

Bristol 2014: Great War Stories Map: The City Centre



This walk is based on the Great War Stories map and app devised for Bristol 2014. The stories were researched, written and uploaded by Eugene Byrne. Email bristol2014@btopenworld.com if you require a large-print Word version of this document.

The dotted line in the map is approximate and gives an indication of the general direction to take, rather than a strict route to follow. Special care will be needed when crossing roads and always look for the safest place to do so. The walk is mainly level with a slight incline up Colston Street. It will take 15-20 minutes to complete.

Start from the lamp-post by the information board at the corner of Queen Square to read Story 1. Note there is a gravel surface to the paths in the Square. The paths are sloped allowing for good access for wheelchair users and pushchairs. Look out for traffic as you cross the street.

1 Immorality in the Dark: The Council's Sanitary Committee, which was responsible among other things for the city's street lighting, decided that the lights would not be turned on at all between 15 May and August 13 1918. (We picked Queen Square for this story as it has a lot of old-fashioned style street lights...) There had long been restrictions on lighting, partly as a half-hearted precaution against Zeppelin raids which few people seriously expected. This time, however, the decision not to turn on the city's lights was taken purely in order to save on coal. At this time, Bristol's streets were

lit both by electric and gas lamps, but both required coal for gas production and electricity generation. Turning the lights off for the summer would save the country much-needed fuel, and around £3,500 from the Council's budget. This led to protests. The Council Watch Committee, responsible for public order, minuted:

'The Committee received a deputation from the Bristol Branch of the National Council for Public Morals, consisting of Lady Baron, Miss White and Canon Talbot, who urged that the cessation of street lighting was likely to lead to immorality in the city, and stated that their experience went to show that reduced lighting tended in that direction. The deputation asked that, if possible, the present position with regard to street lighting should be re-considered.'

The Committee resolved to ask the Chief Constable to report back if there was any increase in immorality. A month later (June 19), the Committee noted: "The Chief Constable reported that as a result of careful observation by the Police it had been found that the amount of immorality had not been increased nor had the complaints received been above normal."

Before leaving Queen Square, read its fascinating history on the information board. Now head up to King Street (it's out of view at first, but soon reached). Cross to the north side of the street and turn right to reach the building which housed the old Bristol Library for Story 2.

2. The War Pensions Office: The old Bristol Library in King Street (now a Chinese restaurant: the stone over the door reads 'Bristol Old Library') was taken over by the War Pensions Office during the war. This was where payments were arranged and made out for next-of-kin of the dead, as well as hardship payments for the families of reservists who had been called up. By the end of the war it had over 11,000 men on its books who had been discharged from the army because of sickness or wounds and administered expenses for their medical treatment and in many cases, re-training. It also administered the King's Fund, a charity making grants to disabled men to help them start businesses. As well as this, various other military and naval charitable funds were run from here, trying to help discharged men, or families who had lost breadwinners. In one case, for instance, three young sisters who had lost their father were each given a sewing machine to help them try and earn a living. On another occasion, a widow applied for a grant to buy a piano for her small daughter in order, she said, to keep the girl from mixing with undesirable lower class playmates. Her application was refused.

Feel free to wander further up King Street to explore this historic area, then go back down the street, turn right, cross at the crossing at the bottom of Marsh Street, continue up to the Centre and along to Clare Street for Stories 3 and 4. Note that Marsh Street is fairly narrow, which may make it awkward for wheelchair users and pushchairs.

3. Corrupting Young Minds: The cinema was still something of a novelty in 1914, but the popularity of 'picture houses' grew during the war. One of the best known in Bristol, the Clare Street Picture House, was on this site (it was demolished in the late 1920s and Café Brigstowe is now on the spot). Showing silent films, they attracted growing audiences, partly because of the restricted pub opening hours, and partly because many youngsters were earning good money working in war factories. The war was disastrous for Britain's homegrown cinema industry, though. With so many men going off to fight, more and more movies were bought in from America. Moralists in Bristol regularly complained about these. In June 1918, for instance, the council received a letter from the Baptist Women's League urging more censorship of films, and of the lurid posters advertising them. Teachers, meanwhile, worried that their pupils were playing truant in order to go to 'the pictures.'

4. Ragmuffin Band: On Armistice Day, November 11 1918, people took to the streets of Bristol in spontaneous demonstrations of happiness and relief, despite the cold, damp weather. One of the most remarkable sights that a few witnesses reported, was a group of about 50 boys, from young children to those in their early teens, marching through town. They had probably come from Old Market or St George. Two led from the front, carrying a large Union Jack. The rest followed behind marching in perfect formation, four abreast, just like the soldiers they would have seen marching through Bristol on numerous other occasions. Each one of them was beating a tin of some sort, making what one witness called 'an indescribable medley of noise'. As they approached the road they would have to cross, a burly police sergeant on duty raised his arm, stopped the traffic, and with a grin waved them through.

Head back to the Centre. The next three stories relate to the area around the Hippodrome so find the safest place to cross at the lights and the most comfortable place to stand or sit to read. You will need to cross the road three times in total but there are safe places to do so which are also wheelchair and pushchair accessible.



5. Record Breaking Emptying of the Theatre: Parties of wounded men from Bristol's war hospitals were regularly treated to outings. The city's theatres and cinemas often put aside seats for injured soldiers, but also held special performances for them as well. Much of this was co-ordinated by the Inquiry Bureau, a local voluntary organisation which helped out with all aspects of wounded soldiers' welfare. The Hippodrome was a regular venue for their entertainment, and when newspapers reported how a theatre in London had been cleared of 2,000 wounded men in record time, the Inquiry Bureau thought it might be fun to try and break the record. So at a performance at the Hippodrome attended by 2,270 men, 400 of whom were on crutches, they encouraged everyone to leave as quickly as possible at the end. The hall was cleared in 52 minutes. A later attempt on the record got 2,200 men (350 on crutches) out in 37 minutes.

6. Unfit for Duty: In 1916 the government brought in conscription, and now every able-bodied man of military age was liable for service, unless he was in an occupation that was vital to the war effort. Some men, however, kept being rejected by the army, even though they were desperate to join. In 1918 the Bristol Military Service Tribunal heard the bizarre case of a man - we do not know his name - who was appearing with his wife in an acrobatic act at the Hippodrome. The tribunal wanted to know why on earth a man who was fit enough to be a stage acrobat wasn't in uniform. The man's solicitor told the tribunal that his client was keen, to serve. Desperate, in fact. He had made four attempts to join the army, but had been rejected as unfit. In desperation, the man, who spoke both French and German fluently from his time as a travelling performer, had offered to join the army as a physical training instructor. This offer, too, had been turned down. The solicitor explained that although his client was an accomplished stage gymnast, the army refused him because: "He has a fractured skull, due to falling 75 feet whilst performing, a fractured ankle, a loose cartilage, flat feet, and is blind in one eye. His father was a gymnast, his grandfather was a gymnast and his brother, who was one of the few cases of a man continuing alive with a broken neck, was also a gymnast."

7. The war crime of the U.86: On the evening of June 27 1918 the hospital ship Llandovery Castle was crossing the Atlantic, returning to Britain after taking some wounded Canadian troops home. There were no injured aboard her but there were 258 crew and medical staff. Around 100 of the crew were from Bristol. Though she was showing bright lights and was clearly a hospital ship and therefore should have been immune from attack under the normal rules of war, the German U-Boat U.86 commanded by Oberleutnant zur See Helmut Patzig torpedoed her. The German captain then tried to cover up a war-crime by deliberately ramming the lifeboats and machine-gunning survivors in the water. Only 24 people escaped on a single lifeboat. We are not sure how many Bristolians survived; it may just have been two. At the war's end, when the German fleet was surrendered, the crew of U-86 did not talk about what they had done. It was a few years before any attempt was made to bring them to justice. In the meantime, some of the captive U-Boats were toured around the country by Royal Navy crews. Two were brought to Bristol in December 1918; one of them was U.86, photographed passing close to where the Watershed is nowadays. They were moored here (this area was still part of the Floating Harbour and would only be covered later). Bristolians eagerly queued up to go aboard and look around the U-Boats, with their entry fees going to charity. And at that point, nobody knew that the ship they were eagerly looking over had been responsible for killing more than 90 Bristol men in cold blood. Oberleutnant Patzig escaped justice, and again worked for the German U-Boat service in the Second World War. He died in his bed at the age of 96.

Turn right along St Augustine's Parade and continue up to Colston Street where you turn left to Colston Hall for Story 8. This is the only hill on this route.

8. Recruitment Centre: When the war began the nearby army recruiting office at 8 Colston Street was unable to cope with the numbers of men coming forward, so the Colston Hall was pressed into service, becoming Bristol's main recruiting centre for several weeks. Eager applicants queued up outside, while the nearby pubs also did a roaring trade as men were gradually called forward, given a medical examination and accepted or rejected by the army. Early on in the war it could be choosy, and only the tallest and fittest were accepted. This would soon change. Some boys were so eager to join up that they lied about their age. One inadvertently gave his true date of birth to the recruiting sergeant, who told him that if he went out of the building, ran around it three times, he would find he had added three years. He followed instructions and was accepted. Not everyone was keen. A story told in Bristol at the time was that a wealthy gentleman, swept away with patriotic fervour, but too old to join up himself, told a young male servant that he would drive him to the recruiting office the following morning. When the man was getting ready to leave the house the following day, he found that his servant had left in the middle of the night. The Colston Hall was used again for would-be recruits before conscription was introduced in 1916. In the winter of 1914-15 it was also a temporary billet for the 10th Battalion of the Black Watch.

Continue up Colston Street for Story 9.



9. The Dug Out: The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) had purchased this site just before war broke out, and was planning a major new building here. Building work was now put on hold and the YMCA decided to build a temporary structure for soldiers' welfare. It was fronted with sandbags and cement to give it a suitably military air and was officially opened by the Lord Mayor on May 17 1917. The 'Dug Out', as it was known, was very popular (a University of Bristol hall of residence is now on this site). It had a canteen and recreation room and a reading room in which soldiers could write letters - YMCA centres had free notepaper for soldiers. There were baths, kitchens and dormitory facilities for soldiers passing through on their way to or from the Front. The sleeping accommodation soon had to be extended. The Dug Out hosted teas and entertainment for wounded soldiers, including outings to places of interest and to cricket and even baseball matches between British and American military teams from nearby camps. Every Sunday there was religious 'song service' and other social events for all. The Dug Out was open 24 hours a day and run by up to 400 volunteers. It was easily the most popular of the many facilities the YMCA had across the city during the war, and during its relatively brief existence its visitors used over a million sheets of notepaper. The Bristol YMCA was receiving letters of praise and appreciation for the Dug Out from around the world for many years after the war ended.

Head back down Colston Street to the Centre for Story 10. The safest place to cross Colston Street is by the lights at the bottom. You don't need to cross Colston Avenue yet: stay on the side you are already on.

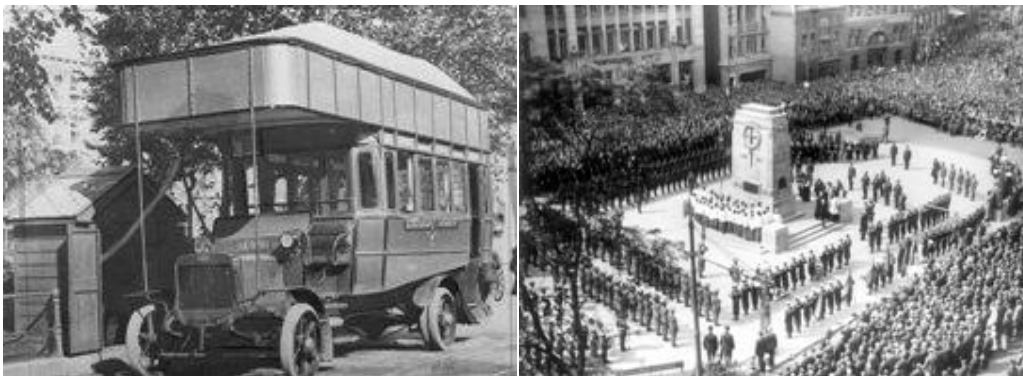
10. The Zeppelin raid that never was: Bristol was heavily bombed during the Second World War, but not during the First. There were, however, periodic fears that Zeppelins or, later, German long-range aircraft, might bomb the city, as they had done in other places. Through the war there was a confusing and constantly changing set of blackout regulations at night, and there were, in theory, a set of air raid regulations in place. People would be warned of an air raid by factory sirens, and they were told by the Council to seek shelter as far below ground as possible. Some schools carried out drills whereby pupils were to go into the cellars. The Zeppelins and bombers never came; Bristol was too far from German air-bases, and presumably the Germans considered it too hazardous for Zeppelins to spend the long time in British airspace that would be needed to reach Bristol. Despite this, a legend later arose that Bedminster had been bombed in a Zeppelin raid. How this story came about is unclear. It might be some distorted folk memory of the only time a Zeppelin flew over central Bristol, which was when the Graf Zeppelin flew over in July 1932 while undertaking a goodwill tour of Britain. This was the subject of what became a very well-known photograph, which appeared in the local press, of the airship over the Centre.



Continue up the avenue to St Mary on the Quay for Story 11. The church was indeed originally on the quayside, as its name suggests, as at the time it was built the river was still open here and had not been covered over.

11. The original Winslow Boy: At the front of the church you will see a memorial tablet to members of the church and its school killed in the war. The first name on the list is 'G Archer Shee', who achieved national fame as a boy because of a famous court case. George Archer-Shee was born in 1895 at the Bank of England in Broad Street, the eldest child of a banker. He had an older half-brother, Martin Archer-Shee, by his father's previous marriage. The family were Catholics. While at the Royal Naval College at Osborne in 1908 he was accused of stealing a postal order for five shillings (25p) from another cadet named Terence Back, forging Back's signature and cashing it at the local post office. He was immediately dismissed from the service, despite protesting his innocence. His father never doubted him, and his half-brother, an MP and lawyer, brought in legal heavyweight Sir Edward Carson to take on the case. The case went to the heart of what a gentleman's honour was supposed to be. Two years of legal wrangling ensued, and the case went all the way to the House of Lords, where the boy endured two days of cross-examination, but never backed down from protesting his innocence. George Archer-Shee completed his studies at Stonyhurst College in Lancashire before going to work for a banking firm in New York. On the outbreak of war he returned to Britain to enlist and was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the South Staffordshire Regiment. He was killed in action at Ypres on October 31 1914. He was 19 years old. Terence Rattigan turned the story into his play 'The Winslow Boy' in 1946. Since then it's been turned into two movies and at least three TV productions.

Head up to the lights to cross over to the pedestrianised area around the Cenotaph for the final two stories.



12. Gas buses: With petrol in demand for the aircraft and vehicles at the battlefield, Bristol Tramways Company looked for other means of fuelling its growing fleet of motor-buses during the war. A short-lived experiment with paraffin was not successful, so instead they decided to try using gas. The buses carried the gas in large bags on their roofs - looking, as one observer put it - "like a small Zeppelin". The bags were filled with gas piped from the Canons Marsh gas works at a pumping station - basically a hosepipe housed in a small wooden shed situated at or near this spot. The gas-powered buses worked reasonably well, though the engines tended to backfire frequently, so that bus journeys were accompanied by loud bangs. To soldiers they sounded alarmingly like machine-gun fire.

13. The Cenotaph: Shortly after the war's end, there were several memorials built around Bristol to honour the memory of those members of the community who had died. There were also numerous memorial plaques unveiled in schools, factories and offices around the city. Many of these are still in place today, while others have been lost. There was also a feeling, though, that there should be city-wide memorial in memory of the 6,000 Bristolians who had died. Years of argument and discussion followed. Should there be a monument, or should the money be spent on something which would be of use to the living, such as a hospital? At one point there was to be a 'memorial bus shelter' in the Centre. It was eventually decided that there would not be enough money for anything other than a monument. There were then arguments as to where it should be. Most people favoured

College Green, but the Cathedral, which owned the land, would not agree to this. In the meantime, there were regular Remembrance Day services being held each year in the Centre by the late 1920s. Following pressure from the local British Legion, and fundraising drives supported by local newspapers, the money was raised for a monument, and a design contest was held. This was won by the local architectural partnership of Harry Heathman and Eveline Blacker. Bristol was among the last of Britain's major cities to have a major civic memorial. It was unveiled in front of a crowd of 50,000 people on a sweltering hot day in June 1932. About 250 of those present fainted. (Picture: *Bristol Post*)