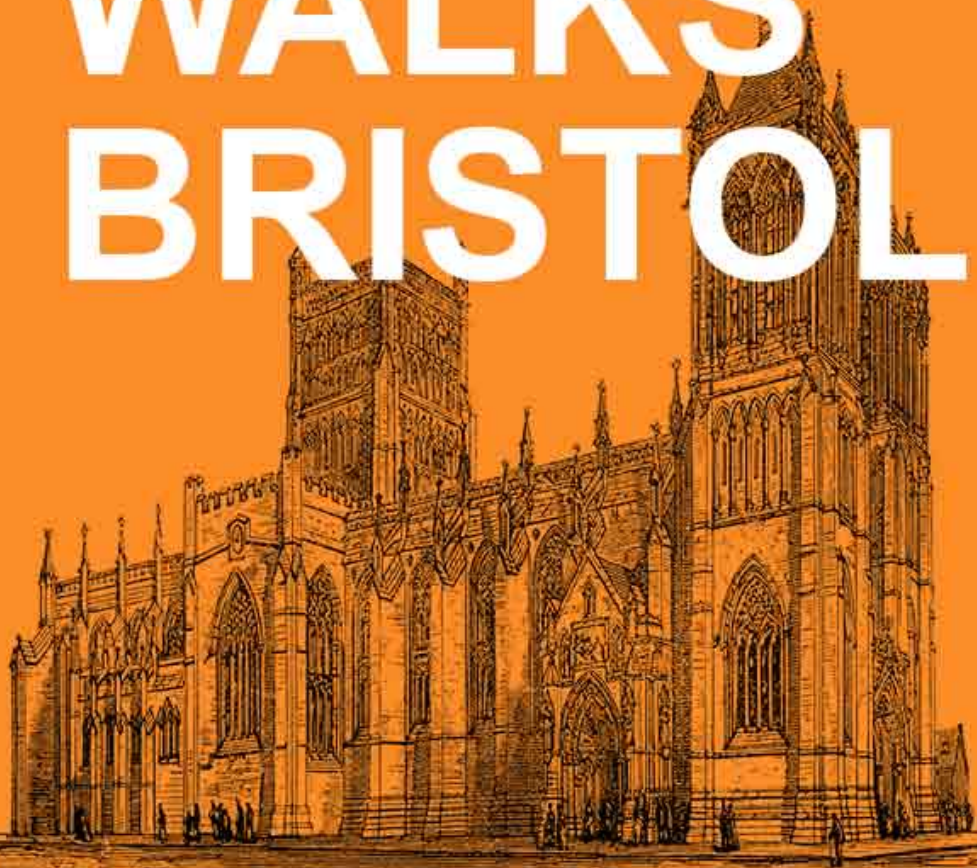


# CITY WALKS BRISTOL



**BY ALEX MASON**

**2023**

**CITY  
WALKS  
BRISTOL**

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“There is no better way to discover and explore Bristol than on foot. Few other cities in Britain can boast such a treasure chest of wonderful sights and fascinating places of interest.”

Alex Mason

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# CONTENTS

Contents	4
Prologue	5
Bristol Bridge	6
About the Author	13

# PROLOGUE

Not all walks need to be a laboured march. With the whole family together – smaller ones on scooters or in buggies, and persons with mobility aids – a stroll along level paths, covering a couple of miles, is just what the doctor ordered.

Such a short walk is no less rewarding, especially now different family circles are able to assemble outside again. After all, a slow amble allows more time to take in the surrounding vista, and the panorama of flora, fauna and wildlife you might stumble upon.

Whilst in recent times the Government advice has been to 'stay local', I've chosen nine of Bristol's gentlest routes to motivate you, including wheelchair and pushchair accessible options, and both urban trails and rural meanderings – with a little help from the Bristol City Council working to protect and expand walking spaces.

There are not many better ways to spend quality time with loved ones.

# 1.

## BRISTOL BRIDGE

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Archaeological finds have shown that there have been settlements in and around the Bristol area for up to 60,000 years although it is unclear exactly when the first bridge over the River Avon was built. The river itself has a wide tidal range, second only to Canada's Bay of Fundy, and so could only have been forded twice a day. This significant crossing gave Bristol its Anglo-Saxon name 'Brycgstow', the meaning of which is 'bridge-place'. It may be that former bridges were situated slightly upriver and nearer to St. Peter's church, the ruins of which can be seen from the existing bridge.

Bristol Bridge, which was originally constructed of wood. This was replaced, in 1247, by a four-arched bridge constructed in stone. Many houses with shopfronts were built upon it. These bridge houses were up to five stories high, including the attic rooms, and they overhung the river much as Tudor houses overhung the streets. Eventually, the bridge became too small for modern traffic and, in 1768, a bill was passed through parliament, by the Bristol MP Sir Jarrit Smyth, for it to be replaced with the one you see today.

As Bristol expanded and joined the southern bank of the river, the size of the city was effectively doubled. This gave the bridge and its location an even greater significance. So much so that, in September 1793, a Georgian bridge toll was implemented. This

was the cause of so much indignation that it gave rise to one of Bristol's bloodiest riots. Although the Georgian bridge still remains the roadway was later expanded during the reign of Queen Victoria to accommodate the increasing tide of people and goods through the south gate of the city.

Next to where the south gate was situated is the site of the church of St. Nicholas, founded here in 1154. The church had a chancel to reach out over the south gate of the city. Both the gate and the church were demolished to make way for the building of the new Bristol Bridge. The church itself was rebuilt between 1762–1769 by James Bridges and Thomas Paty. Bridges and Paty were also responsible for the construction of the spire. Glimpses of the former church and town wall survive and can be seen in the 14th-century crypt beneath the church.

During the Bristol Blitz of 1940, the interior of the church was destroyed. Works began in 1974 to rebuild the church and today it stands as a church museum.

The Church hosts one of two commissions by artist William Hogarth. The triptych alter-piece named, Sealing The Tomb, was painted in 1765. It was originally housed in St. Mary Redcliffe church. It was displayed there up to 1858 until a community campaigned to have the furnishings. removed as they were not in keeping with the church's original Gothic aesthetic. Around that time The Bristol Academy for the Promotion of the Arts, latterly, The Royal West of England Academy, bought the works for the princely sum of £20. The paintings change hands again in 1910 and in 1955 they were passed to the Bristol Museum and Art Gallery, although they remain at St. Nicholas Church. They may be viewed by arrangement and on Bristol Open days.

Away from the church and along the High Street the tower of St. Mary-le-Port can be seen. The church is said to have been founded in Saxon times, based on nearby archaeological excavations. It was

originally built on a ‘hollow way (or sunken lane). This was filled in and paved in the 13th century. The church has been rebuilt and enlarged a number of times between the 11th and 16th-century. All that remains of the church today is the 15th-century tower, following the church being bombed on 24 November 1940, during the Blitz. After the bombing, the congregation moved to St. John-in-the-Wall church which you will pass later, in the walk. The area next to the tower has had various uses, once a car park and then, in the 1960s, the building have been used by various financial institutions including the Bank of England which leased it for a time. There are current proposals underway to re-vitalise the site. This will involve repairing the tower. Re-installing the streets lost during the 1940s and creating a new and exciting development for commerce and entertainment. Revitalising the whole area and incorporating Castle Park, in turn, attract visitors and create hundreds of new jobs.

On the left side of High Street stands St. Nicholas Market, The market was established in 1743. Its classical façade was built by Samuel Glascodine with John Wood the Elder. Four principal streets meet at the top of the High Street. These are High Street itself, Corn Street, Wine Street and Broad Street. This was the site of the forty-foot tall ‘Civic High Cross‘ erected in 1373 to commemorate Bristol becoming a county. It was removed for safety reasons in 1733 at the request of a local goldsmith, who feared that his adjacent property was in danger from the swaying structure. In 1768, the Dean of Bristol gave the cross to a friend of his called Henry Hoare.

Hoare used the cross as a focal point of his fine landscaped gardens in his then-new property in Stourhead. It was returned to Bristol and what remains can be seen in the gardens of Berkeley Square.

Turning right you are in Wine Street. This street was the site of the timbered merchants’ houses, sadly destroyed during the Second



World War. Its name was derived from ‘Wynch’ Street, where a pillory once stood.

Number 9 Wine Street is where Bristol poet Robert Southey was born, in 1774. There is a plaque on the wall of Christ Church commemorating his birth. He was England's Poet Laureate for 30 years from 1813 until his death in 1843. This was also the site of his father's linen draper's shop. Opposite, you will see the ruins of St. Peter's Church, which can be explored on another walk.

Turn left into a narrow lane named ‘Pithay’ (pit-hay). This was the site of the gateway through the second city wall. On the left is Tower Lane. The tower no longer exists, but the lane still curves along the line of the old wall. Here you will pass from the old Parish of Christchurch into the parish of St. John-the-Baptist or St. John-in-the-Wall. There is a reference to the boundary on the wall. At the end of the lane, you will find a church built into the old city wall alongside the last remaining Gothic gateway of seventeen (aptly named St. John's Gate) through which the ancient city was entered.

There has been a church on this site since 1174. During the 12th century, there were five churches built into the walls. This is the only one that remains. Founded in the 14th century by three-time mayor, Walter Frampton. His effigy lies on a tomb chest decorated with heraldic shields, with a long-tailed dog at his feet. The entrance to the vaulted crypt can be found on Nelson Street. The interior of the church is accessible via a few stone steps. It has a beautiful interior and a bell tower with a working bell - rang it myself once.

Proceeding through the gate into Nelson Street and on the right, you will see St. John's Conduit, which conveyed water from the top of Park Street. At one time this was the only water supply for the whole city. Queen Elizabeth the first, entered Bristol through this very gate in 1574.

Returning through the gate to Broad Street. If you turn back towards the gate and look up you will see two figures – Gaulish chiefs, Belinus and Brennus – who, legend has it, founded the city of Bristol in 390 BC. Sons of Malmutius, King of Cornwall, Brennus and Belinus, reigned jointly as Kings of Britain following their father's death. Brennus is credited with enlarging and improving Bristol during this time.

In Broad Street, one of the four original streets of the old city, there are several well-preserved 17th-century houses. This was an important corner of ancient Bristol. On the left is the beautifully preserved Edward Everard Printing Works, possibly the most decorated Art Nouveau building in Europe. Designed by Bristol architect Henry Williams around 1900 and was far larger than the Broad Street front suggests. It stretched back from the street and behind neighbouring properties to another entrance on John Street.

John Street is a narrow street running through, with the Bank Tavern on the left and the remains of St. James's Churchyard on the right. The Bank Tavern has stood here since the 1800s and not so long ago was awarded Bristol's best Sunday Lunch at the Bristol Good Food Awards.

Another street with reminders of the 17th century is Tailors' Court. Here you will find the Merchant Tailors Guild Hall built in 1745. At the far end of the court, you will see a fine example of a Jacobean house, aptly named Court House, built in 1692 for I.F. Miller, a Bristol wholesaler.

On the other side of the road stands The Guildhall which was built in 1846 in a Tudor style on the site of the earlier medieval Guildhall. In 1685, in the aftermath of the Monmouth Rebellion, this is where Judge Jeffries held his 'Bloody Assizes'. The early Guildhall doubled as a theatre. William Shakespeare is believed to have been a member of the Lord Chamberlain's Company, which performed here between 1587 and 1603. Bristol's earliest surviving

example of Norman domestic architecture can be found in The Law Library, where parts of a thirteenth-century house are retained.

At the top of Broad Street stands Christ Church, easily recognisable with its eighteenth-century quarter-jacks on the clock. The hammers strike the quarter-hour after which the figures move. In 2013, they were taken down for repainting and found to be so badly split they could not be returned to the outside. There is a movement underway to raise funds for their restoration. The works are going to cost around £125,000 and take a least 12 months to complete. Personally, I was fortunate enough to see these working when I first moved to Bristol.

There has been a church on this site since 1153. The present church was designed by James Paty in 1786. Poet Robert Southey was baptised here.

At the top of Broad Street turn right into Corn Street and on the corner stands the old Council House built in 1827 by Sir Robert Smirke. The sculptures on the exterior of the building are by Edward Hodges Bailey, whose statue of Nelson sits on the column in Trafalgar Square, London. Corn Street was the centre of world banking akin to London's Lombard Street in its heyday. Although banks may still be present here, many buildings have been converted into cafe bars & eateries.

Turn right into Small Street. This was the site of the premises of attorneys Lambert. And it was here that poet Thomas Chatterton spent many tormented hours. Thomas Chatterton, born in 1752, was an English poet whose precocious talents ended in suicide at age 17. He was an influence on Romantic artists of the period such as Coleridge, Keats, Shelley and Wordsworth.

The Corn Exchange, built by John Wood the Elder of Bath in 1741, leads into the glass-covered St. Nicholas Market, which was established just two years later in 1743. In front of the ...

... to be continued. The full version, containing all nine walks, is available to download from the website - [citywalksbristol.com](http://citywalksbristol.com)



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Alex Mason. Born in London, lives in Bristol in the west of England. Passionate about walking and writing and so this book was conceived. Originally written and published in 2003. Bristol has seen so many changes during the last 20 years and. this is the new, long-awaited, revised version.