The background image shows a waterfront city scene. In the foreground, several white motorboats are docked along a canal or river. The water is calm, reflecting the sky and the buildings. In the background, there are multi-story buildings with a mix of brick and white facades. Some buildings have bay windows and balconies. The sky is blue with some light clouds. The overall scene is bright and clear.

***transSCAPE* Goes South of England:
A Snapshot of Current Culture-led
Urban Regeneration in Bath, Bristol,
Exeter, and London**

Transfer Excursion

24 Mar – 01 Apr 2026

Max Jokschus and Nora Pleßke

transSCAPE

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Preface

Is it not a fallacy to speak of the “South of England”? Should the implication that one could capture within one breath and three words the rich palette and distinct flavour of vastly different cities and landscapes – from busy urban centres nestled in pastoral green to quaint seaside towns built atop craggy rock – not prohibit one from cutting them uniform in language? The short answer is: yes. In order to more adequately capture nine days of inspiring conversation and inimitable experience, this excursion report hopes to offer as a slightly longer answer.

The excursion led us from the UNESCO-listed grandeur of Bath to the eclectic buzz of Bristol, connected by train within minutes, yet worlds apart in more ways than one. From there, the medieval splendour of Exeter would welcome us and send us downstream along the Exe to the picturesque coastline of Exmouth, before a call from London would send us back home to Magdeburg, with impressions on our mind (and biscuits in our luggage). There, the Science Port lies in wait – for us to process, adapt, and transfer the potentials and challenges we witnessed and discussed in the fields of culture-led urban regeneration and (post-industrial) heritage maintenance.

The aim of this report is thus to provide a structured summary as well as a guideline for future action. It combines the transcription of *in situ* interviews and walk & talks with a variety of local practitioners with extensive photo documentation to condense observable, notable and transferable aspects in a workable manner.

We want to express our warmest gratitude to the people of Bath, Bristol, Exeter and London who shared with us their time and knowledge, taking us on strolls through the streets of their city or joining us for coffee indoors, whenever the English weather lived up to its reputation. Without these moments, our academic inquiry, no matter how much it adores the written word, could not have reached beyond its confines – and for that, we want to say: “thank you”.

Max Jokschus



1 - Exploration Obelisk Bristol, photo: Nora Pleßke, 2026

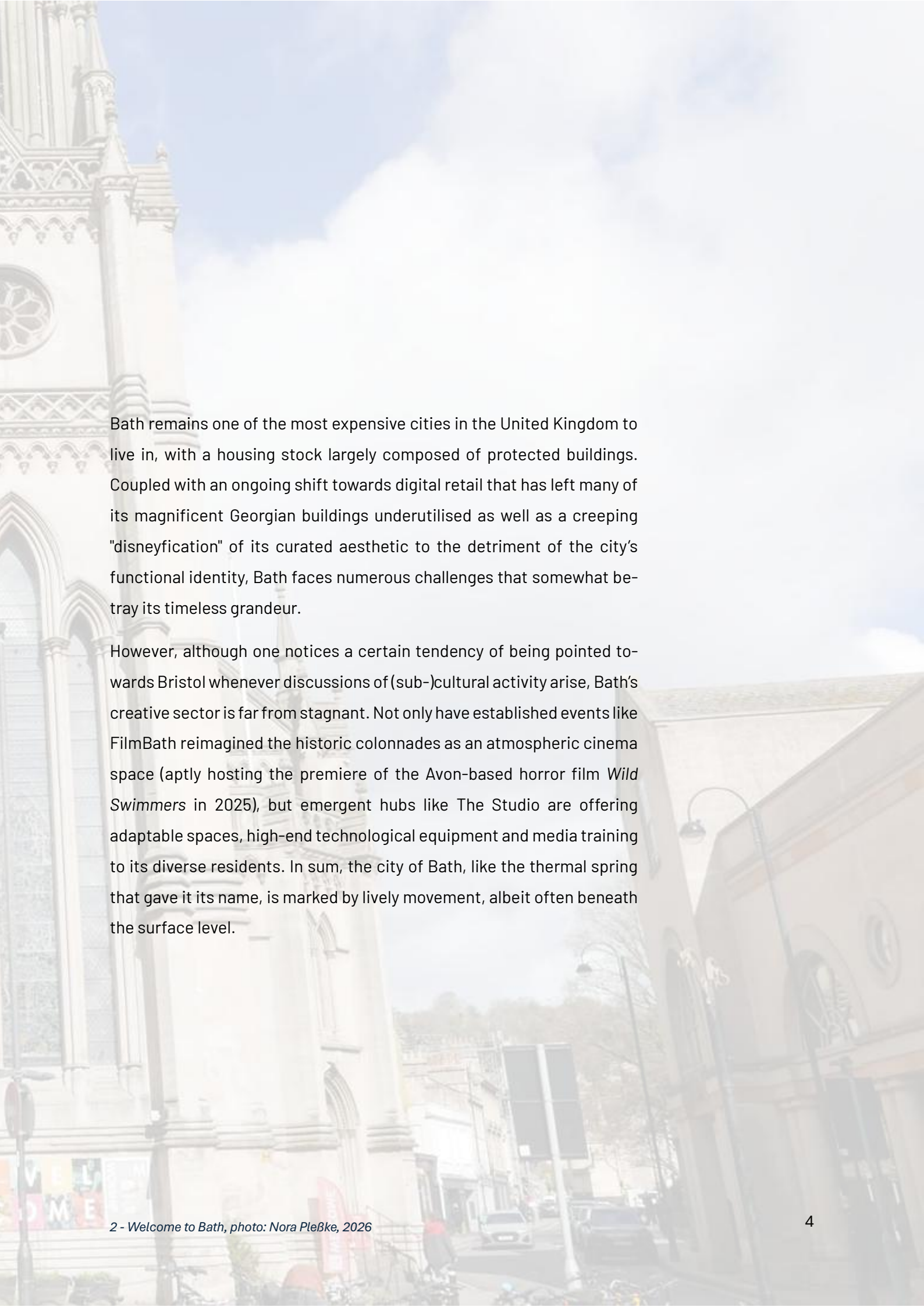


Beneath the Veneer

On its shiny surface, Bath is a city synonymous with heritage. With its name still making prominent reference to the Roman *thermae* that jumpstarted the area's urban settlement two millennia ago, the city has more recently ingrained itself in pop-cultural memory as a stand-in for Regency-era London in the hit TV series *Bridgerton*. When walking amidst its stern façades of honey-coloured limestone, one cannot help but feel transported to a world of timeless elegance.

That this façade, in places, is only surface deep, becomes apparent when confronting the complex socio-economic and infrastructural challenges that the city currently faces. The pristine image of Bath as a static museum piece is being interrogated by the dual pressures of a modern housing crisis and the urgent need for sustainable urban regeneration. Behind the sweeping curves of the Royal Crescent or the bustling stalls of the Guildhall, a silent struggle persists between the requirements of the city's UNESCO World Heritage status and the demands of its 21st-century population.

Practitioners in the field of culture-led urban regeneration consequently lament a paradoxical "success trap" as the city's double inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage list – first for its Roman and Georgian architecture in 1987 and again in 2021 as part of the Great Spa Towns of Europe – ensures a steady stream of global tourists while also creating an environment where physical change is met with bureaucratic and preservationist resistance.



Bath remains one of the most expensive cities in the United Kingdom to live in, with a housing stock largely composed of protected buildings. Coupled with an ongoing shift towards digital retail that has left many of its magnificent Georgian buildings underutilised as well as a creeping "disneyfication" of its curated aesthetic to the detriment of the city's functional identity, Bath faces numerous challenges that somewhat betray its timeless grandeur.

However, although one notices a certain tendency of being pointed towards Bristol whenever discussions of (sub-)cultural activity arise, Bath's creative sector is far from stagnant. Not only have established events like FilmBath reimaged the historic colonnades as an atmospheric cinema space (aptly hosting the premiere of the Avon-based horror film *Wild Swimmers* in 2025), but emergent hubs like The Studio are offering adaptable spaces, high-end technological equipment and media training to its diverse residents. In sum, the city of Bath, like the thermal spring that gave it its name, is marked by lively movement, albeit often beneath the surface level.

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Roman Baths are set to co-finance the new Fashion Museum, as it will likely not be able to finance its up-keep alone. Already, parts of Roman Baths' profits are channelled into Bath's social programmes, contrasting sharply with the situation in Stirling, where Stirling Castle absorbs tourist attention and spending without much benefit to city budgets.

In order to gain a firsthand impression of this regenerative effort taking shape, *transSCAPE* met with Wendy Maden, Design & Masterplanning Team Leader for Sustainable Places & Regeneration at Bath & North East Somerset Council, for a walk & talk along Milsom Quarter. We were accompanied by her colleagues Tyron Tucker, architect and senior project manager, and assistant design officer Sasha Murray, as well as joined later by Cleo Newcombe-Jones, Sustainable Places & Regeneration Service Manager.

As the team outlined, the Milsom Quarter project works to uplift the northern part of Bath's city centre to foster a creative milieu made up of mixed-use residential and retail facilities. Taking up Bath's historic identity as a city of fashion and style (shaped by its 18th-century emergence as a premier social stage of Georgian England), the project seeks to establish an intersection of communal cohabitation, cultural tourism, artisanal manufacturing and fashion education.

The centerpiece of this vision is the relocation of the Bath Fashion Museum to a vacant retail store (formerly a post office). Previously owned by a tobacco company and left vacant, the building was acquired by city council (with funding by the central government and national lottery). The focus now lies on creating an anchor point for the regeneration of Broad Street (an adjacent shopping promenade facing numerous vacancies) as well as to reclaim the building's inner courtyard and adjacent outdoor area leading up to St Michael's Without Church as a new public square. By removing the clutter of bus stops and through-traffic, the plan envisions a cultural foyer that functions as a sticky place for residents and visitors alike as well as a provision of some much needed green in the built-up city centre.

However, remodelling the old post office poses challenges, as the building is Grade 2 listed. Tyron explains that features like the original windows need to be retained while other sections like the courtyard (remodelled in 2005) can be reconfigured more easily. A similar patchwork characterises funding, as Wendy comments. Despite finances having been approved, some of the smaller funders are waiting for big funders to commit, drawing out the development. In general, the team agrees that although an opening targeted for 2030 (with construction beginning in 2027) is highly ambitious, the public seems to think otherwise, expecting much quicker progress on the council-led project. However, as Wendy explains, the process is anything but smooth: “you have a battle on your hands sometimes”. Extensive consultation with different groups (business, residents, associations) on local, regional, and national levels have engaged a broad spectrum of the population to increase the overall acceptance of the project – not least among the more conservationist wing of city council itself.

Numerous cooperations exist between city council and local universities. For instance, Bath Spa University runs a fashion programme that is naturally interested in the museum and currently considers hosting a collection centre as part of the museum’s depot. Likewise, Bath College runs a full-time learning engagement team whose work with local schools will be channelled into designing new street dressings for the project. Like Kelvin Hall in Glasgow, the Fashion Museum is set to entail educational facilities and work spaces for graduate students. Finally, Somer, a sustainable fashion store and creative hub, is the result of a collaborative initiative led by Bath Spa University (BSU) in partnership with the Fashion Museum Bath.

The Fashion Museum hosts a collection that is under local government ownership, managed by the Bath & North East Somerset Council as a public asset. For several decades, this archive of historical dress was housed within the city’s Assembly Rooms.



3 - New location of the Fashion Museum, photo: Nora Pleßke, 2026

Besides the tandem-project of Fashion Museum and the adjacent public square, Wendy, Tyron, and Sasha also highlight the proposed redevelopment of Broad Street car park into a multi-use workspace for makers and small-to-medium enterprises (to be rented out by the city at 30% below business level). Also, they discuss the planned transformation of Cattle Market into a residential gateway to both unlock a subsequent regeneration of Corn Market as well as to provide a strong frontage to open up the northern city centre. This latter project, as part of the Bath River Line project, also aims to reconnect the public to the river Avon, envisioning a public-private space in-between the new residential buildings and the waterfront.

To the question as to whether Bath implements buyback options in its contracting, Wendy answers that costs outweigh actual benefits. Owners tend to invest just enough to keep their buildings below risk, making the stipulation toothless. A case in point is the Old King Edward's School on Broad Street, owned by Samuel Smith Old Brewery and lying vacant since 1990.



4 - Cattle Marke, photo: Nora PleBke, 2026

We end our walk at Studio 22, a mixed-use office and pop-up event space that acts as a pilot to the regeneration of Broad Street and a headquarter to the Milsom Quarter Project team. During a presentation on further developments that the team has overseen in Bath and the broader region, Cleo stresses that the city has come to acknowledge creative industries as one of its five central economic pillars (next to science & tech, education & local government, green jobs & design and everyday economy), as testified by the recent publication of a culture development plan. The desire for cultural offerings had noticeably risen after the COVID-pandemic, when a new wave of residents, having moved in from London, had increased footfall to the point of flattening the once seasonal pattern.



To revitalize the city centre of Bath, a series of urban interventions are being implemented along Milsom Street to transform it from an underused retail corridor into a multi-use space. A key component of this strategy involves the adaptive reuse of vacant retail units into residential housing, helping to increase local population density and bringing a sense of community back into the high street. This physical transformation is further supported by the introduction of regular market activity, the installation of parklets, and the addition of new seating areas to encourage residents and visitors to linger. Later in 2026, the historic Jolly's Bath department store will be reopened.



5 - Milsom Street, photos: Nora Pleßke, 2026

“We need to balance classical tourism with bringing in new cultural life.”

To continue the conversation surrounding urban regeneration and the challenges posed by Bath’s architectural heritage, *transSCAPE* met with Rupert Grierson and Rosie Madden, company director and associate at MacGregor Smith, a landscape architecture and design practice centrally involved in the Bath Quays North development.

Up until the 18th century, the area of Bath Quays North, formerly known as Avon Street district, had housed an industrial neighbourhood and served as a hub of warehouses and commercial quays. As trade shifted to canals and railways, that status declined and the area was left to slumify throughout the 19th century. Plans to rebuild the quarter with housing were halted during World War II and not pursued for decades, resulting in more utilitarian uses, such as several car parks.

Today, the need for regeneration is driven by physical and economic factors, not least because existing structures occupy a prime city-center location that severs the public from the waterfront. Accordingly, the work of Rupert and Rosie follows clear placemaking principles with a threefold focus on climate, community and character.

Next to the construction of housing and office space, plans for the mixed-use quarter also envision a regeneration of the public realm into a pedestrian-first extension of Bath’s historic city center as well as soft landscape towards the riverside. Sustainability and water sensitive design are paramount to the development as well as a reasonable retention of Bath’s architectural style. To Rupert, the UNESCO title, although causing tension between the old and anything new, determines a certain level of quality that calls for creative reinterpretation. For example, redeveloped streets could retain the original cobble stone as long as surfaces are flattened to allow greater accessibility.

Rupert Grierson

Company Director

MacGregor Smith

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MacGregor Smith enjoys a cooperation with the University of Bath in form of a short-term placement programme, wherein students in the field of architecture/master planning become involved in development projects.

With regard to the Bath Quays North project, the University of Bath is a strategic partner of city council, working to transform the site into a high-tech innovation district (Bath Riverside Innovation Quarter) and establish a bridge between its hilltop campus and the city’s commercial centre. It is noteworthy that purpose built student accommodation is explicitly not pursued as part of the development, as it would impede the delivery of other council objectives.

Likewise, Rupert would like brickwork to come into the design in order to pay tribute to the area's industrial past. A centre-piece installation akin to a cabinet of curiosities will commemorate the city's industrial heritage by featuring items like plasticine (invented in Bath in 1897). When it comes to greening, it is not only architectural purists that require persuasion (who are even said to oppose the towering London planes at the centre of the Circus), but resilient species are needed to withstand the urban environment and enhance biodiversity – "it cannot just be elms everywhere". In general, greening the city is difficult due to its many underlying vaults. Because the cost of installing a single tree can run up to 30,000 GBP, parklets have so far been the most viable option, with rooftop greenery being hotly debated (as Tyron had confirmed for the new Fashion Museum as well). Rupert points to the Bath Pattern Book as an important guideline for retaining Bath's urban character while pushing the cityscape into new directions.

"You'd probably describe it as a shady part of town... it's a good contrast to Jane Austen"

Rupert and Rosie's presentation of the Bath Quays North project highlights an approach to urban design that consciously combines lived culture with history and heritage. Reflected in their planning are literary descriptions of Bath and its riverside (f.i. by Jane Austen) as much as wishes and needs by local communities. For their previous involvement in the regeneration of Bath Assembly Rooms they had actively sought input from people that would otherwise go unheard, like children. Formats such as photovoice or town x-rays (in which mixed groups made up of engineers, architects, and citizens explore the area together and learn from each other's observation) have proven particularly effective.

Essential to any consultation, however, is a commitment to communicating appropriate results, since consultation alone can result in frustration and fatigue. Start (early!) with an open book, formulate a proposal on its basis and collect feedback and keep everyone updated – that is the roadmap Rupert suggests following.

Carolien Anstey

Creative Producer at
The Studio

Bath Spa University

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To round out our picture of Bath – from the old and the soon-to-be to the new – *transSCAPE* met with creative producer Caroline Anstey at The Studio, Bath Spa University’s dedicated hub for creative technology and digital innovation. Financed by the University, The Studio is run on a residency model in which residents (i.e. users of the provided spaces and technology) are contractually obligated to work towards some form of exchange with broader communities.

One example of such an exchange is Little Lost Robot, a non-profit art-based robotics collective aimed at making the complex technology more humane, accessible, and playful. The project was realised as part of the University’s NEEDS programme (Neurodiversity, Engagement, Empowerment, and Design for Society) and received core funding and structural support by the BSU boost programme. However, as Caroline states, the struggle that comes with any such initiative is the expectation that projects will eventually become self-sustaining and generate profit – a trajectory that is difficult, if not counter-productive, for spin-outs in the arts and humanities:

“Artists aren’t interested in becoming Apple.”



6 - The Studio, photo: Nora PleBke, 2026

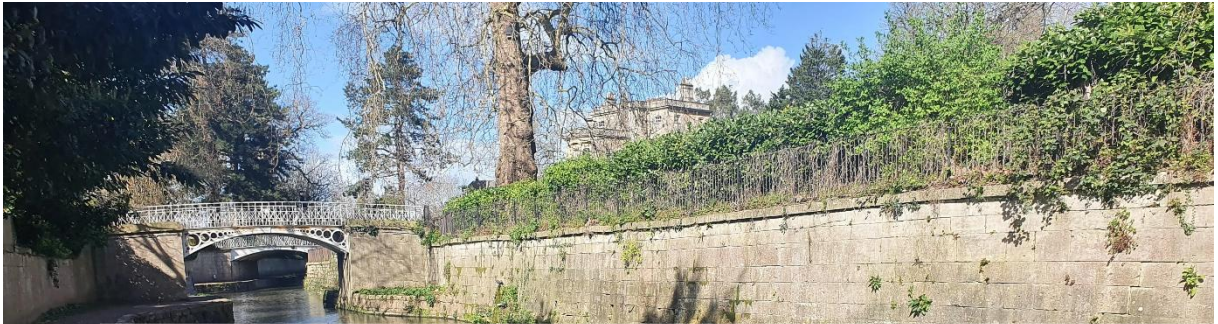
Nonetheless, Caroline and her (small) team are working on ways to commercialise projects while opening The Studio to the public. The goal is to empower a diverse range of residents in developing their own ventures and generate income. This revenue is then channeled back into community initiatives that deliver measurable impact in areas such as education and healthcare, ultimately reducing public spending by addressing social challenges at their root. “It’s an underrecognised resource”, Caroline subsumes in view Bath’s creative sector and the challenges it faces due to a lack of funding. She echoes a sentiment that all practitioners had verbalised so far, namely that Bristol was the more hip and cutting-edge, but also underprivileged city in whose shadow Bath loses out on financial support: “we don’t get funding because it’s shiny”.

Christina Horvath

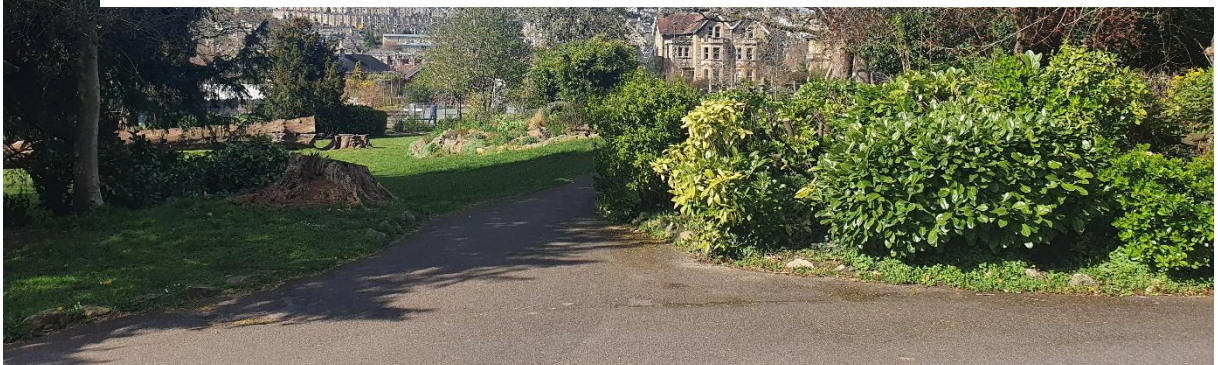
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At the Holburne Museum, *transSCAPE* met with Christina Horvath, reader for Politics, Languages & International Studies at the University of Bath, to discuss her work on decolonising the city through co-creative projects such as “Botanical Encounters” or “Walk Bath’s Uncomfortable Past” in cooperation with the museum and Sidney Gardens. A version of the former had already been transferred to Magdeburg in form of a workshop that was held in June 2025 at the Gruson-Gewächshäuser. Although she highlights how the Holburne Museum pursues a focus on anti-slavery and resistance in parts of its exhibition, she also reports contestation surrounding the topic and laments the Museum’s pandering towards *Bridgerton*-tourism. This conversational thread would be picked up and intensi-



Transferables from Bath

Pattern Book

The Bath Pattern Book is a comprehensive public-realm design guide commissioned by city council to ensure that streetscapes, furniture, and lighting respect the city's status as a world heritage site. It provides standardised design principles to harmonise contemporary urban interventions with Bath's iconic Georgian and Roman architecture.

For the Science Port, similar principles could be codified to achieve a sense of visual identity that communicates the vision of a med-tech ecosystem without losing connection to the site's industrial heritage. First steps could be a unified colour-scheme for all temporary installments.



The Trunk

The Trunk is a mobile "mini museum" and interactive community resource designed to keep the collection of Bath Fashion Museum accessible while moving locations. The wardrobe-like box travels to various local sites, allowing diverse audiences to engage with parts of the collection.

The cooperation between transPORT and 3ioS could conceptualise a similar travelling kit for (historic) medical technology to foster tactile and creative learning activities. For instance, a travelling trunk with low maintenance equipment and informative fact files could be stationed at the Science Port during public events.

Street Art

As Tyron had explained, Broadstreet Place had long been seen as a place of anti-social behaviour in the city. An overhaul of the site has changed this, relying, next to the installment of new paving and lighting, on commissioning public art through a temporary high street renewal programme. Even a simple graffiti – softly coloured and visually unobtrusive – makes a narrow passages more inviting.

The Science Port could leverage the potential of such interventions by redesigning its current hoarding to be more visually intriguing and less cryptic, for instance by using images directly related to medical technology and industrial heritage combined with a call to explore the new and old.



City-Campus Strategy

Bath hosts numerous public-facing interfaces that integrate the city's universities within its civic and social life. Spaces such as The Studio, Somer or Studio 22 act as porous boundaries between established institutions.

For Magdeburg, similar principles could be implemented to bridge the gap between scientific institutions and the public. Third spaces within research buildings could (literally) open closed doors. The envisioned student agency could furthermore focus on transforming academic projects into visible urban contributions.

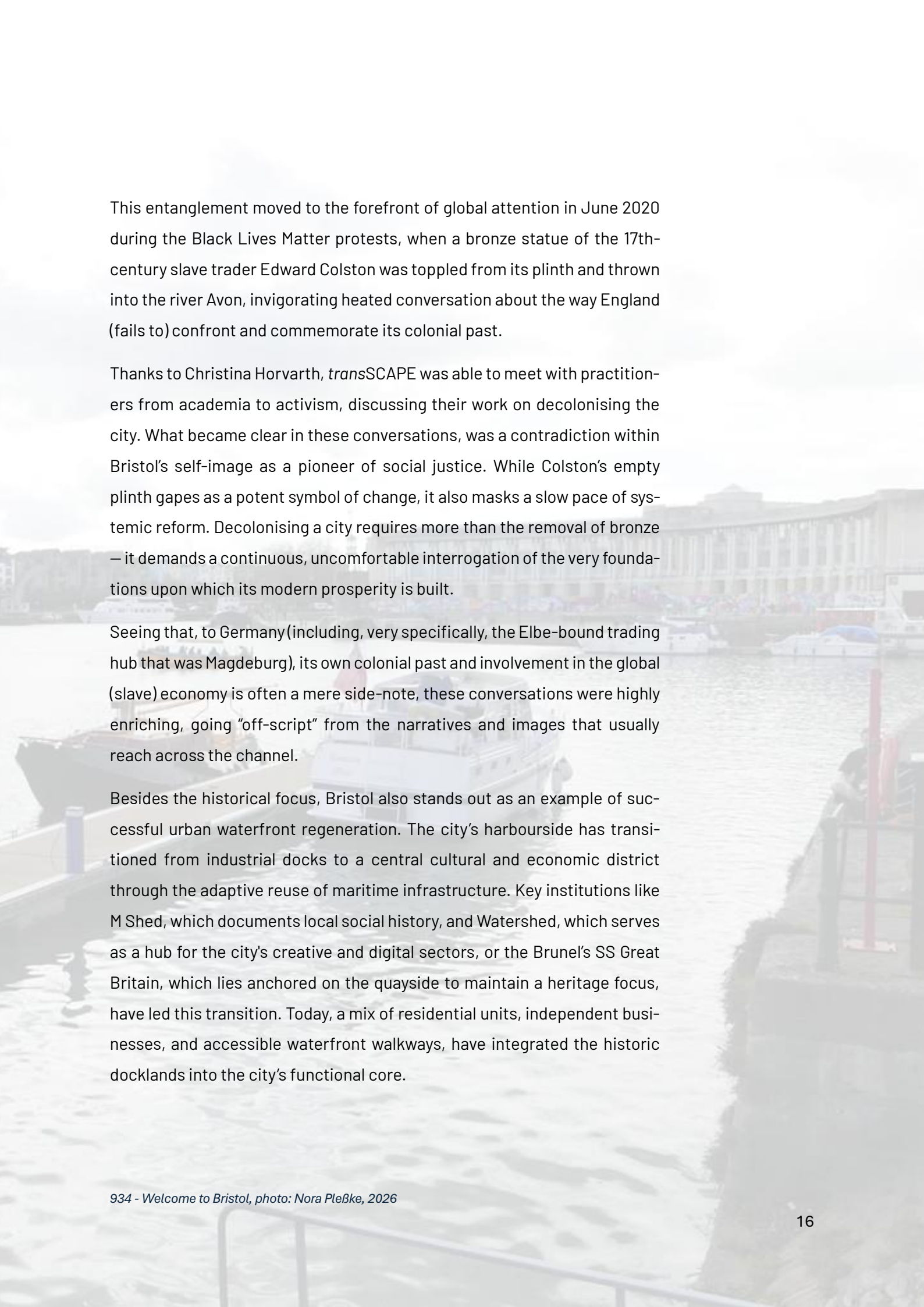


BRISTOL

Beyond Banksy

It seemed a perplexing coincidence when on 13 March 2026, mere two weeks before *transSCAPE* would set foot in Bristol, one of the city's most (in)fa-mous and mysterious residents – Banksy – was unveiled to the world in a journalistic stunt that bordered on tabloid doxxing. The graying, bespectacled man that was paraded as the fabled graffitist not only deflated a modern mythos surrounding some of the most recognisable street art pieces in recent memory, but bespoke a curious contradiction when it came to Bristol's creative scene. As we were told numerous times during our stay in Bath, Bristol is regarded as the younger, messier, and hipper step-brother to the UNESCO-listed limestone monument that is Bath (on the surface!). However, as one cultural practitioner would lament, Bristol, not unlike the alleged man behind Banksy, has outworn its rebellious image and grown comfortable with a certain cultural stagnation.

Indeed, this would not be the only aspect that Bristolians would lament about their city. Situated on the rivers Avon and Frome, Bristol had once grown from a medieval trading port (its name meaning “settlement by the bridge” in Old English) into one of England's most significant commercial hubs for maritime trade. Much of the city's wealth was inextricably linked to the enslavement of African people, as the city served as a primary port for the Royal African Company and independent merchants who financed hundreds of voyages to West Africa and the Americas. Between 1720 and 1740, Bristol was the greatest slave trading port in the world, its profits funding many now iconic landmarks and institutions – including the University of Bristol.



This entanglement moved to the forefront of global attention in June 2020 during the Black Lives Matter protests, when a bronze statue of the 17th-century slave trader Edward Colston was toppled from its plinth and thrown into the river Avon, invigorating heated conversation about the way England (fails to) confront and commemorate its colonial past.

Thanks to Christina Horvarth, *transSCAPE* was able to meet with practitioners from academia to activism, discussing their work on decolonising the city. What became clear in these conversations, was a contradiction within Bristol's self-image as a pioneer of social justice. While Colston's empty plinth gapes as a potent symbol of change, it also masks a slow pace of systemic reform. Decolonising a city requires more than the removal of bronze – it demands a continuous, uncomfortable interrogation of the very foundations upon which its modern prosperity is built.

Seeing that, to Germany (including, very specifically, the Elbe-bound trading hub that was Magdeburg), its own colonial past and involvement in the global (slave) economy is often a mere side-note, these conversations were highly enriching, going "off-script" from the narratives and images that usually reach across the channel.

Besides the historical focus, Bristol also stands out as an example of successful urban waterfront regeneration. The city's harbourside has transitioned from industrial docks to a central cultural and economic district through the adaptive reuse of maritime infrastructure. Key institutions like M Shed, which documents local social history, and Watershed, which serves as a hub for the city's creative and digital sectors, or the Brunel's SS Great Britain, which lies anchored on the quayside to maintain a heritage focus, have led this transition. Today, a mix of residential units, independent businesses, and accessible waterfront walkways, have integrated the historic docklands into the city's functional core.

Commencing our journey into Bristol's uncomfortable past, *transSCAPE* accompanied Mark Steeds, member of the Bristol Radical History Group, on a walk of the inner city, beginning and ending at the disjointed remains of the Colston statue. We were accompanied by Richard White, artist-researcher and visiting research fellow in the School of Art Film and Media at Bath Spa University as well as two students from the University of the Durham.

Mark Steeds

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The Beaufort Arms

Member of
Bristol Radical History Group

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Already at Colston's statue, displayed sideways in a glass cabinet at M Shed, Mark makes the tenor of his walk clear: to him, Colston's encasement in glass (like a sleeping king?) and the omission of key dates from a timeline commemorating the history of the transatlantic slave trade, bespeak a certain lack of commitment on the part of the city to seriously – radically – confront its past.

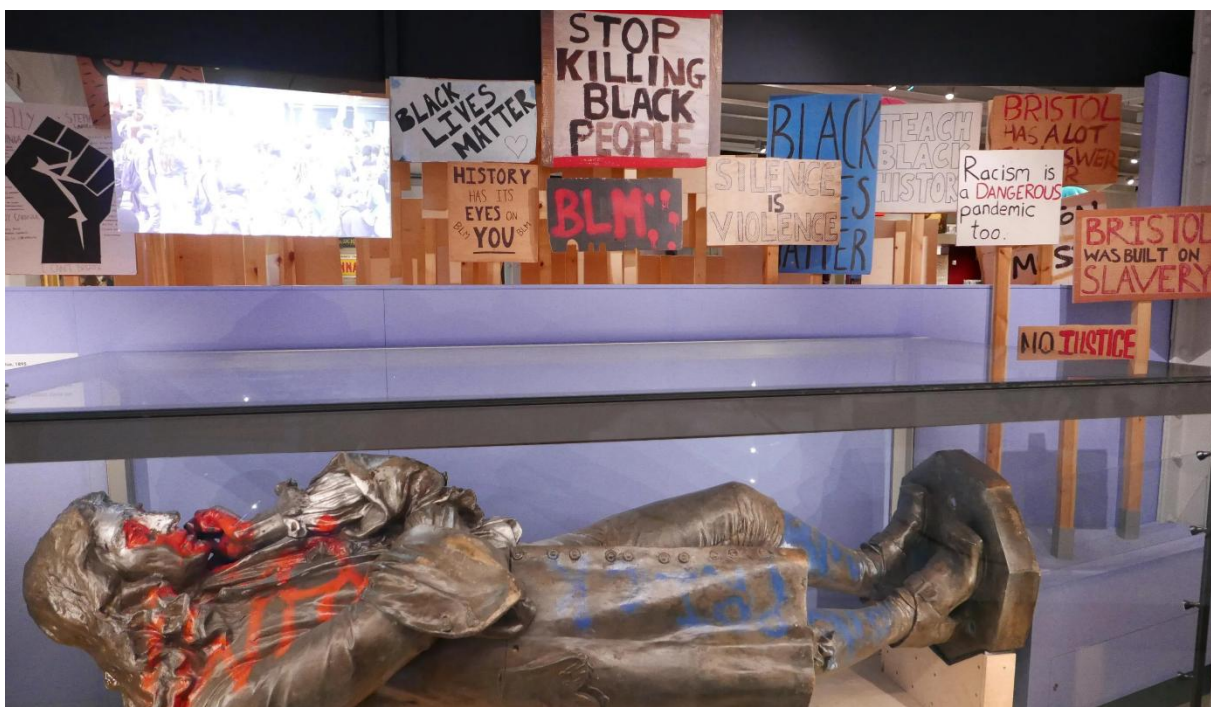
Richard White

Artist-researcher
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While he points out that 1996's Festival of the Sea was a turning point, due to the outcry it caused over its open romanticising of John Cabot's voyage to America without reflecting on the violence it carried in its backwash, the scope of critical reappraisal since then has been as limited as the commemorative plaque that was installed on the outside of M Shed in 1997. Vandalism surrounding Colston's statue and other memorial landmarks in the city had therefore erupted as early as 1999, reaching a high point in 2020, but having dissipated ever since.



1042 - Colston's statue on display, photo: Nora Pleßke, 2026

In response to this waning interest, the Bristol Radical History Group has long advocated for an appropriately sized memorial to all people exploited by slave trade to be installed at a central location near the Quay. However, according to Mark, part of the reason for why these plans have not yet materialised, is the power that the Society of Merchant Ventures, a secret body of unelected business people protected from investigation by royal charter, still exerts in the city. It is to their influence as well that Mark attributes the omission of key aspects of Bristol's deep involvement in slave economies from official narratives, dating as far back as the Anglo-Saxon period and St. Wulfstan. "It's one for the mystery books", he tells us with a smile.

In general, Mark highlights how Bristol's history has constantly been torn between revolution and repression. While buildings like the late 19th century Cabot Tower had apparently been erected to strategically occupy a former gathering place of protesters, Bristol never lost its status as, in Mark's words, "a hot-bed for non-conformists. Colston hated their guts".

At the site, where Mark and his group had hoped set up a memorial park, fencing is hung with advertisement for numerous events. Transferring the transfer from the previous excursion to Northern England, transSCAPE encourages Mark to pursue the possibility of enlisting this hoarding as a intervention in service of his cause.



1150 – Rejected spot for a memorial park, photo: Nora Pleßke, 2026

Nonetheless, as we end our tour at Colston's empty plinth at Magpie Park, Mark expresses resignation in view of the struggle his group faces: "I fought my battles, I lost". Richard echoes his lament, criticising city administration for resting too comfortably on having put Colston's statue on display. Critical engagement with the topic is brushed under the rug, such as the interactive audio project *Colston's Last Journey* which underlays one's stroll from Colston's statue to Pero's Bridge with located audio, accessible via an app. That application, however, is not advertised anywhere on site because, according to Richard, it does not fit the narrative of "job's done".



12 – The Statue of Edward Colston – now an empty plinth, photo: Nora Pleßke, 2026



The Seven Stars pub marks a key site of the abolitionist movement in Bristol. A plaque commissioned by Bristol Radical History Group commemorates Clarkson's stay in 1787, during which he gathered crucial evidence from local sailors regarding the horrors of the slave trade to present to Parliament. The pub's name itself is steeped in the lore of the Underground Railroad, as it is said to refer to the "seven stars" of the Big Dipper constellation featured in the song "Follow the Drinking Gourd." This song was famously taught to enslaved people as a coded map, using the stars to guide them northward toward freedom and the North Star.



Seamlessly picking up on Mark's walk, transSCAPE met with Rob Collin on the next day to accompany him for another walk of Bristol's uncomfortable history. Rob, having worked as a Blue Badge Guide for the South West since 2014, has offered this walk since 2019, stressing its popularity with young audiences, especially after Colston's toppling. Nonetheless, the topic of his walk – Bristol's involvement in the Transatlantic Slave Trade and Britain's slave economy – remains contentious: "Guides are supposed to showcase Britain in its best light" – the Transatlantic Slave Trade was never part of his formal Blue Badge Guide training. Driven however by a desire to provide an honest narrative of history, his walk informs on Bristol, Bath and British participation in the Transatlantic Slave Trade and the slave economy, the latter involving much of Britain, a subject that has been completely overlooked in British education.

Rob Collin

Blue Badge Guide
for the South West

rob.collin1@btinternet.com



14 - Traces of the slave economy,
photo: Nora Pleßke, 2026



15 – Bristol Cathedral, photo: Nora Pleßke, 2026

Like Mark, he uses the term slave economy consciously, highlighting that Britain's wealth in the 18th century derived from its colonial trades, incorporating its Atlantic plantation economy of sugar, tobacco, cotton, cocoa, coffee, and rice, which from the 1680's had become entirely dependent on the labour of enslaved Africans, this Atlantic slave economy linked to Britain's trade with India, and the import of Indian cotton textiles, part of which were re-exported from Britain as trade goods to West Africa. Whilst the trafficking of enslaved Africans was predominantly carried out by Britain's three main slaving ports of London, Bristol, and Liverpool, the slave economy involved much of Britain. Bristol as well as being a slaving port, was in the first part of the 18th century involved with the manufacture of copper and brass metal goods, used to trade for enslaved Africans in West Africa, and then separately involved in the import of slave produced sugar, tobacco, and cocoa from the British American colonies.

The same goes for the University of Bristol, whose architectural and institutional foundations are deeply intertwined with the wealth derived from the tobacco industry. The Wills Memorial Building, the main building of the University of Bristol and completed in 1925, is named after Henry Overton Wills III, who, in the early 20th century, donated half the funds needed for University College Bristol to achieve full university status as the University of Bristol in 1909. Henry Overton Wills III went on to become the university's first chancellor in 1909, highlighting the family's influence on the university's identity. In 2017, despite student petitions and a year-long consultation calling for a name change of the building, the university ultimately decided to retain the Wills name, not least because the Wills family provided so much initial funding to enable the University of Bristol to come into being, but also in its subsequent funding of extensive building works by the university.



16 - Detail of a mural at M Shed, photo: Nora PleBke, 2026

At the end of Rob's walk, he reflects on his work as a professional guide. He provides four points as to why the subject of the Transatlantic Slave Trade and Britain's slave economy is both relevant and important to us now:

Honesty

As a qualified Blue Badge Guide, he believes it is important to provide an honest narrative of history, to include the uncomfortable history of Bristol and not just to highlight the historical achievements, that Bristol can rightly feel proud of.

Understanding

To understand the present in Bristol, Bath, and Britain, he comments that one needs to understand the past. Britain's institutions, including its banks and Fire Insurance Companies, and other organisations such as the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, some of our cathedrals and churches in Britain and our mansion houses in London, Bristol, Liverpool, and Glasgow, have either direct or indirect connections to the Transatlantic Slave Trade period. To make sense of Britain's present and its multi-cultural society, it is important to understand its participation in the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

Legacy

Racism has had a long history in Britain (and elsewhere), so much so that its workings are often invisible to the white majority. Understanding the past can help one understand the everyday struggle of Black Britons.

Morality

Arguments that the Transatlantic Slave Trade and slavery should not be judged by today's moral standards as the elite in England and Scotland who participated in the Triangular Trade saw nothing wrong with it, are to be rejected, as there is good contemporary evidence to indicate that even at the height of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, people were aware that the Slave Trade and slavery were immoral. English and then British merchants, the government, and others who benefitted from the Triangular Trade, became inured to/accustomed to the evils of the Transatlantic Slave Trade because they profited from it. That is very different to saying now that the Slave Trade and slavery was 'a thing of their time and that they had a different morality then,' a much used statement to justify now the Transatlantic Slave Trade and to excuse its participants, but nevertheless a statement which is not borne out as correct by an examination of what ordinary and educated persons thought at the time in the late 18th century.

“It’s never gonna be enough, but it’s progress.”

Roger Griffith

Writer, producer, educator,
social activist and broad-
caster

CEO Creative Connex

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On the question of what terminology he would use to denote his identity, Roger answers that he calls himself Black British - not Afropean. However, “context is everything”. In official writing, he will use BAME, although he confirms that hardly anyone uses the cumbersome construction in speech.

Culminating our engagement with Bristol’s troubled history, *transSCAPE* met with Roger Griffith, writer, social activist and CEO of Creative Connex, a Bristol-based strategic consultancy and production house that focuses on decolonising the creative industries.

To Roger, whose parents emigrated to Britain from Guyana as part of the Windrush Generation, growing up in Britain meant living through racism daily. Discussing Britain’s slave economy is therefore no history lesson – “it’s personal to me”. His mother, like many citizens of Britain’s former colonies, knew little about her people’s history, obliterated by the official narrative of Britain’s generous empire. As a first-born immigrant son, Roger resists this deletion, pointing his finger also to his upbringing in Bristol of the 1980s, when the social climate in the city was “below zero”. Back then, the city-centre was a no-go area where groups like Combat 18 (founded in 1992 in the UK) would commit violent hate crimes.



17 - Australian Aboriginal flag at College Green, photo: Nora PleBke, 2026

Although things have clearly improved, the present is far from perfect. Nonetheless, Roger looks more favourably towards the work being done in the city than Mark and Richard had before, as he takes a more outcome-oriented standpoint. “This stuff isn’t black and white”, he remarks as conversation turns to the Wills Memorial Building. Not only is Roger not in favour of a name-change, as this would mark an erasure in its own right, he also shares that a part of his own family received support through funds not unlike those that the Wills once donated. While it should always be up to the people to decide on such matters, decisions should be done case by case. The Colston statue was put on display at M Shed following a three to one by the people of Bristol, so this is where Roger wants it to be, caring much less about nuances than others. Likewise, he takes a different position on Pero’s Bridge than Mark had two days prior: to Mark the naming of the bridge after Pero Jones (an enslaved African man that lived as John Pinney’s personal servant at the Georgian House) missed to mark, as it commemorates a victim of slavery, not one of the many underrecognised abolitionists, such as Samuel Sharpe who bravely led Jamaica’s Christmas rebellion of 1831 and represents many of African descent who died while resisting slavery. Roger challenges this demand: “nobody who looks like me would say something like that”. In general, he considers institutions like city council or the police to be his “frenemies”, working with them as much as against them, like yin and yang.

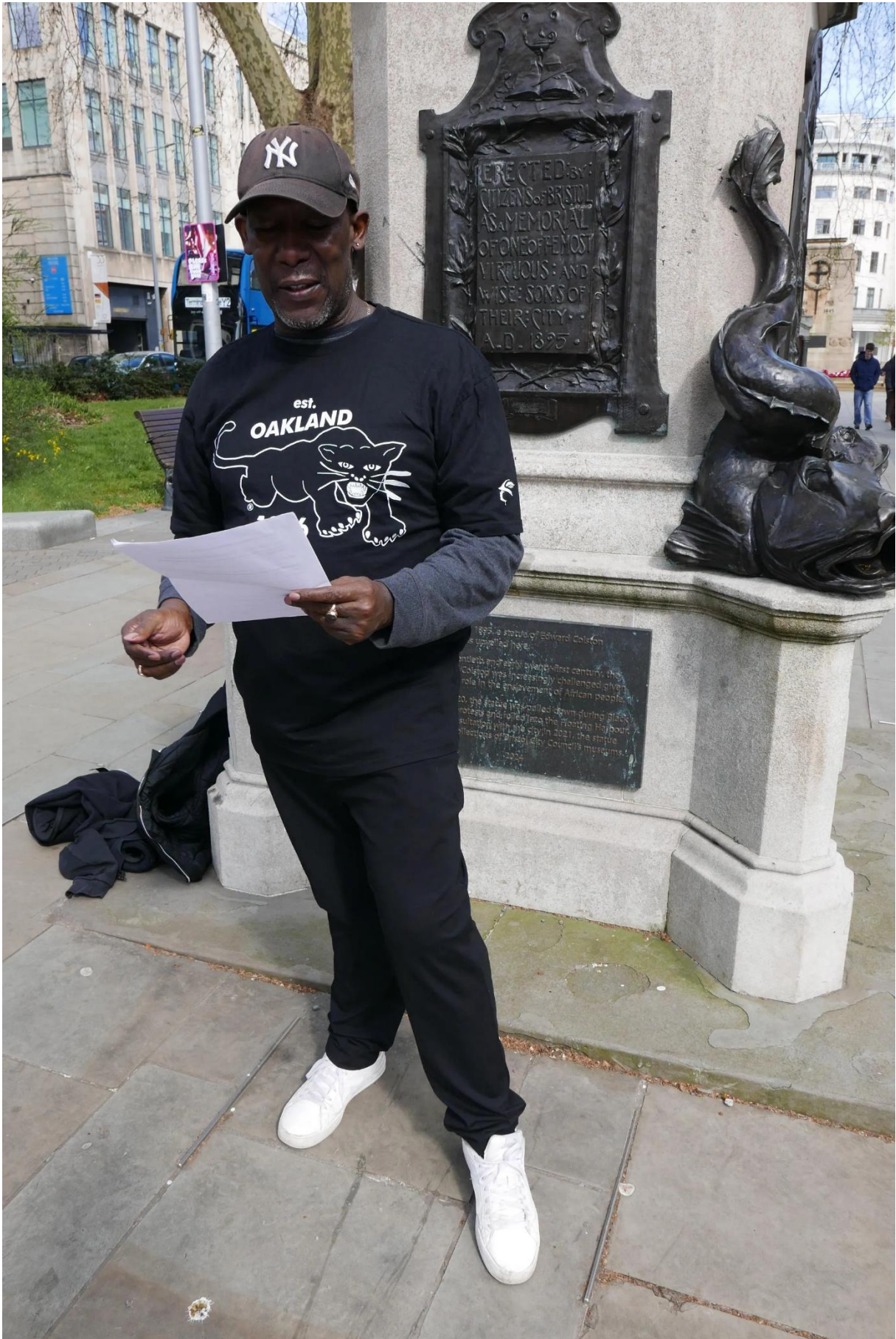


18 - Pero's Bridge, photo: Nora PleBke, 2026

“I challenge Bristol because I love it.”

Reflecting on his own life, Roger deems the pop-culture of his day to have had a bigger impact on him than intellectual or literary figures. While the latter would become more influential as his academic career developed, it was bands like UB40 or The Specials that he credits with inspiring his early work. The poetry he writes aims for similar immediacy. At the Colston plinth, he performs his poem “Of Riots and Rebellions”, a lyrical examination of Bristol’s history of social upheaval, tracing a direct line from the colonial foundations to modern struggles for racial justice. Later, he will highlight the 2008 financial crisis and deleterious social reform that followed in its wake as having opened his eyes to the unjust workings of capital and the lasting legacy of the transatlantic enslavement of Africans.

This momentum, however, seems to have ebbed. Economic and political challenges have taken centre stage over the communal movement against racism in Bristol. To Roger, the last ten years have seen two distinct periods: the first, in the immediate context of BLM, bringing the city two steps forward, the second, infused with the backlash against BLM, taking it three steps back. In particular, he laments an increasing fragmentation among the Black community, resulting in a plurality of less powerful voices. Accordingly, he stresses the importance of holding the line and reminding people that political rights are not natural, but have been fought for.



19 - Roger Griffith, photo: Nora PleBke, 2026

“We haven’t had a new cultural building in 200 years.”

While both Roger and Mark had occasionally touched on the topic of urban regeneration and the role played by creative industries in Bristol, *transSCAPE* was able to deepen that conversation with Matthew Austin, cultural practitioner in Bristol and currently Clore Leadership Fellow.

Matthew recalls that when he first started working in Bristol, a colleague had dubbed the city “the graveyard of ambition”. Although harsh, the attribution was not entirely unwarranted. City council does not currently view the cultural sector as a major economic pillar, relegating its say in city matters to a board on which Matthew has a chair. While a redraft of the city’s development plan is underway and is set to finally formulate a localised cultural strategy, the cultural sector, until then, remains a field that is deemed “nice to have extra” but not essential, as it seems to only ever complain about money. Accordingly, Matthew stresses the need for the cultural sector to reframe its image and emphasise its positive social impact, hoping to thereby encourage the introduction of a citywide standard for better working conditions in the field. Interestingly, city council tends to point to Manchester where, to their mind, “culture is done well” – a reversal of the progressive image that Bristol enjoys in the eyes of practitioners in Bath. With the Arts Council England having restructured its funding strategy, Bristol’s cultural sector bleeds money, having led to the cancelation of Mayfest, a festival for contemporary theatre and live performance that Matthew had co-curated.

Matthew Austin

Curator, producer

2025/26 Clore Leadership Fellow

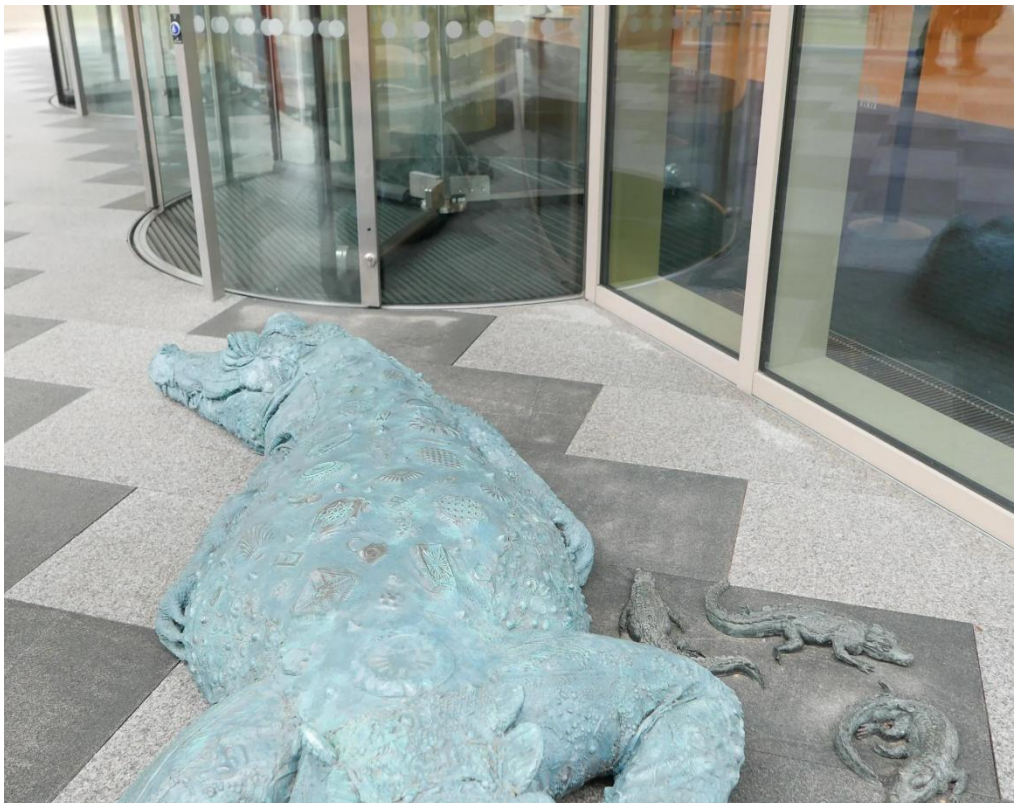
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Bristol had applied to become the European Capital of Culture in 2008, hoping to cement its reputation as a global creative powerhouse. Focusing on its blend of street art, maritime history, and digital innovation, the city had hoped for the title to work as a catalyst, accelerating urban regeneration and bridging the economic gap between its affluent centre and the more deprived suburbs. However, the bid was rejected in favour of Liverpool. The judges deemed Bristol’s application to be lacking the urgent social narrative and city-wide cohesion offered by Liverpool’s proposal.

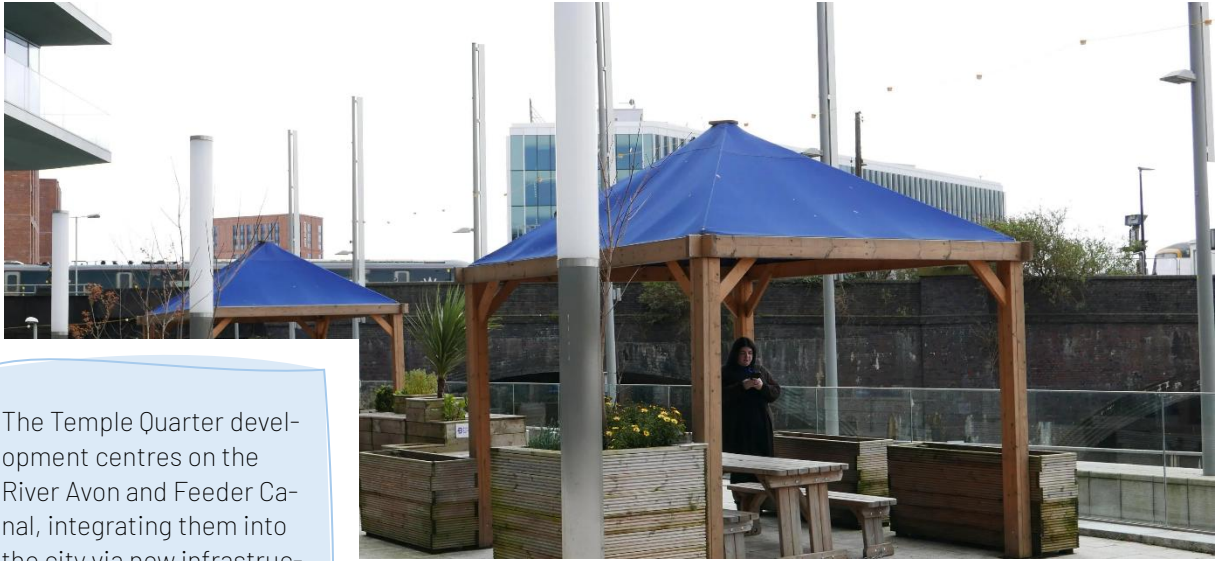
Currently, Bristol is in the running to become UK City of Culture 2029.

To Matthew, a case in point for Bristol's lackluster commitment to culture is Temple Quarter, a 130-hectare enterprise zone surrounding Bristol Temple Meads station that currently undergoes one of the largest urban transformation projects in Europe. The vision of a thriving innovation district that hosts high-tech startups, modern residential developments, and the University of Bristol's new enterprise campus (including extensive students accommodation) excludes a strong a commitment to culture. Although the project includes an incentive to activate spaces through creative means, the results have so far been disparate, small-scale projects. In the words of Matthew: "they want to put culture in, because they have to, but do it in the most minimal way", having resulted in an absence of a distinctive cultural appeal. In his opinion, a joint project like the construction a new theatre, would have been more beneficial to the city overall – especially in light of the Temple development pushing out existing cultural institutions like night clubs.

Post-COVID, he identifies the added pressure of new inhabitants having come in to Bristol from London and speeding up gentrification without providing a real push for the cultural sector. In general, Bristol tends to lose senior level jobs in the cultural sector to the capital – a "talent pipeline", as Matthew calls it.



20 - Statue of the Bristol Crocodile, a local urban legend, photo: Nora PleBke, 2026



The Temple Quarter development centres on the River Avon and Feeder Canal, integrating them into the city via new infrastructure and flood defenses. Key to this plan are several pedestrian and cycle bridges, such as Brock's Bridge and upcoming crossings at St Philip's Marsh, which connect South Bristol directly to Temple Meads station. These structural improvements are paired with a blue-green flood strategy that creates functional waterfront paths while protecting the area from rising water levels. By opening the edges of the Floating Harbour near the new University of Bristol campus, the project seeks to replace industrial barriers with connected transit corridors and climate-resilient public space.



21 – Along the Avon towards Temple, photos: Nora Pleßke, 2026

“Where is the next Massive Attack?”

The Bristol Culture Network, which Matthew has chaired, emerged from a feeling that the city’s cultural sector was dispersed. Set up by city council in the early 2010s but eventually dropped, it would be remodelled as DIY-network chaired by Matthew that, especially during the COVID-pandemic, offered support to practitioners.

Yet Temple Quarter is not the only aspect of Bristol that, to Matthew, has failed to live up to its potential. Pop-cultural benchmarks like Massive Attack or Banksy have had their moment in the 1990s, after which they slowly fossilised and with them, so it seems, the city’s overall creative ambition. This is helped little by participatory initiatives such as the first Citizens’ Assembly for Culture, held in the autumn of 2025 with the goal of launching a so-called Citizens’ Cultural Plan. Having sent out 15,000 invites, the initiative has brought together 51 randomly selected residents from across the West of England to develop a regional strategy for making creativity and arts funding accessible to all demographics. To Matthew, much of that vision will likely remain in expectable tracks – “how would they know what is possible?”. He shares Rupert’s viewpoint that engagement fatigue seems have crept into participatory projects and stresses the value of professional curators.



22 - Area surrounding the new University of Bristol building and campus, photo: Nora PleBke, 2026

Transferables from Bristol

The Legacy of the Slave Economy

As the walks and discussions in Bristol have impressively shown, commemorating the dark sides of a nation's past does not finish with a singular monument or act, but requires open dialogue and a sincere will to learn and know.

The vision of turning the Science Port into a space of knowledge should leverage the opportunity to reflect on Magdeburg's ties to the global slave economy, even if that involvement may not seem straightforward to most. Given that Magdeburg is a temporary home to many international students, the majority of which originating from countries that were exploited by European imperialism, a willingness to commemorate that aspect of German history could go a long way in encouraging cultural dialogue and understanding. The knowledge parcours could provide a platform for this and seek corporation with local train and ship enthusiasts as well as Stimulate, coffee roasters, and agricultural companies from the Börde region..



Pervasive Media Studio

Like The Studio in Bath, Pervasive Media Studio in Bristol is a triple-threat partnership between Watershed, UWE Bristol, and the University of Bristol, that functions as a high-tech playground for research and development, where residents use spaces to prototype everything from robotics to immersive theatre while the public drops in for Friday talks to witness work in progress.

If the Science Port wishes to transform into a med-tech-ecosystem that does not exist alongside Magdeburg but engages with citizens on eye level, it must think of similar formats to open its doors to the public and invite (bidirectional) knowledge transfer.

Immersive Audioscapes

"Colston's Last Journey" creates an immersive audioscape in the city centre. With the help of an app, one can download audio files that automatically trigger via one's headphones if one moves into one of fourteen predefined locations.

The existing "Hafengeschichten" as well as the podcasts to be produced by students in the summer term 2026 could be implemented in such an app and located at different spots in the harbour. Likewise, student's creative writing (especially within seminar contexts) could be recorded and included.

Affective Walk & Talks

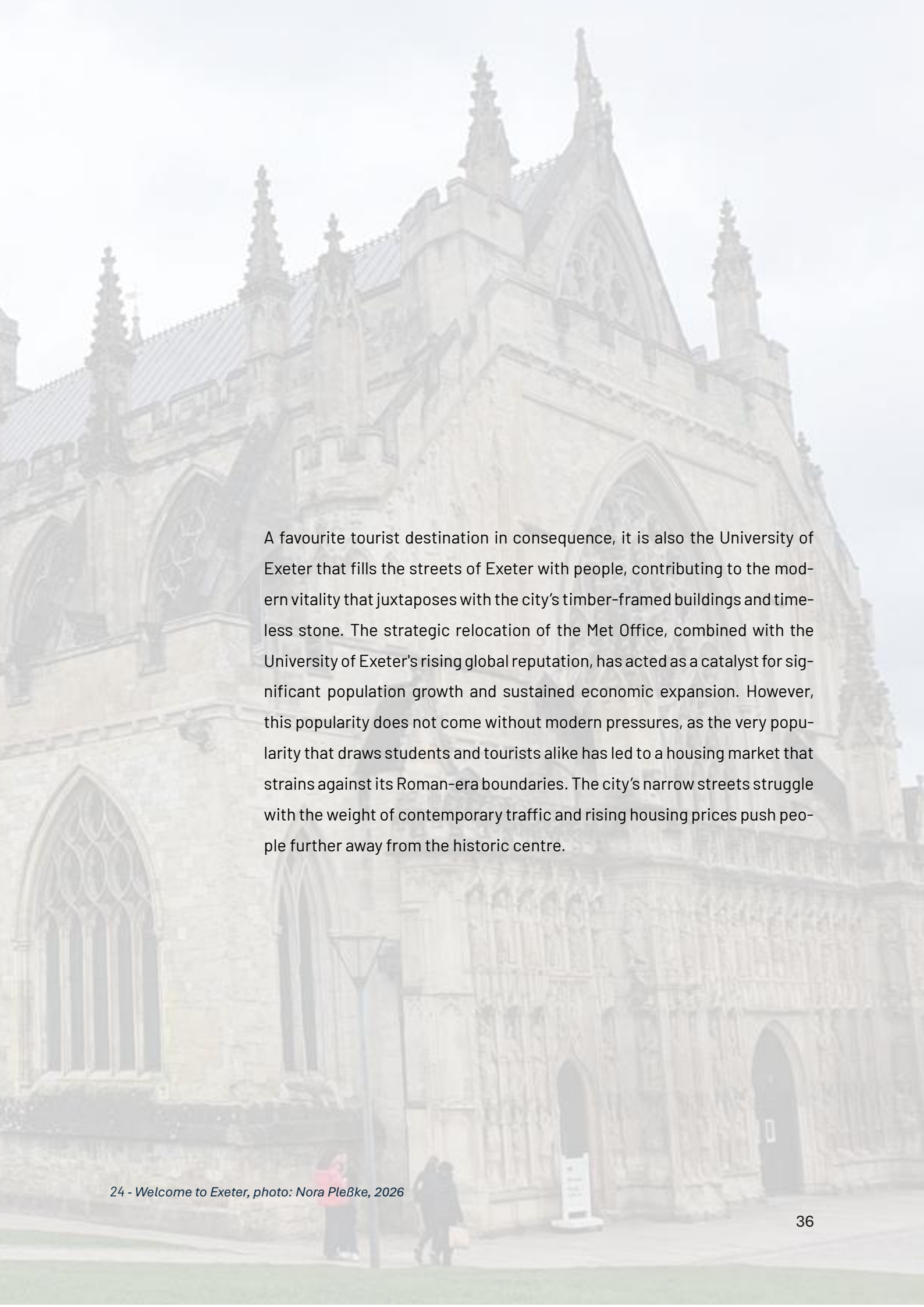
Roger, Richard and Christina had all mentioned their positive experience organising or participating in affective walks. By prioritising subjective feelings and bodily sensations over traditional historical facts, these walks reveal how specific places can evoke personal or collective memories and shape our psychological connection to the urban landscape.

This could also be pursued in Magdeburg's Science Port. The workshop on cryptids already includes a focus on experience the area affectively through its reliance on monstrous/unknown animals. This could be extended further, possibly in conjunction with the aforementioned soundscapes.



Along the Exe

Exeter, the historic capital of Devon, traces its origins to the Roman era, when it was founded as Isca Dumnoniorum by the Mediterranean colonisers, later renamed Exe-ceaster by their Anglo-Saxon successors. Common to both names is the centrality of the river - the Exe - that flows alongside Exeter's city centre and remains, so we are told by locals, an even more popular destination than the city centre itself. That is not to say that the latter had nothing to offer: Exeter's busy streets and promenades are interspersed with whimsical medieval houses, its town square enclosed by remnants of its historic city wall and its skyline dominated by the majestic spires of Exeter Cathedral. If Bath has come to serve as a filmic double for Regency-era London, it is no surprise that Exeter provides a popular backdrop for medieval splendour in productions such as *The Pillars of the Earth* and is even rumoured to have inspired Diagon Alley in the *Harry Potter* series of books and films.



A favourite tourist destination in consequence, it is also the University of Exeter that fills the streets of Exeter with people, contributing to the modern vitality that juxtaposes with the city's timber-framed buildings and timeless stone. The strategic relocation of the Met Office, combined with the University of Exeter's rising global reputation, has acted as a catalyst for significant population growth and sustained economic expansion. However, this popularity does not come without modern pressures, as the very popularity that draws students and tourists alike has led to a housing market that strains against its Roman-era boundaries. The city's narrow streets struggle with the weight of contemporary traffic and rising housing prices push people further away from the historic centre.

There are more people down here than come into the city-centre.”

To get a sense of the historic connectedness between Exonians and their river as well as an impression of recent regeneration efforts on-site, *transSCAPE* met with Sally Flint, poet, editor, and lecturer in English/Creative Writing at the University of Exeter, for a walk along Exeter Quays.

Once an important inland port, the Quays lead to the river Exe via the historic Exeter Ship Canal, constructed in 1566 to secure Exeter’s role as a major trading hub in the region. Gradually expanded in step with the rise of maritime trade and size of vessels, the waterfront is currently in the process of transformation, switching a focus on trade with one on leisure and recreation. A mix of shops, cafés, and pubs invites tourists and residents alike to kayak, paddleboard, or cycle along the canal – so successfully, in fact, that, on weekends, the riverbanks are as crowded with people as the busy market streets.



25 - Exeter Canal, photo: Nora Pleßke, 2026

Sally Flint

Lecturer in
English/Creative Writing
University of Exeter

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Sally’s work at the University of Exeter includes the climate simulation game *Hopeville*, an immersive educational tool that seeks to translate complex climate data into relatable, human-centred experiences. In the game, players take the position of decision-makers to navigate the socio-economic and environmental challenges of a warming planet. The project’s primary goal is to foster climate agency through demonstrating how specific local adaptations, such as flood defences or sustainable urban planning, can impact the long-term resilience of a community.

Together with Prof. Corinna Wagner, co-creative elements of their work have already been transferred to Magdeburg in the form of creative writing workshops in conjunction with *We Are the Possible*, an award-winning international program led by the University of Exeter that uses creative storytelling, art, and education to communicate climate science at UN Climate Change Conferences (COPs).

We begin our walk at the Custom House, a Grade II listed 17th century building that has been repurposed by the Exeter Canal and Quay Trust into an arts, literature and commercial space at the juncture between city and river. Along the canal, one can see the faint outlines of ongoing urban renewal in the form of the Water Lane and Haven Banks regeneration projects, envisioning an area that currently holds derelict retail parks to become a modern eco friendly residential quarter with 'affordable housing'. However, Sally is sceptical that these environmentally conscious plans will come to fruition, because the projects already lag behind schedule - plans being discussed with developers without agreement for over three years are yet to be agreed, and because sustainable plans for other recently completed residential units in Exeter had ultimately been changed. Locals are worried what will be agreed for the quayside development will be done without proper consultation.

Recent demolition on what was considered by locals as 'contaminated land' because of the appalling smell, of what was previously a 'meat factory', was regarded as an act of pollution on the riverside that seemingly went without an appropriate outcry. Accordingly, Sally regards interventions like the signage put up by FLOW, a project aiming to encourage care for fruit and foraging route for insects, animals and humans along the river with mixed feelings: "There's lots of good intentions and good conservation work going on", however, we need more opportunities to bring the community together to get voices taken notice of before future building developments get signed off and agreed.



26 - Custom House, photo: Nora Pleßke, 2026

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To further discuss how the universities of Magdeburg and Exeter could cooperate in the future, transSCAPE concluded its stay in Exeter by meeting with Lindsey Anderson, Andrew Dean, Dom Jinks, and Ian Collinson at the Exeter Innovation Hub.

Located in the Princesshay shopping district, the Innovation Hub serves as a central collaboration space that connects local businesses, entrepreneurs, and community organisations with the University of Exeter's academic expertise. Its primary function is to facilitate the commercialisation of research and support regional economic growth by offering bookable expert advice, networking events, and pre-accelerator programs that help startups validate new products or services.

Under Andrew's leadership, the Innovation Hub pursues civic engagement by fostering strategic cooperation with local partners in Exeter (such as city council), Devon (to combat infrastructural poverty) and Cornwall/ Summerset. Although the hub was originally designed for economic and business transfer, Lindsey and her team now utilise the space weekly to facilitate social transfer, such as hosting law students who provide pro bono legal advice to the general public. Until its recent closure due to funding cuts, the hub also housed the Creative Arc project led by Belynda Dylan, which for years had integrated health, education, and city development into the urban core. Despite these budgetary challenges, the University intends to maintain the space, which is currently being leased from city council, as a dedicated venue for ongoing community-focused initiatives.



27 - Exeter Innovation Hub, photo: Nora PleBke, 2026

Dom, who was involved with Creative Arc until summer 2025, now works as a design thinking coach and is involved with numerous projects in Plymouth and in the Midlands, such as “Invisible Threads” (an action research project that interrogates the producing culture, workforce and infrastructure of South West England) or “Animation Devon” (to support the development of a future investment plan for a newly established Community Interest Company). Following the ideas of urban scholar Charles Landry, Dom advocates for the Creative City approach by placing communities and audiences at the heart of urban development. Rather than relying on traditional, top-down consultation, his methodology prioritises tangible projects that uncover the genuine identification people have with their surroundings. By asking what is truly important to residents and identifying what they take pride in, his strategy moves toward a model of parity to ensure that community voices carry equal weight in the planning process.



28 - Inside Exeter Innovation Hub, photos: Nora Pleßke, 2026

This insight into the work of cultural practitioners in Exeter is accompanied by Ian's perspective. In his function as director of place, Ian oversees a comprehensive spatial development portfolio guided by seven key principles designed to ensure that the city's growth is sustainable. These principles, which form the framework for Exeter's "Liveable Tools," include:

Memorable Places	Developments must reinforce Exeter's unique identity by responding to the local landscape and maximising views of natural and built landmarks. By promoting efficient land use and sustainable transport links, the goal is to keep the city compact, walkable, and culturally vibrant.
Outstanding Quality	This principle demands optimal building density and innovative infrastructure to achieve the city's net-zero carbon ambitions by 2030. Projects should enhance key historic and natural gateways while ensuring long-term success through dedicated management and maintenance of public spaces.
Welcoming Neighbourhoods	Neighbourhoods are designed to be inclusive by providing a mix of affordable housing alongside accessible local jobs and essential community facilities like health and education. The focus is on creating human-scale, people-friendly streets where infrastructure is prioritised and delivered early in the development process.
Liveable Buildings	Buildings must be beautiful and adaptable to changing lifestyles, utilising high-quality materials that complement the local character. They are required to meet rigorous energy efficiency standards, while ensuring healthy internal environments through natural light and superior air quality.
Active Streets	This principle prioritises people over private cars by reallocating road space to support public transport, shared mobility, and high-quality walking and cycling paths. Design must include integrated bike storage and electric vehicle infrastructure from the outset to encourage a shift towards sustainable active travel.
Spaces for People and Wildlife	Developments must strengthen connections to Exeter's green networks, such as the Valley Parks, to provide dedicated areas for biodiversity and nature. These spaces should also promote social vitality by offering safe, attractive environments for outdoor recreation, community food growing, and play.
Connected Culture	This principle uses Exeter's rich heritage and creative talent to foster civic pride and support local economic growth through flexible spaces for creative industries. It emphasises resilient, networked communities where public art and meanwhile uses on development sites contribute to social value and climate resilience.

Although, at the moment, strategic planning is only in preparation due to an ongoing local government reform, the primary focus will remain the long-term redevelopment of the river and industrial areas over the next thirty years. As Sally had mentioned earlier, this vision aims to deliver at least 12,000 net-zero homes while transforming the district into a significant social and cultural asset of the city. Ian confirms that the development will be guided by comprehensive placemaking principles, integrating mixed-use spaces and cultural infrastructure.

To

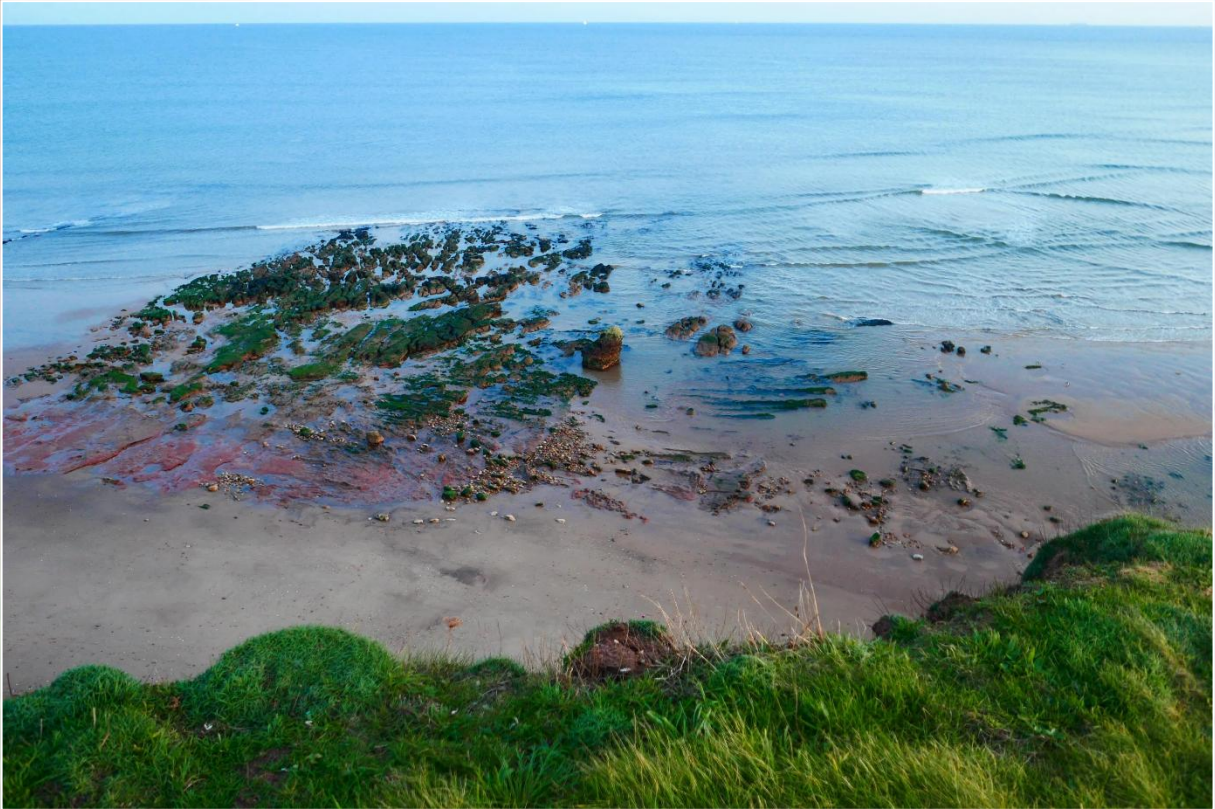
EXMOUTH

In Pictures

From Exeter, we took the opportunity to follow the eponymous river to its estuary in the South, to Exmouth, the buzzing seaside town built atop England's Jurassic Coast. The short train journey on the scenic Avocet Line traced the path of the ancient Exeter Ship Canal, passing through mudflats and marshes that serve as havens for migrating birds and local wildlife. To local people, migrating with us from Exeter, Exmouth seemed to primarily fill the role of a maritime playground, its shoreline crowded with seafood restaurants and colourful arcades.

Indeed, the Exe would not be the only river we would follow from here: together with colleagues from Exeter (as well as a broad network of partners, many of whom we met during this and previous excursions) a research project on rivers is currently in development, working to examine European cities, rivers and ports from different perspectives.

The short photo attempts to provide an impression of the UNESCO World Heritage coastline





Transferables from Exeter

Toolkits for Schools

As Creative Lead on the programme Schools Across the Ocean funded by the British Council and supported by the Blue Oceans Network and the Met Office, Sally has extensive experience in working virtually with school students, and in providing teachers with appropriate teaching and learning material linking climate science and the arts.

In view of the toolkits transSCAPE has developed so far, Sally encourages the inclusion of a more support for teachers. The topic of climate change, framed as planetary health to sustain the connection to the med-tech-ecosystem, should be pursued here, as Sally stresses how children want to know more about how human health and planetary health connect, and what positive action can be taken to protect environments and nature intertwined in these topics.

Mixed-use Houseboat

Although houseboats are not as popular on the Exeter Canal as they are elsewhere in England, Sally points to a moored vessel, The Snark, 110ft sailing ship at the Exeter canal basin where she has attended poetry readings in the past.

A similar fixed installment could provide a desirable event space in the Science Port, especially if it was big enough to offer an interior. It could implement a mixed-use approach, whereby local restaurants and the University share the space for attracting customers and engaging with the public through transfer formats.

Interactive Walking Trails

Around Exeter's city centre, several plaques invite visitors to explore the city via a number of themed walking trails. Additionally, the Hidden Exeter app offers an immersive experience by building three narrative journeys that fill the city centre with life, including numerous pointers to the museum collection.

The Science Port could implement something similar, perhaps in conjunction with an immersive audioscape as experience in Bristol. For instance, once the podcasts with medical professionals are recorded and implemented, further links could lead to Stimulate or potentially the collection of historic medical equipment at the Kustodie.

City Riddles

The Exeter Riddle Sculpture, created by artist Michael Fairfax in 2005 and located on High Street, is a 6.5-meter-high stainless steel sculpture that features riddles from the famous Exeter Book, a 10th-century manuscript kept at Exeter Cathedral. The riddles are laser-cut into the steel panels in reverse. One has to look at the reflection in the opposite panel to read them. Solutions are engraved on steel spheres nestled between the sculpture's wings.

Such playful implementation of literature and heritage could also inform design elements of the envisioned knowledge parcours surrounding the port basin. Creative riddles, with answers to be found in the surrounding, could improve child-friendliness and interlink with other gamification elements.

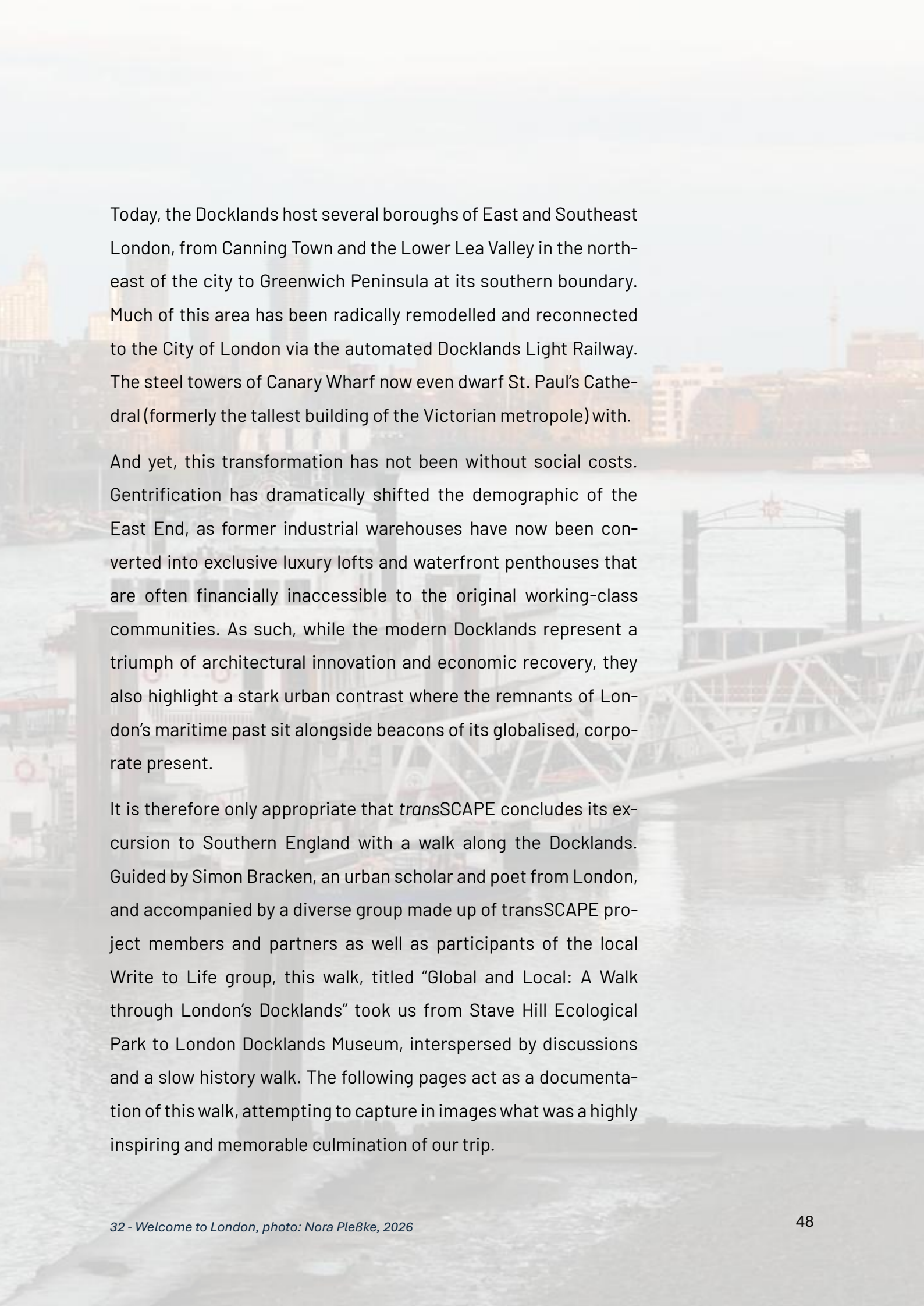


Wharves and Wealth

The capital of the United Kingdom and, arguably, metropolitan centre of Europe hardly needs an introduction. The city of London stands as a cultural, financial and economic nexus of the 21st century, its many iconic sites, from Tower Bridge to Piccadilly Circus, having ingrained themselves in the cultural zeitgeist and are synonymous with urban bustle and grandeur. Over the last decades, however, there has emerged a new-yet-old part of town that now accompanies these famed centrepieces, some even referring to as an unofficial second city centre: the Docklands.

Historically, London's Docklands served as the home port of the British Empire's global trade, housing massive docks like the West India and Royal Docks and overseeing the constant influx of goods, including tobacco, spices, and tea from Britain's colonies. For centuries, the area was therefore characterised by the gritty, industrial landscape of deep-water basins and brick warehouses and served as a home to a massive workforce of dockworkers.

However, by the mid-20th century, when containerisation and a dependency on larger vessels had pushed shipping downstream to deep-water ports like Tilbury, the roughly 22 square kilometres that were the Docklands fell into disuse and slow decay, prompting one of the world's most ambitious urban renewal projects, led by the London Docklands Development Corporation, in the 1980s.



Today, the Docklands host several boroughs of East and Southeast London, from Canning Town and the Lower Lea Valley in the north-east of the city to Greenwich Peninsula at its southern boundary. Much of this area has been radically remodelled and reconnected to the City of London via the automated Docklands Light Railway. The steel towers of Canary Wharf now even dwarf St. Paul's Cathedral (formerly the tallest building of the Victorian metropole) with.

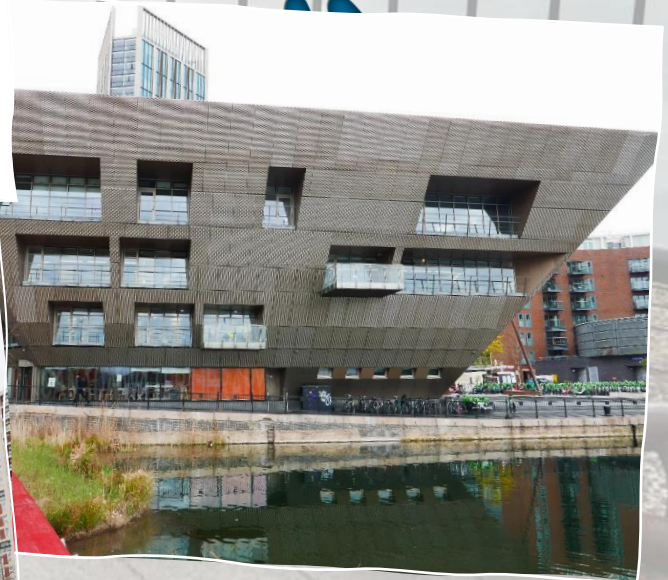
And yet, this transformation has not been without social costs. Gentrification has dramatically shifted the demographic of the East End, as former industrial warehouses have now been converted into exclusive luxury lofts and waterfront penthouses that are often financially inaccessible to the original working-class communities. As such, while the modern Docklands represent a triumph of architectural innovation and economic recovery, they also highlight a stark urban contrast where the remnants of London's maritime past sit alongside beacons of its globalised, corporate present.

It is therefore only appropriate that *transSCAPE* concludes its excursion to Southern England with a walk along the Docklands. Guided by Simon Bracken, an urban scholar and poet from London, and accompanied by a diverse group made up of *transSCAPE* project members and partners as well as participants of the local Write to Life group, this walk, titled "Global and Local: A Walk through London's Docklands" took us from Stave Hill Ecological Park to London Docklands Museum, interspersed by discussions and a slow history walk. The following pages act as a documentation of this walk, attempting to capture in images what was a highly inspiring and memorable culmination of our trip.

Canada Water



We begin our walk at Canada Water, a redeveloped neighbourhood in Rotherhithe in Southeast London that is centred around one of the city's freshwater docks. As we stroll along the boardwalks of Raffer Walk, circling a freshwater lake that serves as a dedicated wildlife refuge, we are taken in by the blend of industrial heritage and modern urban living. Canada Water Library, a well-connected community centre (attached to a busy Underground station) and mimicking in its architecture the hull of a ship, draws our interest in particular.



Stave Hill Ecological Park & Russia Dock Woodland



We then explore Stave Hill Ecological Park and the adjacent Russia Dock Woodland. Nestled within the urban landscape of Rotherhithe, this escape into nature is the result of a late 1980s redevelopment that turned the former dock into a mosaic of habitats. The park itself sits atop the filled-in dock site while Stave Hill, a 9-meter mound that offers a panoramic view of Canary Wharf and the City of London, is made up of rubble left over by the reconstruction. A bronze relief map illustrates the historic layout of the former docks and points towards Hamburg as an important trading partner.



Surrey Docks Farm

Our walk also takes us to Surrey Docks Farm, a roughly one hectare farm located on the south bank of the River Thames that began its life as community garden on former wasteland between Greenland Dock and river in 1975. After a relocation in 1986, the project turned from an informal community project into a permanent institution supported by Southwark Council to provide educational and recreational services. Visitors are invited to engage with a wide variety of live-stock including goats, sheep, pigs, donkeys, and poultry. The community-led project also cultivates a variety of, from a vegetable garden to an orchard and an herb garden in support of local biodiversity. Visitors can browse the farm shop for fresh produce and handmade crafts or engage with educational offers like observing traditional blacksmithing or learning about sustainable food production through seasonal workshops.



Surrey Docks Beach



A few steps further we enter Surrey Docks Beach, a hidden stretch of foreshore along the River Thames that reveals itself primarily during low tide. Located near the historic Nelson Dock and the entrance to the Greenland Dock, this urban beach is composed of a mixture of sand, shingle, and smoothed river stones, offering one of the few places in Southeast London where the public can directly access the water's edge. While it is not a traditional swimming beach due to the river's strong currents and bad water quality, it is a popular spot for beachcombing and mudlarking, where visitors can find fragments of Victorian pottery, clay pipe stems, and other artifacts of London's maritime past.

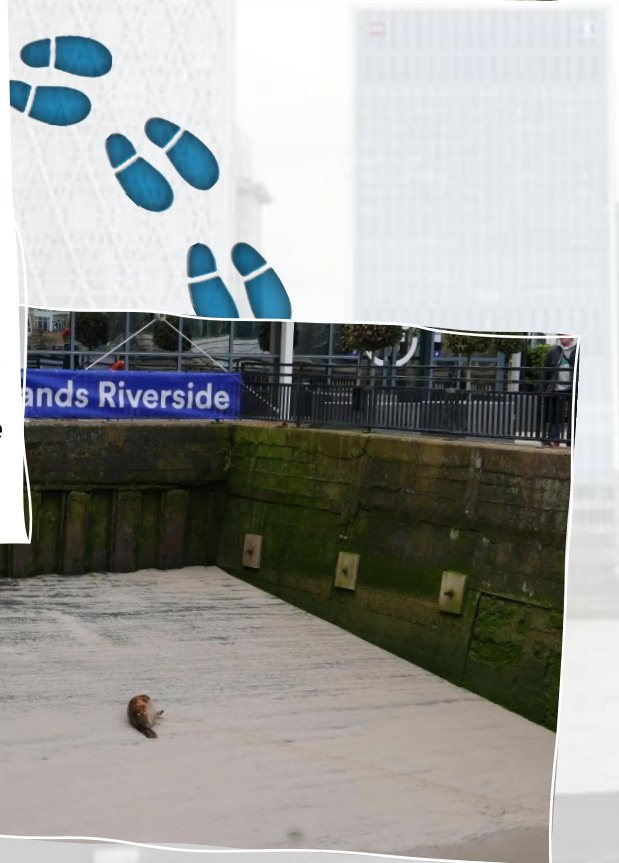


Greenland Dock



We continue our walk towards Greenland Dock, the oldest of London's riverside docks. Originally constructed in 1699 as the Howland Great Wet Dock to provide a sheltered anchorage for merchant ships, the dock evolved into a major hub for the whaling industry, taking its modern name from the Greenland whale fishery that processed its catch at this site during the 18th and 19th centuries. Today, the dock has been transformed into a residential and recreational area, using the water for sailing, windsurfing, and paddleboarding.

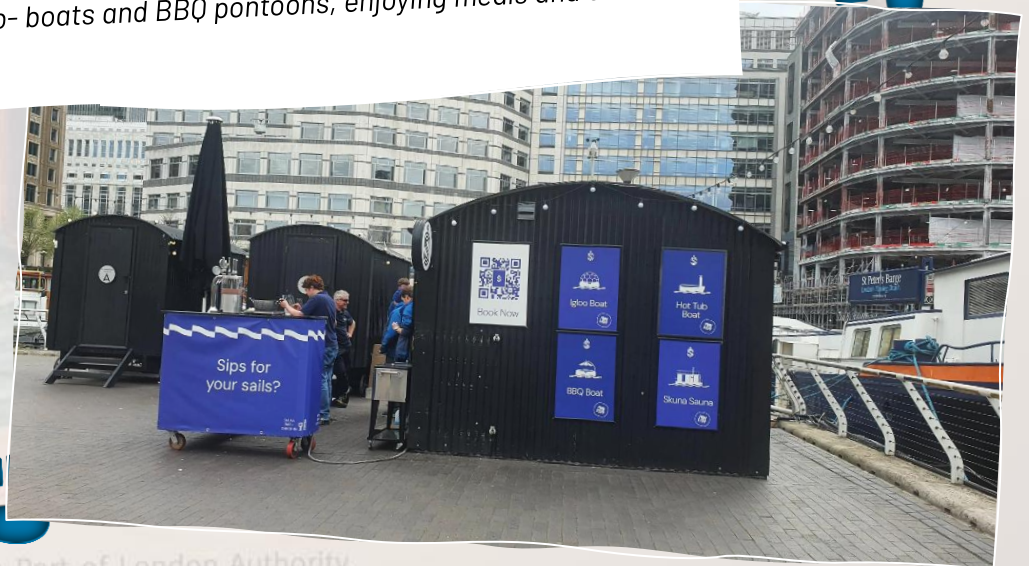
Here, we commence a "slow history walk": Within 200 steps, we imagined a 200,000 year river history, crossing multiple ice ages and tracing the area's habitation from lions, rhinos and elephants to the arrival of modern humans and the present day.



London Museum of Docklands



After a boat ride to the Isle of Dogs, we end our walk with a tour of the London Museum of Docklands. Housed within the Grade I listed No. 1 Warehouse of the West India Docks that remains the oldest surviving structure of its kind, the museum provides a counterpoint to the commercial redevelopment and upbeat expansion surrounding Canary Wharf by focusing on the area's history, specifically the lives of its former workers and the role played by transatlantic slavery in London's historic and current wealth. Indeed, this obvious tension was underscored in 2020, when the statue of Robert Milligan (a prominent slaveholder and dock founder) was taken down just two days after Edward Colston's statue was toppled in Bristol. However, unlike Colston's defaced statue in Bristol, Milligan's statue remains hidden in storage, bespeaking the difficulty of commemorating the city's uncomfortable heritage. Outside the museum we are amazed by the shift in atmosphere: Where labourers once hauled sugar crates, visitors now spend their time in floating hot tub-boats and BBQ pontoons, enjoying meals and saunas directly on the water.



The coat of arms of the Port of London Authority.
The Latin translates as 'May the Imperial Port Flourish'.

Résumé

“And then England—southern England, probably the sleekest landscape in the world. It is difficult when you pass that way, especially when you are peacefully recovering from seasickness with the plush cushions of a boat-train carriage underneath you, to believe that anything is really happening anywhere...”

George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, 1938

The above quote by George Orwell, although holding true for many lush vistas that rushed past our window as we looked out from trains, shows its age. The South of England today is in flux, reinventing itself, remembering itself – struggling with itself. As we learned in Bath while peaking behind the curtains of the new Fashion Museum, architectural heritage is a blessing as much as a challenge, demanding creative solutions to maintain the timeless appeal. In Bristol, where the acknowledgement of enrichment through slavery has broken its long silence, but still struggles to find the right words, we shared our path with passionate educators to listen to their stories and visions. In Exeter, where the Exe took us on a detour to its estuary, we deepened collaboration with cherished colleagues while exploring the medieval town through immersive technology. Finally, in London, we explored the city beyond the tourist magnets, along the waterfront where post-industrial heritage has been transformed into a meeting ground between city and nature. Cities are never set in stone, but always in motion, demanding adaptation. A prime example for this is City Hall in London. Completed in 2002, rent for the building near Tower Bridge had grown so much during the 2010s that the Greater London Authority made the decision in 2022 to relocate to the Crystal building in Newham’s Silvertown district (a part of the docklands), leaving its original building to be redeveloped into a luxurious hotel. Monuments like *The Building Worker* are therefore no testament to a time a historic moment of industrial expansion, but a reminder that work in and on the city is ongoing.

Accordingly, we, too, will put in our work so that the impressions and transferables from this report will find application in Magdeburg, where the Science Port lies in wait.



39133 - *The Building Worker*, photo: Nora Pleßke, 2026

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