urgent conservation. Riveted steel structures such as these depend upon a well-applied, unbroken paint scheme to protect them from corrosion. If rust is allowed to form and build up between mating riveted surfaces, it will eventually blow the joint apart.



▲ A shot of the cranes and boats from the water.

Photo by Chris Bahn

Andy King gives a young family the chance to drive a crane.

© Bristol Culture

Failures like this compromise the integrity and safety of the crane. Their repair would be considerably more expensive than maintaining a protective paint coating.

The necessary work involves the preparation of the surfaces, followed by the application of specialist primer and paint to all four cranes. Additionally, certain surfaces at lower levels will be coated with anti-climb paint to avoid vandalism. The wooden cabs will be coated with a suitable water-based wood finish. An experienced team will need to complete the work and supply specialist cherry pickers to reach the highest points.

The height of the structures and their position on a public walkway alongside a busy waterway mean there are many obstacles in the way of planning their repainting. With the harbourside likely to remain quieter over the coming months, this is the ideal time to begin tackling the issue.

The work will cost in the region of £60,000 with Bristol City Council providing £22,090 towards the total. Meanwhile, Bristol Museums Development Lead, Katie Lee, is working hard with Andy King to secure grants from trusts and foundations.

We are also running a public fundraising appeal to help support this work. The cranes are a landmark of Bristol. They have inspired artists, photographers and even tattooists. We hope that the public will be moved to support the painting of the cranes, securing these benevolent sentinels a place on the harbourside for many years to come.

If you would like to support the conservation or learn more about the campaign simply search 'Bristol Cranes' on JustGiving.com. If you have any questions, or have any memories or stories about the cranes you would like to share, please get in touch with Beth Cutter, who is currently on cutterbeth@gmail.com while working from home.

Beth Cutter Individual Giving Officer

Andy King Senior Curator – Social, Industrial & Maritime History and Working Exhibits



▼ *Newlyweds are hoisted above the harbourside by a crane.*

Photo by Bob Edwardes



Bristol Archives and 'A House Through Time'

'An alternative history of Britain contained within the walls of a single house'.



At 9pm on Tuesday 26th June the first episode of a new series of the BBC's *A House Through Time* aired. Bristol Archives staff had waited almost a year to find out which archive documents had made the final edit. This third series focused on a house in the Redcliffe area of the city and the programme's researchers had made extensive use of our holdings. Previous series had examined the histories of houses in Liverpool and Newcastle, demonstrating how one building could reveal multitudes about the social and economic development of a city. However, when research for this series began no one could have anticipated the circumstances into which the final programme would arrive: during a summer when viewers were spending rather more time in their homes than usual, and Bristol's history was suddenly making national news.

In the programme, David Olusoga told the stories of the house's residents from the early 18th century to the present day. But how did he have a copy of the baptism record of an abandoned baby, as he sat on the doorstep where she had been found? Standing in the former Magistrate's Court, how had he got hold of the details of someone's shady business dealings? The short answer: a large and hardworking research team and hundreds of hours spent trawling through archives.

The series production team contacted Bristol Archives in spring 2019. A house, 10 Guinea Street, had been chosen and we were asked to keep its location secret. A different research team worked on each of the four episodes; some were

▲ Bill of lading for the ship *Hambleton*, 1720. Bills of lading give information about the cargo and destination port of ships leaving Bristol. David Olusoga examined a duplicate of this document while on board ship in the Bristol Channel in the first episode. Joseph Smith, a sea captain, lived at 10 Guinea Street in the early 18th century.

© Bristol Culture

▼ Panorama taken from the Port of Bristol Handbook, 1886. The image was used in episode 3 to show the industrial development of the city in the 19th century.

© Bristol Culture



generalist researchers whereas others were specialists in genealogy or house history. Using standard sources, such as census returns and civil registration records, they were able to trace the occupants, and their families, servants and lodgers, back into the mid-19th century.

To more fully understand the lives of these people, and to go further back into the 18th century, the researchers were reliant on records held at Bristol Archives. These included land tax returns, court, hospital and parish records, as well as building plans, maps, photographs and deeds. The expertise of the Archives team was called upon to search for and retrieve these records. The researchers visited several times to view numerous documents. Between and after visits, Archives staff would follow up various leads by checking documents and advising which record series or sources might help further a line of enquiry.

Although the series was packed with drama and intrigue, the stories only reflect a fraction of the thorough and painstaking research into hundreds of individual lives. Episodes sometimes quickly skipped through generations before alighting on one or two people. For each resident not mentioned in the programme, a researcher would often have spent hours determining whether their life was sufficiently interesting to warrant screen time. Conversely, the most straightforward check of a document could yield a startling tale. On one occasion, a simple request from a researcher to look up an entry in the case book for Bristol Lunatic Asylum (now Glenside Museum) led to the discovery of a letter from a patient to Queen Victoria. The letter, and the case book into which it was pinned, were filmed for the second episode.

Bristol Archives was just one component in a network of local and national collections, online databases, and subject specialists consulted by the team. As well as specific research about individual residents, the researchers also gathered contextual historical information about Redcliffe and the city. Andy King, Senior Curator of Social, Industrial & Maritime History at Bristol Museums, helped with information about the city's role in the international slave trade and the importance of the tobacco industry in the 19th century.

Filming took place at various locations across the city and, of course, within the house itself. Archives staff chaperoned original documents on location at Glenside Museum and at Guinea Street, as well as supervising filming in our own strongrooms. We began the year excited about the programme and planning what public activities and events we would run to coincide with it. And then we all know what happened next...

With staff working from home, our revised engagement plan focused on 'live tweeting' images of archive documents during each episode as well as giving an online talk about house history research. Anticipating some increased interest, we revised and updated our source guides for buildings research. The first episode garnered the highest TV viewing figures on the night. Thanks in no small part to David's generous re-tweeting of our slightly frantic Twitter efforts, we gained over 500 new Twitter followers over the course of the series. Due to high demand the online talk was repeated and attended by participants from as far afield as New Zealand and the US. Although the sight of B Bond in the opening titles reminded us how much we were missing the archives, the overwhelmingly positive response to the programme gave us hope. When we reopen to the public in September we look forward to helping all these new house historians with their own research. If their findings are half as fascinating as those of 10 Guinea Street they will be in for a treat.

Anne Lovejoy Senior Archivist,
Bristol Archives



▲ **David Olusoga at Glenside Museum, in the former hospital chapel. The case book contains patient William Martin's letter to Queen Victoria.**

© Bristol Culture

If you are interested in starting your own house history research, have a look at our source guide: <http://archives.bristol.gov.uk/Sourceguides.aspx>

All four episodes of *A House Through Time* are available on BBC iPlayer: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episodes/b09l64y9/a-house-through-time>

David Olusoga's interview with Bristol Festival of Ideas about the programme can be viewed on their website: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ep5albHUo9Q>

Pillars of Truth

Bristol is a city of slow release. It reveals its wonders steadily over many years to its fortunate residents. I want to remind you of the Bristol Nails outside the Exchange in Corn Street, which we all rather take for granted. We forget that the four bronze pillars are 400 years old and we repeatedly misrepresent their original function. Their fascinating historical associations are little known and their artistic quality is greatly undervalued.

In 1665, half a century after they had been erected, a visiting wine merchant described the nails as being 'for peoppell to leane uppon, and to talke, tell money, sign anie writings or the like'. Then, they were outside the Tolzey, a place of business and adjudication for Bristol's merchants, and very close to the High Cross, so at the very heart of mediaeval Bristol. In 1807, Robert Southey, Bristol-born poet laureate, noted that newspapers were being sold from one of the pillars and a cage of goldfinches from another. By Southey's day, they had been moved a few yards down Corn Street and had become ornaments outside John Wood's magnificent Exchange and a convenience for itinerant market traders. And such they are today, and alarmingly so, for serious damage is being done to them.

The first of the pillars on the left as you look at the Exchange, is also the earliest and may date from 1595, a year after its probable donor, Robert Kitchen, died. Kitchen, from Kendal in Westmorland, had become a very wealthy merchant, trading largely with Spain and Portugal. He entertained the Earl of Leicester, Elizabeth I's favourite, in great state in his house in Small Street. It was a sort of mini royal-progress and when Leicester went on to Bath, he demanded that his bed and bedding should be sent on to him. Kitchen's executors also presented a most magnificent silver-gilt ewer and basin to the city. The basin was to be stolen from the Mansion House in 1831 during the Bristol Riots. The thief, John Ives, chopped it into 167 pieces, which he offered as scrap to a local goldsmith, Mr Williams. Mr Ives was transported for 14 years and Mr Williams, in due course, put the jigsaw back together on a silver backing. But Kitchen's memorial in St Stephen's church is remarkably modest. It is a painted plaster relief pretending to be engraved brass and it tells us that he and his wife 'TO THE POORE GAVE ALL THEIR GOODES AWAY'.

The second pillar was erected by Kitchen's executors in 1630, some thirty-six years after his death and it somewhat immodestly names the four executors.

The inscription on the third pillar records both the maker and the donor: 'THOMAS HOBSON OF BRISTOL MADE ME and NICHOLAS CRISP OF LONDON GAVE ME'. We know nothing more of Thomas Hobson, perhaps both the designer and the bronze founder, but the second pillar is so similar that we may assume that it is also by him. Nicholas Crisp, the donor, was a member of the Salters Company in London. Amongst the inscriptions are the words 'HE SAVED MY LIFE FROM DESTRVCTION' and the implication that this pillar was presented to the city 'IN REMEMBRANCE OF GODS MERCY IN ANNO DOMINI 1625'. That date suggests that the gift was in thanksgiving for his escape from one of London's most fearful epidemics of bubonic plague.

The fourth and last of the pillars was the gift of a Bristol merchant, George White in 1631 and it commemorates the donor's brother, Dr Thomas White. Part of the reverend gentleman's considerable fortune was amassed



▲ *The Exchange, Corn Street, c.1825, engraving by C. Lander*
© Bristol Culture



▲ *First bronze pillar, c.1595, bearing Robert Kitchen's coat of arms; Corn Street, Bristol*

Photo by Francis Greenacre

Silver gilt ewer and basin, London hall-mark, 1595; City of Bristol (Mansion House)

© Bristol Culture





▲ **Memorial to Alderman Robert Kitchen and his wife; St Stephen's Church, Bristol**
Photo by Francis Greenacre

▶ **Second bronze pillar, 1630, erected by Robert Kirchen's executors; Corn Street, Bristol**
Photo by Francis Greenacre



▶ **Third bronze pillar, 1625, given by Nicholas Crisp, made by Thomas Hobson; Corn Street, Bristol**
Photo by Francis Greenacre



from an unfamiliar source: his many benefices in London, Oxford and Salisbury. A famous preacher and a patriotic Protestant, he spoke against such excessive indulgence as the use of down beds and the payment of cooks to produce elaborate meals. He founded an alms-house here and, amongst many other gifts, left money for the improvement of Bristol's roads.

The inscription around the outer rim is revealing and tells us much about the original purpose of the pillars. It begins with the words 'SO WAS THE WORKE OF THE PILLARS FINISHED', indicating that the Nails were part of a finite plan. The number of the pillars, four, had particular religious significance. In Exodus we read that Moses received commands from God to construct a shrine, or tabernacle with four bronze pillars. The inscription goes on to underline the religious significance of the pillars. It states: 'THE CHURCH OF THE LIVING GOD IS THE PILLAR AND GROUND OF THE TRUETH'. Thus, the Bristol Nails were far more than utilitarian table-tops on which merchants completed their deals. These four costly bronze columns proclaimed the merchants' shared Christian faith, which underwrote all their transactions. A deal struck over one of the pillars was similar to the ancient custom of touching an altar. It made an oath inviolable and as eternally binding as swearing on a bible. And it was a deal struck in a very public place. So, Bristol's unique bronze pillars were for the sealing of deals, not, as we have come to believe, for the exchange of money.

Furthermore, these are major works of art. Their grand, confident but refined baluster profiles are early examples of English Baroque and, as such, very rare; perhaps not quite as swagger and bulbous as Gian Lorenzo Bernini's baldacchino in St Peter's Rome, but of exactly the same period.

Francis Greenacre

▶ **Fourth bronze pillar, 1631, gift of George White; Corn Street, Bristol**
Photo by Francis Greenacre



Swivel to digital!

As lockdown began in March, the museum sites closed and visits to our websites plummeted. The question facing the museums and archives was how best to continue our work and respond to the new needs of audiences whilst physically apart from collections, sites and people?

Nearly all staff were working from home using a somewhat chequered selection of digital equipment and broadband. Some colleagues were redeployed within the council to help with the city's response to Covid-19, particularly in the Communities and Communications teams, so we had fewer hands on deck. However we knew we had the potential to draw on existing expertise and the good work that had already been done across the service in terms of digital resources.

A small working group was set up to update the digital strategy and plan our new online offer. With lockdown our audience profile had changed and we identified the following priority groups: families at home with school-age children (4 - 18) and people of all ages confined to their homes who might be bored/lonely/curious and looking for new opportunities for leisure, learning and wellbeing.

We divided our *Culture at Home* programme into three working strands, with a couple of staff working on each. The *Share* strand aims to highlight our museum and archive collections through web articles (blogs), online exhibitions and posts on social media. The *Explore* strand provides fun digital activities for children (particularly 5 – 11 years) and their families to foster learning and creativity. Finally, the *Create* strand provides an online programme of events from talks to digital festivals for a range of audiences, with local people involved in delivery. Colleagues from right across the service worked up ideas for digital content, a testament to their creativity and passion.

In June our Events Officer, Karen Garvey, put on a week-long digital festival, *World in Bristol*, to celebrate the city's rich cultural diversity. The programme included daily live dance classes from flamenco, through African and Tibetan dance to Bollywood, which were recorded and have been watched 5,000 times. Talks by curators explored international and multi-cultural aspects of the collections such as Roman presence in the Bristol area, the Romany wagon and the Broughton Herbarium from Jamaica as well as the contribution of the museum's first curator, Johann Samuel Müller, who moved to Bristol from Prussia in 1801. You can read more about *World in Bristol* in Becky Peters' article elsewhere in this newsletter.

We have increased the frequency of talks by curators and archivists from monthly to weekly, sometimes more. Talks on *The Inhabitants of the Georgian House* by curator, Linda Gordon, and *House Research from Home* by archivist Anne Lovejoy which chimed with the current interest in Bristol's 18th century history and the BBC's *House Through Time* programme drew large audiences. Over 500 people attended the first 11 talks. About a quarter of these completed a short survey which revealed that 9% of attendees had never previously visited our sites; 35% had never attended our events; and 85% would be keen for digital events to continue once the current situation has eased.

On our websites there is new series of blogs – articles written by individuals to present relevant aspects of our work as well as fresh online exhibitions and 'stories'. Colleagues have been very flexible, working hard to provide digital content in new ways.

With the Black Lives Matter protests and toppling of the Colston statue on 7 June, we saw a huge spike in interest from people worldwide with over 30,000 visits to our websites in 24 hours, particularly to pages relating to Bristol's involvement in the Transatlantic Slave Trade. In the past few weeks the website has been partially redesigned to enable people to find the different types of online content more easily, including digital exhibitions and collections online: www.bristolmuseums.org.uk.



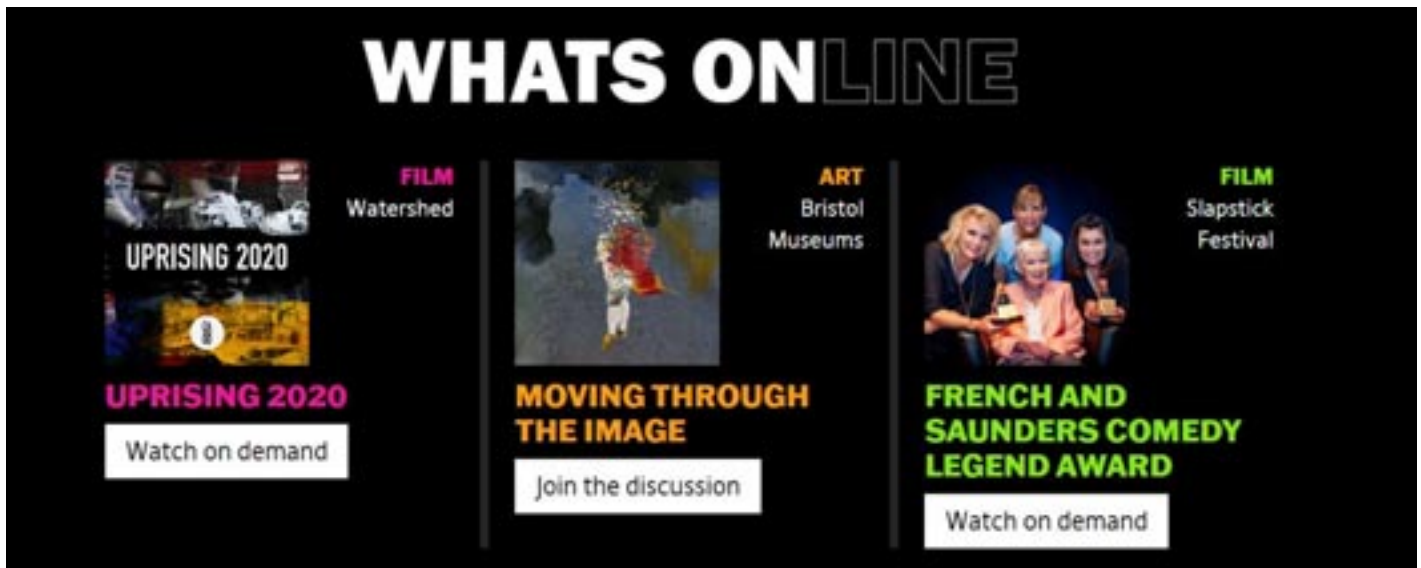
▲ Bristol Arts Channel banner
© Bristol Arts Channel



▲ Linda Gordon giving a Late Lunch talk on Zoom
© Bristol Arts Channel



▲ An image from the 360 degree tour of the Red Lodge
© Bristol Arts Channel



▲ *Bristol Arts Channel headline picks including video stream and blog by Marcin and Weronika, young people working with us on our digital programme*
© Bristol Arts Channel

Many more people have started following our social media accounts such as Twitter and Facebook and a few weeks ago we reached the magic number of 10,000 followers on Instagram which will enable us to do a lot more on this platform.

Also in June we took part in Bristol Arts Channel, not a TV channel but a city-wide digital programme initiated by the Watershed and Bristol Old Vic. It brought together venues and artists to provide a menu of arts in Bristol to enjoy from home: bristolartschannel.com. The channel provided us with a timely platform on which to list our digital material including streams of video works in the museum's collection, talks and 360 degree tours of Georgian House and Red Lodge. Researchers at the University of Bath are studying the success of the project. Bristol Arts Channel brought us closer to colleagues at other Bristol venues and we are exploring how we might work on city-wide programmes in future.

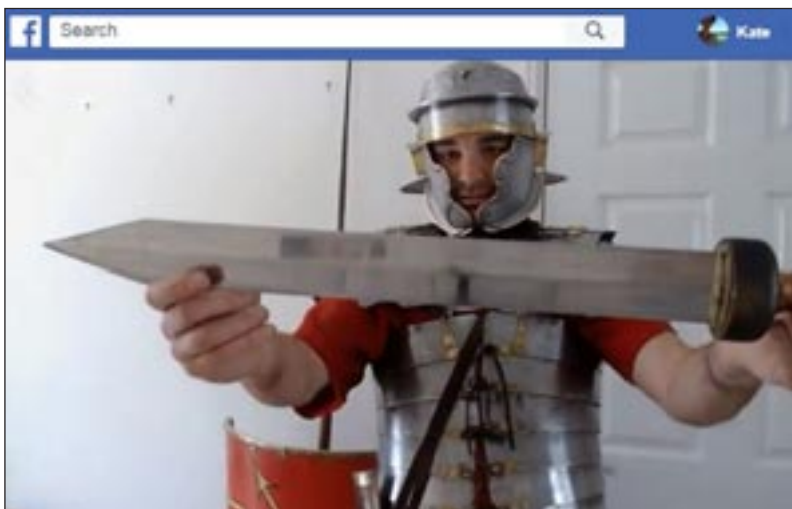
In addition we are contributing to national digital platforms, for example Art UK where Julia Carver has placed articles about our sculpture collection and Jenny Gaschke has made digital 'curations' from Bristol's art collection: artuk.org. Colleagues in the digital team, Roisin Daly and Rachel Cartwright, are building a presence for our museums on Google Arts & Culture to reach out to global audiences: artsandculture.google.com.

In July, the museum hosted a digital *Festival of Archaeology* with events and activities for all ages from talks by university professors to a video showing how to dress your teddy in a toga, with further digital talks and events on a range of subjects taking place over the summer. Look out for *Brizzle week* in September, an irreverent celebration of Bristol and Bristolians.

Over the past few months we have all been on a steep learning curve. The lockdown

provided an unparalleled opportunity to experiment. It showed that close collaboration with colleagues and in-house expertise is as vital as ever. There is much data analysis still to be done but it is becoming clear that we have reached new digital audiences and increased engagement levels with existing ones. In just one example, we have a regular talks attendee who tunes in from Azerbaijan! Thank you to the Friends for your ongoing support, which has contributed so much to what we can offer to our digital visitors today. And thanks to those who have participated in and helped promote the digital programme. We look forward to seeing you online and in person again soon!

Kate Newnham Senior Curator, Visual Arts



▲ *A member of the Ermine Street Guard explains Roman weapons as part of the online Festival of Archaeology*
© Ermine Street Guard

Further responses to the online survey about our digital programme would be extremely useful: www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/NR7WYXS

'The World in Bristol' Festival

The World in Bristol festival is an annual event that showcases the rich diversity of the city's communities. This year, lockdown restrictions prevented the festival being held in the open air so Bristol Museum & Art Gallery took the celebrations online. This was our first ever online festival.

Held at the end of June, *The World in Bristol* celebrated Bristol's different cultures with a week of online activities including dance tutorials, world recipes, crafts and lots more. Visitors were able to join live-streamed dance workshops each day and learn new moves from Asia, Africa, Europe and South America. All of these sessions have had hundreds of viewings each with some reaching 1,300 views.

A new podcast from award-winning local filmmaker Clive Smith, with an introduction by the Mayor of Bristol, Marvin Rees, highlighted the stories behind St Paul's African-Caribbean legends of martial arts and what it was like to grow up in the city during the early 1970s. The history of an Italian family who lived in Bristol over 100 years ago was told by curator Kate Newnham in a free online talk. She revealed why the Policellas came here and whether Maria Policella really wore the ice-cream seller's outfit on display in M Shed. On Instagram, the museum collaborated with 91 Ways (visit: <https://91ways.org/about-us/>, to find out more about this amazing group which promotes the uniting power of food) and experimented with sharing delicious family recipes from around the world filmed by Bristol community cooks. The museum also shared the progress of a mammoth digital Bristol quilt on Pinterest. Each square features the word 'Hello' in one of the 91 languages used in Bristol.

Finally, we wrote a blog about Bristol's diverse population, created family activities relating to world cultures and our curatorial and front-of-house teams made films about some of the objects in our collections with a global connection. This all took place over different social media platforms including Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, SoundCloud and Instagram, and was a brilliant experiment in responding to lockdown by working in new ways, expanding our digital programme, reaching new audiences (some accessing from overseas!) and celebrating Bristol's diversity.

Becky Peters Senior Officer, Exhibitions
& Events



▲ **Local film-maker Clive Smith**
Photo by Clive Smith

▼ **One of the live-streamed dance workshops**
© Bristol Culture



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