

# Sweet History?

Over the past year and a half The Architecture Centre, Bristol has worked with young people from the Knowle West Media Centre on a project exploring the impact of the sugar and slave trade on the built environment heritage of Bristol. The young people from the Archimedia core group worked with local artists and historians to learn about the social and economic impact of the international trades on the port city as part of Abolition 200, commemorating the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the international slave trade.

While there are many resources that explore various aspects of the transatlantic slave trade, the Sweet History? project focuses on the legacy of this trade on the built environment of Bristol.

The aims of the project were to:

- produce an accessible life-long learning resource that highlights the impact of the sugar and slave trade on the built environment of Bristol
- use digital technology to develop a resource that engages a youth audience with heritage buildings
- equip young people with a range of new skills and give them the opportunity to work alongside professionals from different sectors

The young people were central to the development of the project and website and have contributed much of the photographic and media content.

An audio podcast of the Sweet History? Trail is available to download from the website and a mediascape (a site specific interactive experience using a mobile hand-held device) is currently under development.

A printed version of the trail is available from The Architecture Centre, and events for schools and community groups will take place during the autumn.

The Architecture Centre worked in partnership with Knowle West Media Centre in delivering the Sweet History? project and website. It has been supported by the Heritage Lottery Young Roots Fund and the Bristol Visual Arts Consortium.

**Project Team:**

Amy Harrison – The Architecture Centre, Bristol  
Sandra Manson – Knowle West Media Centre  
Archimedia Core Group of Young People from the Knowle West Media Centre

We would like to acknowledge the support of Madge Dresser, University of the West of England and Mark Horton, University of Bristol for their contribution to this project.



29 Queen Square



Headstone at St Mary's Church, Henbury



# The impact of the sugar and slave trades on the built environment of Bristol

During the 18th century Bristol grew very quickly (the population in 1701 was about 20,000 but by the end of the century it had risen to about 64,000). This increase in population was partly because there was lots of new work available in the city, created by the triangular trade\* and its related industries. Merchants in Bristol were importing large amounts of sugar and tobacco from the European-owned slave plantations in the Americas.

The merchants involved in the triangular trade were the people who were living in the grand houses of Bristol and supporting the construction of public buildings during the 18th century. The Sweet History? Trail around central Bristol demonstrates this, exploring which buildings and houses can be linked to the sugar and slave trades.

As Bristol became wealthy during the 18th century, there was more money to invest in new buildings. Those that had grown rich from the slave and sugar trades were able to build themselves comfortable new town houses or grand country homes. The Georgian House and some of the houses in Bristol's Queen Square were built by people linked to the slave trade.



Blaise Castle House Museum

A number of Bristol merchant families grew rich from the sugar trade and used their wealth to buy or build large country houses and estates around Bristol. Redland Court and Blaise Castle Estate were two such places.

Many of the trading ships used in the triangular trade had to be financed and insured and this meant the growth of the banking, insurance and trading institutions in Bristol. Buildings built for these purposes (including coffee houses that were often used by the merchants for doing business) grew during the 18th century and still exist on Corn Street today.

\*Triangular Trade refers to the shape of the trade route created by ships travelling from Europe to Africa with goods, which were exchanged for slaves who were transported to plantations in the Americas. The ships then returned to Europe with goods such as sugar and tobacco.



The Georgian House



The American Consulate, Queen Square





## Young people's involvement in the project

It was important that the young people were the key decision makers. Building up their knowledge of the specific areas was integral to creating a successful project. The young people took part in workshops and visits to develop their ideas and further their knowledge.

### Learning about the history of the transatlantic slave trade

At the start of the project the young people learned about the history of Britain's involvement in the transatlantic slave trade and the Abolition 200 initiative. They discussed the importance of acknowledging the human rights abuses involved and the impact that the wealth generated by the trade had on the economy of Britain and on the city of Bristol. The young people visited the 'Breaking the Chains' exhibition at the British Empire and Commonwealth Museum and this helped them to understand the story of the transatlantic slave trade and gave them a chance to reflect on its legacy.

### Researching the history of Bristol's buildings

The young people took part in several workshops to find out more about Bristol's links with the sugar and slave trade and the impact these industries had on the buildings in the city centre. The group visited the Georgian House Museum, home of trader John Pinney and his slave Pero, and did the 'Sugar Trail' which helped them to investigate the lifestyle of a wealthy merchant in the 18th century. The young people were also taken on a walking tour with Mark Horton of Bristol University, who guided them round a number of buildings that had links to the sugar and slave trades.

### Developing the website

The young people were also key decision makers in the development of the website. They helped to shape the style and content of the website and produced photographic and media material for it. They took part in podcast editing workshops and will be involved in evaluating and improving the mediascape.

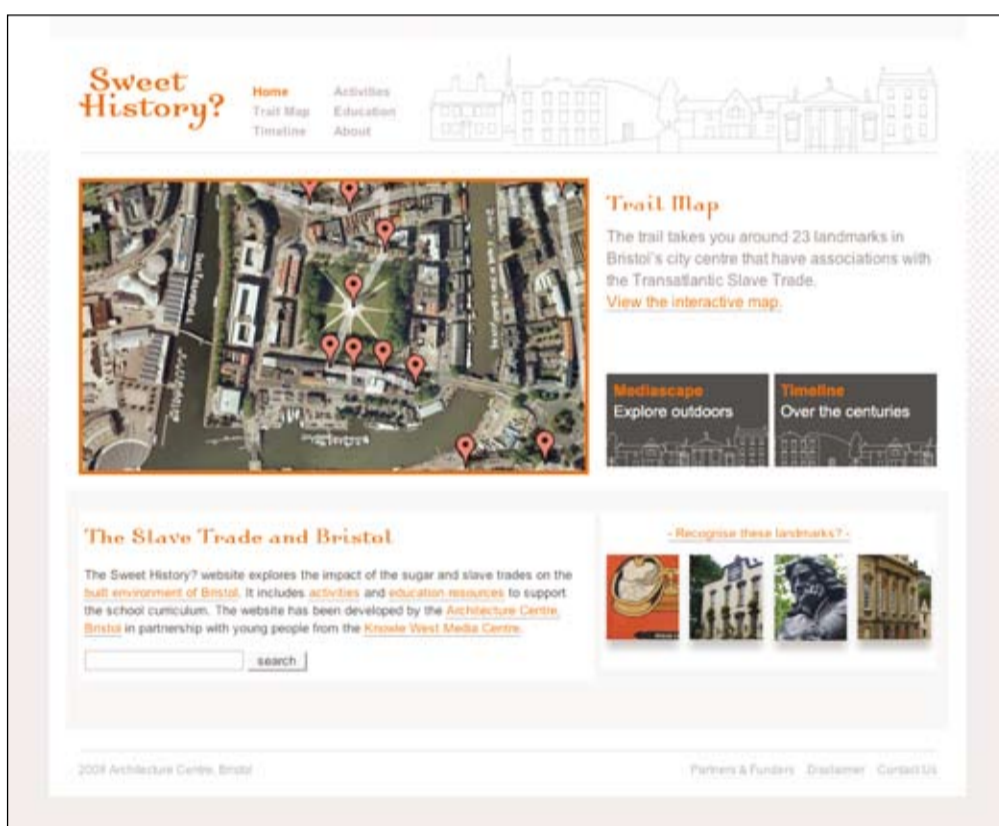




# The Sweet History? Trail

The main element of the website is the Sweet History? Trail visiting key locations round the centre of Bristol. The trail contains photographs and information about 23 sites that have links to the sugar and slave trade.

The information opposite is a sample from the website of one of the locations on the trail.



## Corn Exchange

The Exchange was built in 1741-43 by John Wood the Elder, with carvings by Thomas Paty.

This grand looking building was intended for the use of merchants of all types and including those involved in trade with Guinea and West India. North American and West Indian traders would come here to do business. On both sides of the front entrance in Corn Street were a coffee house and tavern - both were four storeys high. Most African and American merchants preferred to do their business in the more relaxed atmosphere of the nearby coffee houses.

If you look inside the Corn Exchange you can see some interesting plasterwork in the main hall. Above the doors of the main chamber there are plaster carvings representing Africa, Asia and America. The American one is a figure of a woman with a head-dress of tobacco leaves. On the outside of the building there are carvings of African, American, Asian and European figures and animals, which represent Bristol's foreign trade.

The four large brass tables (nail shaped) outside the Corn Exchange on Corn Street are from the 1500's when merchants did their business outside buildings. The brass nails have flat tops and raised edges which would have prevented coins from tumbling onto the pavement. They were used as handy tables for merchants to carry out their business and the phrase 'paying on the nail' may have come from this.

Address: The Exchange, Corn Street, Bristol  
Date: Georgian period (1714-1837)



The Corn Exchange



Corn Street Nail



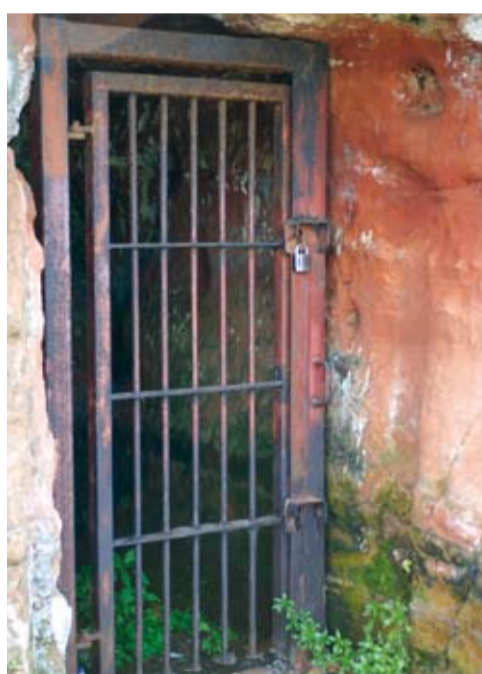
Ornamentation inside the Corn Exchange





# Learning

The Sweet History? website and trail resource is relevant and accessible to young people and lifelong learners. The young people involved in the project felt that it was also important that the resource contained some teaching and learning activities that teachers could use to deliver the formal school curriculum.



The Learning section of the website includes activities that can support the delivery of a range of curriculum areas including History, Literacy, Art and Design and Citizenship. They can be modified to fit in with specific topics or schemes of work.

## General Teaching Activities

- The Residents of Queen Square – investigating who lived in Queen’s Square during the 18th century
- Memorials – investigating the tombstone of Bristol slave Scipio Africanus
- Memorials – investigating the statue of Bristol trader and benefactor Edward Colston

## Primary Teaching Activities

- The Street Name Trail – exploring the links between Bristol street names and the sugar and slave trade Georgian Buildings and the Georgian House
- Museum – investigating the home of John Pinney and his slave Pero

## Secondary Teaching Activities

- Corn Street – exploring the growth of banking and trading on the built environment of central Bristol
- Blaise Castle Museum – exploring how the wealth of the sugar and slave trade led to the growth of country estates and follies in Bristol

The website also contains a downloadable podcast and mediascape, which encourage learners to get out and about and explore the built environment of Bristol.

From left:  
Redcliffe Caves  
Inside The Georgian House  
Footstone of Scipio Africanus  
3 Sugar Loaves pub sign



# Creatively engaging young people with our built environment heritage



The Architecture Centre delivers a wide ranging education programme that encourages young people to become more engaged with both the contemporary and heritage built environments in which they live, play and learn. Exploring this locally can enrich a young person's life and learning experiences.



The involvement of young people has been integral to the Sweet History? project. As well as being a learning journey through which they have acquired new skills and knowledge, it has also been an opportunity for them to express their views, ideas and opinions and to be involved in project decision making.

- create opportunities to celebrate young people's achievements in the project and share their learning with the wider community
- provide new opportunities for young people to gain skills in identifying, recording, interpreting or caring for heritage

## Heritage Lottery Fund Young Roots Projects

The Heritage Lottery Fund Young Roots Programme aims to involve 13-25 year-olds in finding out about their heritage; developing skills, building confidence and promoting community involvement.

## Sweet History? and Thrive!

This project will feed into the Architecture Centre's Thrive! programme as an example of a young audience using digital technology to reveal the history and context of our built environment heritage.

Young Roots projects seek to:

- provide new opportunities for a wider range of young people aged 13-25 to learn about their own and others' heritage
- allow young people to lead and take part in creative and engaging activities
- develop partnerships between youth organisations and heritage organisations

Thrive! is an organisational development scheme from Arts Council England which brings together a number of arts organisations in Bristol to develop their online presence and to use digital technology to allow their audiences to actively participate and contribute.

