



WALKING GUIDE

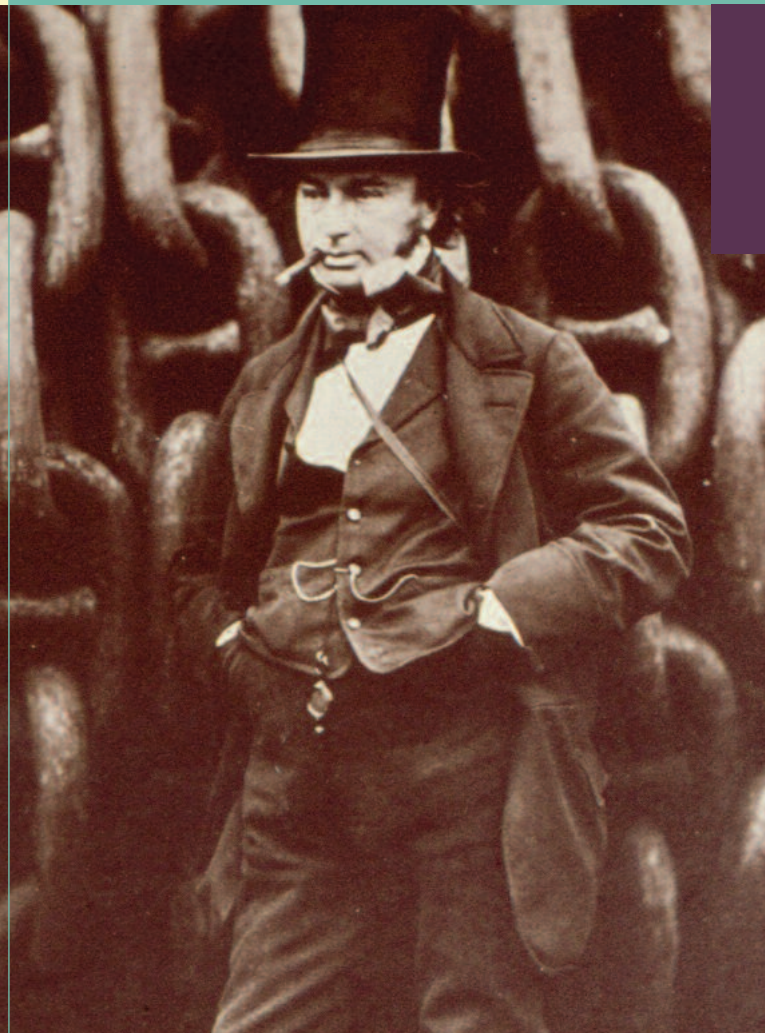
BRUNEL'S DOCKSIDE

The Brunel Mile and dockside walk

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200 



2006 marks the 200th anniversary of the birth of Isambard Kingdom Brunel, one of the most versatile, audacious and inspirational engineers of the nineteenth century.

Brunel 200 celebrates Brunel's life, times and legacy with exhibitions, learning programmes, publications, walks and trails, heritage and arts projects, competitions, debates, media programmes and talks in Bristol, the South West and beyond.

Bristol is home to some of Brunel's finest work including the original Great Western Railway terminus at Temple Meads (now home to the British Empire and Commonwealth Museum), the Clifton Suspension Bridge and the iron steamship *ss Great Britain*.

Brunel's Dockside is one of a series of three guides to Bristol produced as part of the Brunel 200 programme. The other guides in the series are:

- **Victorian Bristol**
- **Brunel's Clifton**

The guides are linked to the Bristol Legible City (BLC) way-finding information system, which includes walking maps and on-street signage designed to improve people's understanding and experience of the city. The BLC walking maps are free of charge and are widely available across the city. They can be found at tourist information centres, visitor attractions, libraries, hotel receptions, travel arrival points and many other sites.

See www.brunel200.com for full details of the Brunel 200 programme.

Enjoy your exploration of Brunel's Bristol and the city's dockside heritage!

Brunel's Dockside

As well as building the Great Western Railway (GWR) and designing the Clifton Suspension Bridge, Brunel was involved in two major shipbuilding enterprises in Bristol that transformed ocean-going travel.

Working for the Great Western Steamship Company, he designed and constructed the *ss Great Western* and, even more significantly, the *ss Great Britain*.

Less well known is that between 1832 and 1848, he was engaged as consulting engineer for the Bristol Docks Company. He worked on a number of projects, the most important being to devise an effective means of dealing with the recurrent problem of silting in the harbour and the design of the South Entrance lock. The *ss Great Britain* is a familiar city landmark and popular visitor destination, but there are also substantial remains of Brunel's docks work that can

still be viewed today, as this guide reveals.

The Walk

This guide provides directions for an enjoyable walk from Brunel's GWR station at Temple Meads to his *ss Great Britain* with the option of extending this on to Underfall Yard and the Brunel lock and swing bridge. Allow at least two hours to complete, not including time for visiting attractions or stopping for refreshments along the route.

The guide provides details of ferry boats that can be used for part of the tour and for the return trip to Temple Meads, if needed, as well as bus services, including the Bristol

City Sightseeing open-top tour bus, which is in operation from Easter to September. The most convenient bus services for travelling across the city are the numbers 8 and 9, operated by First, which run frequently between Bristol Temple Meads station and the city centre and on to Clifton. These routes are marked on the BLC map along with ferry boat and tour bus stops.

1 Launch of the *ss Great Britain* (*ss Great Britain Trust*).



THE WALK

The Brunel Mile forms the southern boundary of BLC's main pedestrian route through and around Bristol city centre.

It runs between Brunel's GWR station at Temple Meads and the waterfront opposite the ss *Great Britain*, Brunel's pioneering steamship. Along the way it passes Queen Square, where Brunel served as a special constable during the Bristol Riots. The designated Brunel Mile is marked in orange on the 2006 edition of the BLC map, but this guide provides a variation to that route.

Brunel's **GWR station** was completed in 1841 and is thought to be the first true railway terminus, with trains and people all inhabiting the same integrated space beneath



a single roof. It ceased to be used as a station in 1965 and is now home to the British Empire and Commonwealth Museum. Information on how the station was built, along with descriptions of the other railway structures on this Temple Meads site, is in the *Victorian Bristol* guide.

Cross Temple Gate at the pedestrian crossing directly outside the museum to the Express by Holiday Inn hotel opposite. Turn right and follow the road round to your left along Redcliffe Way. Crossing to the left hand side of the road, using the pedestrian crossing, walk along Redcliffe Way to **Chatterton House** where the boy-poet, Thomas Chatterton, was born in 1752. Chatterton left Bristol for London in April 1770, allegedly disappointed by his lack of recognition at home, and died shortly afterwards of arsenic

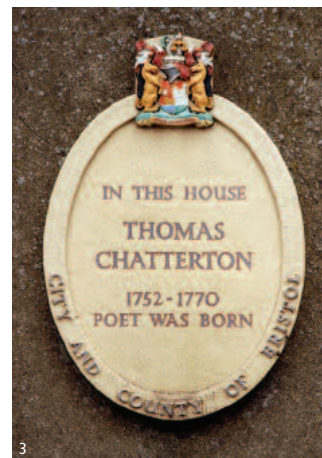
poisoning. His early tragic end has led to the romantic legend of the boy genius destroyed by a philistine world, a legend enhanced by Henry Wallis' famous portrait of the penniless young man lying dead in his London garret.

Continue up Redcliffe Way, towards the large, landscaped traffic roundabout, and cross the road at the pedestrian crossing to view the beautiful **St Mary Redcliffe** church (BLC map reference N7). Queen Elizabeth, on a visit to Bristol in 1574, is said to have declared this to be the 'fairest, goodliest and most famous parish church in



England'. Parts of the church date back to the twelfth century. The Canynges, a Bristol mercantile family, were among the most high-profile of the church's early patrons, paying for major building projects in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The Canynges Society, founded in 1848 to raise funds for essential restoration work, is still active on the church's behalf having been revived in 1928. Much of the nineteenth-century restoration was carried out under the direction of George Goodwin. The imposing spire, which was truncated after being struck by lightning in 1446, reached its full height of 292 feet in 1872.

From the church, cross the bottom of Redcliff Hill and walk past the



2 Brunel's GWR station in Bristol (photograph by Ian Blanter).

3 & 4 Chatterton House and plaque (photographs by Martin Chainey).



Quaker's Burial Ground to Redcliffe Bridge. As you approach the bridge, to your left you will see **Redcliffe Wharf** where the 1997 reconstruction of the *Matthew*, the wooden craft used by explorer John Cabot on his voyage to Newfoundland in 1497, was built. Cross the bridge and enter **Queen Square** (BLC map reference M6).



This elegant square, the largest outside London, was named in honour of Queen Anne when she visited the city in 1702 and was home to some of Bristol's wealthiest merchants. The square was also the site of the Bristol Riots of 1831, which stemmed from discontent at the corruption of city officials and the defeat of the Reform Bill. Brunel visited the city the day after the riots started to supervise work on the Clifton Suspension Bridge and, as the situation worsened, was sworn in

5, 6 & 7 The east nave of St Mary Redcliffe, with views from the Floating Harbour and of the south side (photographs by John Pickard).

as a special constable to stop looting. Armed with a chair leg, it is said that he actually arrested a man but was tricked into handing him over to another rioter disguised as a constable. Many buildings were burnt to the ground during the rioting and business confidence in the city plummeted, leading to delays in the construction of Brunel's bridge.

Although the destroyed buildings were gradually replaced, the square failed to recover its former prestige and during the 1940s suffered the indignity of having a dual carriageway built across it. In the 1990s, Bristol City Council initiated

8 Queen Square setts (photograph by Stephen Morris).

9 The statue of William III (photograph by Stephen Morris).



plans to renovate the square, removing the dual carriageway, restoring gravel paths, digging up tarmac to reveal the original setts beneath and planting mature saplings to fill gaps between the trees. The official re-opening of the square took place in September 2000 and it is once again one of the most attractive public spaces in the city. The equestrian statue in the centre is of King William III in the guise of a Roman emperor.

Take time to promenade around the square then exit along the short lane leading to Prince Street and, beyond, to Pero's Bridge.

Alternate routes: *Here you have a choice of destinations: continue the Brunel Mile by crossing the bridge or turn left on the quayside, in the direction of Arnolfini, and start the Dockside Walk. You can pick up the Dockside Walk later from the end of the Brunel Mile.*

The Dockside Walk is described later in this guide. To continue on the Brunel Mile cross St Augustine's Reach by **Pero's Bridge**. This bridge was designed by Eilis O'Connell and opened in 1999. The centre of the



bridge can be raised for water traffic by means of hydraulic rams, with the large horn-shaped protrusions acting as a counterbalance. The bridge is named after a young slave who came to Bristol around 1783, died in 1798 and was owned by the Bristol merchant John Pinney.

Bristol was once a thriving commercial port, one of the biggest and busiest in England, but by the late-twentieth century the bustling docksides had fallen into disrepair as maritime trade moved to larger and more convenient facilities.

In recent years, the waterfront area has been regenerated with a variety of restaurants, bars, cafés and nightclubs, which are particularly busy in the evening. Diverting from the Brunel Mile and walking up towards Bordeaux Quay on your right, you will come to the **Watershed Media Centre**, which is housed in two converted Victorian warehouses (BLC map reference K5). Watershed has cinemas, exhibition space, a bar and café, and is a popular venue for conferences, festivals, workshops and other special events.

Returning to the end of the bridge and walking straight ahead, you will enter Anchor Square where you

will find the At-Bristol complex. Bristol's Tourist Information Centre is in the foyer of Wildwalk on the right. **Explore-At-Bristol**, at the far side of the square, was converted from a reinforced-concrete railway goods shed. Explore is hosting a major exhibition called *The Forces That Made I K Brunel* as part of the Brunel 200 celebrations. Walking to the left of Explore will bring you into **Millennium Square** where you will find the planetarium (temporarily closed at the time of

10 & 11 Pero's Bridge by day and by night (Destination Bristol, photographs by Graham Flack).

12 View of Millennium Square showing the water sculpture, planetarium and south side of Explore-At-Bristol (Destination Bristol).





writing this guide), William Pye's water sculpture *Aquarena* and statues of Cary Grant, William Tyndale and Thomas Chatterton. The square is particularly lively on sunny days with children turning the *Aquarena* into an unofficial paddling pool (BLC map reference H6).

Continue your walk bearing left across the square to bring you back at the waterfront. Turn right into the **Amphitheatre**, which is set inside the broad crescent of the Lloyds TSB offices. This area is used for open-air concerts and is a focal point for shore-side entertainment during the annual Bristol Harbour

Festival. The stone structure at the water's edge is the base of a late-eighteenth-century crane.

An extensive building programme is currently taking place on what will eventually be the official end of the Brunel Mile.



From the Amphitheatre, you have a number of options available including:

- *Retracing your steps and walking back to Temple Meads or returning to the start of the Dockside Walk.*
- *Catching a ferry boat operated by the Bristol Ferry Boat Company: depending on the service used, this will either take you all the way down to Hotwells and then back to Bordeaux Quay or to the ss Great Britain and then to Temple Quay, close to the walk's starting point at the train station.*
- *Walking back to Explore and out to Anchor Road to pick up an open-top tour bus operated by City Sightseeing.*
- *Walking out to Anchor Road, then turning left and walking down to Capricorn Quay, just off Hotwells Road, to take the Cross Harbour Ferry to the ss Great Britain (this is also a good spot for taking a photograph of the ship).*

13 Bristol's Harbour Festival with Lloyds TSB offices and amphitheatre behind (Destination Bristol).

14 *Matilda*, operated by the Bristol Ferry Boat Company (Destination Bristol, photograph by Graham Flack).

15 Strolling along Narrow Quay (Destination Bristol, photograph by Graham Flack).

The Dockside Walk

At Pero's Bridge you had the option to continue on the Brunel Mile or to start the Dockside Walk.

To take the Dockside Walk, rather than crossing the bridge, turn left and walk along the cobbled Narrow Quay, passing the Bristol Youth Hostel and the stylish Architecture Centre, to reach **Arnolfini** (BLC map reference K6). The building was originally called Bush House and was built in the early 1830s for the iron founders Acramans for



warehousing and administration. It was converted in 1975 to provide the Arnolfini arts centre with exhibition space, a restaurant, a cinema/performance space, a bookshop and offices, and has recently completed further refurbishment and expansion.

Outside Arnolfini sits the **statue of John Cabot**, the Genoese explorer, merchant, navigator and cartographer who set out from Bristol in search of the Far East. Cabot's ships were fitted out by Bristol merchants, including Robert Thorne, founder of Bristol Grammar School, and were manned by Bristol seamen who already had experience of venturing across the Atlantic in pursuit of fishing grounds.



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By travelling west, Cabot came not to the Orient but to Newfoundland. A tower built to commemorate his voyage was built on Brandon Hill in the late-nineteenth century and is described in the *Victorian Bristol* guide.

From the statue, walk along the quay to Prince Street Bridge (a swing bridge) and cross to the **Bristol Industrial Museum** on Prince's Wharf (BLC map reference K7). About half way along is the site where Brunel's oak-hulled paddle steamer the *ss Great Western* was launched from Patterson's shipyard in 1837. The *Great Western* had a

16 Arnolfini (photograph by Jamie Woodley).

17 Cabot's statue with Pero's Bridge in the background (Destination Bristol, photograph by Graham Parish).

18 *Launch of the Great Western from William Patterson's Yard, 19 July 1837*, painting by Arthur W Parsons, 1919 (Bristol's Museums, Galleries and Archives).

19 & 20 Electric cranes and the motor tug *John King* at the Industrial Museum (Destination Bristol, photographs by Graham Flack).



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successful career as a transatlantic liner and was later purchased by the Royal Mail Steam Packet Company, operating out of Southampton on the West Indies run. Bristol has a long shipbuilding tradition producing a variety of ocean-going and coastal vessels. The term 'shipshape and Bristol fashion' refers to Bristol's reputation for building ships that were strong and seaworthy, and the need to stow everything well to withstand the difficult conditions created by Bristol's unusually high tidal range in which the water level can drop as much as 12 metres at low tide.

The **Industrial Museum**, housed in a 1950s transit shed, contains over 700 exhibits relating to Bristol's

long and varied industrial past. Out on the wharf you can see travelling electric cranes built by the Bath company Stothert & Pitt, the Fairbairn steam crane, a steam railway, two tugs and a fire-boat, all in working order and brought to life on summer weekends.



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21 The Fairbairn steam crane with the Industrial Museum in the background (Destination Bristol, photograph by Graham Flack).

22 The dockside steam railway (Bristol's Museums, Galleries and Archives).

23 Boating scene in the Floating Harbour with view of The Point in the background (Destination Bristol, photograph by Graham Flack).



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Continue your walk along the waterfront. Prince's Wharf becomes Wapping Wharf as you pass the steam crane. The crane was completed in August 1878 and is capable of lifting 35 tons. Prior to it being built, there had been no crane in the docks capable of lifting more than around three tons, a serious commercial disadvantage when Bristol was hoping to attract vessels with heavy loads. You will be walking parallel to the dockside steam railway where, during the summer months, the locomotives *Henbury* and *Portbury* pull carriage-

loads of weekend visitors between the museum and the *ss Great Britain*.

As you head in the direction of the *ss Great Britain* you will see on the left **The Point**, a triangular complex of modern apartment blocks completed in 2001. Over to the right, on the other side of the water, you have a view of the top of Cabot's tower.

Meeting Point: for those who have crossed by the Cross Harbour Ferry and are now joining the Dockside Walk.

Brunel's *ss Great Britain*, launched in 1843 at Bristol's Great Western Dockyard, where she now lies, set new standards in engineering, reliability, speed and ocean-going comfort. She was the first iron-hulled, screw-propelled steamship to cross the Atlantic. Between 1852 and 1876, she made 32 voyages to Australia, carrying emigrants, as well as the England cricket team, and is thought to have transported the forebears of around 250,000 modern-day Australians. For many years the ship was moored in the Falkland Islands and used for storage, but she returned to Bristol in 1970 in an epic salvage operation

and has been undergoing extensive conservation work since 2001. In 2005 construction of an innovative glass sea was completed at the ship's water line, which provides the roof to an airtight chamber to prevent any further corrosion of her hull. Visitors to the ship, in addition to enjoying the dockyard museum and exploring the ship's cabins and decks, can also descend beneath the 'sea' for a close-up view of the hull and screw propeller. The *ss Great Britain* is hosting a major exhibition in its Maritime Heritage Centre called *The Nine Lives of I K Brunel* as part of the Brunel 200 celebrations. The *Matthew* is moored at the *ss Great Britain* when in Bristol and can be incorporated into a visit to Brunel's ship.

From the *ss Great Britain*, retrace your steps and turn right to walk up Gasferry Road, past the **Maritime Heritage Centre** (BLC map reference F7). You will soon reach, on your left, the offices of the award-winning animation company Aardman, creators of Wallace and Gromit. On the right, on the corner of a currently derelict Victorian malthouse, you will see a footpath. Do not be put off by the slightly run-down surroundings. This path



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will quickly bring you out to the waterfront again. Walk along the path towards Bristol Marina. Turn left to walk alongside the Marina's wire fence, following the sign to the Marina Office, then turn right at the corner of the fence. The path that will lead you down to the boats, water sports, sculptures



and residential developments of **Baltic Wharf**. Continuing along the waterfront path towards Underfall Yard, pause outside **The Cottage Inn** and look across the harbour up to the terraces of Clifton and the Leigh Woods tower of Brunel's suspension bridge.

Walk on to **Underfall Yard**, which has close associations with Brunel and the development of the Bristol docks (BLC map reference 7D).

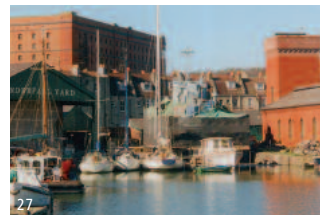
24 & 25 The ss *Great Britain* and the *Matthew* (Destination Bristol, photographs by Graham Flack).

26 Sailing boats near Baltic Wharf (Destination Bristol, photograph by Graham Flack).

27 & 28 Views of Underfall Boatyard.



In the early nineteenth century, the engineer William Jessop was engaged by the Bristol Dock Company to create a non-tidal Floating Harbour to combat continuing problems with ships being grounded at low tide. With his system, which was completed in 1809, water was trapped behind



lock gates so ships could remain floating at all times. Part of the project included building a dam at Underfall Yard with a weir to allow surplus water to flow into the New Cut, an excavation that by-passed the Floating Harbour and joined the River Avon near Temple Meads. Brunel was called in at a later stage to deal with problems of silting. Among the measures he introduced was the replacement of the dam with sluices that controlled the flow of water through the Floating Harbour and allowed dredged mud to be washed away. These were rebuilt during the 1880s and are still in nearly daily use today. A Brunel-designed dragboat for scraping mud away from the sides of the harbour remained in



operation until the early 1960s. An information board at the entrance to the yard provides further details and you can see where the sluices are housed just beyond this point. Most of the buildings and engineering installations you see were constructed between 1880 and 1890 under the direction of John Ward Girdlestone.

Walk through to the other side of the yard, taking care as you go, as this is a working area. At the gate is another information board, this time giving details of the engine house, which operates the Cumberland Basin pumping station locks, and the 1858 hauling up slipway, which was recently restored to full working order. Turn left on leaving the yard to walk up to the road. Turn right and walk to the end of the road. Ahead you will see a car park, with the Nova Scotia Hotel off to your right. Cross by the traffic islands,



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walk across the car park and turn left along the waterside footpath near a large anchor. You are now walking along one side of the **Cumberland Basin** heading towards the **Plimsoll Bridge** (BLC map reference B7). Once a month the basin is drained, which can be a dramatic sight. Walk under the left-hand arch of the bridge, around the spiral staircase and on to a grey, tubular girder bridge. Pause at the middle and turn right to look across the water. You are standing on a replica bridge crossing Brunel's now disused 1838 South Entrance lock. Behind you are the tidal waters of the Avon Gorge. Cross to the man-made island, turn left and walk out to the furthest point for a view of the Clifton Suspension Bridge.

Turn round and walk back across the island, this time keeping to the left-hand side, walking along one edge of the 1873 **Howard Lock**, which is still in operation. On the other side

of the water is Hotwells, a place that once attempted to rival Bath with its spa facilities and which was also an area for shipbuilding. Continue towards the Plimsoll Bridge, this time aiming for the other arch. You will walk past Brunel's original hand-powered tubular **swing bridge**, currently set upon the quayside, an innovative design that later informed his triumphant Royal Albert Bridge at Saltash. Walk under the Plimsoll Bridge and return to the path by crossing the concrete bridge to your right and walking back towards Underfall Yard. The large redbrick structures you will see to your right are former tobacco warehouses, one of which has been converted to house the Bristol Record Office and the CREATE Centre.

- 29 Brunel's lock during draining of the Cumberland Basin (photograph by Antony Lyons).
 30 View to the Clifton Suspension Bridge (Bristol Ferry Boat Company).
 31 Swing bridge (photograph by Ross Floyd).



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You now have a number of options, including:

- *Retracing your steps, perhaps breaking the journey by picking up the Cross Harbour Ferry at the ss Great Britain, if you have not previously taken this route.*
- *Catching either the Bristol Ferry Boat Company's Hotwells service from the Nova Scotia or The Cottage stops, which will take you to top of St Augustine's Reach in the city centre, or the Temple Meads service from the ss Great Britain, which will take you to Temple Quay, near to the train station.*
- *Joining a Bristol Packet city docks tour or afternoon river cruise from the stop near to the ss Great Britain's Maritime Heritage Centre.*
- *Picking up the number 500 bus service operated by Bugler Coaches on Cumberland Road, which will take you to Temple Meads (service does not run Sundays).*
- *Hopping on to the City Sightseeing open-top bus at the Baltic Wharf Caravan Park or ss Great Britain stop to join their city tour.*

If you return to the city centre, you can catch the number 8 bus from College Green to Clifton and the suggested starting point of *Brunel's Clifton*, a walk lasting approximately one and half hours. Alternatively you can explore some of Bristol's Victorian architecture using the *Victorian Bristol* guide, which will take you around St Michael's Hill, West End, Old City and Temple.

We hope you enjoy exploring Bristol.



32 City Sightseeing bus.

Websites for further information

St Mary Redcliffe
www.stmaryredcliffe.co.uk

Watershed Media Centre
www.watershed.co.uk

At-Bristol
www.at-bristol.org.uk

The Architecture Centre
www.architecturecentre.co.uk

Arnolfini
www.arnolfini.org.uk

Bristol Industrial Museum
www.bristol-city.gov.uk/ccm/
content/Leisure-Culture/Museums-
Galleries/bristols-industrial-
museum.en

ss Great Britain
www.ssgreatbritain.org

The Matthew
www.matthew.co.uk

Underfall Boatyard
www.underfallboatyard.co.uk

Bristol Ferry Boat Company
www.bristolferryboat.co.uk
(also operates the Cross Harbour Ferry service)

Bristol Packet
www.bristolpacket.co.uk

Bugler Coaches
www.buglercoaches.co.uk

City Sightseeing
www.bristolvisitor.co.uk

Brunel 200 is a partnership initiative initiated and managed by the Bristol Cultural Development Partnership (BCDP – Arts Council England South West, Bristol City Council, Business West). South West activities are being developed in partnership with Culture South West. Brunel 200 is part of Science City Bristol.

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Text by Melanie Kelly. The BLC team is planning an environmental upgrading of the Brunel Mile route with high quality pathways, improved lighting, interpretative displays, increased tourist information, archaeological markers and arts projects. For further information and to provide letters of support for the Brunel Mile initiative, contact: Tina Speake, Design Project Officer, City Centre Projects and Urban Design Team, Department of Environment, Transport and Leisure, Planning Services, Brunel House, St George's Road, Bristol BS1 5UY Tel: (0117) 9222915.

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Designed by: Qube Design Associates Ltd
Printed by: Doveton Press

The Brunel Mile and dockside walk

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