



Clifton Down

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The Avon from Clifton Down, watercolour by Francis Danby, c.1822 (private collection)

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The Downs
Committee



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Today, the Avon Gorge is classed as one of the top three botanical sites in England and its exposures of carboniferous limestone are of great geological interest.



"Projection of the S. Part of St Vincents Rock...abounding in autumnal Hiacinths / Sept. 17th 1789"; pen,ink and grey wash by Samuel Hieronymous Grimm (BCMAG Ma3707)

A little background history

Clifton and Durdham Downs: how has such an extensive and dramatic landscape that is so close to the centre of a great city survived open and free from development for so long?

For many centuries the tenants or commoners of the two medieval manors of Clifton and Henbury had the right to graze their animals here. But by the mid-nineteenth century grazing was declining as the city expanded and development pushed in at the edges of the common land. Mines and quarries also scarred the Downs as well as the Avon Gorge.

In 1856 the Society of Merchant Venturers, owners of Clifton Down since the late seventeenth century, promised "to maintain the free and uninterrupted use of the Downs." The following year Bristol City Council purchased two small properties in Stoke Bishop, together with one of the few remaining commoner's rights to graze animals on Durdham Down. In the spring of 1858 the City of Bristol turned out sheep stamped 'CB', keeping alive the medieval rights of pasturage and making further development more difficult.

Then, in equal partnership, the council and the Merchant Venturers promoted The Clifton and Durdham Downs (Bristol) Act, 1861. This act allowed the council to purchase Durdham Down. It preserved the Downs for us all 'for ever hereafter'. And it set up the method of management that continues today: the Downs Committee, made up equally of councillors and Merchant Venturers under the chairmanship of the lord mayor.

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2B Samuel Hieronymous Grimm's viewpoint was just 15 metres to your left. He evidently delighted in the two intrepid quarrymen on the right who appear to be sending rocks hurtling down the cliff towards the old limekiln at the base of St Vincent's Rocks. They may have been searching for Bristol Diamonds, for which St Vincent's Rocks had been celebrated since the sixteenth century. The broken geodes or nodules filled with clear but relatively soft quartz crystals were much used by Thomas Goldney in his grotto at Goldney House in Clifton in the 1740s. They were also one of the most popular souvenirs of a visit to the Hotwell Spa.

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"Chasm of St Vincent's Rock, below the windmill...Aug 13th 1789"; detail of pen, ink and wash drawing by S H Grimm (BCMAG Ma3711)

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will not refuse riding behind a man... and numbers of what they call double horses are constantly kept for that purpose." Three 'double horses' are depicted.

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View of the Windmill & Camp at Clifton...from my window at Mrs Rossignols...Sept. 12th 1789"; pen, ink and wash drawing by Samuel Hieronymous Grimm (BCMAG Ma 3701)

Walk on up the hill always keeping to the path at the edge of the gorge. Continue past the Observatory and take a seat at the first bench 20 metres after you have enjoyed the information panel 'Having a wild time'. You have four 'chapters' here; do also wander and marvel at the spectacular landscape around you.

3A You have climbed into one of three ancient camps at the highest points of the Avon Gorge. These hill forts used the steep cliffs for defence, adding massive ramparts and ditches. Seyer's map, illustrated here, makes it easier to recognise the remains of these fortifications. The ramparts at Stokeleigh Camp in Leigh Woods (top left of plan), have recently been largely cleared of trees and shrubs by the National Trust and are now mightily impressive. You will find that the banks of Clifton Camp, through which you are about to walk, are shallower and that they have become largely hidden under scrub within the last hundred years (bottom right of plan). Burwalls Camp (bottom left of plan) was largely destroyed in the 1860s following the completion of the Clifton Suspension Bridge whose approach road ran through it.

These hill forts were occupied in the centuries around 200 BC, the pre-Roman Iron Age. Whether they were part of a unified defensive system or were the strongholds of separate tribal units remains uncertain. It would have been earlier still, perhaps in the Bronze Age (c.2000–c.800 BC), that extensive felling of the woodland on the Downs took place allowing both grazing and cultivation to develop.



Iron Age hill forts above the Avon Gorge; lithograph from Memoirs...of Bristol and its Neighbourhood by Revd. Samuel Seyer, 1821



Ramparts of Clifton Hill Fort c.1910, postcard (BRO43207.935.323)



Detail of I.K.Brunel's approved 'Egyptian' design for the Clifton Suspension Bridge, 1831; watercolour by Samuel Jackson and Auguste Charles Pugin (BCMAG K4077)

1B We are at the southern extremity of the commons of Clifton Down. When William Vick, a Bristol wine merchant, died in 1754 there was hardly a house to be seen from this spot. Vick's will left £1000 in the care of the Merchant Venturers to grow by compound interest until sufficient for the building of a stone bridge from Clifton Down to Leigh Down – a flight of inexplicable fancy, for such a bridge was then beyond the wit of man. But by the end of the century iron was revolutionising engineering and the small but growing village of Clifton had become a building site.

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Walk on up the hill following the tarmac path that curves left and then right below the bridge's abutment. Very carefully cross Suspension Bridge Road by the speed restriction signs and take the steep tarmac path winding up Observatory Hill, stopping very soon at the first bench.

3B You are very close to Francis Danby's fenceless viewpoint. His watercolour allows us to sense something of the excitement and vision of the engineers who believed that they could span this vast space. It also depicts the Hotwells Spa. In the centre both the Old and the New Hotwell House stand side by side above the muddy banks of the Avon. The Old Hotwell House was built in 1696 and its successor was completed in 1822. The rebuilding was part of a valiant and ultimately unsuccessful attempt by the Merchant Venturers to revive its declining fortunes. The spa had become detached from its clientele now mostly lodged at the top of the hill in Clifton's elegant new terraces.

The new road, which is so prominent in the watercolour, is depicted very shortly before completion in 1822. The Old Hotwell House has still to be demolished so that the road could pass over its foundations. The road continued along the river and up what is now called Bridge Valley Road to the Downs and Clifton, providing much easier access by carriage at a gentler gradient than either Granby Hill or Park Street allowed. The Portway was not to be built for another one hundred years.



St Vincent's Rocks looking upriver towards Hotwells and Clifton, c. 1821; detail of watercolour by Francis Danby (Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection)



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St Vincent's Rocks looking upriver towards Hotwells and Clifton, c. 1821; detail of watercolour by Francis Danby (Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection)



View from the Giant's Cave, 1837; watercolour by Edmund Gustavus Müller (BCMAG M993)

3C In 1837 after two years' excavation a 200-ft tunnel was opened running from beneath the Observatory to the Giant's Cave, a natural cavity in the cliff face of St Vincent's Rocks. Today, if you stand back within the cave, you will find that the view of Nightingale Valley and Leigh Woods on the Somerset side of the gorge has hardly changed at all. For this we are indebted to George Alfred Wills, who presented much of Leigh Woods to the National Trust in 1909.

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Proctor's Fountain and the Downs at the top of Bridge Valley Road, 1911; postcard (BRO43207.9.35.68)

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"From the Summit of the Observatory, Clifton", 1834; detail of an oil painting by William West (BCMAG K8)

Walk on along the path and descend through the hill fort's ramparts to the Promenade avenue. Continue to the far end of the avenue, cross over very carefully by the bus stop and take a seat on the bench near the point of the Triangle close to the gothic fountain.

In the foreground of West's painting; there are some sheep and some bushes but no trees. Quarry boats rest on the mud beneath Black Rocks and a paddle steamer belches its way down the river towards a square-rigged merchantman coming up on the tide. Sea Walls reflects the sun and in the far distance there is a glimpse of the Bristol Channel and the Welsh hills. For at least the last half century this spectacular view has been denied to us. This winter, 2011/12, some judicious lopping and felling should make it available once again.



The Clifton turnpike seen from the Triangle looking down river, 1816; watercolour by Lt. Col. William Booth (BCMAG K191)

4A Lt. Col. William Booth's viewpoint must have been very close to yours. The Colonel would not have misled us – you really could once see the river from here. In his careful drawing it can be glimpsed just to the left of the toll house.

The charge of 2d for a horse and cart was very considerably more than a car's equivalent toll for crossing the Clifton Suspension Bridge, today. No wonder that the gates were to be repeatedly broken down by protesters in the years immediately following the erection of this turnpike in 1727. The origin of the term 'turnpike' can clearly be seen – the centre post revolved in a very similar manner to modern versions at football grounds.

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The new tollhouse on Clifton Down, 1823, lithograph

5B Rowbotham's drawing was sketched from Observatory Hill in 1830. The two brand new semi-detached houses on the left had been completed just a year or two earlier. You can see them almost straight ahead. They are the first and earliest of that remarkable sequence of detached and semi-detached mansions to be built over the next thirty years which you followed from the top of Bridge Valley Road. Behind these houses were ancient quarries or mines. The field name, Litfield, derives from lead field. To their right there is a gap awaiting Litfield House, the mansion that so unusually bears the name of the architect, Charles Dyer, and the date, 1830, on its grand Greek portico.



It was Dyer who was later to complete Christ Church's outstanding tower and spire that overlooks us.

The terrace to the right of centre is Harley Place, one of several fine terraces of the 1780s marking that first phase of the comprehensive development of Georgian Clifton. Opposite is a curving copse of trees. Almost certainly this represents the temporary appropriation of the Downs by the new residents who were landscaping the land before their elegant new homes as if it was at the centre of an urban square. Today, the problems and conflicts of maintaining the Downs somewhere between down land, park land and municipal park continue.



Sheet 10 from the panorama of Clifton from Observatory Hill by T.L. Rowbotham, 1830; pen, ink and wash (BCMAG M6428.10)



Eastwards – just one more stop. First retrace your steps towards those two Georgian semi-detached houses and at the corner carefully cross the road to the large central green. Zigzag down the tarmac paths and take a seat at the bench before the obelisk.



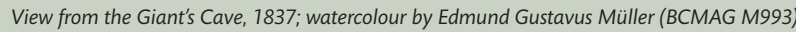
Manilla Hall, Clifton; engraving after a drawing by S.C.Jones, c.1835 (BCMAG K4594)

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Manilla Hall had been built by General Sir William Draper with the £5000 prize money he received from the East India Company for his capture in 1762 of the Spanish city of Manila in the Philippines. He erected the sarcophagus in memory of the officers and men of the regiment he had himself formed. Do read the inscriptions – a moving history of India

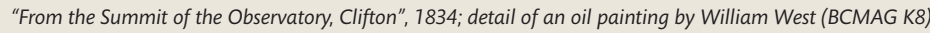
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In 1766 the Merchant Venturers, owners of Clifton Down, resolved that "In an attempt to preserve the Clifton Down and to prevent nuisances the Hall gladly accepted the offer of Sir William Draper to act as Conservator of Clifton Down." Sir William was a fellow of King's College, Cambridge, but also an outstanding sportsman. He was chairman of the committee that laid the foundations of the modern rules of cricket and he would certainly have played cricket on the Downs – in his day near Sea Walls.



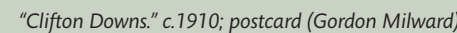
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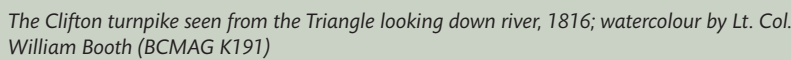
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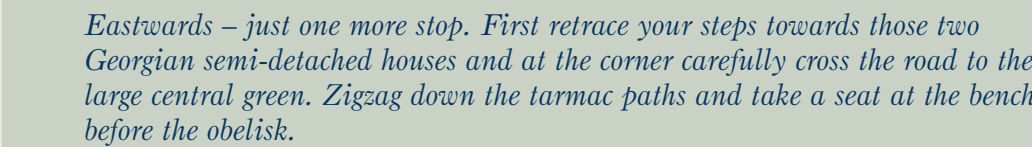
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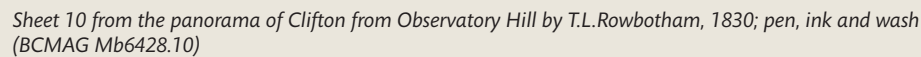


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Clifton Down

“... for ever hereafter open
and unenclosed...”



The Avon from Clifton Down, watercolour by Francis Danby, c.1822 (private collection)

It is 150 years since The Clifton and Durdham Downs (Bristol) Act, 1861 secured the Downs as a place of recreation for us all – forever. This trail and a second trail exploring Durdham Down celebrate this anniversary and explore the rich and fascinating history of the Downs.



The Downs
Committee



2A The exact viewpoint of Grimm's drawing is a few feet above you and you will be passing the spot shortly. The drawing's inscription is testimony to the fame that the Avon Gorge and the Downs have enjoyed since the early sixteenth century for their wealth of rare wild flowers.

The 'autumnal Hiacinths', which the artist mentions, are now better known as autumn squill, Scilla autumnalis, and you can see it in the special flowerbed at the Clifton end of the bridge, created in 2006 to display several of the Avon Gorge's rarest plants. It was long believed that this scarce plant had been obliterated by the building of the Clifton Suspension Bridge, which springs from the projecting point on which the diminutive figures stand. In

1888, however, some plants were rediscovered in the Avon Gorge and a tale of pioneering conservation emerged.

Isambard Kingdom Brunel had been warned by Mrs Glennie, wife of his principal engineer, of the destruction he was about to cause. Brunel then ordered his workmen to remove turf containing bulbs of autumn squill to a safer and, evidently, almost inaccessible spot.

Today, the Avon Gorge is classed as one of the top three botanical sites in England and its exposures of carboniferous limestone are of great geological interest.



"Projection of the S. Part of St Vincents Rock...abounding in autumnal Hiacinths / Sept. 17th 1789"; pen,ink and grey wash by Samuel Hieronymous Grimm (BCMAG Ma3707)

A little background history

Clifton and Durdham Downs: how has such an extensive and dramatic landscape that is so close to the centre of a great city survived open and free from development for so long?

For many centuries the tenants or commoners of the two medieval manors of Clifton and Henbury had the right to graze their animals here. But by the mid-nineteenth century grazing was declining as the city expanded and development pushed in at the edges of the common land. Mines and quarries also scarred the Downs as well as the Avon Gorge.

In 1856 the Society of Merchant Venturers, owners of Clifton Down since the late seventeenth century, promised "to maintain the free and uninterrupted use of the Downs." The following year Bristol City Council purchased two small properties in Stoke Bishop, together with one of the few remaining commoner's rights to graze animals on Durdham Down. In the spring of 1858 the City of Bristol turned out sheep stamped 'CB', keeping alive the medieval rights of pasturage and making further development more difficult.

Then, in equal partnership, the council and the Merchant Venturers promoted The Clifton and Durdham Downs (Bristol) Act, 1861. This act allowed the council to purchase Durdham Down. It preserved the Downs for us all 'for ever hereafter'. And it set up the method of management that continues today: the Downs Committee, made up equally of councillors and Merchant Venturers under the chairmanship of the lord mayor.

Where to start:

At Sion Hill at the look-out point above the Avon Gorge Hotel, but you can join at any point on the map.

How far and how long:

it is 2.5 km long and takes about 90 minutes. It is almost all on tarmac paths.

How to get there:

By bus: 8, 9, 586 and 587; by train: the nearest station is Clifton Down Station, 15 minutes walk away.

The nearest toilets:

Are by the Clifton Suspension Bridge, see map.

Further information:

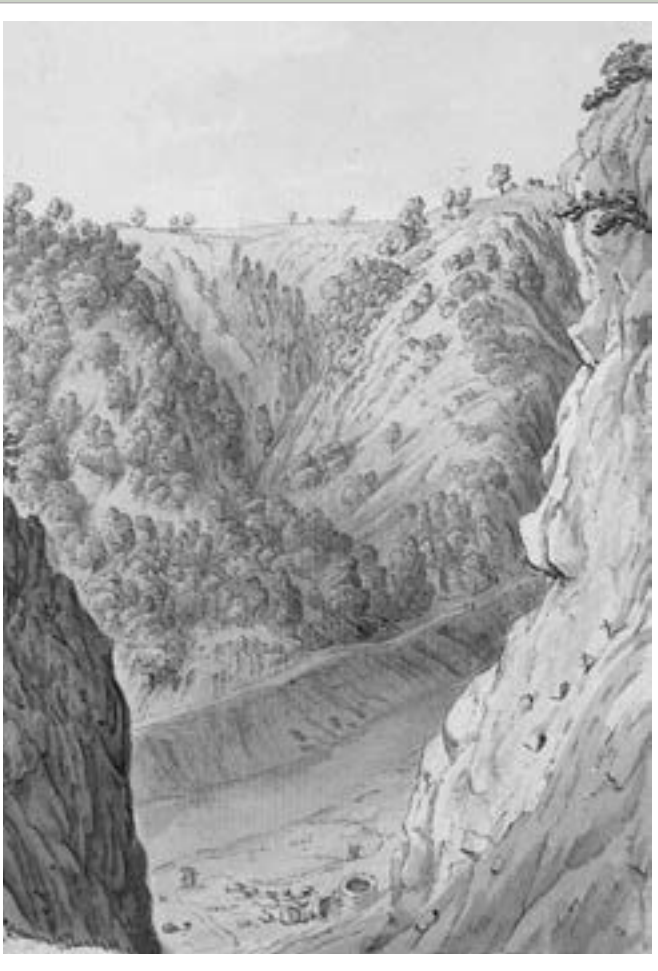
Go to www.bristol.gov.uk/page/downs to download other trail leaflets on trees, birds, lichen and other subjects. For educational visits, events, guided tours, news and volunteering go to the Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project's site: www.avongorge.org.uk or e-mail mleivers@bristolzoo.org.uk; for the Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge email: robinhaward@blueyonder.co.uk.

2B Samuel Hieronymous Grimm's viewpoint was just 15 metres to your left. He evidently delighted in the two intrepid quarrymen on the right who appear to be sending rocks hurtling down the cliff towards the old limekiln at the base of St Vincent's Rocks. They may have been searching for Bristol Diamonds, for which St Vincent's Rocks had been celebrated since the sixteenth century. The broken geodes or nodules filled with clear but relatively soft quartz crystals were much used by Thomas Goldney in his grotto at Goldney House in Clifton in the 1740s. They were also one of the most popular souvenirs of a visit to the Hotwell Spa.

Near the limekiln elegant visitors to the Hotwell can be seen perambulating beneath a parasol, apparently oblivious of the danger they are in.



Geode of 'Bristol Diamonds' 150mm across



"Chasm of St Vincent's Rock, below the windmill...Aug 13th 1789"; detail of pen, ink and wash drawing by S H Grimm (BCMAG Ma3711)

START at Sion Hill look-out point

Start at Sion Hill look-out point above the Avon Gorge Hotel; take a seat looking up the hill.

1A This seemingly bleak view was drawn in September 1789 from an upper window of a newly built lodging house in Sion Row, only just out of your sight around the rising bend of Sion Hill. Clifton was then expanding rapidly partly at the expense of the declining Hotwell spa, immediately below you at the river's edge.

In 1793 Shiercliff's Guide tells us that "Some ladies also take great delight in riding upon Durdham Down... and the best lady attending the Hot-well, if she does not chuse to ride a single horse,

will not refuse riding behind a man... and numbers of what they call double horses are constantly kept for that purpose." Three 'double horses' are depicted.

On the top of the hill is the defunct windmill, which was to become the Observatory thirty years later. Below the tower is a ruined building, just possibly the remains of St Vincent's Chapel which William Worcester recorded in 1480 and which was still extant in 1625. Any remaining traces would have been swept away in the 1830s during the construction of the approach road to the Clifton Suspension Bridge which springs from the point just to the left of the ruins.



View of the Windmill & Camp at Clifton...from my window at Mrs Rossignols...Sept. 12th 1789"; pen, ink and wash drawing by Samuel Hieronymous Grimm (BCMAG Ma 3701)

Walk on up the hill always keeping to the path at the edge of the gorge. Continue past the Observatory and take a seat at the first bench 20 metres after you have enjoyed the information panel 'Having a wild time'. You have four 'chapters' here; do also wander and marvel at the spectacular landscape around you.

3A You have climbed into one of three ancient camps at the highest points of the Avon Gorge. These hill forts used the steep cliffs for defence, adding massive ramparts and ditches. Seyer's map, illustrated here, makes it easier to recognise the remains of these fortifications. The ramparts at Stokeleigh Camp in Leigh Woods (top left of plan), have recently been largely cleared of trees and shrubs by the National Trust and are now mightily impressive. You will find that the banks of Clifton Camp, through which you are about to walk, are shallower and that they have become largely hidden under scrub within the last hundred years (bottom right of plan). Burwalls Camp (bottom left of plan) was largely destroyed in the 1860s following the completion of the Clifton Suspension Bridge whose approach road ran through it.

These hill forts were occupied in the centuries around 200 BC, the pre-Roman Iron Age. Whether they were part of a unified defensive system or were the strongholds of separate tribal units remains uncertain. It would have been earlier still, perhaps in the Bronze Age (c.2000–c.800 BC), that extensive felling of the woodland on the Downs took place allowing both grazing and cultivation to develop.



Iron Age hill forts above the Avon Gorge; lithograph from Memoirs...of Bristol and its Neighbourhood by Revd. Samuel Seyer, 1821



Ramparts of Clifton Hill Fort c.1910, postcard (BRO43207.935.323)



Detail of I.K. Brunel's approved 'Egyptian' design for the Clifton Suspension Bridge, 1831; watercolour by Samuel Jackson and Auguste Charles Pugin (BCMAG K4077)

1B We are at the southern extremity of the commons of Clifton Down. When William Vick, a Bristol wine merchant, died in 1754 there was hardly a house to be seen from this spot. Vick's will left £1000 in the care of the Merchant Venturers to grow by compound interest until sufficient for the building of a stone bridge from Clifton Down to Leigh Down – a flight of inexplicable fancy, for such a bridge was then beyond the wit of man. But by the end of the century iron was revolutionising engineering and the small but growing village of Clifton had become a building site.

The first competition for the bridge, held in 1829, was a fiasco. In the second competition Brunel had to overturn the committee's initial decision against him and then, having won, to get agreement on the style of architecture that was to clothe the engineering solution. Elegant Egyptian gateways topped with sphinxes were selected. The towers were to be covered in cast-iron plaques illustrating every phase of the bridge's history and construction.

Brunel died in 1859 and the bridge was finally completed in 1864 to a much altered design and as a memorial to the great man from his fellow engineers.

Walk on up the hill following the tarmac path that curves left and then right below the bridge's abutment. Very carefully cross Suspension Bridge Road by the speed restriction signs and take the steep tarmac path winding up Observatory Hill, stopping very soon at the first bench.

3B You are very close to Francis Danby's fenceless viewpoint. His watercolour allows us to sense something of the excitement and vision of the engineers who believed that they could span this vast space. It also depicts the Hotwells Spa. In the centre both the Old and the New Hotwell House stand side by side above the muddy banks of the Avon. The Old Hotwell House was built in 1696 and its successor was completed in 1822. The rebuilding was part of a valiant and ultimately unsuccessful attempt by the Merchant Venturers to revive its declining fortunes. The spa had become detached from its clientele now mostly lodged at the top of the hill in Clifton's elegant new terraces.

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St Vincent's Rocks looking upriver towards Hotwells and Clifton, c. 1821; detail of watercolour by Francis Danby (Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection)



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"From the Summit of the Observatory, Clifton", 1834; detail of an oil painting by William West (BCMAG K8)

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"Clifton Downs." c.1910; postcard (Gordon Milward)

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In the foreground of West's painting; there are some sheep and some bushes but no trees. Quarry boats rest on the mud beneath Black Rocks and a paddle steamer belches its way down the river towards a square-rigged merchantman coming up on the tide. Sea Walls reflects the sun and in the far distance there is a glimpse of the Bristol Channel and the Welsh hills. For at least the last half century this spectacular view has been denied to us. This winter, 2011/12, some judicious lopping and felling should make it available once again.



The Clifton turnpike seen from the Triangle looking down river, 1816; watercolour by Lt. Col. William Booth (BCMAG K191)

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The charge of 2d for a horse and cart was very considerably more than a car's equivalent toll for crossing the Clifton Suspension Bridge, today. No wonder that the gates were to be repeatedly broken down by protesters in the years immediately following the erection of this turnpike in 1727. The origin of the term 'turnpike' can clearly be seen – the centre post revolved in a very similar manner to modern versions at football grounds.

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revolutionising the method and standards of road building began here. Essentially, 'Macadamisation' involved ten inches of small stones, very well compressed, laid on well-drained subsoil with a camber to drain off rainwater. A very much smarter tollhouse with Doric columns at its corners was erected here in 1823 immediately after the building of Bridge Valley Road. It was about this time that the avenue itself was first planted.



The new tollhouse on Clifton Down, 1823, lithograph

5B Rowbotham's drawing was sketched from Observatory Hill in 1830. The two brand new semi-detached houses on the left had been completed just a year or two earlier. You can see them almost straight ahead. They are the first and earliest of that remarkable sequence of detached and semi-detached mansions to be built over the next thirty years which you followed from the top of Bridge Valley Road. Behind these houses were ancient quarries or mines. The field name, Litfield, derives from lead field. To their right there is a gap awaiting Litfield House, the mansion that so unusually bears the name of the architect, Charles Dyer, and the date, 1830, on its grand Greek portico.



It was Dyer who was later to complete Christ Church's outstanding tower and spire that overlooks us.

The terrace to the right of centre is Harley Place, one of several fine terraces of the 1780s marking that first phase of the comprehensive development of Georgian Clifton. Opposite is a curving copse of trees. Almost certainly this represents the temporary appropriation of the Downs by the new residents who were landscaping the land before their elegant new homes as if it was at the centre of an urban square. Today, the problems and conflicts of maintaining the Downs somewhere between down land, park land and municipal park continue.



Sheet 10 from the panorama of Clifton from Observatory Hill by T.L. Rowbotham, 1830; pen, ink and wash (BCMAG M6428.10)



Eastwards – just one more stop. First retrace your steps towards those two Georgian semi-detached houses and at the corner carefully cross the road to the large central green. Zigzag down the tarmac paths and take a seat at the bench before the obelisk.



Manilla Hall, Clifton; engraving after a drawing by S.C.Jones, c.1835 (BCMAG K4594)

6 The obelisk and the sarcophagus before you were originally in the rear garden of the Manilla Hall, the subject of this engraving whose viewpoint was almost identical to yours. In 1883, soon after the house was demolished and replaced by Manilla Road, these monuments were re-erected here.

Manilla Hall had been built by General Sir William Draper with the £5000 prize money he received from the East India Company for his capture in 1762 of the Spanish city of Manila in the Philippines. He erected the sarcophagus in memory of the officers and men of the regiment he had himself formed. Do read the inscriptions – a moving history of India

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In 1766 the Merchant Venturers, owners of Clifton Down, resolved that "In an attempt to preserve the Clifton Down and to prevent nuisances the Hall gladly accepted the offer of Sir William Draper to act as Conservator of Clifton Down." Sir William was a fellow of King's College, Cambridge, but also an outstanding sportsman. He was chairman of the committee that laid the foundations of the modern rules of cricket and he would certainly have played cricket on the Downs – in his day near Sea Walls.



View from the Giant's Cave, 1837; watercolour by Edmund Gustavus Müller (BCMAG M993)

3C In 1837 after two years' excavation a 200-ft tunnel was opened running from beneath the Observatory to the Giant's Cave, a natural cavity in the cliff face of St Vincent's Rocks. Today, if you stand back within the cave, you will find that the view of Nightingale Valley and Leigh Woods on the Somerset side of the gorge has hardly changed at all. For this we are indebted to George Alfred Wills, who presented much of Leigh Woods to the National Trust in 1909.

In 1834 a new twenty-one year lease had allowed William West, who had earlier rebuilt the windmill tower, to extend the building substantially. He added a circular room complete with a rotating dome to

house a large revolving telescope. A successor to the original camera obscura that West installed on top of the tower remains today and on a sunny day it can still delight us all.

In 1929 there were complaints about slot machines at the Observatory. William West's descendants were finally evicted in 1943, long after the now decrepit building had been requisitioned by the Home Guard. The Merchant Venturers sold the property in 1977 with restrictive clauses concerning the maintenance of access to the camera obscura and the Giant's Cave.



4B The postcard below reminds us that the fountain behind us was first erected near the site of the second turnpike house which had been demolished in 1867. The elegant landau has just come up the gentle incline of Bridge Valley Road, built in 1822 and vital to Clifton's subsequent development. The fountain was moved to its new site in 1988 after becoming a hazard to traffic at this alarmingly busy junction. It is still in working order (October 2011).

Alderman Thomas Proctor's fountain was erected to commemorate the "liberal gift of certain rights over Clifton Down made to the citizens of Bristol by the Society of Merchant Venturers" under the Downs Act of 1861. More important, originally, was its function as a drinking fountain. Alderman Proctor, himself, stated that it provided sufficient water for the "thousands who avail themselves of the



Sheep, May Blossom and snow on the Triangle, 25 April 1908, postcard (BRO43207.9.22.13)

downs on the Sunday afternoon and evening... but to meet any extra demand, my man takes out a number of half-pint mugs." In 1872, when the fountain was completed, Proctor was living in the only detached house overlooking the Triangle – all the others are very grand semi-detached mansions. In 1874 he presented it to the city for use as the mayor's Mansion House. You can see its white conservatory from here.



Proctor's Fountain and the Downs at the top of Bridge Valley Road, 1911; postcard (BRO43207.9.35.68)

3D The title of the painting is the artist's own and it was proudly made, for this was William West's very own viewpoint – one that he had, himself, created. The Observatory had started as a corn windmill, erected with the permission of the Merchant Venturers in 1766. It may subsequently have become a snuff mill until 1777, when, over-driven in a gale, the pivots caught fire and it was burnt out. The tower became a picturesque ruin until 1828 when the Merchant Venturers granted William West, a professional artist, a five-year lease to turn it into an observatory.



"From the Summit of the Observatory, Clifton", 1834; detail of an oil painting by William West (BCMAG K8)

Walk on along the path and descend through the hill fort's ramparts to the Promenade avenue. Continue to the far end of the avenue, cross over very carefully by the bus stop and take a seat on the bench near the point of the Triangle close to the gothic fountain.

Follow the pavement to your right along the grandest sequence of semi-detached houses in England. After the first four gloriously various houses turn right past the Mansion House and cross the road above the point of the Triangle opposite the Merchant Venturers' Hall, rejoining the avenue's broad path. At the top of the avenue bear left this time around the hill until you see the playground and the bench beside it.



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