

Newsletter

Gromit Unleashed Again!

In this edition

- Gromit Unleashed 3 Trail artworks
 - The British Association of Friends of Museums conference at M Shed
 - Exhibitions, Acquisitions and Members' trips



From the Chair

Bring Turner Home campaign

Those of you for whom we have an email address are already aware of the Friends support for the Bring Turner Home campaign – aimed at acquiring Turner's newly-discovered, earliest-exhibited oil painting – of Hotwells. Many of you will have seen the extensive coverage in the local and national media. The £100k plus raised in just a week through a highly successful public online crowdfunder, plus a substantial contribution committed by the Friends after an extraordinary meeting of the trustees, unlocked significant further promises from national funders such as the Art Fund – but sadly at the auction the museum was the underbidder, and the painting has gone elsewhere. The other trustees and I were excited to be working with the museum team on such a high-profile potential acquisition, and I felt privileged to accompany the curators (at no expense to the Friends) to view the painting in a private room at Sotheby's ahead of the sale. Phil Walker, Head of Culture and Creative Industries, has written about the campaign from the museum's viewpoint later in this issue.



▲ J M W Turner's 'The Rising Squall' at Sotheby's visited by Sue Thurlow with the curators ahead of the sale

© Kate Newnham

British Association of Friends of Museums (BAFM) Annual Conference 2025 – at M Shed, 4 October

It is not too late to book your place on the 2025 BAFM Conference which we are honoured to host this year at M Shed. There is an article later in this issue outlining details of the programme for the day and the speakers, and a booking form is enclosed. It will be a particularly busy and interesting weekend at M Shed as the conference coincides with the annual Docks Heritage Weekend – in partnership with SS Great Britain and Underfall Yard – with lots of action on and around the quayside on both days.

Digital Newsletter Trial

A big thank-you to those who let us know your views on offering an electronnewsletter option for members. We had an excellent response rate of 30% of the membership, with 91 preferring or willing to receive their Newsletter

Cover photo: Yellow Submarine Gromit, with paintwork designed by Paul McCartney (on a sculpture by Nick Park) arriving by steam train

©Sue Thurlow

electronically, and 75 preferring the hard copy. For our next issue we will therefore trial a simple version of a PDF attachment to an email sent to all those who showed an interest in the digital option. As this is a trial, those members will also continue to receive a paper copy in the post. If the trial proves to be successful, we will look into the possibility of offering an electronic version in an email rather than through an email attachment to all those interested.

For the foreseeable future the paper version, which so many of us enjoy, will continue to be produced and you do not need to take any action to continue to receive your printed copy by post as usual.

Gromit Unleashed 3

I am sure many of you will have been out and about over the summer – perhaps with younger family members – tracking down the Gromit Unleashed 3 Trail artworks. The event was launched in July with the arrival by steam train outside M Shed of the colourful sculptures of Wallace, Gromit, Feathers McGraw, Norbot the gnome and Shaun the Sheep ahead of their distribution across the city and beyond over the following few days. Of course, one of the statues, Phileas Fogg, did not have far to go – it was installed in Museum Square, just outside M Café – and the Museum and Art Gallery played host to Casperis Gromit.

Sad News – Monica Freeman

I am sorry to share with you the sad news that Monica Freeman has died. She was a very active member of Friends of Bristol Art Gallery and, when I first met her at the start of merger discussions between FoBAG and FoBMGA, was one



▲ Gromits and pals arriving via Bristol Harbour Railway at M Shed
©Sue Thurlow

Jolly Roger Norbot on Pyronaut with her crew
©Sue Thurlow



of the FoBAG trustees. She quickly embraced the merger as a way of strengthening our combined support for the museums and was an enthusiastic and very helpful advocate for the merged organisation. She had been unwell for the last few years and unable to come to events but will be remembered fondly by her many friends from both heritages.

Bristol Harbour Festival

During the Harbour Festival weekend in July we held a very successful sale of cakes, preserves and jigsaws in the ground floor of the museum stores at L Shed, taking well over £1,000 over the two days. That was only possible with the support of a small army of volunteer members who contributed jigsaws, home-made cakes and marmalade, and those (often the same people) who help sell and at the same time raise the profile of the Friends in a very public way. I hope all the members who worked to make the weekend such a success enjoyed it as much as I did.

Museums + Heritage Awards – the Oscars of the museum world!

We brought you news in our last edition that M Shed had been shortlisted for a Museums + Heritage Award in the category of Permanent Exhibition of the Year for the Protest exhibition at M Shed, for which the Friends provided a significant share of the funding. The winner of the Award was later announced to be Showtown Blackpool, the town's museum of fun and entertainment, but simply being nominated is a vote of confidence in Bristol's Protest exhibition and raises Bristol Museums' profile on the national stage.

Sue Thurlow Chair

Annual General Meeting

Saturday 25 October 2025 - 2.30 pm
at M Shed

Enclosed in this newsletter you will find a formal notice of the AGM and a nomination form for committee membership. Following the business (which will be kept to a minimum) there will be short presentations from museum staff about some of their current projects. We shall conclude with tea and cake.

Do please come along to the AGM as we like to get feedback from our members and this is a good opportunity to give us your views.

Election of Executive Committee officers and members

The current officers of Friends of Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives are: Sue Thurlow, Chair; Katherine Martin, Secretary; Robert Walters, Treasurer; and Richard Avery, Membership Secretary.

The remaining elected members of the committee are: Lucy Bailey, Mary Bailey, Ray Barnett, Clive Burlton, Susan Hibberd, Carol Lear, Toby Pinn and Steve Sparks.

All elected members stand down at the AGM and most can be likely to stand for re-election. There are twelve members in all. If you are interested in standing, please complete the nomination form enclosed and return it to the Secretary.

Bristol Museums, Galleries and Archives

Staffing News

I am pleased to let you know that Elisa Ricci has been appointed on a nine-month secondment as Curator of Applied Art to cover Amber Turner's maternity leave. Elisa will be working on the refreshment of the Glass Gallery, to which the Friends have kindly committed funds. Elisa had been working as a Visual Arts Documentation Assistant on a project to digitise artworks and we are now recruiting to backfill that role so the project can continue.

In early June Grace Kelsey was appointed as Senior Campaigns and Marketing Officer. This is a new role within the council's Policy, Strategy and Communications team at City Hall, but is primarily focused on working closely with the Museums team to promote our venues and events.

Events and Exhibitions

Knowle West Dreams

In June we launched Knowle West Dreams at Filwood Community Centre. The project is inspired by the 2024 Clive Smith film about Guy Bailey, a key player in the Bristol Bus Boycott, commissioned by the museum and screened at BMAG in 2024.

Through film screenings and activities, we are inviting people to reflect on their own aspirations while exploring a shared history of our city, learning about other community experiences and role models, and establishing and growing local connections.

As part of the project, we have been running Dream Workshops in Filwood to capture people's hopes and visions. The people involved really enjoyed the event with some travelling from Easton to be there. Feedback was really

touching and demonstrated a strong feeling for place and community.

People's Dreams included:

- 'That history from lived experience continues to be shared and valued by all including experts and professionals'
- 'I want to see love and justice grow in Knowle West and across Bristol – and to write to help younger people and other towns and cities dream similarly.'
- 'I am just hoping to see a lot of changes before I pass on – a high standard of living with plenty going on for Knowle West.'
- 'I would like to see local artists and musicians more connected and for there to be more local collaborative working.'
- 'To live in a happy and vibrant place with lots of things to do in the community.'

Artists Edson Burton and Claudia Collins will be transforming these dreams into a collaborative art piece, which will be unveiled at our final event in October. This project could only happen thanks to Bristol Museums Development Trust whose support of both the film and the Knowle West Dreams project has been invaluable.

Gender Stories exhibition

BMAG until 12 October

Feedback for the *Gender Stories* exhibition has been very positive. Visitors to the exhibition have made their views about gender very clear ... we have more in common than the media would have us believe.

Thanks to Grace Kelsey, advertising to support the exhibition is being seen city-wide, including on bus stops, and a targeted social media campaign is drawing visitors



◀ A film showing the 2024 Clive Smith film about Guy Bailey, a key player in the Bristol Bus Boycott, as part of the Knowle West Dreams project

© Bristol Culture/Ibolya Feher



from further afield. Brighton's Scenemag recently picked up news of the *Gender Stories* exhibition, as did the BBC.

The accompanying public programme at BMAG includes:

- LGBTQIA+ tours of the museum with local resident Jack Shoulder, who has created similar tours for the V & A and is one half of the irreverent duo, Museum Bums. The first tour in July sold out quickly. There are further tours on 6 and 13 Sept, and 4 Oct.
- Babbers of Comedy on 11 September will be a night of stand-up comedy with three of Bristol's finest female comedians: Dani Johns, Capriella Monique and Jasmine Darling.
- *Gender Stories* Panel Discussion on 24 September will feature Sid Boyer (Chair, exhibition adviser, agency producer for Rising Arts Agency and Off the Record), Cheryl Morgan (trans historian and senior trainer & consultant for the Diversity Trust); Ben Akers (founder of Talk Club – a support group for men's mental health); Sasha Acheson (former firefighter and former Bristol Bears Women and England international rugby player, now head

AGM and Curators' Talks

Saturday 25 October

Enclosed with this Newsletter you will find the formal notifications for our AGM at M Shed on 25 October at 2.30. As usual we are aiming to keep the AGM itself as succinct as possible, so that formal and essential business takes not much more than half an hour. The AGM will be followed by a less formal Q&A, some interesting short talks from the members of the museums team, and finally tea and cake. It is an opportunity for you to hear about and contribute to the inner workings of the Friends, learn more about what's happening at the museums, and meet up with Friends old and new. There's no need to book, just turn up. I look forward to seeing you there.

Sue Thurlow Chair

◀ *As visitors leave, they are each invited to add their response to the Gender Stories exhibition in the form of a coloured ribbon*

© Bristol Culture

coach of Bristol Bisons RFC) and Dr Sarah Jones, (social and cultural historian of gender and sexuality at the University of Bristol).

- 9 October will see a special event with international artist and performer Del LaGrace Volcano
- A Queer Writing Workshop with writers Tom Marshman and Brenda Callis on 11 October brings things to a close.
- Talk Club, a support group for men's mental health, is also being invited to hold sessions at the museum on an ongoing basis.

Other Upcoming Events

As we go to press final details are yet to be announced, but keep an eye out for:

- Black History Month in October
- Wildlife Photographer of the Year at BMAG in the autumn
- Following the success of the Erased from the Face of the Earth photographic exhibition, highlighting the impact of the ongoing war in Ukraine, we shall close the year with a small exhibition in M Shed's first floor Window on Bristol gallery devised with young people aged 16-25 who have experience of being in care. We want the Window on Bristol to become a space where the many communities of Bristol can see themselves reflected.
- Lunar New Year will return in 2026, slimmed down to a one-day event but no less colourful, exciting and joyous.

Beth Cutter and Caroline Booth-Morris

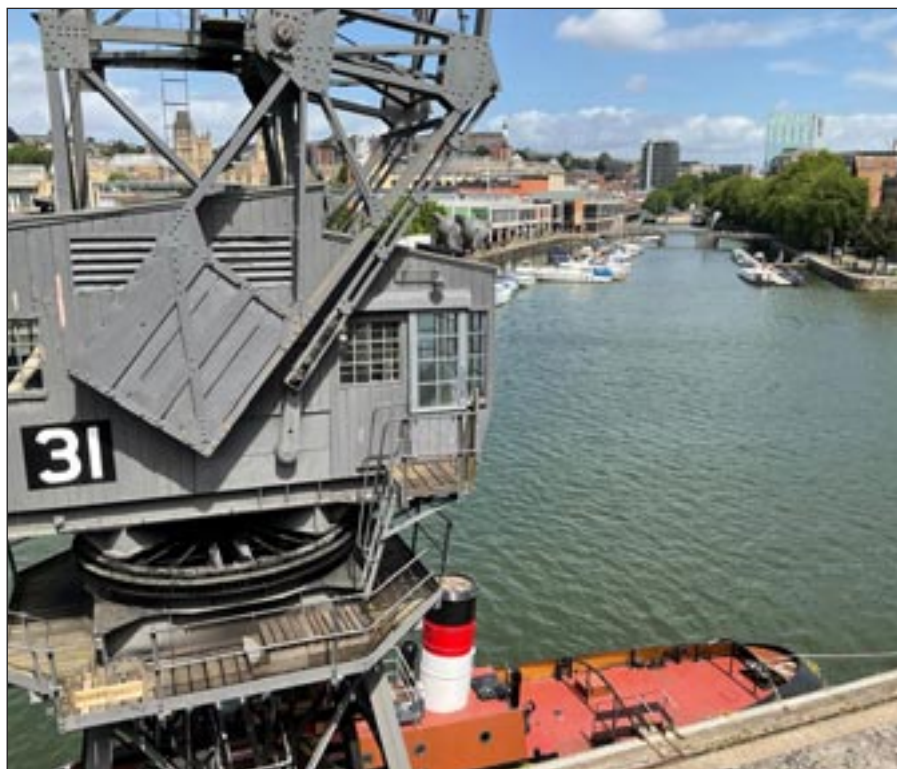
Co-Development Managers

BAFM Annual Conference 2025 in Bristol

Saturday 4 October

As you know, in a few weeks' time we are hosting this year's Annual Conference of BAFM, the British Association of Friends of Museums, at M Shed. As appropriate for our colourful and diverse city our theme is *Who do we represent? Diversity and inclusion in Friends groups and in the heritage we support*. Our speakers are drawn from a wide range of heritage backgrounds, and all have hands-on experience of re-thinking the approach to our theme.

For those of you who have not already signed up, but would like to, there is an application form enclosed.



▲ The view from the terrace at M Shed, our conference venue

© Sue Thurlow



▲ Linda Coode, Head of Collections for Bristol Museums

© Linda Coode



▲ Shawn Sobers, Professor of Cultural Interdisciplinary Practice at the University of the West of England

© Bristol Ideas

The first session of the day will be *Displaying contentious history: what can we learn from Colston's Statue?* It will be delivered by Linda Coode, Head of Collections for Bristol Museums, and Shawn Sobers, Professor of Cultural Interdisciplinary Practice at the University of the West of England, who worked together, alongside many others from our communities, to develop M Shed's Protest display which was shortlisted for a Museums + Heritage 2025 Award in the Permanent Exhibition of the Year category.

Linda has wide-ranging experience in the museums sector, with roles including delivery of the Aerospace Bristol Museum and taking the National Trust Tyntesfield from project to operation. Linda's first task on arriving back in Bristol – she was a social history curator here in her early career – was to put the Colston statue on permanent display in M Shed. She will be talking about this and the way in which Bristol museums have moved forward from the statue

by continuing to embed community engagement in developing content.

Shawn's work includes projects on legacies of slavery and African presence in Georgian and Victorian Britain, often seen through the lens of hidden histories, unheard stories, everyday life and material culture. He has directed and produced documentaries for BBC, ITV, and Channel 4.



◀ Alison Bevan, former director of the Royal West of England Academy of Art

© Vince Bevan

In our second session Alison Bevan, former director of the RWA, will speak about *Embedded Inclusion: how the Royal West of England Academy transformed its core community*. Alison has spent her entire career working in or with museums and art galleries including 10 years at the Glynn Vivian Art Gallery in Swansea before becoming Director of Penlee House Gallery & Museum, Penzance. From 2013 to 2024, Alison was Director of the RWA, Bristol's first public art gallery and Britain's only regional Royal Academy of Art. She is Chair of Bristol Museums Oversight Board and was Chair of the South Western Federation of Museums and Galleries from 2009 to 2012.



◀ **Claire Byfield, Head of Supporter Engagement at the British Museum**

© Claire Byfield

After coffee we will hear from Claire Byfield, whose chosen topic is *Forever Friends – engaging supporters at all ages*. As Head of Supporter Engagement at the British Museum, Claire leads a team responsible for events, communications, and digital content for more than 80,000 Members, Young Friends, Patrons, Donors, and Corporate Partners. She oversees a busy programme of over 150 events a year, including everything from intimate curator talks to large-scale members' evenings. She also manages member communications across print, digital, and onsite touchpoints – from magazines and podcasts to welcome packs and supporter web content. Previously Claire worked at Bletchley Park, where she ran events and public programmes, creating partnerships with organisations like the BBC and Google. She began her career with the National Trust at the Ashridge Estate, focusing on visitor experience and community events. She is passionate about creating meaningful connections between audiences and cultural spaces. She is especially interested in how museums can use storytelling, events, and digital content to build lasting relationships with their supporters.

We shall have an extended lunch break (sandwich-style buffet included) to give visiting delegates in particular an opportunity to see what M Shed museum is all about, inside and out. On the quayside in front of the building the annual Docks Heritage Weekend event (free) will be in full swing including demonstrations of 1950s cargo handling by crane.



◀ **Kate Newnham, Senior Curator Visual Arts, Bristol Museums**

© Kate Newnham

After lunch we will hear from Kate Newnham, Senior Curator Visual Arts, Bristol Museums, about the different ways in which she and her team have worked together on *Forging links with Chinese communities*. Each February Bristol Museum and Art Gallery hosts the biggest Lunar New Year celebration in the southwest of England, an annual highlight in its calendar over the last 20 years. Kate and colleagues

are at the heart of the celebration, working closely with local people and Chinese students at the city's universities, and planning and delivering a vibrant array of activities related to Chinese culture. Those collaborative links are not limited to the annual event, or to the Chinese community – the Museum's ongoing role in cultural exchange brings people from different backgrounds together to experience and understand diverse cultural traditions.

Kate's talk will be followed by a panel discussion, giving everyone a chance to ask questions of all the day's speakers.

After a short tea break there will be a presentation from Southampton Museums, hosts for BAFM's 2026 Conference. That will be followed by the BAFM 2025 AGM. Since we are a group member of BAFM all our members are welcome to attend, but there will be a brief pause to allow those who would prefer to skip the AGM to leave.



▲ **Marc Allum, our after-dinner speaker on Saturday evening, filming for BBC Antiques Roadshow at Bristol Aerospace museum**

© Marc Allum

Our evening drinks reception and dinner (open to all, not conference delegates) will be at the Bristol Hotel, just a 5-minute stroll from M Shed. Our after-dinner speaker will be Marc Allum, all-round antiques expert known to many of us from BBC Antiques Roadshow where he has been a miscellaneous specialist since 1998. Marc has his own unique style with interests ranging from pre-history to modern design and is a self-confessed collectaholic. He has a passion and reputation for divining the unusual; 'a desire to connect with history through the interpretation and pursuit of objects and their origins'.

We look forward to welcoming some of our members to the conference and/or dinner to join delegates from BAFM-affiliated museums across the country.

Sue Thurlow

Chair, Friends of Bristol Museums, Galleries and Archives



▲ *Lydiard House and Park from the lake*

© Richard Avery

Lydiard House and Park

19 June 2025

It turned out to be another very hot day when we went to Lydiard Park. We were very grateful for the air-conditioning in the coach and that it was our regular driver, despite rumours of his retirement.

There had been a home for the St John family at this Wiltshire site since 1420. The house was then extensively altered in the 18th century. John St John had married into considerable wealth and he wanted a Palladian building, having visited both Wilton House and Studley Royal for inspiration.

In 1943, after a period of serious financial difficulties, the St John family put the house and park up for sale. The then Swindon Town Clerk wanted to bring it into public ownership and, largely thanks to his dogged determination, the council was eventually persuaded to buy it for £4,500 – a not inconsiderable sum in all the circumstances of the times. The house was in a poor state and several of the associated buildings were demolished as being beyond reasonable repair. twelve years' work then went into restoring the house, the ground floor rooms going on public display in May 1955. Further restoration work then continued. As a result of that 1943 decision the citizens of Swindon now have a fine resource.

In July 2005 the Heritage Lottery Fund awarded £3 million to support a project to restore the 18th century landscaped parkland, the work being completed in 2009. The project restored the lake and reinstated the castellated dam wall, restored the plunge pool and icehouse and replanted the walled Garden with flowers and fruit. Many new trees were also planted. The grounds are now lovely (even if walking in them was a hot business), the lake and stream proving a cooler spot, as well as the cover of the trees on the woodland walk.



▲ *A bat nesting box outside the walled garden*

© Sue Thurlow



▲ *The walled garden at Lydiard Park*

© Richard Avery

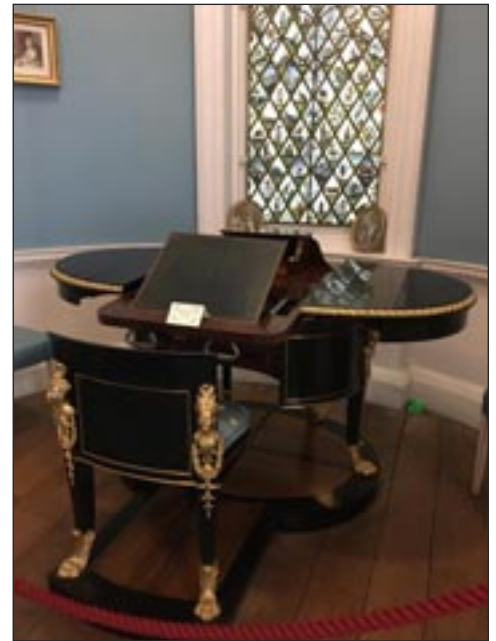
The house contains many ornate ceilings and an impressive collection of furnishings, along with the inevitable family portraits. Each room has been cleverly set up as a backdrop to tell part of the family story. For example, the library ceiling is ornate off-white plasterwork with gold-leaf highlights – except in one corner. The family story is that some 300 years ago the owner of the house, Viscount Bolingbroke, came into the room while the gilder was near to finishing and spotted that the workman had a dead hare sticking out of his pocket – clear evidence of poaching. The Viscount dismissed the gilder on the spot, and the ceiling was never finished. In subsequent restorations over the centuries the incomplete gilding has been retained as a reminder of that story.

The dining room is set up to help tell a much later story, set in the late 19th century. Henry St John, 5th Viscount Bolingbroke, was widowed in his 60s and moved back to Lydiard Park from London. While riding round the estate he took a shine to Mary Howard, the daughter of one of his estate workers, and gave her employment as a housekeeper. They maintained that formal relationship at Lydiard Park but also kept an establishment at rather more liberal Bath, where they lived as Mr and Mrs Wilson. They had two daughters before they got married secretly at Bath Registry Office in 1893, and went on to have a son, the Viscount's only legitimate heir. Henry St John died in November 1899 and after the funeral the existence of a wife and heir was revealed, a scandal which was reported in all the British newspapers. Mary continued to live at Lydiard Park and died in February 1940 (precipitating the sale of the house and estate to Swindon Borough Council), and in the dining room is shown making the final arrangements for a formal dinner.

As is usual for an army that clearly marches on its stomach, the various catering facilities were well used during our visit. It appeared to be unusual for a coach party of our size to descend on the house and the very friendly staff were extremely pleased to see us. The one disappointment was that owing to a misunderstanding over dates, the associated St Mary's church was closed, volunteers opening it on a Friday (and our visit being a Thursday). This was a shame.

Nonetheless another Grand Day Out (although Wallace did not come) – and many thanks to Richard Avery for organising it.

Richard Avery and Sue Thurlow



▲ A beautifully crafted 19C metamorphic desk and painted window in Lady Diana's bedroom
© ?????



▲ The dining room set up for an early 20C formal dinner, to be presided over by Lady Mary
© Sue Thurlow



▲ The library at Lydiard House, with the ceiling gilding still not finished 300 years after it was started!
© Sue Thurlow

The Observatory

Thursday 12 June 2025

One wet and windy Thursday in June an intrepid group of Friends made their way up to the Downs to visit the Observatory. Our guide, Alice, took us from the small reception area through a doorway to a large central room that I had no idea existed. Once the working area of the observatory, it is now used to host events managed by the current owners, Bristol Venues.

In 1766, a windmill for grinding corn was built here on the site of a Bronze Age hill fort. It was converted to a snuff mill which burned down in about 1777 and was left derelict. In 1828 a local artist and man of many talents, William West, rented it for five shillings per year from the Merchant Venturers to use as a studio. He added a central room with a domed roof to the original tower, to convert the building into an observatory. This room housed the astronomical equipment, including a large reflecting telescope. In 1829, West installed the camera obscura in the tower. It has a 5-inch lens and a 5-foot concave viewing bowl so that, on a bright day, the projected image is clear and neither back to front nor upside down. This proved a popular attraction to the Victorians and was also used by the Bristol School of artists for drawing the Avon Gorge and Leigh Woods. In 1835, West tunnelled down into the rock to make an entrance to the Giant's Cave 90 feet below the tower and opened it to the public.

William West died in 1860, but his family continued to live there and eventually his granddaughter Edith West, a suffragette, became the observatory keeper. She was reputed to be rather abusive to visitors and was finally evicted for non-payment of rent. There was a suggestion that the Cabot Tower might be built on the site but the people of



▲ The Observatory. Note the camera obscura on the very top of the tower

© Sheila Round

▼ After an interesting but rather damp visit to the Clifton Observatory some of our members enjoyed coffee and cake in the smart, cosy café

© Sue Thurlow



▲ A model of the Observatory which was discovered in a charity shop

© Carol Ouvry



◀ Section of the camera obscura image formed on the concave viewing bowl clearly showing the terraces of Clifton village
© Sheila Round

▼ This notice, now displayed in the briefing room, used to be outside the Observatory.
© Carol Ouvry

Bristol wanted to keep the Observatory, so it was built on Brandon Hill instead. In 1940, it was used as an air raid shelter and as a base the Home Guard. In 1977, it was sold by the Merchant Venturers with the requirement that public access to the camera obscura and the cave be always maintained.

After our introduction we were allowed to enjoy the attraction at our own pace. A few hardy people braved the 130 uneven steps down to the cave to enjoy a different aspect of the Avon Gorge. I am told that the view did not match the splendid one from the tower. Even in the day's poor light we were able to see from the camera obscura a clear image of cars crossing the Suspension Bridge just below us. New to me was the museum, an excellent display on the three floors of the tower leading up to the Camera Obscura. The history of the site, the Observatory and of photography are displayed on easy-to-follow panel boards. There are paintings, old photographs and a wonderful model of the Observatory found in a charity shop in Weston Super Mare. True to the Friends traditions, several of us rounded off the visit with a coffee and cake in the café.

I have visited the Observatory on several occasions previously but, this time, I learned so much more, thanks to Alice's excellent introduction and to the information so well displayed around the tower. Thanks too to Carol Ouvry for organising yet another rather special trip behind the scenes.

Sue Pears





▲ **The Rising Squall**
by J M W Turner
© Sotheby's

*An image from the social media
campaign of an empty frame in the
gallery anticipating the arrival of the
Turner*

The Rising Squall

In early June the museum service received notice that an early Turner oil painting depicting Hotwells House and the Avon from St Vincent Rocks, was going to be auctioned.

With only three weeks until the auction, the service galvanised into action – with one mission – to bring the Turner painting 'home' to Bristol. The painting had been missing for over 150 years in a private collection and only recently reappeared. It was painted by the young artist at the age of 17, his first attempt at oil painting – and also his first to be exhibited at the Royal Academy.

So it was significant to Bristol and also pivotal in his early career as an artist.

A public fundraising campaign was launched with the support of the Bristol Museum Development Trust. The museum hired a PR agency called Strike Communications to help with the public communication campaign, resulting in an extraordinary amount of news coverage across tv, radio, social media and online. The crowdfunder met its £100,000 target in pledges in less than a week.

The Friends' committee held an extraordinary meeting of trustees and agreed to commit an unprecedented amount to help with the purchase. This helped



significantly in the team's fundraising efforts, unlocking other funds including support from Art Fund UK. The generous commitment by the Friends was made possible due to recent gifts in wills. Curators and conservators visited the Sotheby's showroom to view the painting ahead of the auction, as did Sue Thurlow, Chair of the Friends.

Having built a war-chest that exceeded the estimated auction price several times over, the team waited anxiously for the auction itself, confident that they stood a chance to purchase the painting. Unfortunately, it was not to be, as they were outbid on the night, with the painting ultimately selling for over £1.9million, but the team came so close. Whilst they were clearly disappointed with the outcome, they were unperturbed and immediately planned an exhibition of watercolours to mark the 250th anniversary of Turner's birth for Bristol Museum and Art Gallery for autumn 2025. It showed great ambition, and what can be done when the city unites in support of its cultural heritage. It was a huge effort by the team – and better luck next time!

Phil Walker Head of Culture and Creative Industries

Members of the public enthusiastically supporting the social media campaign for Bring Turner Home

© Bristol Culture / Strike Communications



Alderblatti cockroach

Palaeoart funded by the Friends is award-winning!

The fossil collections at Bristol Museum & Art Gallery contain many varied and incredible specimens, including ancient fossil insects. A beautiful 180-million-year-old cockroach fossil in the collection was reconstructed in 2024 to illustrate a scientific paper describing the cockroach as a genus and species new to science. The reconstruction was created by palaeo artist Julianne Kiely and in April 2025 her artwork was awarded Highly Commended by the jury of the Palaeontographical Society Marsh Palaeoart Award. *Alderblattina simmsi* is a relatively small cockroach and differs considerably from all other Jurassic cockroaches due to the presence on the forewing of the two distinct spots and coloration at the wing tip. It was named in honour of Dr Mike Simms who collected the fossil from Alderton Hill, Gloucestershire in 1984. Thank you to the Friends for funding the reconstruction, enabling the unique story of this ancient cockroach to come to life.

Deborah Hutchinson Geology Curator

▼ *Alderblattina simmsi, a cockroach from the Lower Jurassic of Gloucestershire, takes a stroll across a landscape of ancient plants*

© Julianne Kiely / Bristol Culture



William Champion's Garden

Tuesday 20 May 2025

Kingswood Heritage Museum is housed in a former 18th century brass mill tucked away among houses and industrial buildings in Warmley. This exciting museum, which is run by volunteers, celebrates the rich industrial and social heritage of Kingswood from the origins of Kingswood Forest including coalmining, boot-making and social life through the Victorian period and on to 1945. The building, which is packed with displays, artifacts and hands-on exhibits, is well worth a visit.

The museum also hides a fascinating secret. Hidden away behind the building, veiled by trees, lies a garden created by the Quaker industrialist William Champion, who made his fortune producing zinc and brass. This rare early 18th century industrial pleasure garden was built between 1746 and 1768 and is of national significance.

We were given a tour by Kay Ross from Avon Gardens Trust. Our first stop was at the statue of Neptune. This is not only the largest garden statue of Neptune in the country but also the first concrete statue in the country. He is a very imposing figure standing and looking over the grounds. We then saw the grottoes made from waste clinker and slag from Champion's nearby brass works, which now houses the museum. There were a great many features to admire: among them a windmill tower, an icehouse, a pond, a lake, a boat house and a summer house.

The visit finished with tea and cake in the museum's café and some Friends also enjoyed a tour round the museum.

Thanks to Kay Ross for her tour; Sally Dore for organising the visit; and to Carol Lear and Catherine for 'taking the register' for the two groups on the day.

Catherine Dixon

▼ Friends at an entrance to the grotto

© Catherine Dixon

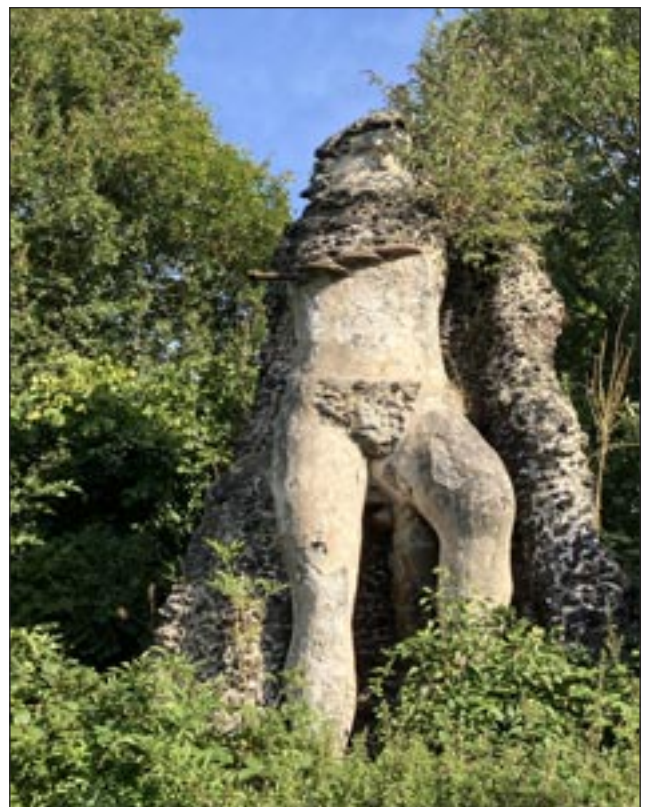


▲ The grotto entrance is shaped like a monster's face ready to swallow visitors

© Mike Luff

▼ The 7-metre high statue of Neptune, made of cement and black clinker, once stood on an island in the middle of a 13 acre lake

© Mike Luff



Bristol Tramways 150th Anniversary

Saturday 9 and Sunday 10 August

The balloon fiesta at Ashton Court may have been attracting the crowds on this warm weekend but at Museum Square attention was focussed on a display of heritage buses, all connected to the Bristol Tramways and Carriage Company Ltd. At 12 noon on the Saturday a procession of buses recreated the original journey from Perry Road to Apsley Road of the first horse-drawn tram on 9 August 1875. Free rides were offered in an open-top and a single-decker bus every half hour during the weekend while transport enthusiasts and interested passers-by spent time visiting the buses on display.

This was another opportunity for a cake sale so, over the two days, volunteers from the Friends offered delicious homemade cakes to visitors from the shade of L Shed, raising over £660 to help support the museums service. Many thanks to all those who baked cakes and helped to sell them.

Mary Bailey



▲ *Heritage buses on the quay outside M shed*
© Mary Bailey



◀ *Sue Thurlow selling cakes in L shed*
© Mary Bailey

Port Of Bristol Authority Rules for Crane Drivers

This rare dockside enamel sign, which I am delighted to say was won at auction with funding from the Friends, is now formally part of M Shed's Industrial and Maritime History collection. It dates from 1947-1957, as confirmed by records of Norman Alastair Matheson, being Engineer-in-Chief to the Port of Bristol during that time. It represents a significant period in the city's dockside history – also reflected in M Shed's 1950s cargo cranes and the museum building itself.

Although the exact site of its original use is unknown – it may have come from Bristol City, Avonmouth, Portishead, or Royal Portbury docks – the sign has a strong connection to M Shed's cranes. Built by Stothert & Pitt in 1951, the cranes were part of a group of eight installed to serve the L and M transit sheds. The sign illustrates working practices involved in the operation and maintenance of these cranes.

The rules listed on the sign still apply to M Shed's cranes today, although some terms – such as 'derricking' – have since changed ('luffing' is now used).

Its acquisition adds depth to the interpretation of 1950s dockside life, a central focus of the museum's annual Docks Heritage Weekend. It helps bring to life the working culture, language, and spirit of the times, supporting a fuller understanding of the Port of Bristol's industrial past.

It is hoped the sign will be displayed in M Shed or housed in a prominent position inside the museum store, accessible to visitors during behind-the-scenes tours. As the only surviving example of its kind in the collection, it offers a valuable and engaging link to Bristol's maritime heritage.

Lee Hutchinson Curator, History

Enamel sign: 'PORT OF BRISTOL
AUTHORITY RULES FOR CRANE DRIVERS'
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FRIENDS OF BRISTOL MUSEUMS GALLERIES & ARCHIVES

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