

Bristol's Fascinating Fountains

in celebration of the Redland Green Fountain Restoration and the visit to Bristol of the British Fountain Society

Historical Background

During Temple Local history Group's survey of Street Furniture we decided to focus on our city's many public drinking fountains as a separate study. Carrying out a survey of Bristol's drinking fountains often required the "Eye of Faith" because some of those noted in earlier accounts were completely missing. A notable example was Bristol's famous Angel Fountain that used to be on one of the city's busiest road junctions, opposite Bristol Bridge on the east end wall of St. Nicholas Church in the High Street.

This fountain often featured in photographs of Bristol and was also known to many as a newspaper seller had his pitch in front of it. However when we enquired we were told that the only surviving pieces were believed to be in "safe-keeping" in a corporation store. In an attempt to find out more about this former landmark, now only marked by the shrapnel-pocked remains of a marble-backing slab, we had to turn to the history books. This is the story of what we discovered and how it put us on the trail of many other fountains including the delight on the Redland Hill corner of Redland Green (right).



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When we started our survey we noticed that many dated from 1859 and at first we couldn't understand what had caused the outbreak of "**Fountain Frenzy**". As is usually the case, the explanation was quite simple but nevertheless an interesting aspect of Bristol's history.

Bristol had its first municipal water supply in 1858, resulting in an upsurge of interest in matters of public health. Correspondence on the subject between Mr Robert Lang and Mr William Naish, Chairman of the Local Board of Health, was published in the Bristol Times. To publicise the new municipal water supply and to encourage the Temperance cause, Mr Lang proposed during the course of a Council meeting in January 1859 that a number of drinking fountains should be erected throughout the city. As an exemplar, he donated one hundred pounds to start the "Fountain Fund". His public-spirited action resulted in many other donations being made by prominent citizens during the course of the year. Turning to Arrowsmith's Dictionary of Bristol we discovered that "There are over forty fountains in different parts of the city, the following being the principal" :-

- **Alderman Proctor's**, Clifton Down, The Promenade [recently moved across the road]
- **Bath Street**
- **Bedminster Bridge**
- **Brandon Hill**
- **Clifton Down** [at Gloucester Row]
- **Colston's Avenue**
- **Durdham Down** [near the reservoir]
- **Hampton Road**
- **Haymarket** [St. James' Churchyard]
- **High Street** [the aforementioned **Angel Fountain**]
- **Hotwell**
- **Lower Berkeley Place**
- **Neptune Statue** [Victoria Street]
- **Nicholas street**
- **Old King Street**
- **Redland Green** [in memory of John Bryant and Emily Clifford]
- **Simon Short Memorial**

- **St. Philip's Bridge**
- **St. Vincent's Spring**
- **Stoke Road**
- **The Triangle** [Queen's Road]
- **Uriah Rees Thomas Memorial and Clock tower** [at the top of the Blackboy Hill]
- **Welsh Back**
- **Westbury-on-Trym**

Today's Fountains.

Our society, Temple Local History Group, produced a fifty-eight page illustrated publication for the "Parish Boundary Markers and Stones of Bristol" (ISBN 0 951 00 68 7 8) which is used by historians and by the City to support their planning, conservation and listing activities. For the same reason, if there is sufficient interest we plan to produce a similar gazetteer of Bristol Fountains.

There follows a **very** short extract from our 'Fountain' records which includes, in addition to those fountains which were the subject of the tour, others in the locality which can be seen if you visit our city.

A Three hour Tour - et seq

1 St Mary Redcliffe Vestry, Conduit, Redcliffe Hill, circa 1190

The bronze conduit outlet is set in the outside of the west wall of the churchyard and a commemorative plaque records the granting to the church of the right of water from Robert de Berkely's 'Rugewell' at Knowle. The annual walk of the pipe, a couple of miles, is an ancient Bristol custom which still takes place on the last Saturday in September. The participants are 'bumped' on each of the stones that mark the route. Further details can be obtained from the vestry.

2 Monument, former Drinking Fountain – Somerset Square, Redcliffe

Listed Grade II Conduit head and drinking fountain, circa 1756, the date of the square. Form: octagonal freestone structure, on pennant-stone plinth, gothic trefoil arches, with plain columns with capped with a vase and fircone decoration.

3 Former Churchyard Drinking fountain, Temple Church, Temple

Recently fallen into disrepair, to the benefit of the adjacent publicans!

4 The Ark and Fish, Drinking Fountain, Castle Park

This design by Kate Malone and dating from 1993 is an absolute delight. It was commissioned especially for the new park and is everything that a drinking fountain should be - functional, aesthetically pleasing, and witty.

5 The Drinking Fountain and Maze, Castle Park

This water feature was also commissioned especially for the new park. It is situated in the garden adjacent to the bombed shell of St Peter's Church. The design provides a fine sense of form, function and place, matching as it does the serenity of the location.

6 Former 'Angel Drinking Fountain', High Street, east wall of St Nicholas Church

As mentioned in the introduction, this fountain, one of the results of Mr Lang's initiative, was erected by the 'Iron Merchants of Bristol' on 19th November 1859. A well-known Bristol landmark (a newspaper seller had his pitch here for many years), it was damaged during WWII and then removed for repair. The only remaining evidence is the shrapnel marks still visible on the church wall. A Coalbrookdale pattern, Number 101, it was in the form of the upper three feet of an Angel's torso holding the Bible open at John IV v13 & 14, "Whosoever shall drink of these waters shall thirst again, but ...", with a scalloped iron basin beneath. In addition to the wartime damage this fountain suffered from post-war neglect and resistance from those responsible for the church structure because water from the

fountain was causing damp penetration of the east wall. After many years of neglect in a city council yard, representations from the Temple Local History Group and the Bristol Civic Society resulted in the remains being eventually moved to the Bristol Industrial Museum. Note: there is a surviving identical ‘Angel Fountain’ from the same Coalbrookdale pattern in the centre of Birmingham, set in the churchyard wall of St Philips.

7 Former Queen Victoria Memorial Drinking Fountain, exterior of the Market-House wall, St Nicholas Street

Listed Grade II, this nice little brightly painted cast iron wall fountain dates from 1859. Supposedly the first public fountain to Queen Victoria, it features the young Queen supported by cherubs. Designed by Wills Bros of Suffolk, sculpted by Payne and paid for by Mr Budgett, a Bristol Grocery Merchant, it is from the Coalbrookdale catalogue, pattern number 106. The iron back plate and basin were damaged and in 1982 the basin was rebuilt in concrete/resin. Until recently the fountain was kept painted by a Mr John Hewett of Whitehall in Bristol.

8 St John’s Conduit, outlet in the City Wall beneath St John’s Church

Although known locally as “St John’s Conduit”, it is more correctly referred to as “The Carmelite Pipe”. The pipe was named after the White Friars who in 1267 took the water from their springs on the slopes of Brandon Hill (top of Park Street) to their house in Colston Street (the present-day Colston Hall occupies the site). The St John's conduit house is a recent addition, i.e. 1376, and arises from the granting of a branch or ‘Feather’ to the parishioners of St John’s. With the dissolution of the monasteries the water supply reverted to the Parish and the City. During the ‘blitz’ of the last war this provided the only source of potable water for the local residents. The water had run continually until the effects of an upsurge in building development caused it to stop for a number of years. As a result of entreaties from every interested group and organisation, it appears that the City has now finally found and fixed the break in the underground pipe! Full details of this very complex system are contained in the Temple Local History Group publication

entitled “An account of St John’s Conduit ~ Bristol’s Medieval Water System” (ISBN 0 951 0068 0 0).

9 Horse trough with dog basin, north side of Colston Avenue by the Cenotaph

This dates from 1908; the inscription reads: “In grateful memory of Captain R. B Nicholetts R.N. who died August 14th 1908. This trough is erected for the use of animals of whom he was always the unfailing friend and champion. Blessed are the merciful.”

10 Former Drinking Fountain, Industrial & Fine Art Exhibition, Colston Avenue, adjacent to the statue of Edward Colston

This square Grade II listed polished grey and red granite fountain with brass Coat of Arms of the City and lion head spouts was erected to celebrate the success of the exhibition held on the site (known locally as Magpie Park) in 1893. The exhibition raised £2,200 for five local medical charities and the fountain, which cost £220, has a descriptive plaque giving further details and names of the committee members responsible for its erection.

11 Former Parish Pump, St Stephen’s Churchyard

This 19th century pump set in the wall of the churchyard faces outwards for the use of the parish and is unusual in that it is box cased in cast iron panels. Although no longer in use, it has been maintained in recent years by members of Temple Local History Group as a ‘thank you’ for help received from the vestry.

12 Bristol’s newest water feature, The ‘Centre’

‘Forty-ish computer controlled small jets and a cascade’ must be seen to be believed; viewed by many Bristol taxpayers as controversial.

13 King George V Fountain, on Narrow Quay side of Broad Quay House

Nice use of monumental figures from the former CWS building, replaced by Broad Quay House completed on the 27th May 1982 with a grant of £25,000 from the King George V Memorial Fund. *(both sides illustrated below)*



14 Sabrina and her attendants, in courtyard of Broad Quay House, Narrow Quay

In a private courtyard, normally accessible during office hours but still visible from the quayside out of hours, this design is by George Laing. This fountain tucked away in the courtyard is an often-overlooked delight.

15 The Millennium Fountain, Millennium Square, Canon's Marsh

An excellent laminar flow fountain, but who will be the first visitor to get a wet seat? Visit it to see what we mean! The square and surrounding attractions look like becoming a vibrant new centre for Bristol - what the city has long needed.

That concludes the tour around the central area of the city - a morning's tour. The following list gives others that you might like to see during your visit. Although a walking tour encompassing all of them would be onerous and a bus tour time consuming and very expensive, it would be feasible to visit most if not all of them by car.

❖ **Computer Controlled Water Jets, Cribbs Causeway Shopping Mall**

Good, but it would be nice to see more of the possible programmes used.



(illustrated)

❖ **King Edward VII Memorial Fountain, Victoria Rooms**

Grade II Listed: dated 1912, designed by Rickard & Poole, and newly restored to its former glory; a fine combination of Art, Form, Function and modern technology – there is even an anemometer (wind speed gauge) to control the fountain water pressure so that on windy days the pressure is reduced in order that the water does not blow across the adjacent roadway!

❖ **Preaching Cross and former Drinking Fountain, St James' Churchyard**

The restoration of this cross (the shaft is broken and the tabernacle head is missing) is another proposed TLHG project. The stepped base contains a now defunct drinking fountain and basin.

❖ **Alderman Proctor's Drinking Fountain, Clifton Down**

Grade II Listed: it was erected in 1872 to record the liberal gift to the citizens of Bristol of the rights of use and access to the Clifton & Durdham Downs for ever – preserved by an Act of Parliament. In 1906 this triangular Gothic structure of Bath Stone with a pointed arch supported by pink granite columns on each face was considered to be “...one of the prettiest designed fountains in Bristol”. Originally sited at the head of Bridge Valley Road, it was causing a traffic hazard and in the

1980's was moved to its present location on the grass on the opposite side of the road. The new location allows easier and safer access and has the merit of being in sight of the Mansion House, the Lord Mayor's official residence, itself given to the City of Bristol by Alderman Proctor. The relocation was also used as the opportunity for a major restoration programme.

❖ **Drinking Fountain, Clifton Down**

(Suspension Bridge end of Gloucestershire Row) This fountain has an elaborate four columned cast iron canopy by McFarlane's of Glasgow let down by a modern (1980s) column type push button fountain (but at least it works!). A twin of this fountain can be seen outside the North Melbourne Post Office, Australia.

❖ **Queen Victoria Diamond Jubilee Memorial Drinking Fountain, The Green, Shirehampton**

The four columned cast iron canopy by McFarlane's of Glasgow is similar to that at Gloucester Row but the fountain and basin are very elaborate with a bird (heron or stork) as a supporter for the now missing chained cups. These very popular designs were registered in 1860 and used throughout Great Britain and the Empire.

❖ **Simon Short Memorial Fountain, Hotwells**

Grade II Listed: erected in 1902 as a memorial to Simon Short, one of the originators of the Seaman's Institute and many other movements for their welfare. Originally sited on Bristol Docks Company land it was moved to the present location and restored when the site was needed for the new Cumberland Basin traffic system. Currently in front of a Knightstone Housing development, planning permission was conditional upon the inclusion of maintenance by the developers.

❖ **Uriah Rees Thomas Memorial Drinking Fountain and Clock Tower, Blackboy Hill**

Grade II Listed: erected in 1904; the Rev U. R Thomas was the first Minister of

Redland Park Chapel, a position he held for forty years, until his death in 1901. His memorial is a massive octagonal structure in polished pink granite complete with five basins, a tiled roof and cupola containing an electric clock by Kemp Bros. The clock is the subject of an annual maintenance contract but sadly the water supply is not!

❖ **Drinking Fountain, at entrance to St Andrew's (Birdcage) Walk, St Andrew's Churchyard, The Fosseway, Clifton**

Grade II Listed: the Clifton & Hotwells Improvement Society (CHIS) is currently trying to raise the funds to get this late 19th century fountain restored.

❖ **Maze fountain, Victoria Park**

Built in 1984, it lies on the route of the Redcliffe Pipe. Water from the conduit system is diverted to flow through the thirty-foot diameter Christian Maze design. The maze design was chosen because it replicates one of the medieval roof bosses within St Mary Redcliffe Church. In 1984 a major civil engineering project took place beneath Victoria Park and the construction of this fountain was seen as a significant link, both between the City and the Church and as a project spanning nearly eight centuries of parish history. As a final note, fund raising associated with the construction of the maze fountain resulted in sufficient funds being raised to provide a water supply for a village in Africa.

❖ **'Gaius Sentius', Drinking Fountain, Warmley**

(on the Bristol to Bath Cycle path) Designed by Gordon Brown, this must be Bristol's most marvellous and imaginative modern drinking fountain. It is really worth 'driving to drink' for – we mean, of course, cycling and water!

❖ **Cllr W.D.Watts Memorial (former) Drinking Fountain, Horfield**

(junction of Kellaway Avenue & Wellington Hill) This is another splendid example of the work of the McFarlane Iron Foundry, recently restored by the City and once more complete with WORKING lamp! The twenty foot high green painted fountain

in the form of a lamp-standard combines drinking fountains and animal troughs and now stands on the grass verge at the corner of Kellaway Avenue and Wellington Hill. However, it was originally located at the bottom of the locally known 'Pig-Sty Hill', also in Horfield. In the 19th century there were stables nearby for the trace horses needed to help heavily laden carts up the hill - and I'm sure that the fountain was welcomed by all, whether two or four legged! Although twentieth-century road widening resulted in the removal of the fountain it was fortunately saved to its new location, albeit sans gas-lamp or water supply. Every fountain and watering hole in Bristol has a story attached, and we have managed to record many of these historical and anecdotal details.

❖ **Goldney House Grotto and water features**

(University Hall of Residence, Clifton) A classic example of Victorian landscaping and folly construction. Of course it always helps if you are a merchant who can instruct your Captains to bring shells and corals back with them from their trading voyages.

That concludes this brief overview of some of Bristol's fountains and water features - however, there are many more! **For more information contact us using our on-line enquiry form.**

In addition to those listed above, some fountains were combined with cattle and other animal troughs. The first of these was provided by the SPCA at the Jacob's Wells and opened on September the 7th 1883. Many drinking troughs were provided by the ladies of the Metropolitan Cattle & Horse Trough association.

Sadly the first fountain resulting from the setting up of the "Fountain Fund" in 1859 by Mr Robert Lang, which was a Coalbrookdale design and located at the Triangle in Clifton, succumbed to road widening and is no more.

The background to some of the fountains is shrouded in the mists of time. What of John Bryant and Emily Clifford who sponsored the Redland Green Fountain? Who were they and why were their names linked? In an attempt to find out we delved into the history books, so far, alas, without success. Were they linked by a joint philanthropic venture, or by a common tragedy? Was the selection of the flowers on the carved stone support for the fountain purely for aesthetic reasons or do they represent a significant link? Whatever the story behind the presence of their names on this delightful little fountain, we are pleased to have been invited to contribute to its restoration celebrations and congratulate the enthusiasts of Redland & Cotham Amenity Society whose hard work made it possible. We believe that this project validates our stated aim of "Having an interest in the past with a concern for the future". Thank you RCAS for restoring this bit of Bristol's history for the rest of us to enjoy.

Temple Local History Group has been pleased to provide a photographic display of some of the fountains mentioned and we would be pleased to learn of any that we have missed.

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More will be added to this pamphlet as information becomes available.