

Walking Bristol

Routes in North and East Bristol
Walk 3 - Royate Hill



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.

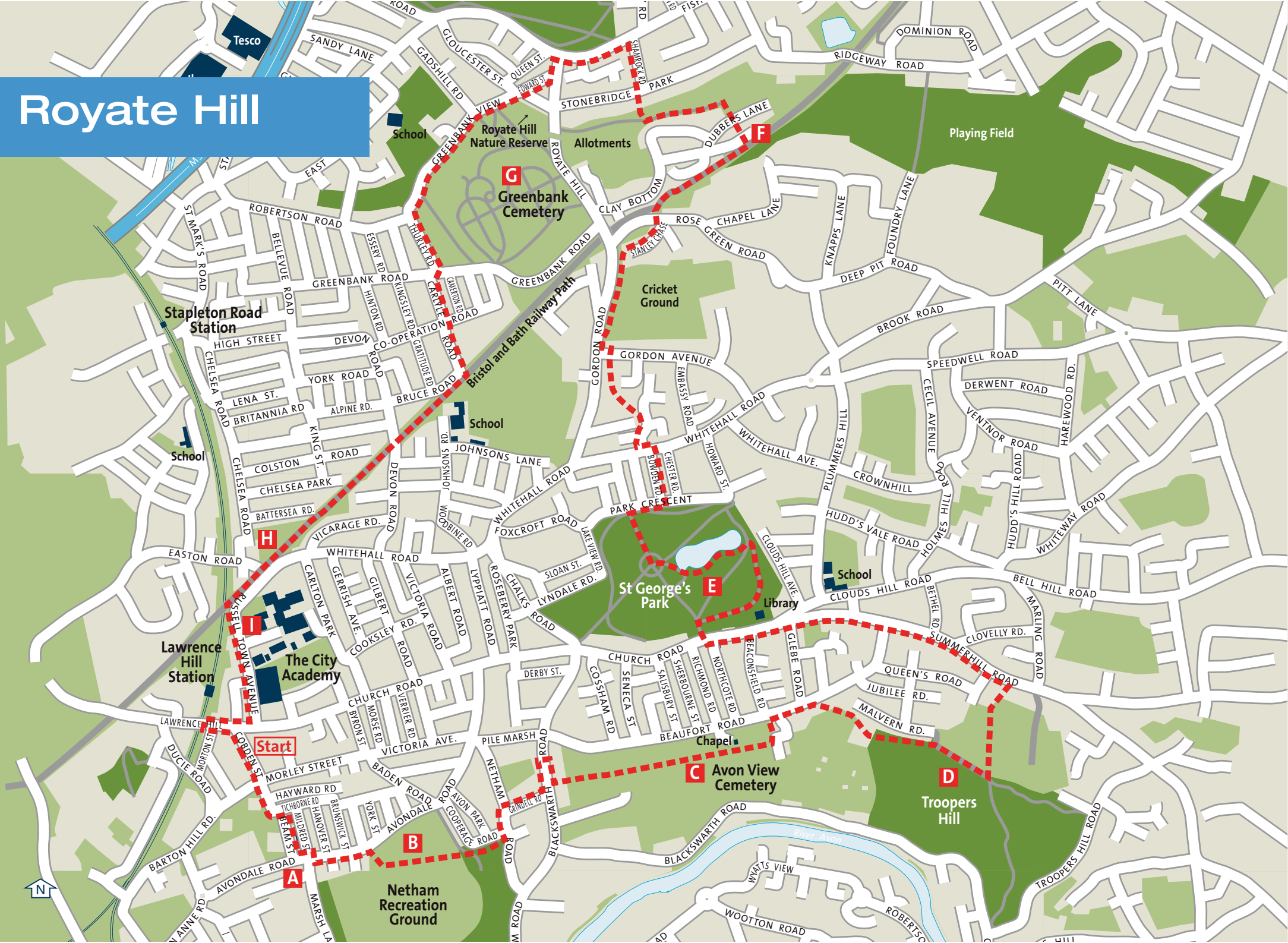
The book was intended to be sold, as it had been lovingly produced to a high quality. Unfortunately, this meant that when stocks began to run low, the cost of re-production proved to be prohibitive.

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.

Royate Hill



Stapleton Road Station

Lawrence Hill Station

The City Academy

Netham Recreation Ground

Royate Hill Nature Reserve
Greenbank Cemetery

St George's Park

Avon View Cemetery

Troopers Hill

Cricket Ground

Playing Field

Bristol and Bath Railway Path

River Avon

Royate Hill - *walk* 3

Description: Two urban cemeteries (open on weekdays between 9.00am and 7.00pm from February to October, from 9.00am to 4.30pm for the rest of the year), an elegant park, ancient hedged paths, a hummocky hill and a panoramic view of South Bristol enhance this walk.

Length: 6 miles circular route. (2.5 to 3 hours)

Refreshments: Public toilets, cafés, pubs in Lawrence Hill and St George.

Start at Cobden Street (off Church Road). Walk up Cobden Street and continue to Avonvale Road
A *Turn left and cross road to climb up steps into Netham Recreation Ground.*

The area covered in this walk was industrialised in the early nineteenth century. The Feeder Canal, cut between 1803 and 1809, was built to supply the

new Floating Harbour to overcome the problems caused by the wide tidal range of the River Avon. As a result of the Feeder, much industry was developed in the area. The Great Western Cotton Factory was opened in 1838 and employed about 1,500 workers, some coming from Lancashire. This was the factory which transformed Barton Hill from a rural country area, where rich merchants had their quiet country seats surrounded by wheat fields and grasslands, into a very industrialised area.

St Anne's Board Mills, ICI works, Lysaghts and Feeder Road Power Station were among other local industries. The tower blocks are the result of regeneration of the 1950s. The Council compulsorily purchased 722 houses near the old Cotton Factory and Barton House, the first tower block, was built in 1952. 'What Hitler missed, the planners finished off for him,' was a local saying quoted by David Stephenson. In fact it's surprising that the houses in several streets open directly onto the pavement even today. They had

two bedrooms, a front room, back room and a kitchen. There was an outdoor lavatory but no bathroom. It is said that large families solved overcrowding by sitting on the stairs at meal times and sleeping four or six to a bed.

Mr Stephenson claims that one profession which never existed in Lawrence Hill is that of solicitor. I couldn't find a date for his or any of the other local history books so don't know when he made that statement. This walk gives us an opportunity to witness the changing use of land. Under the vast expanse of grass are the remains of Netham Chemical Works **B**. 'Let me try to describe the Industrial side,' wrote E. Golding.

'Netham Lane was noted for the Alkali Works which produced sulphur, soda and sulphuric acid. These works were later known as the Imperial Chemical Works. There was also an engineering factory

and the Cooperage which used to make thousands of barrels. Down by the Feeder Canal was William Butler's tar and resin manufacture'. For many years, children played on the deserted slag dump until it was levelled and grassed over in the 1950s. But when and why were the great surrounding stone walls built? And why are the entrances from Rupert and Compton Street blocked?



Walk diagonally towards the football pitch and cluster of trees at the end of a row of houses. Take the track (known as a desire line by sociologists) and walk towards 'T' sign. Cross Netham Road, turn right into Grindell Road, then cross Blackswarth Road and into Avon View Cemetery through main or side gate.

Tree lovers should be able to identify at least thirty different types of tree in Avon View Cemetery **C**. The tree-lined avenue parallel to Beaufort Road includes Fir, Silver Birch, Beech and Limes. The bird survey in November 1983 recorded sixteen different varieties including two migratory birds - the sparrow-hawk and green woodpecker. More recently skylarks have been seen. Some of the local

propertied families were buried here. Grindell, Herapath and Butler were important in local industry, and they and their families are here, some dying tragically young. Can you find a grave dated before 1881? The children's cemetery on the right was opened in 1995. The grandest funeral at Avon View must have been Handel Cossham's. Thousands of people lined the route, and the procession of mourners took fifty minutes to pass. Cossham was the archetypal self-made man; the son of a Thornbury carpenter, he started as clerk in a Yate Colliery. He studied geology, formed a correct theory about the lie of the seams in the Bristol Field, and, exploiting this knowledge, worked his way up to own most of it, employing 1,500 men. Lord of the Manor of Kingswood, Mayor of Bath, and M.P. for East Bristol (he died suddenly in the House), Cossham politically was a 'Radical of Radicals'. He was also strongly religious, a lay preacher who left his fortune to found the hospital

named after him. His life was the model for the hero of Mrs Craik's John Halifax, Gentleman. One of the fascinations of urban walks is the constant change. In 1999 many of the headstones in this cemetery were falling backwards. The following year they had been propped up by sturdy staves. By 2001 the headstones had been secured and stood erect.

Walk up to the chapel and out through gates at end (into Beaufort Road). Turn right into Strawberry Lane taking the signed path on the left until you reach a lamppost in front of a bungalow. Continue for a few steps then turn left beside a gatepost and along the path parallel to houses on left. Then go through gate onto open space with swings and slides in the corner and

enter Troopers Hill Local Nature Reserve.

*Walk towards the bench and luxuriate in the magic of Bristol. If you want to explore the extraordinary landscape of Troopers Hill **D** take the path on the left. You will pass cockspur thorn, hawthorn, broom and gorse.*

According to the display panel, woodpeckers, blackcaps, whitethroats and jays live here and there was a colony of grayling butterflies in 1885.

A large steeply sloping woodland and scrub area to the south known as the Forest is a designated conservation area.

The sandstone of Troopers Hill was quarried from mediaeval times until the early 1900s which explains the craggy dips. The impressive chimney was built in 1863 as a vent for the sulphurous smoke produced by William Butler's Tar Distillery at the bottom of the hill. Butler supplied the Great Western Railway. The fumes from tar were considered to have curative powers. Children with coughs were brought up the hill to breath the fumes. They also wore a tar rope round their neck during the winter. Added to the fumes from the distillery was the stink of tanneries, abattoirs and coal-fired industry from Crews Hole.

Leave Troopers Hill from the gate you entered and keep the hedge and three Lombardy poplars on your right. Take the path near the corner on your left and walk to Summerhill Road admiring

the magnificent milestone stating 'Bristol 2 miles'.

Turn left and keep on left-hand side to Northcote Road. Cross into St George's Park at crossing. Turn right and walk up the tree-lined avenue known as Church Walk.

St George's Park **E** is the most ambitiously laid out park in Bristol and its history is fascinating. Over 100 years ago the movers and shakers of St George decided to provide 'a public park or pleasure ground' for the inhabitants of the newly built houses. In those days St George was not part of Bristol and the project seems to have been run by their Amenities Committee. They bought up land formerly known as Fire Engine Farm and the Whitehall Colliery. Preparation for the park included grubbing out old

hedgerows, flattening colliery buildings, evicting tenants, planting trees, erecting a bandstand, a urinal, a library and creating a lake.

The committee launched a competition for a design for the park. The winning design featured axial paths leading to a bandstand with an avenue of lime trees to Whitehall Gate. In 1895 the unemployed were being paid four pence halfpenny an hour to prepare the area and the following year a caretaker was employed at twenty one shillings per week for a 12 hour day with alternate Sundays off (uniform included). But the hotchpotch of cheapest tenders and limited contracts caused endless problems. Out of 450 trees planted in 1895, only 100 were alive in 1897 when St George's came under the control of Bristol Corporation. There was major disagreement about the cheapest method of laying the foundations for the lake compounded by the fact that the main sewer lay across

the site! By the time the paths, the shelters, the ranger's hut, and a footway 10 feet wide to the bandstand mound 'using Cemetery stone for foundations' were complete, it was agreed that 'the bandstand was to be erected if anything left.' The magnificent avenue of planes (behind the library) were planted between 1901 and 1902.

Cross Park Crescent and walk up Bowden Road. Cross Whitehall Road at the traffic island.

Notice the plaque to the past on the brick wall on Park Crescent. George Whitefield and the Wesley brothers were conservative evangelical orators who preached to the workers of East Bristol from 1739 to 1788.

Walk past the prefabs with garages on left-hand side. Cross Gordon Avenue and walk along

pavement which becomes a track to Stanley Crescent. Look downhill and cross to low brick wall. Join the Bristol to Bath Railway Path.

The Bristol and Bath Railway Path was constructed on the track bed of the former Midland Railway which was closed in 1976 but, thanks to the energy and imagination of campaigning cyclists, was converted into a route for cyclists and walkers between 1979 and 1986.

*Turn right and take the second brick exit on left **F**. Walk down steps, cross road and enter Dubbers Lane Allotments. Cross bridge and turn left. Walk, with more allotments on the right, side until you reach a flight of steps on the right. Climb them,*

cross Stonebridge Park and walk to Fishponds Road. Turn left. Cross Royate Hill at traffic lights. Walk down hill and turn right into Edward Street. Walk up the steps on the left-hand side and enjoy the wilderness of Royate Hill Nature Reserve.

Royate Hill Nature Reserve was saved from developers by local people and their supporters in the 1990s. Greenbank Cemetery **G** was established as an overflow from Arno's Vale Cemetery in the nineteenth century.

On weekdays a tranquil walk through the avenue of sepulchres in Greenbank Cemetery is possible. If the gate is locked, walk around the cemetery. Cross Greenbank Road and walk up Carlyle Road and onto the cyclepath.

Sections of the cyclepath are refuges of wildlife, others are unwholesome. In October 2001 this section of the path was cleared of garbage and embellished by a small flower garden. Again, this attractive area was the result of community effort. In the spring of 2001, an energetic woman leafleted local residents suggesting an anti-litter day. 60 local people turned up, cleared the debris and six months on the path still looked fresh and clean.



*Continue on the path. The attractive play equipment and the large building on the left are part of the Easton Community Centre **H**.*

Before entering the building, study the outer walls. One side celebrates 'Under One Sky' which is Number 5a of the Time-Signs which enhance 32 buildings in Easton. The front wall has the following: THIS STONE WAS LAID BY THE PEOPLE OF EASTON 2ND OCTOBER 1989.

Inside there is a plaque placed in recognition of the work of Bristol City Council Direct Labour Organization, 28 September 1990. The centre was awarded the Gulbenkian Award for Community Buildings. The users, the workers and the art demonstrate the cosmopolitan nature of the area. The walls of the entrance hall were decorated by artists from Nicaragua while on a tour

of this country in the 1990s. Welcome to Easton is a glossy publication which gives detailed information about services and facilities to newcomers to the area. The welcome message on the cover is printed in ten different languages.

Easton today is dramatically different from the industrial Easton of the past. This is how Ben Tillett described it: 'I was born in Easton, Bristol, on 11 September 1860 in a tiny house in John Street, not many yards from East Coal Pit. It was a drab, mean street and most of its inhabitants worked in the pit. The outlook was black, gaunt and smoky against the skyline. The buzz and musical clangour of the circular saw, swiftly cutting timber at pit props length, driven by an engine with a deep-voiced exhaust added to the industrial orchestra.' Ben Tillett started work at the age of seven in Roche's brickyard on the Easton Road. He joined the navy at the age of 13 and before the age of thirty was organizing 'the so-called unskilled worker' on the London Docks. Strikes in London, Bristol and Liverpool

helped to win the Dockers' Tanner in 1889. The magnificent mural on Stapleton Road Station shows a picture of Ben Tillett and his local doctor - W.G. Grace.

*Return to path until you see the sign 'Russell Town Avenue' **I**. Walk down the pavement until you reach Church Road and the end of the walk.*

Much of this area was owned by the Russell family. Russell Town, Russell Town Avenue, the Earl Russell and the Russell Arms are reminders of the land-owning Liberal Prime Minister Lord John Russell and Earl Russell over one hundred years ago.

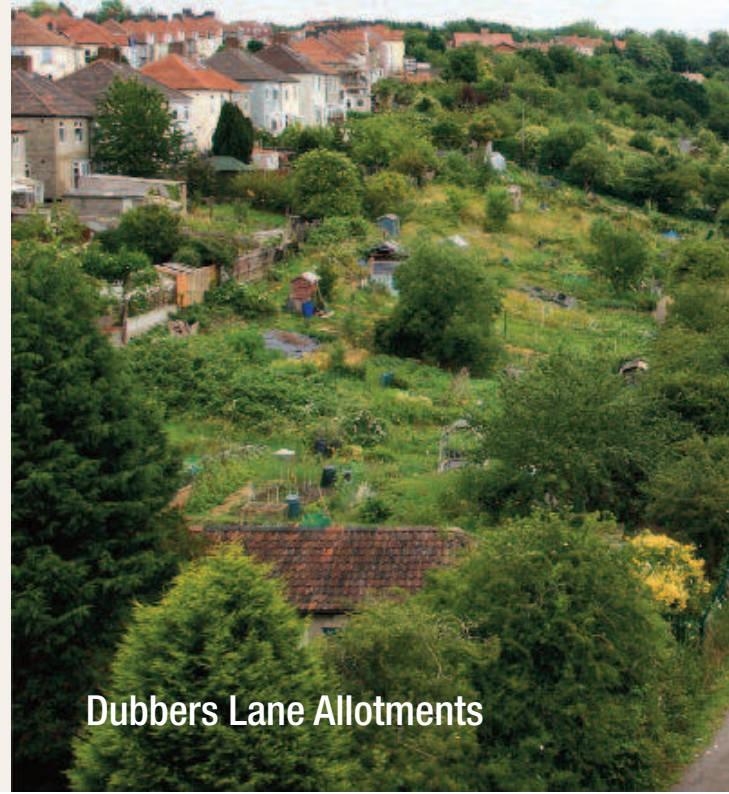
**Walk devised by Julie Boston,
Bristol Ramblers**



G Greenbank Cemetery



Royate Hill Nature Reserve



Dubbers Lane Allotments



D Troopers Hill