

Routes in Central and South Bristol

Walk 5 - Bedminster & Southville

Walking Bristol



Bristol Group Ramblers

As members of the Ramblers we promote walking, protect the rights of way, campaign for access to open country and the coastline and defend the beauty of the countryside.

We have regular walks of varying distance and difficulty on Saturday mornings, Sundays and Wednesdays. In the Spring and Summer we have shorter walks on Tuesday and Thursday evenings. Our walks on Wednesdays and Tuesday evenings are usually accessible by public transport.

Non-members are most welcome. After a few walks they will be invited to join the Bristol Ramblers Group. We have a membership of almost 1000 walkers in Bristol and over 2000 in the West of England area.

For details of membership and our walks programme visit **www.bristolramblers.org.uk**. Then just choose a walk to suit your ability and contact the walk leader to introduce yourself and obtain further details.

Even though these walks are within the city, suitable footwear and a waterproof are still advised. All of the walks are accessible by public transport. The times for buses and trains can be

checked at **www.travelinesw.com**. We have done our best to provide accurate and up to date information, but services are liable to alteration at short notice.

Whilst every effort has been made to check the routes in this book, mistakes do happen and the city is subject to changes, so neither Bristol City Council or the Ramblers can accept responsibility for any inconvenience this may cause. To advise of mistakes or recommend new walks for future editions contact Bristol City Council at **transport.plan@bristol.gov.uk** or **0117 9036701**.

Neither Bristol City Council or the Ramblers necessarily endorse the opinions expressed by the authors of the walks.

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Introduction

Walking is the simplest and cheapest form of travel and also one of the best forms of exercise. It helps you to feel good, reduces stress, increases your energy levels, reduces blood pressure and helps you to sleep better at night. It is a very good way to help you to lose weight.

Walking also helps you to appreciate the city that you live in. Other forms of transport race you past those lovely views or small points of historic interest. They make it more difficult to pop in to that small shop or stop off for a drink and a bite to eat. Walking lets you appreciate all of these at a leisurely pace.

In 2002 Bristol City Council and Bristol Group Ramblers collaborated to produce a delightful publication called 'Bristol Backs – Discovering Bristol on Foot'. This book contained 27 walks around the city, all over varying length and all taking in various features of this great city.

The book was intended to be sold, as it had been lovingly produced to a high quality. Unfortunately, this meant that when stocks began to run low, the cost of re-production proved to be prohibitive.

It seemed a real shame that access to these walks could be denied to so many people, so it was decided to re-produce a selection of these in a smaller format. The beauty of this new publication is that it will be free for all to enjoy.

Trying to decide which walks to exclude was very difficult and this led us to producing two booklets, one for the north and east of the city and the other for the south and central. You may wish to pick up the one that is local to you or both of them to explore other parts of the city. Although a number of walks are in or close to the city centre a conscious effort has been made to take these walks to the majority of the population out in the suburbs. There are some little gems in the most unexpected of places.

So please, go out and walk around your city and enjoy its little hidden pleasures and explore those alleys and lanes that you might not have known existed and if it means that you occasionally leave the car at home, it will have all been worth it.

Bedminster and Southville - *walk 5*

- Description:** A view of areas that lay outside the traditional city boundary.
- Length:** 5 miles (2.5 hours). Or 6 miles (3 hours) to return to start.
- Refreshments:** Pubs and cafés en route. Café at Ashton Court Mansion.
- Transport:** Several buses serve Bedminster. There is no bus link between the beginning and end of the walk described. Although, you can catch a ferry from by The Cottage pub and alight at the The Ostrich pub. From there it is a 10 minute walk back to Bedminster.

Bristol has been established since the eleventh century as a port, but Bedminster, just south of the river Avon and now part of Bristol, has been established even longer. Some believe it was Roman; certainly there was a Saxon settlement. However, most of the buildings that you see in Bedminster today relate to Bristol's Victorian industrial past and the working people in that community - tobacco warehouses and factories and coal mines, non-conformist churches and chapels, old-fashioned Victorian shops and pubs.

Bedminster is still a lively and friendly community, with a clear sense of its own identity separate from Bristol. The factories and coal-mines closed years ago and have now been converted into offices, an arts space and a children's playground, but the community itself still thrives.

By the middle ages, Bedminster was a thriving rural area - its rural past can be seen today in pub names such as the Barley Mow, the Spotted Cow and the Three Horseshoes - centred around St John's Church, which sadly no longer

exists. The imposing fifteenth century church was destroyed in 1644 during the Civil War, and a rather modest replacement was built in 1663.

By the middle of the 1800s, the population of Bedminster had increased enormously and St John's church was rebuilt in a far more imposing style in 1855. The church was destroyed during a Luftwaffe raid on Good Friday 1941, and the ruins were eventually demolished in 1962. In its time, St John's church was the major church of Bedminster, and St Mary Redcliffe was merely a daughter church of St John's.

The walk starts at the new Bedminster Library, opened in 2004 **A**. Note the tall tower of the old police/fire station next to the library - this was a watchtower for fires. This area was renovated after the millennium and includes flats, a surgery, a restaurant and an art gallery.

With your back to the entrance to the Library, walk to your right along East Street.

The junction of East Street and Philip Street was a thriving hamlet within Bedminster called Brightbow. Philanthropist John James was born in Philip Street and he is commemorated by a blue plaque at the nearby Windmill Hill City Farm. From this point, you can see the Barley Mow pub and one of Bedminster's many church halls behind. You can see the former factories and offices of the tobacco firm W.D. & H.O. Wills - now an attractively renovated

shopping precinct - and the shops of East Street. Methodism was very strong in Bedminster, and Wesley preached on at least four occasions here in 'The Paddock', which is probably where ASDA's car park now is.

Turn right into Lombard Street, and follow the road round the bend until you see the ASDA car park on your right. Immediately opposite the car entrance to ASDA is a cul-de-sac, but with pedestrian access. This is Southville Place. Turn left along Southville Place, then at the end turn right then immediately left into Southville Road.

Here you can see St Paul's church **B**. The Bishop of Bath and Wells, an opponent of Reform, was mobbed when he came to consecrate it in 1831. (At that

date, Bedminster was in Somerset whilst the See of Bristol covered the City and Dorset.) There was also an ecclesiological dispute.

The altar screen 'frightened one or two nervous people, who fear that every sign of good taste is a "mark of the beast" and that the Devil and the Pope are sure to be concealed in everything that is not incongruous in design and barbarously out of place'.

St Paul's was gutted during the war. In recent years the building has been struck by lightning. The church fronts on the busy Coronation Road, running alongside the New Cut on an embankment of spoil. It used to be a favourite course for running matches in which some of the Grace brothers competed. In 1873 Thomas Proctor spent £500 planting trees along the riverside.

A foolish attempt was made to style this parade a boulevard but the public declined to adopt the misnomer.

Proctor's other benefactions included the Mansion House and a service of civic plate. The drinking fountain on Clifton Down for which he left £100 in his will, was impiously moved to speed up traffic.

Directly opposite the front entrance of the church is a ramp leading down to the old Gaol Ferry (on the 1903 OS map, it appears as Coronation Ferry), replaced by a suspension bridge in 1935.

The New Gaol gatehouse, a place of public execution until the practice was abolished, still stands on the opposite bank. The first execution in 1821 drew a huge crowd. Unfortunately the executioner lost his nerve and hid himself as soon as he observed the near approach of the criminal.

After some search he was found behind a door and brought upon the scaffold. Tactfully, at the gathering before the event, the BRI surgeon whose duty it was to anatomise the body was not introduced to the prisoner.

He had himself given evidence at the trial, though it is at least arguable that the death was caused not directly by assault with a lump of rock but by unhygienic hospital treatment. The surgeon made a mistake with the paperwork so he had to come back later to collect the body in a coach.

Eventually, he had the skin tanned as a book-binding. One can only admire the style of Mrs Burdock, the poisoner, who, wearing an expensive dress, demanded an umbrella as she waited on the scaffold. (In another version of the story, she was offered an umbrella and said 'No need to bother now. I shan't be wearing this lot again').

Turn left down Acraman's Road. This leads to Dean Lane. Turn left into Dean Lane

At the junction with Alpha Road (no 48) was the endearing (but sadly defunct) Bristol Dolls' Hospital.

Acraman's Road was named after the man who owned the plot of land on which the church now stands.

The story of Bedminster and Southville in the last 150 years is also the story of the Smyth family. They owned most of Bedminster, including Ashton Court, and the mark of the family is to be seen everywhere.

Kingswood was already a mining area, and Sir Greville Smyth commissioned a mining survey to see if there were coal deposits in Bedminster too. There were, and the first pit was opened in South Liberty Lane in 1744.

By 1830, eighteen pits were in operation, the biggest of which was in Dean Lane.

This can still be seen in Dame Emily Park **C** (named after Greville Smyth's wife), to be seen shortly on your right, where a set of railings (and formerly a bandstand) mark the covered top of the area's biggest pit. The last pit closed in 1924.

Dean Lane comes out to the junction of North Street and Cannon Street, by a pub now called the Bar Salt **D** (until recently called The Star, the Florikin and Firkin and Aurora). This pub has a colourful history - in the 1830s, the landlord purchased a live tiger from Bristol Docks, which he displayed in a cage in the pub. This drew the crowds for a while, but the novelty wore off. So to boost crowds further, the landlord took to getting into the cage with the tiger. This ploy worked, and would probably have made the landlord rich, were it not for the inevitable night when the tiger killed and ate the unfortunate man!

Continue along North Street.

Just past the Bar Salt by the zebra crossing, glance up at the corner house on Merrywood Road - 'Poets Corner 1882' **E**. Southey and Coleridge both had Bedminster connections, but this corner is not dedicated to them.

A butcher's shop once stood here, owned by the brother of the butcher whose shop still stands further up North Street (Collard's). He was renowned for his awful music-hall style poetry, and the monument was erected as a joke.

Cross over the zebra crossing, turn left and round into Cannon Street (this involves doubling back a few metres, as the 'Merrywood Road' 'Poets Corner' is actually a minor detour).

You can see the Robert Fitzharding pub on the left. The Fitzhardings were lords of the manor of Bedminster between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries. The Robert Fitzharding after whom this pub is named was a rich merchant who founded Bristol Cathedral. Cannon Street also housed the Town Hall of Bedminster (where Clara Butt gave her first performance), and three haberdashery shops owned by E.N. Miles (where the advertising hoardings now are). Over to the left above the rooftops, you can see Cameron Balloons **F**, and the Robinsons Paper Bag factory. The Cameron Balloons building was in fact the first Robinsons paper bag factory, built in the 1880s. By 1897, they had expanded and built a second big block. This is now unoccupied, but the company name can still be seen from behind the building. Work to convert the building to flats started in 2007.

Just past the Robert Fitzharding pub, turn right into British Road.

This was originally called Victoria Street, but was renamed British Road in 1846. The non-conformists competed against the 'National Schools', mainly founded by the Church of England, and set up their own 'British Schools', a major one being on this road and giving the later name to the road. The school had many uses after its closure, but had been standing empty for several years when it was vandalised in 1997. It was demolished a year later, and little remains apart from a single wall still standing.

The Lam Rim Buddhist centre can be seen in Victoria Place - this is also a complementary health centre. The Princess of Wales is an early nineteenth century pub, and the pub sign with the picture of Princess Diana is recent - the sign formerly showed Alexandra, the wife

of Edward VII. Bedminster Methodist church in British Road is a modern church, replacing the grand neo-classical church of 1837 which stood until 1980, and was known as Ebenezer Methodist Church

Turn right into Hebron Road. The bottom of Hebron Road comes out onto North Street. Make a minor detour here by turning right into North Street.

The magnificent Hebron Chapel **G**, was built as a chapel by a breakaway Methodist group and later became a Spiritualist church. The overgrown burial ground contains the grave of the exotically named Princess Caribou. In fact, the 'princess' was a poor Devonian woman named Mary Baker who pretended to be a Javanese princess and was fêted by the wealthy and famous in

the early 1800s. She died a pauper in 1868. A couple of houses down along North Street is A.D. Collard, the butcher (now an antiques shop). It still has the original tiles on the shop front and some original wrought iron fittings **H**. The Collards were originally a French Huguenot family and established themselves in Bedminster in the 1850s.

Double back along North Street in the other direction. At the Hen and Chicken, turn right into Greville Road.

You will see Gaywood House on your left. This is now a doctor's surgery and tower block, and replaced a graceful eighteenth century building called Dorset House. Further on is the Spotted Cow (another reference to Bedminster's rural past) and then the Hen and Chicken pub. This traditional Bedminster pub became nationally famous in the early 1990s

when it became Bristol's first theatre pub **I**, and hosted the very talented Show of Strength theatre company. Most performances were sold out, and people came from all over the U.K. to see their performances, which received glowing reviews in national broadsheets such as the Guardian and Observer. The theatre group are still performing at various venues, including outdoor shows. Greville road is named after Sir Greville Smyth. You will notice houses on the right with names such as 'Prospect Place'. These houses, built in the 1880s, used to have superb views over Clifton until the larger three storey houses were built later. Some of the larger houses have the house numbers engraved into the stone, for example number 171 on the left. However, the house with 171 engraved into it is not 171 Greville Road **J** - it's 51 Greville Road. The reason for this can be seen by looking at any map - Greville Road has a 'dog-leg' in it. It was

originally going to be an extension of Stackpool Road, and Stackpool Road now stops dead at a large brick wall. This marked the boundary of a vicarage, and the church refused to sell up to the developers. As a result, the brick wall stayed (and is still there), and Greville Road had to be diverted around the vicarage. The vicarage is no longer there, but Vicarage Road is.



At what seems to be the end of Greville Road, turn right (in fact, you're still in Greville Road), then follow the road round to the left, then at the top of the hill turn left again, and follow the road round to the right. You've negotiated the 'dogleg' of Greville Road, and you are now in Stackpool Road. Walk along Stackpool Road and turn left down Beaulley Road.

You can see the Southville Centre, a former school. This is now a thriving community centre and sheltered housing development.

Continue down Beaulley Road, and near the bottom, turn left along Raleigh Road, then take the first

right (it's quite a way) along Upton Road.

The end of Raleigh Road was very industrial, and that part of the road was very hemmed in. The old tobacco factories were demolished a few years ago, but the ones in Upton Road have been renovated as offices.

One of the redbrick tobacco warehouses, on the corner of Raleigh Road and North Street, is now the Tobacco Factory theatre, and is home to the 'Shakespeare at the Tobacco Factory' company.

When you reach the crossroads, turn left along Greenway Bush Lane. Keep going until you almost reach North Street, then turn right into Ashton Gate Road.

At the end of Ashton Gate Road, turn left along a tiny road called Back Lane. This comes out into North Street near the old tollhouse **K** and faces Greville Smyth Park at Ashton Gate. At the end of Back Lane, turn right past the tollhouse, and then Greville Smyth Park. One path runs parallel to Frayne Road, but take the diagonal path leading into the play area of the park. Walk across the grass of the park and at the far corner you will see an underpass. Go through the underpass, follow the path round the corner and stick to the pavement - you don't need to cross any roads at this point.

Follow the path round to the right under another underpass, and follow the path to a bus stop by a roundabout. From here, there are two possible routes to Ashton Court. The easiest is to turn right along Clamage Road, the A369, then turn left into Kennel Lodge Road. This leads past the University of the West of England and along a paved road to Ashton Court mansion.

The alternative is to cross the A369 into the small road directly opposite, Parklands Road. Keep going until you near the end of this road, and you will see a narrow footpath to the left leading into Ashton Park school playing fields.

Continue along this path between the school and the playing fields. Follow the path to the end as it bears right. You will be arrive at the road next to the Dovecote public house (formerly the Smythe Arms). Walk past the pub and take the road entrance to the right with stone pillars. This leads to a car park. Within a few yards, go through the first kissing gate to your right. Bear right and continue towards Ashton Court mansion.

From this direction, you get an imposing view of Ashton Court mansion **L**, the ancestral home of the Smyth family, and the kissing gate leads right into the mansion garden. Ashton Court hosts major international events such as the

Balloon Fiesta and Kite Festival, and has dozens of different walks in its own right.

Walk onto the estate road and turn right past the mansion (if you've taken the pretty route - otherwise simply turn back and go back down the entrance road the way you came). This estate road leads past the University of the West of England and into Kennel Lodge Road.

At the bottom of Kennel Lodge Road, turn left onto the busy Clange Road. Cross the road at the crossing and then follow the new path immediately ahead taking you along the fringe of Bedminster Cricket Club. At the end

of this path turn left and over the railway bridge and follow the path between the allotments and the rear of a stonemasons yard. This path eventually goes under Brunel Way. Then follow the path to the iron bridge just slightly to your right.

This iron bridge **M** used to be a double-decker bridge, with a railway line underneath and a road on top. Before the Cumberland Basin complex was built in the 1960s, this was the main road from the South West into Bristol. After you've crossed the bridge, you can take a very short detour to the 'eco-house' **N** almost immediately on your left, and the warehouse housing the CREATE centre which is well worth a visit, with a permanent exhibition and a good, reasonably priced café.

After you've crossed the bridge, turn right along the cyclepath.

Just before the cyclepath becomes narrower and follows the river, you'll see an exit on the left onto a very busy road (Cumberland Road). Go onto this road, and cross it with great care - there is a bit of a blind bend, and cars coming from your right may either bear right or whiz straight past you.

Turn right along Cumberland Road, and take your first available left into a car park for the Harbourmaster's Office.

At the Harbourmaster's Office you are on the dockside. On your right is

the end of our journey, the Cottage - a popular dockside pub with spectacular views to Clifton and the suspension bridge - and formerly the harbourmaster's cottage.

Note: to return to Bedminster Library, retrace your steps to the cyclepath and follow it along the river until you get to the second footbridge. This footbridge will take you across the river and bring you out at St Paul's church near the start of our walk. Turn left and walk through the ASDA car park to Bedminster Library.

Walk devised by Chris Mitchell,
Bristol Ramblers

A Bedminster Library

