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## HUMANITIES ESSAY

# Colston's Travels, or Should We Talk About Statues?

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The toppling of slave trader Edward Colston's statue in Bristol on 7th June 2020, and its dispatch into the waters of the nearby harbour – a defiant act of protest by members of Britain's 'Black Lives Matter' movement – helped to raise international awareness that far too many statues and other artefacts within the urban realm carry troubling histories, even if their contentious associations might have been forgotten. Acting as quasi-Trojan horses, they can appear benign enough within their cultural landscapes while yet silently continuing to reinforce socio-economic inequalities.

This essay investigates the incident in Bristol to offer a wider reassessment of those cultural legacies now seen as 'difficult heritage', particularly those associated with slave trading in the former British Empire. It looks at how the cultural value of the Colston statue, when viewed over time in relation to material and ideological conditions in Bristol as a declining port city, creates a real tension in their meaning today given that they so obviously represent a highly selective construction of local history. The increasingly vociferous demand globally for the removal of such sculptures, especially by the 'Black Lives Matter' movement, exposes the ongoing evasiveness and indecisiveness of official bodies in dealing with such artefacts.

While the final outcome of the toppling of the Colston statue remains in the balance in terms of its legal resolution, the role of urban art as part of activism and protest clearly demands more attention. This essay traces the emergence of debates about 'difficult heritage' as a combination of social performance and civil disobedience. As this kind of struggle continues, the urgent questions become who should be allowed to determine what is considered history and how should it be displayed in our urban public spaces?

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**Keywords:** Edward Colston; Statues; Monuments; Public Realm; Bristol; Slave Trade; Black Lives Matter; Difficult Heritage

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## When the Statues Topple

History became contested yet again in the early summer of 2020 with the violent death of George Floyd in Minneapolis on 25<sup>th</sup> May. His last words were 'I can't breathe', his neck pinned to the floor by a policeman's knee for more than eight minutes. Live filming did something here. It acted as a collective witnessing. And although George Floyd himself expired, his death drew people together in a pain that we all could feel. We understood that but for the colour of our skin we could be that person. There was also something sacred about the unfolding global horror. This sacrifice of the life of a human being for a greater good now seemed so urgent.

Since then, history has continued to be fluid at an ever-increasing pace, spreading across continents and oceans. Figures who were once celebrated for their conquests and then became fossilized and forgotten within their respective urban landscapes as the names of streets, piazzas, buildings and statues, are now being exposed as offensive and inappropriate in a globalized, postcolonial, multiculturally connected world that is no longer comfortable with the centuries-old power structures that these reminders reinforce, often complicit with ideas of racial supremacy, misogyny and humiliation. Embedded into the urban grain they have seeped into the collective subconscious, suggesting that inequality is an acceptable thing.

Over the second weekend following the death of George Floyd more than 130,000 demonstrators gathered throughout Britain to protest against racism in solidarity with the 'Black Lives Matter' campaign in the USA (**Figure 1**). There were concerns that this would put people at risk from the COVID-19 virus, given that mass gatherings were still forbidden as part of the ongoing lockdown caused by the pandemic.

The first sculpture to be toppled in the UK was that of the slaver Edward Colston (1636–1721), who had been born in Bristol and who portrayed himself as a great benefactor. Around 10,000 protesters gathered in the centre of that port city on Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> June 2020, pulling down the 5.5-metre-high bronze figure from its ornately carved stone plinth. A local journalist, broadcaster and artist, Jasmine Ketibuah-Foley, provided a flowing account of the event (**Figure 2**):

People proceeded to get sort of on top of the plinth where the statue had stood and say their piece and make a mark on that space where history had been solidified into bronze. Into that statue. They, the people stood in place of that statue and told their truth, and it was so powerful. People spoke passionately about continuing this conversation of anti-racism past the demonstration and then people came together and helped each other drag the statue of Edward Colston towards the dock. You could hear this great big grinding of the metal on the ground as they dragged it and dragged it and pulled it all the way to the dock. ... The statue wasn't close to the dock, it's a good, I don't know, five-minute walk from that spot. So, it took them a while. They dragged it all the way to the end and I watched, I watched as they pushed it into the dock. And it just had so much symbolism behind it, you know. That dock is where so many slaves have been traded and Edward Colston who was a slave trader had been returned into the dock, had been pushed and dumped into that very same dock. [1]

By Monday 10<sup>th</sup> June, and in response to the wishes of the local community in East London, a sculpture of the late-eighteenth century slave owner, Robert Milligan (1746–1809), had been removed by its owners. The Canal and River Trust took it discretely from outside the Museum of London's outpost in the East India Docks and put it away into storage. Then, on Tuesday, a large crowd of more than 1,000 protesters assembled as part of the 'Rhodes Must Fall' campaign in front of Oriel College in Oxford University to demonstrate for the removal of the statue of Cecil Rhodes (1853–1902), chanting 'Take it Down!'.



**Figure 1:** In June 2020 and with the death of George Floyd in the USA, the Black Lives Matter campaign started to become visible within Britain's urban realm through street protests, placards and signs stuck up with Sellotape in house windows [Courtesy of the author].





**Figure 2:** On 8 June 2020 the statue of Edward Colston was dramatically toppled as part of the 'Black Lives Matter' movement in Britain [Courtesy of Alasdair Doggart].

By Wednesday, and back in Bristol, the world's best-known graffiti artist, Banksy, had put together a proposal which he posted on his social media. As the master of re-appropriating art and environments to subvert their intended messages, this native son of the city sought to reinstate the Colston sculpture by writing:

What should we do with the empty plinth in the middle of Bristol? Here's an idea that caters for both those who miss the Colston statue and those who don't. We drag him out the water, put him back on the plinth, tie cable round his neck and commission some life size bronze statues of protestors in the act of pulling him down. Everyone happy. A famous day commemorated. [2]

In that same evening, however, the decision had been made by Bristol's authorities to fish the dumped statue back out of the harbour, clean it up, and reposition it in a museum where its presence would be contextualized by including some 'Black Lives Matter' placards. Bristol City Council moved quickly, and on Thursday the newspapers confirmed that Colston had indeed been rescued from its watery grave at 5am that morning. The local authority explained that the statue had constituted a health and safety concern for what is still a working harbour, and they had sent divers down to find Colston's effigy so that he could then be hoisted out by crane. Choosing such an early hour guaranteed that there would be no bystanders who would impede the activity of retrieval. Colston's statue was brought to an undisclosed location, hosed down, and is now currently being fixed up for public display in an appropriate cultural institution. Ray Barnett, Bristol

City Council's head of collections and archives, has however promised that the protestors' spray-paint and ropes will be carefully preserved [3].

This essay has begun by presenting this brief chronology of events as they furiously unravelled in June 2020 so as to provide the context for the discussion which follows. Yet what I am more interested in is in thinking more closely about the ways in which history is constructed. In the case of the Colston statue, it began with the initial ephemeral news reportage on mass media (such as radio or television broadcasts) but soon touched upon more permanent markers of remembrance (for example the names of streets and buildings with their power to embed themselves subliminally into our daily lives), and also evoked aspects of our own personal histories (such as those from living in or visiting that city), all of this creating what then becomes considered to be history at large. Hence, the aim in this essay is to include our memories and senses as essential testimony of the ephemeral when writing a historical account which also uses the more conventionally accepted sources for historical research in texts, maps and photographs.

This ambition to widen research methodology is particularly important when analysing heritage environments and their interstitial position in reconnecting us with the past, reactivating it spatially, and allowing it to inform the here-and-now. The responsibility of heritage objects, markers, buildings, urban environments and even landscapes is critical: they are not and never have been innocent or neutral. As in other countries, in Britain they are selected within a highly politicised framework. National interest is the over-riding key criterion, with the Secretary of State having the final word over determining what is placed on the statutory protection list and what is not [4: p.7]. Hence this essay, about the fate of a public statue in Bristol, also intersects with architecture, urbanism and heritage studies. Although some architectural historians such as Alan Powers try to claim that 'buildings are solid facts' [5], which facts they might be evidence of remains part of a deeply ideological process of negotiation. In this sense, our built heritage acts as a cultural mediator that links object to meaning – and what is therefore important to realize from the outset is that this relationship is inherently unstable. Rodney Harrison, an expert in heritage studies at UCL's Institute of Archaeology, expresses this point clearly when stating:

Heritage is mostly about how we want to live in the future. I don't think of the past as a real place that is independent of the present. I think of the past as a space that is constantly reworked in the present ... It is important for us to think critically about Heritage and the work it does in society, particularly at this time when we see certain political and social movements emerging which draw on heritage narratives to justify extremism. [6]

Politics and ideology thus abound when one is writing about architectural and urban history. Indeed this essay, which deals with the problematic issue of race and space, was rejected twice for publication – once for being too long and once for being too inter-disciplinary – showing that the mechanisms to censor the controversial are polite but vigilant framing devices for cultural discourse. My writing style is also perhaps seen by some as too atypical in allowing the activist event of the toppling of the Colston statue to speak for itself in its performance of history. Thus the writing itself becomes part of my methodology. But this is perhaps not so new.

## **The Things of Memory in Contestation**

The politics of heritage objects surfaced immediately after the removal of Colston's statue from its granite plinth and its dispatch into the river. By drawing the attention of citizens who are still somehow in favour of cultural dominance and racial inequality, elsewhere in Bristol in the early hours of Wednesday morning on 17<sup>th</sup> June 2020 the headstone of Scipio Africanus was shattered in an act of supposed 'retaliation' [7]. Not that much is known about this young man except that he had been brought to Bristol as a child and 'belonged' to the household of Charles William Howard, the 7<sup>th</sup> Earl of Suffolk and 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Bindon. It is thought that the family lived in the Great House at Henbury, near to the churchyard of St Mary where his grave is located. We do not fully understand how Scipio Africanus came to live with this household, as the Howards had no known connections either to the West Indies or indeed America. Grade II\*-listed because of its importance, the headstone records his death on 21<sup>st</sup> December 1720, at just 18 years of age. As a note from Historic England explains:

Graves represent one of the few forms of tangible evidence regarding the existence of slaves in England, and as such graves are rare; the vast majority died without trace. Such memorials as do



exist may help us to understand more about the lives of others, whose graves were not marked; this record of Scipio Africanus's history serves to remind us of the many histories which have been lost. The quality of this tomb makes it particularly interesting. [8]

Exploitation of Africans, including those enslaved, was more widespread within eighteenth-century British domestic life than we currently like to admit to – yet the historical evidence shows how commonplace it actually was (**Figure 3**). A reality is that most of those exploited servants were never memorialised. In contrast, the tomb of Scipio Africanus is a beautifully personalised object, carefully decorated with winged African cherubs and flowers (**Figure 4**). Composed of a headstone and footstone, it resembles the sunken bed of a child and had been repainted in its vivid colours in 2007 to celebrate the bicentennial commemoration of the 1807 Abolition of Slave Trade Act. The statue's inscriptions are practically the only source we have of the life of Scipio Africanus, and read:

HERE/Lieth the Body of/SCIPIO AFRICANUS/Negro Servant to ye Right/Honourable Charles William/Earl of Suffolk and Bradon [sic]/who died ye 21st December/1720 Aged 18 Years. [8]

And on the footstone:

I who was Born a PAGAN and a SLAVE/Now Sweetly Sleep a CHRISTIAN in my Grave/What tho' my hue was dark my SAVIORS sight/Shall Change this darkness into radiant Light/Such grace to me my Lord on earth has given/To recommend me to my Lord in Heaven/Whose glorious second coming here I wait/With saints and Angels Him to celebrate. [8]

Even worse, this was not the only damage done. On Thursday that same week, the Bristol police were informed that the memorial of the Jamaica-born poet, playwright and actor Alfred Fagon (1937–1986) had also been attacked in retaliation. His statue was doused in bleach as an act with almost unimaginable racial implications [9].

Nor is Bristol the sole location for ideological disputes about Britain's built heritage. Already back in 2018, in response to pressure from students and staff, University College London had initiated what it called an 'Inquiry into the History of Eugenics at UCL'. The key objective of the protestors was to rename the existing buildings and awards that commemorated the two pioneers of the dangerous pseudo-science of Eugenics, Francis Galton (1822–1911) and his protégé Karl Pearson (1857–1936) [10]. Having moved slowly in its deliberations, suddenly on Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> June 2020 the review was sped up as a matter of urgency with UCL's Provost requesting that recommendations from the 'Buildings Naming and Renaming Committee' should be put forward to the university's presiding council just a week later [11].

A day earlier, the University of Liverpool had taken the decision to rename Gladstone Hall, a residential block that had only recently been rebuilt while retaining its original name – as taken from the famous Victorian prime minister and son of the city, William Gladstone (1809–1898), whose family's wealth came via slave ownership in the West Indies. Here too the Liverpool students had demanded in an open letter to the university that the name had to be altered since it was offensive to those from minority ethnic backgrounds [12]. By the end of that same week, news channels were reporting that a bronze statue of Robert Baden-Powell (1857–1941) in Poole had been put under 24-hour guard because it was thought to be a target for imminent attack by protestors. The potential removal of the statue for safekeeping was prevented by the fact that this life-sized figurative depiction of the founder of the Boy Scouts movement, and alleged Nazi sympathizer, had been given extra-deep foundations when being erected just twelve years prior. So instead the sculpture was boxed in, using plywood to protect it from potential defacement. A posse of predictably mono-ethnic residents gathered around it as 'human shields' until this protective work was done [13].

Defacement is thus clearly regarded by some as appalling desecration. During the 'Black Lives Matter' protests held in London over the previous weekend, the statue of Britain's wartime prime minister Winston Churchill (1874–1965) had been daubed in graffiti. Quotations were stuck onto the memorial to allow the politician's forgotten words be read by passers-by, thereby exposing Churchill's tendency to employ phrases that expressed both imperialist supremacy and overt racism, which objectors felt underpinned his oft-overlooked role in opposing Indian independence and in causing the 1943 famine in colonial Bengal. Usually hailed by a large segment of the general British public as a national hero who should be revered, this action caused outrage nationwide, also because 6<sup>th</sup> June marked the 76<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Second World War D-Day landings in Normandy [14].



**The London Daily Post, and General Advertiser.** Numb. 1838.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 1740.

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**DRURY LANE.**  
By the *Manager's* Company of Comedians.  
At the Theatre Royal in Drury-Lane,  
was play'd the following Comedy, call'd  
**THE STRATAGEM.**  
The Part of Alcibiades, by Mr. Moore; Archer, by Mr. Mills;  
Philo, by Mr. Mitchell; Boniface, Mr. Stanger; Falstaff, Mr. Talbot;  
Mistress, Mrs. Woodcock; Cleopatra, Mrs. Wogan; Sir Charles  
Mordaunt, Mr. Selles; Mrs. Selles, Mrs. Pritchard; Dorinda, Mrs.  
Miles; Lady Boniface, Mrs. Baines; Cleopatra, Mrs. Baines;  
And the Part of Cleopatra, by Mrs. Selles.  
The whole will be added.  
**THE DEVIL TO PAY;**  
OR  
**THE WIVES METAMORPHOS'D.**  
The Part of Sir JOHN LOVERULE (in which will be introduced  
the *Play House*) to be performed by Mr. LOW,  
(who has just got his Licence as an Actor)  
Nell, by Mrs. Selles; Jodan, by Mr. Talbot; Lady Loverule,  
Miss Bonnet; Butler, Mr. Rafter.  
Places for the Boxes to be taken at Mr. Brown's, the Box-keeper,  
at the King's Arms, in Ruffell-street, near the Playhouse.  
To begin exactly at 5 o'Clock.

**THE NEW WELLS,**  
Near the LONDON SPAW, CLERKENWELL,  
**BEGIN** their Diversions, every Day, at  
Five o'Clock in the Afternoon; consisting of the greatest Variety  
of New Entertainments of Singing, Dancing, and Feats of Acrobacy,  
that have been hitherto performed in any one Season in that  
Place. And will exhibit at Seven o'Clock, that celebrated Entertainment,  
call'd  
**A HINT to the THEATRES;**  
OR, **MERLIN IN LABOUR.**  
With the Birth, Adventure, Education, and Religion of  
Also an Addition of MERLIN'S CAVE, as in the Royal Gardens  
at RICHMOND, by Mr. DEVOTO.  
Likewise a new Wonderful Pastime of Amusement, call'd  
**THE HAPPY MILLER ARRIV'D;**  
OR, **Let None Despair.**  
The Whole to conclude with a new Entertainment, call'd  
**THE SIEGE of PORTOBELLO,**  
With the Demolition of their Forts and Castles.  
With all proper Decorations.

**SOUTHWARK FAIR.**  
AT  
**TEATE'S** Great Theatrical BOOTH,  
On the Bowling-Green, Southwark,  
**DURING** the Time of Southwark-Fair,  
the Town will be elegantly entertain'd with the History of  
**ORPHEUS, and the Death of EURYDICE.**  
To which will be added,  
**The Metamorphosis of HARLEQUIN.**  
The Part of Orpheus, by Mr. Corbett; Eurydice, by Mrs.  
Joughall; Rhodope, Mrs. Hickin; Pluto, Mr. Stanger; Acalax,  
Mr. Macquire; Nymph, Mrs. Hill; Harlequin, by Mr. Rofman;  
Pantheon, Mr. Price; Squire Cawkey, Mr. Yester; Clown, Mr.  
Warner; Squire Cawkey's Mother, Mrs. Mitchell; the Dwarf, by  
Master Jefferson; Colombine, by Mrs. Warner.  
All the other Parts to the best Advantage.  
As the Proprietor has put himself in a great Expence in getting the  
Machinery made to the utmost Perfection, he humbly hopes to be favour'd  
with the Company of the Curious.

**WHEREAS** Y<sup>e</sup> has lost Effects of a  
considerable Value. These are to certify, that if the Party  
concern'd will appear to meet, or by Messenger to agree, they shall  
not be hurt or damaged, but if they do not come in four Days from  
the Date hereof, shall have a Publick sale of the same in the  
general Papers, and be liable to the Rigour of the Law.  
At witness my Hand, this 11th of September,  
P. Y.

**ANY** Person dispos'd to buy a Negro  
Boy or Girl; the Boy about 14 Years old, the Girl about  
eight, both well-proportion'd; the Boy is able to wait at a Gentleman's  
Table, the Girl handy in the House, and works with her  
Needle.  
For further Particulars, enquire of Mr. Samuel Downes, Distiller,  
in Deptford.

**To be SOLD,**  
A Good Freehold and inclos'd Estate of  
1001. or 1601. a Year, more or less, in Surrey, about twenty  
Miles from London, with 25 good Rights, Common, Customs, and  
Privileges, as in any Place whatsoever.  
Enquire of Mr. George Hawkins, at Upper Hawford, in Sudbury  
in Middlesex, by the Post or otherwise, and you may know further.

**WHEREAS** at a Meeting held at the  
White-Hart in Whiteley, on Thursday the 11th of this  
Instant September, in order to consider of what was propos'd to be done  
in relation to the County Goal of Oxford, pursuant to an Advertisement  
published in the Daily Papers for that purpose; It was then  
thought necessary by the Gentlemen then present, (that several Rights  
belonging to the County of Oxford, might appear more plainly) to  
have a Copy made of the Grant from the Crown of the Castle of Ox-  
ford, with the Appurtenances thereto belonging; and it was accord-  
ingly ordered, that a Copy of the said Grant from the Crown should  
be prepared for the Use of the Gentlemen of the County at their  
next Meeting.  
It is therefore desired, that the Justices of the Peace, and Gentle-  
men of the said County of Oxford, do meet at the White-Hart in  
Whiteley, on Monday the 24th Instant, by Eleven of the Clock in the  
Forenoon, in order to consider further what is to be done for the  
Service of the said County.

**SADLER'S WELLS.**  
For the Benefit of Mr. and Mrs. RAYNER.  
AT SADLER'S WELLS, adjoining to  
the New-River Head, in Illegion, this Day, will be perform'd  
**THE USUAL DIVERSIONS of that PLACE.**  
Likewise a New Dance by M<sup>rs</sup>. Boudin, M<sup>rs</sup>. Froment, Mr.  
Davenport, Mrs. Woodward, M<sup>rs</sup>. Rayner, and Mrs. Davenport.  
**THE PARTING LOVERS.**  
Also a Dance, call'd **THE PIGMALION**, by M<sup>rs</sup>. Froment,  
M<sup>rs</sup>. Rayner, and others.  
With a new Balance by Mr. Rayner.  
The whole concluding with a new Pastime Entertainment, call'd  
**THE BIRTH OF VENUS;**  
OR, **HARLEQUIN PARIS.**  
Consisting with the LOVES of  
**ZEPHYRUS and FLORA.**  
N.B. There will be Variety of Rope-Dancing by Mademoiselle  
FREDERICK KERNAN, lately arriv'd.  
Boxes s. s. 6 d. Pit and Gallery 1 s. 6 d.  
Tickets to be had of Mr. Rayner, at the Night-door, in Bridewell-  
Walk, near the London-Spaw.

**GOODMAN'S FIELDS.**  
**THE NEW WELLS,** the bottom of  
Lemon-tree, Goodman's-Fields, will begin at Five o'Clock  
this Evening, with Variety of TUMBLING by  
M<sup>rs</sup>. JANNY, Mr. Steward, Mr. Williams, and Mr. Tindal;  
And several Entertainments of Dancing both Serious and Comic, viz.  
The Soldier and Sailor, the Union Dance, and the Dutch Dance.  
With Singing by Mr. Blogg, Mrs. Hill, and Mrs. Mesa.  
To which will be added,  
A new Pastime in Grotesque Characters, call'd  
**HARLEQUIN STATUE;**  
OR, **A TRICK to catch the OLD ONE.**  
The Part of Harlequin Statue, by Mr. Hays; Colombine, by  
M<sup>rs</sup>. Dove; Farmer, Mr. Pollard; Pigot, Mr. Dove.  
Intermix'd (by Dance) with a Serious Entertainment, call'd  
**BAUCIS and PHILEMON;**  
The Part of Baucis, by Mrs. Hill; Philemon, by Mr. Niblett;  
Jupiter, Mr. Blogg; Mercury, Mr. Hays; Hymen, Mr. Tindal;  
Cupid, M<sup>rs</sup>. Granier; Psyche, M<sup>rs</sup>. Granier; Followers of Hymen,  
by M<sup>rs</sup>. Granier, Mr. Obeliskion, Mr. Littleton, Mr. Baker, M<sup>rs</sup>.  
Richmond, M<sup>rs</sup>. Hays, Mr. Mesa, Mr. Morris.  
The Scene, Machines, Music, and Drifts, all entirely New.

**For the Benefit of M<sup>rs</sup>. FROMENT.**  
AT SADLER'S WELLS, adjoining to  
the New-River Head, in Illegion, the DIVERSIONS will be-  
gin on Monday next, at Five o'Clock, with Variety of Rope-Dan-  
cing, and several odd Performances by Mademoiselle FREDERICK  
KERNAN, just arriv'd, with Tumbling and Singing, and several  
new Grand Dances (both Serious and Comic) made by M<sup>rs</sup>. Froment.  
The last new Grotesque Ballet, call'd **The Temptation of Tambourine.**  
A new Serious Dance by M<sup>rs</sup>. Froment and M<sup>rs</sup>. Scott. A Comic  
Ballet, call'd **Polly**, by M<sup>rs</sup>. Froment and others. A Serious Pa-  
antomime Dance, call'd **Pigmaliion**. And a Ball-Dance, with a Minuet,  
by M<sup>rs</sup>. Froment and M<sup>rs</sup>. Scott.  
With a New Entertainment, call'd  
**The Birth of VENUS, or Harlequin Paris.**  
With the LOVES of ZEPHYRUS and FLORA.  
Zephyrus, to be perform'd by M<sup>rs</sup>. FROMENT.  
Tickets to be had at Sadler's Wells.  
Boxes s. s. 6 d. Pit and Gallery 1 s. 6 d.  
The Evening's Diversion will conclude exactly at Nine o'Clock.  
They who chafe Wine may have it, at 2 s. per Bottle.

**For the Benefit of Mr. CARNEY, and  
Mrs. WOODWARD the Colombine.**  
AT S<sup>ADLER'S</sup> WELLS, adjoining to  
the New-River Head, in Illegion, on Tuesday next, will be  
perform'd  
**THE USUAL DIVERSIONS of that PLACE.**  
N.B. There will be Variety of Rope-Dancing by Madem. FRE-  
DERICK KERNAN, lately arriv'd.  
Also Tumbling, Singing, and several new Grand Dances, both Se-  
rious and Comic, particularly The last new Grotesque Ballet, call'd  
**The Temptation of Tambourine**. A Pastime Dance, call'd **The Cal-  
lar, the Miller, Mr. Carney; Nell, Mrs. Woodward.** A new seri-  
ous Dance by Mr. Carney and Mrs. Rayner. And a Comic Ballet,  
call'd **Polly**.  
The whole Concluding with a New Pastime Entertainment,  
call'd  
**The Birth of VENUS, or Harlequin Paris;**  
With the LOVES of Zephyrus and Flora.  
Boxes s. s. 6 d. Pit and Gallery 1 s. 6 d.  
To begin exactly at Five o'Clock.

**HIS MAJESTY** has granted to *Walter  
Churchman*, Letters-Patent for his New Invention  
making Chocolate without Fire, to greater Perfection in all  
Respects, than by the common Method, as will appear on  
Trial, by its immediate dissolving, full Flavour, Smoothness  
on the Palate, and intimate Union with Liquids; and as it is  
much finer than any other sort, so it will go farther, and is  
of greater Nutrimment, and less offensive to weak Digestions,  
being by this Method made clean, and free from the usual  
Grit and gross Particles, so much disliked, which is refer'd  
to the fair and impartial Experiment; such the Patentes  
propose for his Standard; but the curious may be supply'd  
with his superfine Chocolate, which is as many Degrees finer  
than the above Standard, as that exceeds the first sold by  
other Makers.  
Take the said Churchman's Chocolate Warehouse, at Mr.  
Tobin Young's, Musical Instrument-Maker, in St. Paul's  
Church-yard, London i. where Persons in Town and Country  
may be supply'd with any Quantities.

**Desd. Sept. 11.**  
In the Downs his Majesty's Ship the *Roe*  
book; Paany, Higginson; and the George,  
Biffin, for Jamaica; William and Mary,  
Sutherland, for Carolina; the Theophilus,  
Godard, for Venice; Charles-Town, Wi-  
tche, for a upham; Anne and Lucy, Leonard, for Mon-  
day; Prince William, Rook, for Carolina; Providence,  
Barrett, for Exeter. Several Foreign Ships Names not  
known. Wind S.W. blows very hard.

**Arriv'd at several Ports.**  
The John, Blomart, from Gallipoly, is arriv'd at Bri-  
tol.  
The Mary and Betty, McGowen, from Barbadoes, is  
arriv'd at Liverpool.  
The Whale's-Finn, Allen, from Bolton, is arriv'd off  
Dover.

L O N D O N.

Messengers have been dispatch'd from the Admiralty  
Office to the several Ports where the Men of War lie, with  
Orders relating, as 'tis said, to the intended Expedition  
to the West-Indies.  
We hear Sir Chaloner Ogle is sail'd from Torbay to  
Spithead, with Twelve large Men of War; at which Place  
the grand Fleet is to assemble, and sail from thence with  
the first favourable Wind.  
They are very busy at Woolwich in preparing a large  
Quantity of Military Stores, particularly Bombs; and Gre-  
nades.  
At a Meeting of a great Number of Liverymen last  
Night, at the Queen's Arms in St. Paul's Church-yard,  
it was unanimously resolv'd to renew the Opposition to  
the Election of a certain Person to the high Office of Lord  
Mayor of this City; and we hear that a Meeting will soon  
be appointed, to take the Sense of the Livery for the No-  
mination of two proper Persons to be returned to the  
Court of Aldermen for that purpose.  
Yesterday Advice came, that the Princess of Wales,  
Capt. Viscount, was lost in the late bad Weather at Shields,  
being drove from her Anchors, by which Misfortune three  
of the Seamen were drown'd, and the Captain and the rest  
of the Crew with great Difficulty sav'd themselves.  
At the Time the above Ship was lost several others were  
drove from their Anchors, so that 'tis fear'd we shall hear  
of other Accidents.  
We hear, that a Privateer which mounts 30 Guns has  
lately appear'd off Falmouth.—But 'tis now thought her  
Reign here must be very short.  
We hear, that a Letter has been sent to Col. De Veil,  
by Order of the Magistrate of Darenty, touching the  
Murder suppos'd to be committed by Bryan Connel, upon  
the Body of a Butcher, who was kill'd and Robb'd near  
Lousley-Weeden, who proves to be one Richard Bingley,  
who, by the Words of the said Letter, was most barbar-  
ously and inhumanly murder'd; and we are further in-  
form'd that the Widow and other Persons concern'd in the  
Prosecution, will be in Town with all convenient speed,  
to prosecute the Law with Effect.  
Michael Hilderley, Esq; whose Death was publish'd in  
some of the Papers, is in perfect Health.

**SITTINGS** appointed in London and Middlesex before  
the Right Hon. Sir John Wiles, Knt. Lord Chief Jus-  
tice of his Majesty's Court of Common-Pleas, in and  
after Michaelmas-Term, 1740.

MIDDLESEX.		LONDON.	
Monday	Octob. 27	Tuesday	Octob. 28
Friday	Nov. 7	Monday	Nov. 10
Thursday	13	Friday	14
Monday	24	Tuesday	25
After Term.		After Term.	
Saturday	19	Monday	Dec. 1

The following is an exact Copy of a Letter from George  
Wight, now under Sentence of Death in Newgate, for  
robbing Mr. Martin, a Surgeon of Shadwell, on the  
Highway near Old-Ford.

From the Sells at Newgate.

**S I R,**  
I have now a Defiance for to sell my Body, and if you  
are willing to buy it, I desire that you would let me  
know, and if you have a Mind for to buy it I desire  
that you would speak to some at your Hall. I am found  
Wind and Lime.

All from Yours,  
Geo. Wight;

For Mr. Martin, Surgeon,  
Shadwell.

Whether there be a Providence, or the State has to do  
with Religion, or Mr. B——— is right, that the Metho-  
dists are Impostors, will be the Oratory. Quodlibet To-  
morrow.

I R E L A N D.

**Dublin, Sept. 2.** The 200 Barrels of Beef which was  
seiz'd by the Right Hon. the Lord Mayor, for being un-  
der proper Weight for Exportation, has been since replac-  
ed by the Owner.—An Abridgment of the Statute re-  
lating thereto, will not be unacceptable to our Readers,  
and of Use to the Publick.  
2 Ann. Sess. 1. c. 15. pass. No Person shall, from  
the 25th of March, 1704, slaughter any Oxen, Cows,

**Figure 3:** The fifth item of the left-hand column in this mid-eighteenth century newspaper shows how ordinary it was to own African servants if you were a British householder at the time. 'Any Person disposed to buy a Negro Boy or Girl; the Boy about 14 Years old, the Girl about eight, both well-proportion'd; the Boy is able to wait at a Gentleman's Table, the Girl handy in the House, and works with her Needle. For further Particulars, enquire of Mr. Samuel Downes, Distiller in Deptford' [Image from *The London Daily Post and General Advertiser*, Saturday, 13<sup>th</sup> September 1740 – courtesy of British Library/© Gale, in the public domain].





**Figure 4:** Dating from 1720, the headstone and footstone of the beautiful and personal tomb for Scipio Africanus are rare memorials of the existence of African slaves in Britain [Courtesy of William Avery/Creative Commons CC BY-AS 2.5].

The spray-paint on Churchill's granite plinth was thus quickly removed, yet it was decided by the powers-that-be that the statue and the conflicting narratives it now stood for made it vulnerable to continued attack. Hastily it was enclosed in a metal box and protected by two policemen in advance of the 'Black Lives Matter' protest planned for the following day. That event had been brought forward to Friday 12<sup>th</sup> June in order to avoid clashes with right-wing groups who were known to be descending on London on Saturday to 'protect' the statue of Winston Churchill in a counter-protest. These right-wingers included 'Britain First' supporters, far-right sympathizers of a Neo-Nazi leader called Tommy Robinson, the Loyalist Defence League, the Football Lads Alliance, and some so-called patriots who were there to promote the idea that British history consists only of white culture and white identity. In anticipation, two further statues were boarded up for being at risk of vandalism from this right-wing horde, namely those of Nelson Mandela (1918–2013) and Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948). When the racist groups arrived at Parliament Square, they were unsurprisingly mostly white middle-aged men and soon it became evident that they were spoiling for a fight, attacking the police with beer bottles, hurling smoke flares, and letting off fireworks whilst chanting 'E-n-g-e-l-a-n-d' in an atmosphere that became increasingly tense and violated. One of the right-wingers was photographed urinating on a memorial plaque for Keith Palmer (1969–2017), marking the site where that the unarmed police officer had been killed during the 2017 terrorist attack on Westminster Bridge. Scotland Yard reported that more than 100 arrests were made during the right-wing rally. After the event it became apparent that this counter-protest was in fact a premeditated attack on the police force, who those on the far-right saw as having been too lenient on the 'Black Lives Matter' campaigners. In notable contrast, many anti-racism demonstrations taking place that same day in other locations proceeded without any such infringements [15].

Following these and other related events, a variety of politicians, cultural leaders and indeed living relatives of these well-known former (and now controversial) exponents of British imperialism voiced the need for continued dialogue to take place, on the basis that there has to be an understanding of a more complex and inclusive narrative in British history. London's mayor, Sadiq Khan, had already set up a commission to determine which monuments and which names of streets, squares and buildings in the city were now being seen by those in the minority ethnic communities as being hurtful and offensive to them.

From an entirely different perspective, the Secretary of the Georgian Group, David Adshead, also announced to its members in June 2020 that their society needed to acknowledge openly that so many of the buildings and urban settings from the 18<sup>th</sup>-century period it so proudly champions – monuments which

still influence everyday life in Britain today, both as tangible and intangible cultural environments – were built with money deriving from the slave trade:

This painful history must continue to be explored and interpreted and the Georgian Group, with its expertise in architecture of the period, and its educational and preservation remit, is committed to helping to do so and in this would welcome collaboration with others. [16]

While in many ways the attack on the Colston statue can be seen as having similarities to the growing controversies in the southern states of the USA in recent years about Confederate monuments, given the mutual links to the history of the transatlantic slave trade, the action in Bristol was expressing something far more specific to the British situation. It was challenging not just the legacy of slavery, but also the entire ubiquitous veneration of colonialism which has until now been part of the national debate at large. The unquestioned celebration of Churchill as a national hero, and the love of country houses built from assets reaped from all across the former British Empire, are both cases in point. Hence this essay wishes to make an intervention into a debate in which heritage studies, as well as architectural history and theory, have so far failed to engage with sufficiently.

### Shipshape and Bristol Fashion

While the sentiments by heritage organisations such as the Georgian Group are all fine and good, on the national scale there is however a major problem in taking their suggested course of action. The existing political structures available to effect change through democratic processes in Britain – such as public debates or official inquiries – are always incredibly protracted, thereby effectively kicking into the long grass the issue of how one might embrace more complex and contentious British artefacts of the kinds that fall into the category of 'difficult heritage'. Meanwhile the class-based worship of wealth and sponsorship – at least in part founded upon the colonial strategies of division and exploitation – continues to thrive, thereby only further imbedding historically ingrained inequalities. Real change by the British government is thus still awaited, while in frustrated response, the urban landscape of cities is increasingly being challenged by those who have simply grown impatient. This counterforce now consists of a broad coalition of supporters, largely of a younger generation, from across all of Britain's diverse ethnic backgrounds – not just those marginal groups who have been most systemically isolated from the frameworks of influence. Challenged by the BBC about why he had not used democratic means to remove the Colston statue much earlier, Marvin Rees, the Mayor of Bristol, explained his own compromised predicament:

The people have been asking for the statue to be removed for a long time. It is something that I would have liked to have seen. But there's a couple of real-world reality checks that have to come in. First of all, I've come into a local authority facing austerity, a housing crisis, soaring rates of poverty and child hunger. You know of all the things I could focus on doing to tackle inequality and racial inequality in Bristol, removing a statue was not top of my list of priorities. Second of all, I'm the first directly elected mayor of African heritage in Europe. If I just pitch up and start tearing down all the memorials to slavery, that would be another debate and I would be on the receiving end. I don't have the latitude to operate like that, that other people would. You know, just the same way that [ex-US President] Obama didn't have the latitude to criticise American security services in the same way [ex-US President] Trump does ... This is where it is really important for a journalist asking questions like that to have a real sense of understanding of the way race works in this country. [18]

Perhaps the oddest thing in all these events and actions was that countless visitors to Bristol had walked past Edward Colston's sculpture in recent decades without the slightest clue as to the history surrounding this man (**Figure 5**). It was as if the placement of his effigy into urban space had relieved any need to communicate meaning beyond representing an anonymous human form. Adrian Forty writes in *The Art of Forgetting* that a monument itself is able to facilitate and become an instrument of forgetting, serving as a process of decanting the precise emotional event for which it stands into an imprecise and seemingly immortal object [19: p.13].

The historian David Olusoga expands upon this conundrum when noting that Colston's statue is a hopelessly flawed memorial when it comes to conveying and communicating any actual sense of historic complexity:





**Figure 5:** Edward Colston's sculpture was put up in 1895 as part of a city that was trying to reinvent itself: this bronze effigy was Grade II-listed by Historic England in 1977 for its historic and artistic merit [Courtesy of Historic England].

The real history of that statue ... is the history of the merchant elite who ruled Bristol in the 1890s, their ambitions, their aim to have his philanthropy remembered and his role in the slave trade forgotten. There is a history to that statue. But you can't tell any of it ... If you had been standing there in Bristol a week ago, before the statue was toppled, and you looked at the statue and you read the plaque, you would know none of that history of the 1890s [when it was erected] and you would know none of the history of the Atlantic slave trade. Statues aren't very good at telling history. They are not the mechanism of delivering history. They are a way of saying that this was a great man. [20]

Hence the idea behind erecting any statue of a human being is that there is somehow a general agreement with the values expressed or represented by that particular person. The statue becomes synonymous with such a consensus. At its core it is intended as a marker of celebration, benefaction, gratitude and honour. When the Colston statue was toppled and the event became headline news globally, the reaction was most often one of disbelief that such an artefact actually still took pride of place in the midst of a city. Olusoga pointed out:

For people who don't know Bristol, the real shock when they heard that the statue of a 17th-century slave trader had been torn from its plinth and thrown into the harbour was that 21st-century Bristol still had a statue of a slave trader on public display. For many watching the events unfold on social media, that was the real WTF moment. [21]

What most people also failed to realize was that the statue was not at all contemporary with Edward Colston's life; instead, it had been put up no less than 174 years after the slave merchant's death. The inscription on its plinth reads: 'Erected by citizens of Bristol as a memorial of one of the most virtuous and wise sons of the city'. Yet all of a sudden, the toppling of the Colston statue made possible the interrogation of its untold past, thus expanding our historical understanding. The event also allowed other objects and locations in cities throughout Britain and globally to be shown to be equally contested. As concrete evidence of the selective process involved in the glorification of past acts, the attack on Colston's effigy challenged people everywhere to read their city, and then to re-read their city. Not for them to merely accept pre-existing narratives written on the plinths of statues, but to comprehend fuller, complex, and often more troubling histories.

Britain's current Conservative prime minister, Boris Johnson, who has written a biography of Winston Churchill and who reportedly had by this point become infuriated about the entombment of the latter's statue in Parliament Square, has warned rather confusingly about the 'dangers' of rewriting history. As a typical right-wing reaction, Johnson compared what was going on to a cultural upheaval, invoking the simile of a person engaged upon editing their own Wikipedia page or else 'Photoshopping' the cultural landscape around them. It was a staggeringly ignorant thing for him to say, for precisely the opposite was taking place. Ignored, side-lined histories were now being reinserted as an additive process, and nothing at all was being erased [22].

But of course, there is also something deeper going on here. The old British Empire is still for many citizens an evocative period that is bound up in their sense of national pride and (assumed) importance. As such, it is for them essential to their own self-identification, especially within an increasingly diverse global context. Although oppression always sits at the root of any claim about cultural dominance, it is nonetheless difficult for many British people to square this realization with taking on direct responsibility for the inequity and sense of marginalization for those living within that old framework as it is still experienced by them today, so many decades after the British Empire formally crumbled. Here can also be mentioned the dearth of any meaningful education in British schools about the complexities of imperialism, as well as the absence of more diverse histories about this topic. Calls to decolonise the curriculum at both secondary school and higher education level in Britain is still in a troubling state of infancy, only really gaining attention since 2017 [23]. What is needed is urgent changes in how such knowledge is produced and disseminated. The recent book, *Empireland*, written by the journalist Sathnam Sanghera [24] goes some way to address the selective amnesia and nostalgia – while also itself helping to invert the racial hierarchy of the post-imperial storyteller within British culture, which, as Sanghera observes, 'is usually a white man talking to the camera from a train in India on BBC 2 at 6.30pm' [25].

Amidst the general uproar about the dismantling and relocating of the Colston statue have been repeated appeals to the supposedly general 'common-sense' understanding that statues are meant as permanent markers, and as such they should not be moved or scrapped. And if they are moved or scrapped, this symbolic act in itself bears witness to a cultural rupture. This argument is to some extent understandable, being imbedded within definitions of the word 'statue', which originates from the Latin verb, *stare*, meaning 'to stand'. As the English noun, 'statue', the concept is most commonly used to describe a specific three-dimensional object that has been 'stood up' somewhere in order to 'stand in' for a particular meaning. When erect, it has thus been 'instated', and from then on it is assumed to remain 'static' and immutable. Yet the fundamental problem with this argument is that this is usually not what happens in actuality in any culture, due to the pressures of political and socio-economic complexity, as can clearly be seen by looking now in more detail at the genesis and subsequent lifespan of the Colston statue in Bristol.

## A Brief Life of the Colston Statue (and its Relatives)

Edward Colston's bronze statue [17] was made by the sculptor John Cassidy [26] and then set up in Colston Avenue facing south. The statue was unveiled with great fanfare on Colston's birthday on 13<sup>th</sup> November 1895, some 259 years after he had been born in Bristol (**Figure 6**). Over time this particular day had even become known as 'Colston Day': indeed, this was until only very recently celebrated enthusiastically in Bristol whereby a procession of men from local charitable societies dressed up in top hats and tails to march through the streets, little girls wore flowers, and people ate sweet Colston Buns that came in two sizes, small and extra-large [27].

The extent of these celebrations did not merely relate to just one statue. Edward Colston has indeed claimed his territory and marked many objects throughout Bristol, with his name and likeness appearing seemingly everywhere. The location of his now-toppled statue is perhaps the most prominent, being constructed as part of a comprehensive urban intervention in 1893 that created an island site when the River Frome – hitherto the location of Bristol's famous 'Floating Harbour' – was culverted and infilled. Widely known as Magpie Park until the street pattern around it was later rearranged to facilitate traffic movement, this new Victorian urban space also originally included a bandstand and a statue of the political philosopher Edmund Burke (1729–1797), with what was renamed as Colston Avenue flowing around either side of the park. Colston Parade and Colston Street are similarly named after the celebrated slave trader; today they still form important tributaries within the city's transport system [28].

There are also several more statues of Edward Colston dotted across Bristol. By far the most accomplished is a monumental dresser tomb with recumbent figure carved in grey marble in 1729 by John Michael





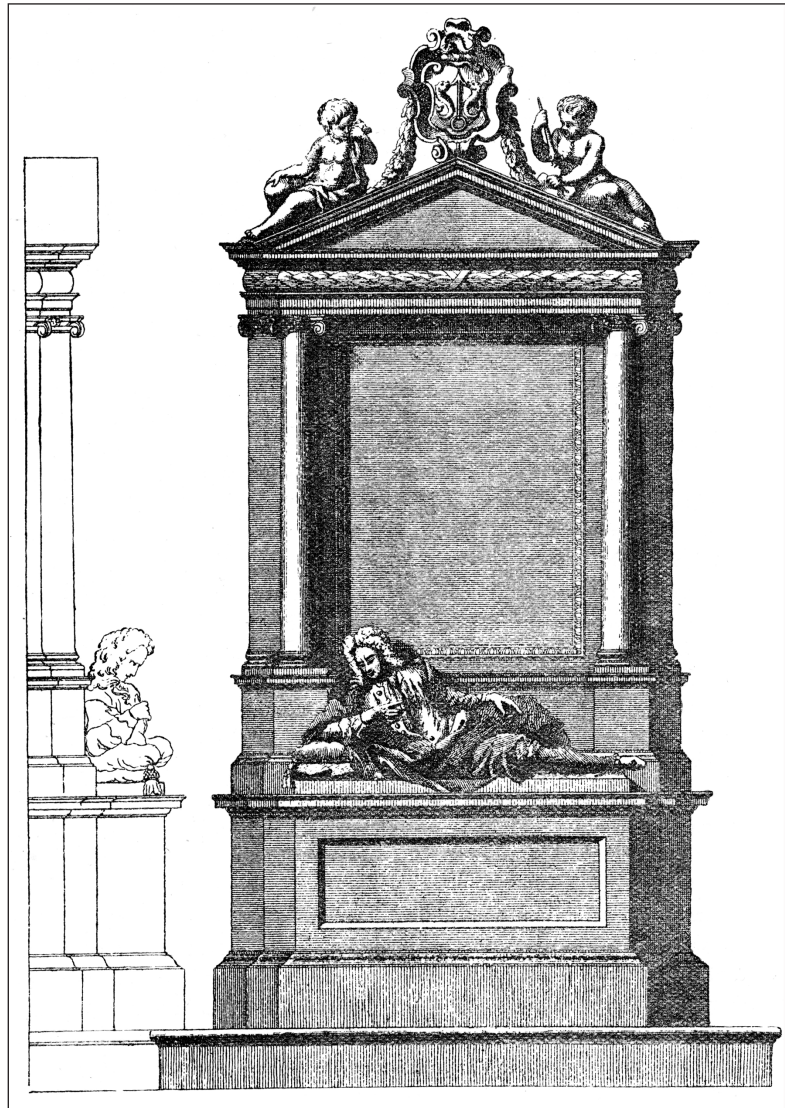
**Figure 6:** Preceded by an ostentatious parade, Colston's statue was unveiled on 13<sup>th</sup> November 1895 in commemoration of the philanthropist/slave trader's birthday, by then some 259 years past [Courtesy of Bristol Archives, PicBox/5/EvPh/2].

Rysbrack, to a design by James Gibbs, in All Saints' Church in Corn Street (**Figure 7**). The backpiece of this imposingly pedimented monument is inscribed with a comprehensive list of the slaver's favoured charities [29]. Elsewhere, in Stapleton, sequestered in a niche of the main staircase in Colston's School for Boys, an institution that he founded in 1710 along with the Society of Merchant Venturers, is a painted polychrome maquette. A further maquette – this time carved in stone, and possibly the preparatory model for his main statue in central Bristol – stood for a long time in Colston's Girls' School, established in 1891 as a 'sister' school to the one for boys, again using funds from his charitable bequests. It too however has recently announced that this commemorative object was being removed. Finally, back out on the streets, yet another statue of Edward Colston looks down from the first-floor façade of Bristol Guildhall [30], as part of an ornate frontage alongside figures of Queen Victoria, King Edward III and older charitably minded merchants from the city. The Guildhall was erected from 1843–46 to the architectural designs of Richard Shackleton Pope, with statuary by Thomas of Bristol.

And in terms of other forms of commemoration, Bristol Cathedral has a large stained-glass window that overlooks the north transept with a plaque stating that it is 'dedicated to the glory of God and in memory of Edward Colston 1636–1721'. It was installed between 1888 and 1890, having been gifted to the church by the Dolphin Society. Facing into College Green, the window's prominent position is marked on the exterior by the cathedral clock located just above its Gothic pointed arch. There is another stained-glass window with a dedication to Colston in the church of St Mary Redcliffe, to designs by Clayton and Bell in 1870. Tellingly, any references to Colston in the windows of both these churches were covered over rather speedily on 16<sup>th</sup> June 2020.

Colston Hall is Bristol's largest and most famous concert venue, sitting unsurprisingly on Colston Street (**Figure 8**). It was built in a Neo-Byzantine style by Foster and Wood in 1867 and occupies the initial site of the Colston's School for Boys [31]. From Colston Hall one is easily able to see Colston Tower, a massive structure designed by Moxley Jenner & Partners and erected from 1961–73, standing right next to the now-removed statue of Edward Colston. At 64 metres in height, with 13 floors rising above its low podium, Colston Tower is a handsome enough office block that ranks as the city's seventh-tallest building. Centrally located on Colston Avenue and adopting the aims of the post-war vision for the 'New Monumentality', the building's name was inscribed in large block capitals at the very top of Colston Tower in order that it could be seen from afar – that is, before this signage was also quickly taken off in June 2020.

Over many generations, therefore, Bristol had for various reasons constructed much of its urban landscape around the assumed virtues of Edward Colston, thereby forming and informing a shared identity for local



**Figure 7:** The dresser tomb by Michael Rysbrack in All Saints' Church in Bristol is the most impressive monument to the slave trader as benefactor [Image from *Bristol Past and Present*, 1882, in the public domain].

citizens. The process had been at best aspirational, attempting to foster a sense of social stability and order. At worst, however, the obsessive commemoration of Colston that took hold during the Victorian era was about exploiting blatant symbols of hegemony as a means of dominating urban space. In analysing and evaluating such complex self-mythologizing entities, which they describe as palimpsests, Owen Dwyer and Derek Alderman have proposed an interesting framework to decode these objects in three senses: as 'texts' that can be read as ideas, as 'arenas' within which the ideas are staged, and as 'performances' whereby the ideas are physically enacted [32: p.165–178].

### The Invention of Tradition

Edward Colston has thus literally left his mark on Bristol in many different ways – he is embodied as buildings, street names and memorials, and he is then enacted through processions, festivals, and foodstuffs. As cultural signifiers they all seem easy enough to understand. The main statue of Colston was arguably the most successful representation, reconstructing his image as an individual so carefully and being so much on public display (**Figure 9**). Yet were all these various memorials an actual gift for the city, or do they operate more like an enforced act of collective memory? There is no doubt that Edward Colston is presented to Bristol's citizens in a manner that is in 'our space' and in 'our way'. As one navigates around his numerous representations, up and down the roads named after him, in and out of places of education, entertainment, municipality, worship and work, Colston is used to control and orientate one's visual, cultural and auditory senses. But how can this in any meaningful way reconcile this slaver's wrongdoings? What happens when





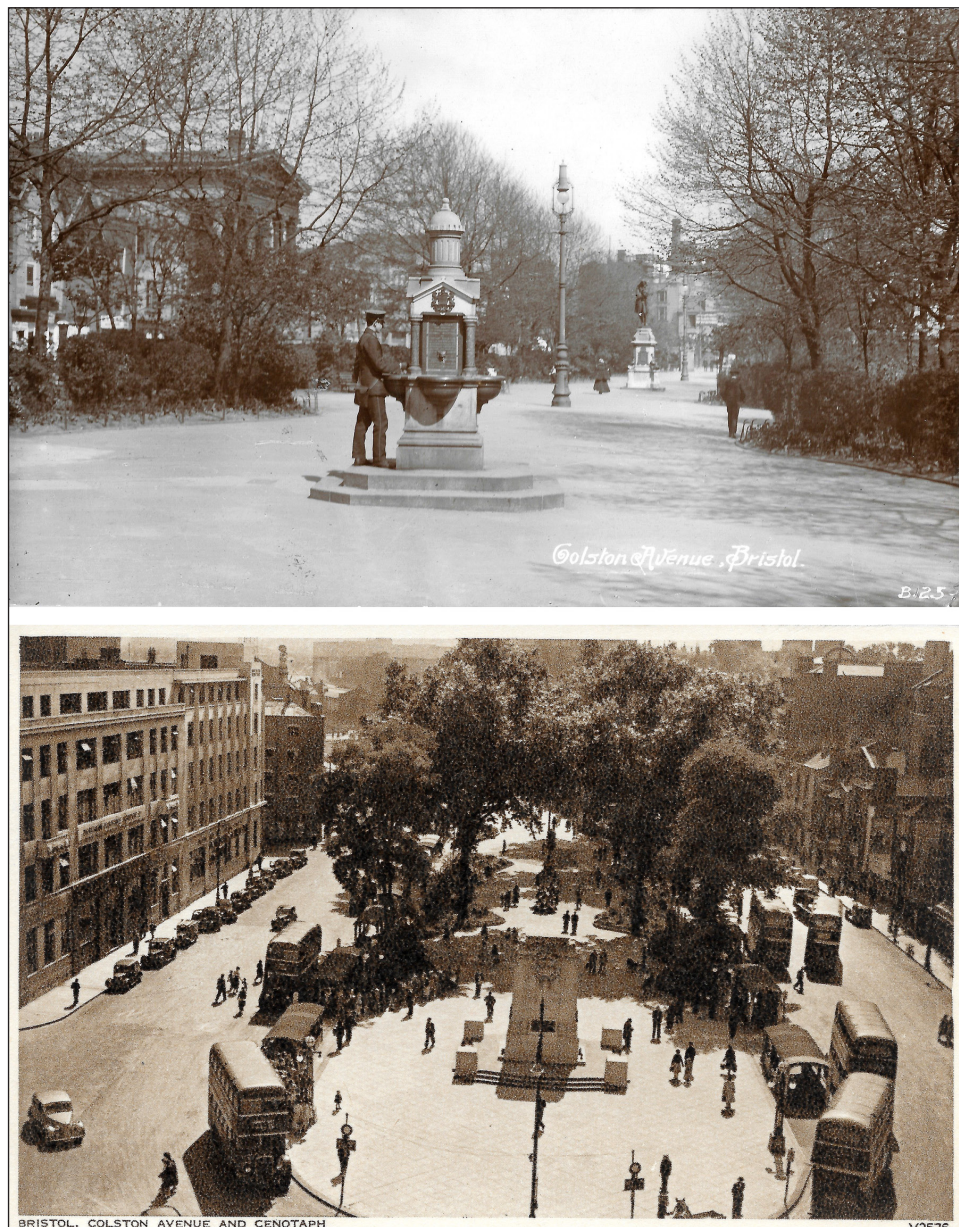
**Figure 8:** The original Colston School – now the site of Colston Hall – was founded in 1710 and was located in the centre of Bristol until it moved out to Stapleton. Colston Girls' School opened in 1891 [Images courtesy of the author].

heritage commemoration is situated between celebration and trauma, when the supposed hero is also a perpetrator? When people looked up at his statue on Colston Avenue, he was just that little bit larger than life, looking down with a kindly expression, hand resting on his cane, his head thoughtfully supported on one hand. Colston's stance was what is described as *contrapposto*, whereby the weight of the figure is placed upon one foot (here his right foot), allowing for a more naturalistic and asymmetrical curvature of the body. The personalisation of the Colston myth lay in stark contrast to that of depersonalized Africans, laden onto his ships in their thousands as an anonymous mass of human bodies, exchangeable for the promise of great wealth and charitable reputation [33: p.468–471].

The commemoration of Edward Colston was consciously constructed as a myth during the Victorian era. The earliest accounts of his life are by Thomas Gerrard (1852), S.G. Tovey (1863), James Fawckner Nicholls and John Taylor (1882), and his name was then entered into the *Dictionary of National Biography* by Leslie Stephen in 1887 [34: p.20]. It was this resurgent interest in Colston and his philanthropic deeds that became inscribed so strongly into Bristol's urban landscape during the nineteenth century. The economic and social historian Kenneth Morgan traces this local veneration back to Colston's own lifetime, noting his fondness for celebrating his own birthday with others in the public realm. At that time, annual dinners in Colston's name were hosted by the Loyal Society, a body set up when he was elected as the first Tory MP for Bristol in 1695, as Morgan observes:

The occasions were noisy and celebratory. Continuing each year until 1715, they included a procession by hundreds of high churchmen to hear sermons at Bristol Cathedral and St Mary Redcliffe church before and after dinner. [34: p.13]





**Figure 9:** Edward Colston's statue was located at the centre of Bristol and quickly became an important urban landmark, as seen in the backgrounds of these two historic postcards [Images courtesy of the author].

Later in his life, Colston paid for yearly sermons to be held at Bristol Cathedral accompanied by an entourage of boys from the school he had founded [34: p.12]. These traditions continued beyond his death, with the Colston Society (aka Parent Society) being formed in 1726 to honour his memory and to engage in philanthropy. The Dolphin Society followed in 1749, and then, in ten-year intervals, came the Grateful Society (1759) and the Anchor Society (1769).

All these local charitable societies were hence established relatively soon after Colston's death and can be seen as such as continuations of his own life and values. What however was invented in the Victorian era was something entirely different although with obvious links back to his own eighteenth-century context. The three new societies that were added in the Victorian era were the Colston Fraternal Association and Old Boys' Society, both in 1853, and the Bristol University Colston Society in 1899. Colston's birthday celebrations were reinstated during this period and consisted of sumptuous dinners and speeches, as Morgan also explains:

They were accompanied by a regular display of civic ritual in which the societies paraded through the city, held their service, and distributed money as part of the ceremony. These occasions reached



their height in the late Victorian period. In the 1880s and 1890s each of the four parades attracted between sixty to seventy of Bristol's leading civic bourgeoisie. [34: p.17]

In 1837, for instance, a special sermon was held for the Dolphin Society at Bristol Cathedral to encourage those present to consider Edward Colston as an object of religious devotion [34: p.17]. But the question then is, why did Bristol need a myth like this so urgently? Why did Colston have to be revived as a figurative replica after having been more or less absent from the city for well over a century?

Roger Ball from the Bristol Radical History Group goes some way to explain the mythologizing of Colston by what he calls 'proto-religious' fervour. Ball also draws attention to the fact that there were other local people who were in fact even more generous to the poor, such as the Quaker Richard Reynolds. Born in Bristol in 1735, Reynolds had gone on to own an ironworks in Shropshire, and as a result was much concerned with the conditions of his workforce. Just like Colston, in later life Reynolds returned to his native city as a philanthropist, yet unlike Colston he is today all but forgotten. Ball instead links the ascendance of Edward Colston during the Victorian era as particular to the social conditions of the time, with the desire of those in power in Bristol to promote a figure who could be presented as combining mercantile cunning with an attachment to the British Empire and the Anglican Church. Worshipped as a kind of moral compass for the city, as an almost saint-like figure, locks of hair and nail clippings from Colston are even still kept as relics by the Society of Merchant Venturers, safely preserved in the Merchants Hall [35].

Although who actually owns the toppled Colston statue is somewhat unclear, it was evidently commissioned by the Anchor Society at the behest of its president in the early-1890s, James Arrowsmith, owner of a large printworks and publishing house in Bristol. The statue was forced into the urban realm; it was most certainly not a 'people's statue' to a well-loved benefactor, as one might now assume. The funding drive to raise the moneys required to erect the statue was protracted and received little support from Bristol's populace. Indeed, the large shortfall had to be eventually paid by a wealthy anonymous donor, generally assumed to have been Arrowsmith himself as the project's main instigator. All this however might have been expected given the general social turmoil in the city in this period. The years preceding the statue's instatement were tarred by the exploitative working conditions that Bristol's labourers were subjected to; hence there was a simmering undercurrent of civil discontent. Working in the Floating Harbour was especially dangerous. On two occasions the annals describe its waters being covered in flames, like in an inferno, firstly when 310 barrels of petroleum spirit on board a schooner exploded in 1888 [36: p.10] and secondly in a major incident in 1892:

A tremendous fire broke out in the afternoon of May 14<sup>th</sup> at the petroleum warehouse on Temple Back. The burning fluid poured in vast quantities into the Floating Harbour, the surface of which resembled a lake of fire; and several small vessels, including one of the Corporation barges, were destroyed. [36: p.25]

Strikes flared up in 1889 when the stokers of the Bristol Gas Company laid down their tools in protest over long working hours. There was a labourers' demonstration in 1892 because the timber-carrying ships were paying wages not by the hour but by piecework. Sensing serious unrest, the municipality called on the support of the British government, which sent two squadrons of cavalry to help quash any disorder. Just three years later – the exact year that Colston's statue went up – there was a major lock-out in which all of Bristol's shoe and bootmakers walked off the job in support of national demands for their trade [36: p.14, 31, 44]. By 1898 around 3.26% of Bristol's population were being classified as paupers, a far higher proportion than in other large cities in England. Bristol's rate of poverty at the time is estimated as three times higher than that of a successful industrial city like Birmingham [36: p.67]. Was therefore the resurgence of philanthropy in Bristol in the late-nineteenth century linked to this concentration of poverty caused by the city's slow efforts to industrialise? Was it hence a reaction of wealthy burghers driven by guilt to compensate because they were making profits from low-paid labourers? Or else was it about recreating a pride-of-place for a city already by that point in marked economic decline, by instead harking back to its more prosperous, slave trading days? This latter line of thinking certainly echoes the ideas of Eric Hobsbawm when he points out that, during the rapid changes of the Victorian era, each 'invented tradition' had a very specific ideological purpose:

What it does is to give any desired change (or resistance to innovation) the sanction of precedent, social continuity and natural law as expressed in history ... [and thus] establishing or legitimizing institutions, status or relations to authority. [37: p.2, 9]

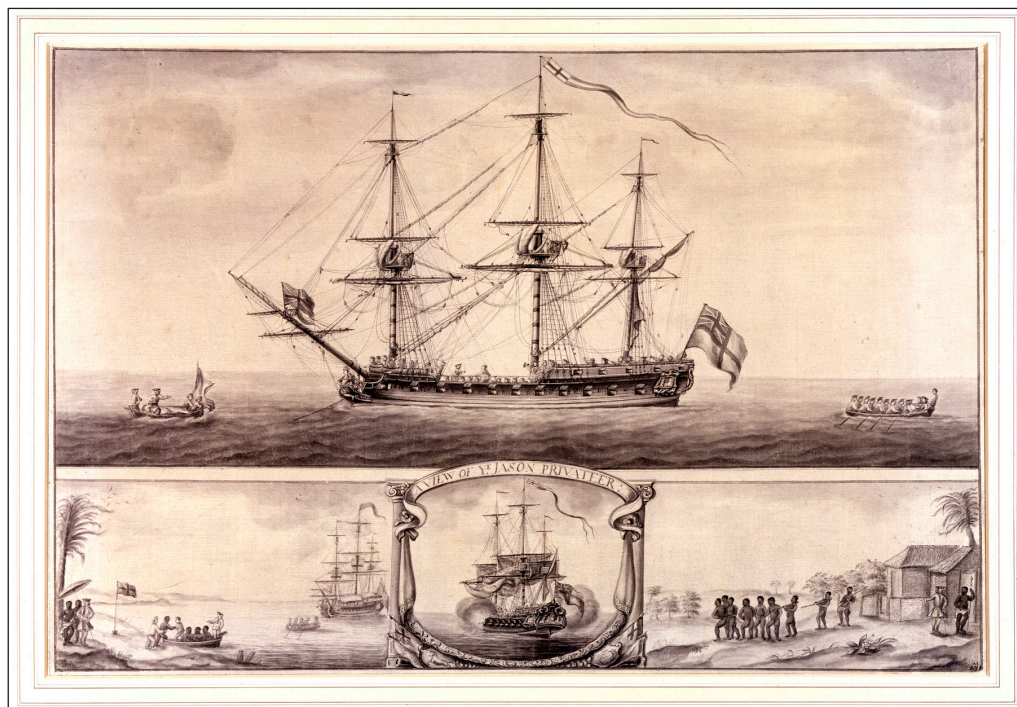
Hobsbawm goes on to ask:

What benefit can historians derive from the study of the invention of tradition? First and foremost, it may be suggested that they are important symptoms and therefore indicators of problems which might not otherwise be recognized, and developments which are otherwise difficult to identify and to date. They are evidence. [37: p.12, 14]

Within the invented traditions of the Victorian age was the fundamental aspiration to establish permanence, and in the case of Bristol to protect the social continuity of privilege among its urban elite. Architecture and the urban realm thus became important facilitators in establishing this invented tradition in Bristol by using Colston's name for many roads and avenues along which the Colston Society's processions marched yearly past buildings called after Colston as well. The role of a city in terms of identity formation is thus an important component in understanding how the Colston statue operated as the touchstone for this wider constructed mythology of Bristol's history. To understand the level of ideological distortion that was required, it is necessary to look back at how Edward Colston actually made his fortune.

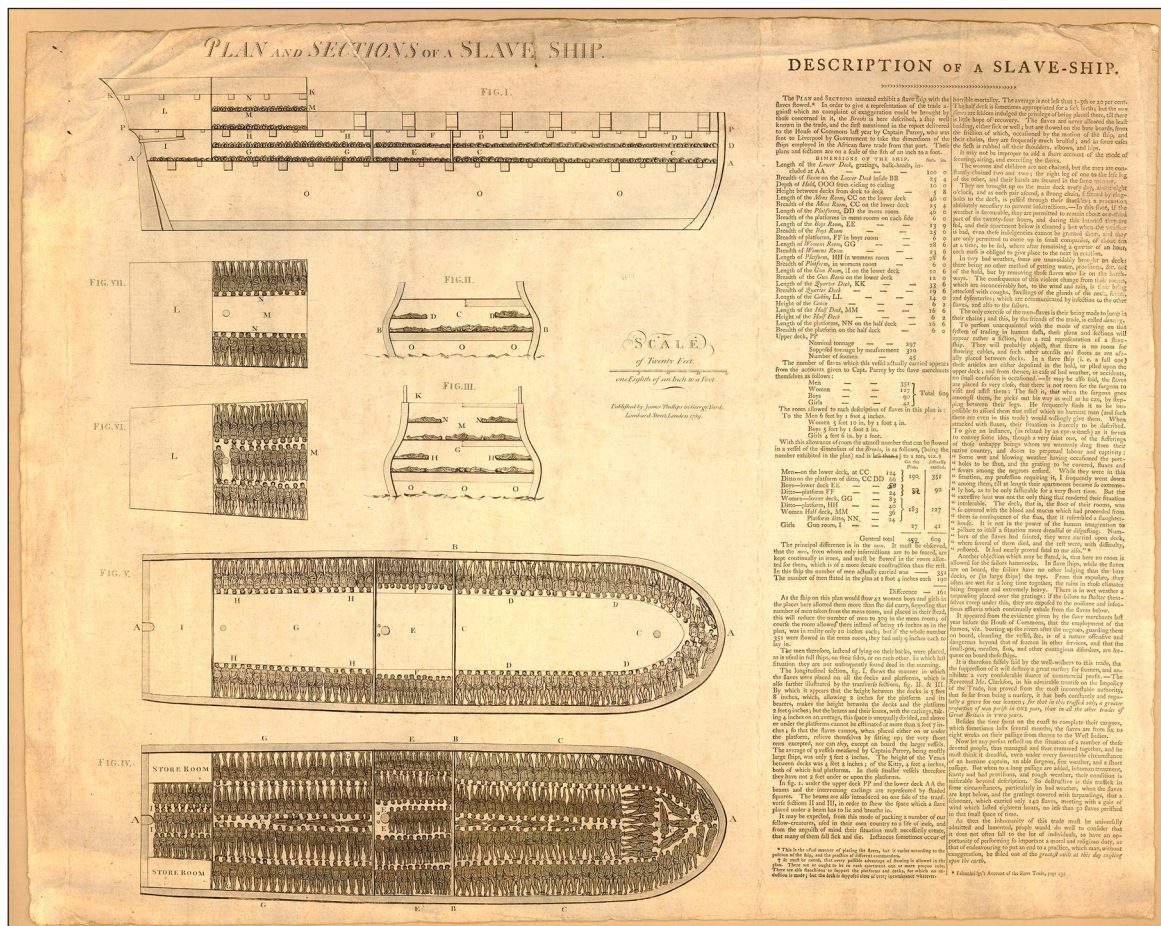
### The Roots of the Bristol Slave Trade

Much of the known information about Edward Colston comes from a concise biography written by Kenneth Morgan, yet even the latter's text must be understood as part of Bristol's changing narrative since it was written in reaction to emerging discontent in the 1990s about the celebration of Colston as the city's 'hero'. Indeed, the booklet by Morgan appeared just one year after Colston's sculpture was defaced for the first time, in 1998, when the words 'Fuck off slave trader' were painted in bright red paint across its plinth to alert passers-by of the 'hero's' real history. Morgan's text was thus an open apologia, arguing for instance that because Colston never actually went to Africa, then his involvement in the transatlantic slave trade was merely at arm's length. But how might that make Colston any less culpable? Here we simply need to recall Hannah Arendt's observation about the 'banality of evil' to reconnect the doer with the deed. Edward Colston's failure to show empathy, indeed his lack of any remorse, cannot be explained away by the fact that slavery at the time was still a lawful trade in England, condoned by society generally and even the Anglican Church. The horrific dehumanization of those loaded as densely packed human cargo on his shipments from Africa is a more germane point (**Figures 10 and 11**) [34: p.18].



**Figure 10:** The *Jason Pollock* privateer was a slave trading ship from Bristol: in 1748 she loaded 600 slaves on board in West Africa of which only 340 were still alive upon her arrival in Jamaica [Image by Nicholas Pocock, c 1760, courtesy of Bristol Culture – Bristol Museums].





**Figure 11:** Dating from 1789, the plans and sections of the slave ship *Brooks* of Liverpool show how more than 600 Africans could be laden as human cargo. This graphic representation in its multiple reproduction was used effectively by abolitionists in the anti-slavery campaign [Courtesy of The Trustees of the British Museum, Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0].

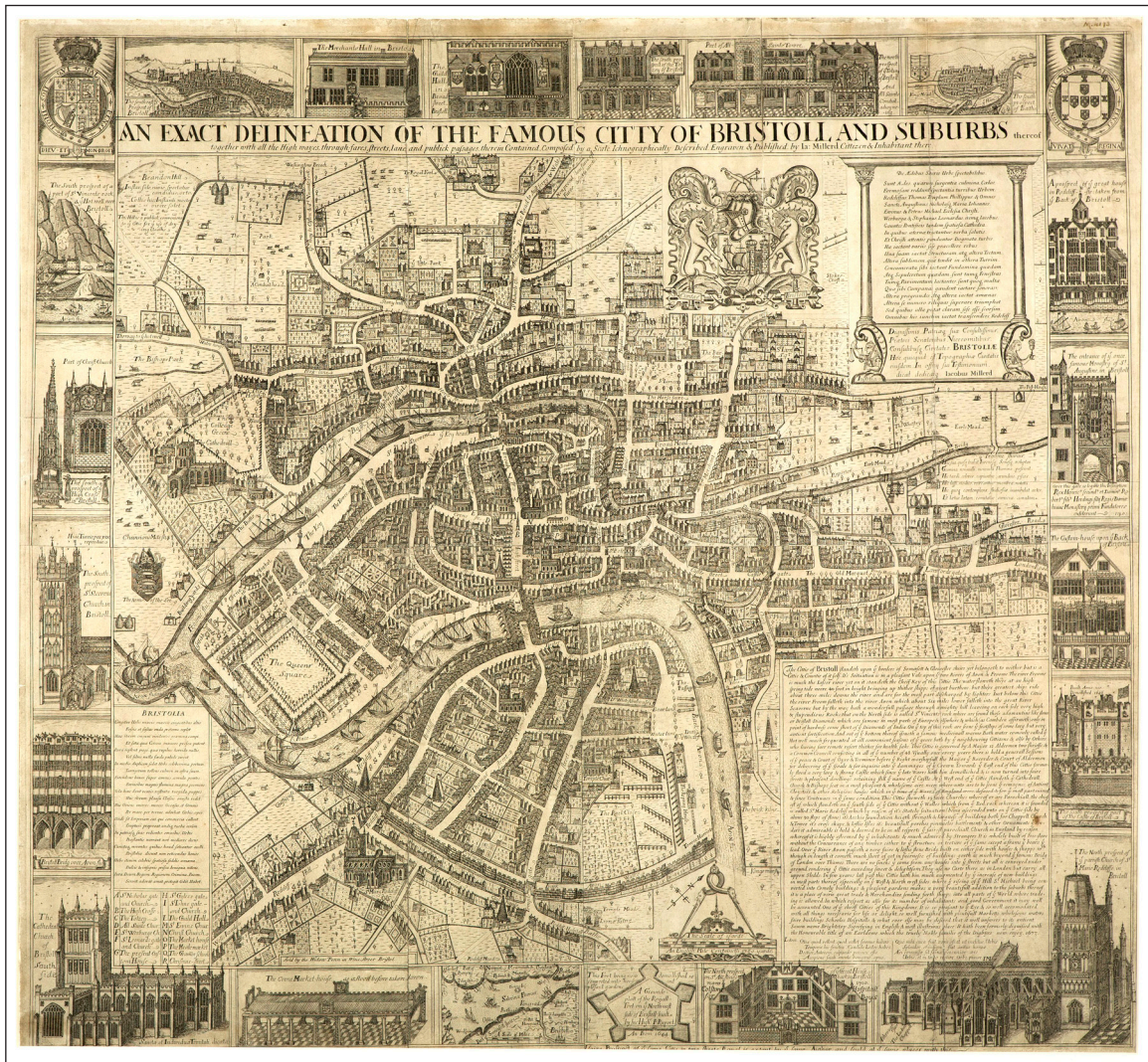
After all, an awareness that the trading of humans was not the same thing as the trading of goods was not a 'new' concept that emerged in late-eighteenth century Britain in the run-up to the abolition of the slave trade in 1807. Plentiful accounts of the significance of the slave trade for Bristol were being written already during the reign of Queen Anne at the start of the eighteenth century, while Colston was still very much alive. As the city prospered due to the slave trade, the impact became ever more apparent in the urban realm (**Figure 12**). A local history written by James Fawcaker Nicholls and John Taylor in 1882 pulled no punches about the implications for Bristol's built environment:

There is not a brick in the city but what is cemented with the blood of a slave. Sumptuous mansions, luxurious living, liveried menials, were the produce of the wealth made from the sufferings and groans of the slaves bought and sold by the Bristol merchants. From the first cargo of human flesh sent to Ireland until the abolishing of the abhorrent traffic, they traded largely in the living commodity. In their childlike simplicity they could not feel the iniquity of the merchandise, but they could feel it lucrative; advancing it as a reason for certain privileges. [38: p.165]

Importantly, that late-Victorian account relied heavily on older treatises. Dating from 1713, *Tovey's Local Jottings* attributed the city's growing wealth to the triangular exchange of commodities between Bristol, the coast of West Africa, and various American colonies:

That the chief dependence of the inhabitants of this city for their subsistence is on trade, the greatest part whereof is to her majesty's plantations and colonies in America and the coast of Africa, which employs great numbers of handicraftsmen [sic] in building and fitting out ships, and in the making and manufactures of wool, iron, tin, copper, brass &c, a considerable part whereof is





**Figure 12:** Originally dating from 1673, James Millerd's map of Bristol was updated numerous times after the monopoly of the Royal African Company was ended in 1698. This version shows the addition of the graceful Queen's Square in 1699–1750: situated just outside the city walls, it had formerly been Bristol's rubbish dump [Image: Courtesy of Bristol Culture – Bristol Museums].

exported to the coast of Africa *for the buying of negroes*, which trades are the great support of our people at home and the foundation of our trade abroad. [38: p.165]

Edward Colston was deeply complicit in early-eighteenth century slave trading, with his brother Thomas also manufacturing the glass beads used in unequal exchange for the nameless human beings procured in West Africa [39]. Although Colston himself moved to London to further his commercial interests, he, like other Bristol merchants, grew very rich on the back of slavery. Nicholls and Taylor went on to explain that the slave trade grew so abundant in the city that the whole port district had to be enlarged:

[T]owards the close of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, seventy large ships were employed in the West India trade, and Bristol became the great mart for sugar, rum and mahogany; the Guinea trade for ivory, gold dust and negroes was flourishing; a large export trade was on with the American coast and Newfoundland, the return freights being tobacco, rice, tar, deerskins, timber, furs, indigo, logwood and fish ... For better accommodation of the shipping the Floating harbour and Cumberland and Bathurst basins were constructed. [38: p.309]

Economic benefits to Bristol from this despotic practice spanned well into the nineteenth century: in 1830, more than 60% of the city's trade was still reliant on dealings with the West Indies, and when it was made



illegal later in that decade for British citizens to continue to own slaves abroad, vast sums of compensation had to be paid out to Bristolians who were slaveowners-by-proxy over there [38: p.323, 344].

As the nineteenth century progressed, however, and hit hard by the ending of slavery, Bristol's harbour went into a notable decline. It lost its position as the United Kingdom's second most important seaport for global trade, to Liverpool, which now boasted a fine array of new Victorian docks; later, it also fell behind Manchester once the latter's ship canal opened. A belated expansion of Bristol's port facilities in the early years of the twentieth century was in vain [38: p.309]. Yet the wealth harvested from the slave trade was by this point long embedded into the city's fabric, with Bristol setting out to modernize itself through urban improvements for new streets and infrastructures, along with venues and facilities that often bore Colston's name. Throughout the Victorian era, Bristol's wealthiest citizens became prone to extensive and arguably excessive self-celebration as is seen in descriptions of their great feasts, banquets and receptions hosted in between parades, pageants, and processions. John Latimer compiled the *Annals of Bristol* in 1901, and his listing of the revelries that were staged, recounted page after page, stand in sharp contrast to the shocking figures of poverty in the city that he only briefly mentioned in his book [36].

More recently, Spencer Jordan's research reveals how the various Colston-funded charitable societies in Victorian Bristol consistently and grossly overstated their benefaction. Instead, their ostentatious activities, interwoven with special religious services of devotion, meant that only a relatively small amount of relief funds were left to spend on alleviating the hardships of poverty [40: p.179–181]. Jordan also points out that because of the continued decline of the city's port – by 1900 it had fallen to only the ninth largest in Britain – there was a shift in Victorian Bristol away from its older focus on merchant shipping. Now the elite families historically associated with Bristol's shipping trade had to make room for a more heterogeneous group of entrepreneurs whose wealth came from manufacturing and services. Those in the old-guard elite thus used their positions within the Colston societies for social and political consolidation, while those from the new (non-shipping) elite, such as James Arrowsmith the printer, used the Colston myth as a stepping-stone to advance their power and influence. Above all, what spurred this joint reformulation among the wealthy elites in Bristol was the fear of genuine democratic change from below. Following the Second Reform Act in 1867, with its gradual inclusion of more and more men from lower classes who gained the right to vote, and who were also becoming highly vocal through the labour movement – as evidenced by the aforementioned strikes in Bristol in the 1880s and 90s – organisations like the Colston-funded charitable societies became increasingly important in the strategy to safeguard the supremacy of the city's leading families, now comprising the old-guard elite and the nouveau riche [40: p.182–183, 185, 188, 190–192]. From there it was but an easy step to erecting a statue to a slave trader like Edward Colston who had been dead for more than 170 years.

The Victorian Colston statue thus needs to be understood as a representation of Bristol's class ideology at the time of its erection. It was in reality a statue to the city's reformulated elites, and only about Colston in the sense that he had been turned into a proxy for their continued dominance. There was even some discussion in 1890s Bristol about pulling down the earlier Edmund Burke statue so as to give Colston's effigy the pride of place visually [41: p.8]. The yearly bestowal of charitable giving in Colston's name enmeshed both the discrepancy of wealth and the power of the new elites into the rituals of the newly invented tradition – thus implicating the poor into an enactment in which they became the receivers and needed to show themselves duly grateful, and even indebted, to their generous benefactors in the Colston societies, whose prosperity was of course the root cause of their exploitation.

Thus, the almost total lack of interest, financial or emotional, among ordinary Bristolians in instating the Colston statue in the early-1890s is in this sense tangentially linked to the growing discontent that it was arousing in the 1990s, one hundred years later. Just as the ritualistic celebrations of what Madge Dresser terms the 'cult of Colston' have continued right through to the present day, so too the suppressed memories of the source of Bristol's wealth have also re-emerged. Recent scholarship about Britain's involvement in the transatlantic slave trade has played an important part, but even more crucial is the intersection of this uncovered knowledge with the changing post-war demographics of Bristol – notably the arrival of many migrants from the former Empire creating a solid contingent of local people with West Indian origins. By the 1980s the disparity of the levels of education, employment and general life chances for this group of Bristolians was as obvious as their structural and systemic powerlessness. They formed in effect their own living memorials to colonialism, while the racially profiled and culturally prejudiced police tactics that these generally impoverished citizens were subjected to, were the trigger for the bitter 1980 riots in the St Paul's district of Bristol (**Figure 13**) [42: p.223–225, 228].



**Figure 13:** While the police defend their 'white' city, a young boy in a sweatshirt endorsing Oxford University surveys the wreckage caused by protests about inequality [Courtesy of Bristol Culture – Bristol Museums/© David Kirkpatrick].

Statues and urban landscapes together, through their names and associations, create memories and hence become critical in forming a feeling of identity; they are in no sense coincidental factors. By the late-twentieth century the Colston statue had come to reflect both historic and contemporary power structures, connecting the past with the present. The city's main museum therefore decided that the slave trading activities which had once provided Bristol's prosperity were due for in-depth contextualization. In preparation for the opening of their 1999 exhibition, titled 'A Respectable Trade? Bristol and Transatlantic Slavery', the Bristol Museum published a 'slavery trail' that re-engaged with this almost completely forgotten history by looking at common landmarks. Colston was heavily featured as part of this urban trail, further intensifying local discontent with a figure that so many citizens had been prompted to herald since their early childhood, yet who was now being exposed by an upsetting historic narrative that most of them had not been aware of. Was the simulacrum that Edward Colston had been turned into something really to be feted as a symbol of Bristol? It was following a preparatory public discussion in 1998 to launch the exhibition – held in the St Paul's district and hosted by Bristol Museum, at which Colston's role as a prominent and successful slaver was the main topic – that his sculpture was defaced for the first time using the swear words mentioned above [42: p.229].



## Some Wider Ripples

What the story about Edward Colston's statue most clearly illustrates is the inherent problem in society today with the figurative memorialization of any individual person. Given our increasingly nuanced and fragmented worldview, it seems no longer possible to celebrate anyone in this manner. So, was taking down the Colston statue a contemporary example of iconoclasm? Was it an act of vandalism or the making of history in action? What was intended by the toppling of the statue, the dragging through the streets by its neck, the scraping noise of bronze on the pavement, the splash that it made when rolled into the harbour? What, indeed, was the protest really about?

Ekow Eshun, who chairs the Fourth Plinth Commissioning Group for London's Trafalgar Square, has provocatively suggested that the Colston protest should be given the Turner Prize, Britain's premier art award:

Is the toppling of the statue of Edward Colston worthy of winning the Turner Prize? You know that art can be activism, but can activism be art? The artist Jeremy Deller won the Turner Prize with a work that memorialized public protest. The architects group Assemble were a recent winner with a project of social activism ...

We look to art, to theatre, to performance to be moved, to be elevated, to make sense of our lives or glimpse what's hidden in our selves. That's what great art does. It creates these striking moments of encounter that take us closer to the truths of who we are and how we live. And the gathering of the crowd in Bristol, the tearing down of this figure on a plinth, it functioned in a similar way. It spoke of anger and sorrow, collective pain and collective resistance. I found it very moving ...

Millions of Africans were shipped across the Atlantic during the slave trade. Many of them died on the way or were thrown into the sea. That's why the scene of the statue splashing into the water feels such a fitting end. No wonder the crowds were cheering. It's the conclusion of a show. A grand finale. It's a moment that says we are not obliged to live in the shadow of the past, that history is not fixed in place, that we can make and remake the present in our age as an act of belief in equality, in our shared humanity.

Great works of art, such as some of those that have won the Turner Prize, interrogate the past and ask questions about the present. We see that here too. The removal of Colston's Statue, the powerful, resonant act. It represents a coming together of politics, pain, history, justice and thrilling symbolism. It's a moment that will live long in our collective memories. [20]

The toppling of Edward Colston's statue and its dispatch into Bristol's harbour was undoubtedly a historical moment – one that was to do with a culturally-loaded object and its contested connections to the city it was meant to stand for. During that brief moment in the early summer of 2020, Bristol became a site of resistance demanding cultural change.

Here it is useful to cite Pierre Nora's concept of *lieux de memoire*, defined as sites that are located somewhere in the flux between recollection and history:

Our interest in *lieux de memoire* where memory crystallizes and secretes itself has occurred at a particular historical moment, a turning point where consciousness of a break with the past is bound up with the sense that memory has been torn – but torn in such a way as to pose the problem of the embodiment of memory in certain sites where a sense of historical continuity persists. There are *lieux de memoire*, sites of memory, because there are no longer *milieu de memoire*, real environments of memory. [43: p.7]

Whereas the history of Edward Colston's statue had been used to act as a mechanism against multiple conflicting memories, such as in denying Britain's pivotal role in the African slave trade, now was a moment when that incomplete and selective representation was ruptured, spilling forth many inconvenient truths. The action in Bristol has thus also now set in motion the reassessment not only of sculptures, but also of the 300 or so historic country houses owned by the National Trust, of which just under a third are directly connected to empire and slavery [44]. English Heritage is also re-examining the credentials of each of its 900 Blue Plaques that seek to commemorate important historic figures by associating them spatially with where they once lived or worked, almost all of these plaques being within the built environment of London [45].

Activism has also spilled into seemingly unconnected social sites and practices. With the football season starting back in England on 17<sup>th</sup> June 2020 – following disruption due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and thus without any of their loyal crowds cheering them on – the luxuriously-paid Premier League players were now

not wearing their own names on the back of their shirts. Instead, all were inscribed with 'Black Lives Matter', in penance, and also as attempt to refute the ongoing racism that the 'beautiful game' still too often evokes [46]. Live coverage by Ian Dennis for the BBC 5 Live radio channel described the start of the very first match after the resumption, between Aston Villa and Sheffield United:

After a gap of a hundred days the topflight returns for the longest season in the history of English football. The eyes of the world are watching. [Whistle blows] The Premier League is back. [Silence] And this is a very symbolic moment because on the whistle from Michael Oliver everybody has 'taken the knee'. That is an extremely symbolic and significant moment. [47]

As the referee's whistle blew the players had not begun to run around, as everyone was expecting them to do, but instead dropped to their knees. It was an image of great emotional intensity, almost a sacred scene, which spoke of death and sacrifice for the greater good as a quasi-religious gesture of solidarity. For approximately eight seconds – one for each of the minutes that it had taken a Minneapolis policeman to kill George Floyd – they knelt on the green grass. Socially distanced and frozen in time, these twenty-two men had themselves become monuments.

Talking about statues has since been much chided by some politicians as being a distraction from the real issue, which is the need to make real changes to eradicate systemic racism. This is of course a valid argument, but it is to miss the crucial point that the Colston statue, as part of engrained racism, has turned into a monument in the truest sense of the word. 'Monument', unlike 'statue' or 'sculpture', originates from the Latin word *monere*, which means 'to warn' – and in the English language it creeps into the verb 'to admonish', meaning exactly the opposite of 'to praise' or 'to approve'. Viewed in this alternative light, the tale of the Colston statue should be seen as a warning of accepting urban narratives all too readily.

Thus, while talking about statues may not be the right thing, let's therefore talk instead about monuments! With this observation in mind, and to offer a further cultural overlay, I would like to cite a previous suggestion from 2018 about what to do with the problematic Colston statue that offers a provocative reading of the complexities embedded in that site – yet which until that dramatic day in Summer 2020 were never sufficiently addressed.

To kick-start their exhibition on *Immortalized: The People Loved, Left and Lost in our Landscape*, Historic England had organised a competition in 2018 [48]. Entrants were asked to address the question: 'But who decides who and how we remember?' The winning designs were then put on display as a pop-up event that was hosted in the London Fire Brigade's building in Lambeth later that year. Architecture's place within the urban environment was very much the topic of the competition, and for their entry MSMR Architects chose the Colston statue in Bristol as their site. MSMR's design proposal was to shallowly excavate the terrain surrounding the statue in the outline of a slave ship (**Figure 14**). Based upon historic lading prints for how one could transport large numbers of slaves on old sea-faring vessels, the new ground surface was going to show inscribed within it – in graphic cruelty – the human cargo in the form of two-dimensional outlines arranged according to sex and age, maximizing space by using double-decks, and thereby showing how eighteenth-century slave traders had increased their profits by stacking living bodies 'efficiently'. The outlines of these figures were to be drawn life-sized, and MSMR's visualizations show people walking on top of them in contemplation, perhaps feeling challenged to lie down among the outlines in order to try out this space for its fit, and thus to identify.

MSMR's depiction of the inscribed bodies however also had something very unreal about them, in that the figures were in fact all exactly the same, and hence interchangeable, as if they might be just anyone. But on closer inspection it would be possible to recognize in these human outlines the confident stance, the contrapposto with one foot being straight while the other is more relaxed, facing just a tad sideways. The prone figures were thus to have had the outline of Edward Colston, who was himself also 'looking' down on them from his statue plinth above. Shocking in its intelligence and deeply emotionally charged, this scheme by MSMR Architects is but one of several art/design projects that over the years have been put forward to integrate, through adaptive reuse, the Colston statue as a full-blown monument within a more complete urban narrative. But none of the proposals has yet been realised [42: p.237, 239].

As another example, the Colston statue's plinth – which had been left to stand empty in the centre of Bristol – suddenly became inhabited again (**Figure 15**). At the crack of dawn on 15<sup>th</sup> July 2020 a crane illicitly heaved another figure into place. Made of dark brown resin and resembling in tone the Victorian bronze-cast statue of Colston, this one was however the likeness of a confident young woman. With the right





**Figure 14:** MSRM Architects' proposal for a recontextualization of the Edward Colston statue shows the monument surrounded by a shallow excavation in the shape of a slave ship laden with human bodies. This evocative design was put on display at Historic England's 2018 exhibition, *Immortalized: The People Loved, Left and Lost in our Landscape* [Courtesy of MSRM Architects].

arm raised with a clutched fist in the air, as if in victory, the posture had something of the Statue of Liberty. It brought to mind Jasmine Ketibuah-Foley's description of people at the Colston protest clambering onto the plinth once his statue was gone, trying out this position of power, viewing the other people in the street from above as they cheered. And so, indeed, this new statue was an effigy of Jen Reid, a local woman who had been cast and positioned by the artist Marc Quinn. Experienced in populating empty plinths, Quinn had most famously been commissioned in 2005 to inhabit the aforementioned one in Trafalgar Square. There, by means of his white Carrara marble sculpture of a pregnant fellow artist, Alison Lapper, born with no arms, allowing her to be celebrated for her beautiful and unique body, letting viewers appreciate her for two years as if a timeless image from Antiquity – an ancient and proud heroine bearing within her a child. Here too in Bristol it was another fearless gesture, this time the fierce anti-racist pride of Jen Reid, which had caught the artist's attention from that eventful day in June (**Figure 16**). Quinn has said:

... it really was a collaboration between us. What happened is that the day after the Colston statue came down I saw a post on *Instagram* of Jen standing on the plinth with her arm in the Black Power salute. And I just thought, Jen has created this amazing sculpture there and I should just crystallize it and make it a little bit more permanent, so more people can see it. [44]

Once again there was an immediate flurry of press coverage. Bristol's mayor, Marvin Rees, quickly made clear that this new 'ambush sculpture' would need to come down. Rees pointed out that there had been no official application for its instatement, and that due democratic process needed to be followed for the people of Bristol to determine what should be placed upon the plinth. Furthermore, apart from the planning irregularity, the artist was not local to Bristol, and it was not seen as his place to decide what the city's urban and cultural landscape ought to include [49].

Never intended as a long-term installation, Quinn's sculpture titled 'A Surge of Power' was in fact meant more as a gesture to keep the conversation going about racial inequality, as part of a performed dialogue. Both the artist and his subject made clear in their numerous interviews that the replacement sculpture was about arguing for new cultural values and power structures, symbolizing this in part through the object, but mainly through the action of installing it. But just like Arrowsmith's process back in the 1890s when erecting the Colston statue, Quinn's contribution was created without any real public consent, as a kind of





**Figure 15:** Jen Reid's sculpture by Marc Quinn has however itself been challenged in regard to the role of artists in response to inequality, arguing that the role of creator has wrongly been privileged over the human representation being memorialised [Courtesy of Marc Quinn].

unasked-for gift to the city. Unlike the Victorian monument of a powerful white man, cast in bronze, however, the presence of this resin cast of a strong young woman didn't last long – barely twenty-four hours – before Jen Reid's effigy was hoisted back into the air the very next day at 5.30am in the morning, to be carted away in a rusty tipper truck to Bristol Museum to become part of its new-found and growing role as a repository for 'difficult heritage' [50].

The consensus of what should go up in place of Colston is still very much in the sway, with historical interpretations continuing to quicken. Jen Reid's statue was attacked as contentious not because of her figurative representation in sculptural terms, but because of the person who was the creator of the work – Marc Quinn, a successful and established white artist. This added a further layer of complexity to how one might celebrate individuals via sculptures within the public realm. As another artist, Thomas J. Price, explained:





**Figure 16:** A rig of 201 individual cameras was used to record Jen Reid recreating her pose on the Colston statue plinth as part of the 4D-scanning process involved in making Marc Quinn's sculpture, 'A Surge of Power' [Courtesy of Alasdair Doggart].

It was presented as if it was an opportunity for racial equality to be furthered, the debate to be extended and for the image of a protester to be placed in a way which could draw everyone's attention to what positive ways forward could be. But having known the previous works of the artist, what we really wanted to achieve was to change the system, to change the systems of power ... This whole thing has been about giving voices. Trying to give a platform to now black people who have been the ones really suffering from this and to have that opportunity removed by a very privileged white man just felt like a slap in the face. [51]

Thus, the focus of the politics around the Jen Reid statue had shifted from the figure that was being celebrated in this work of art to the actions of the (white male) artist who was using it to position himself in the limelight through its creation. Price interpreted Quinn's piece as not being about anti-racism, but about the significance of the maker – someone who was historicizing himself and his status through a sculpture he had conceived purportedly as part of a movement for globalized cultural change. Sadly, the fact that as few as seven public statues representing women of African descent are currently on display in Britain's streets became side-lined by this debate among artists.

### Concluding Thoughts on the Colston Statue

The intersection of humanity with heroism is a complicated and often flawed construct within our ideas and patterns of social cohesion. Because we know that histories and politics change throughout time, then any sculpture that immortalizes the narrative of a mere mortal, and which is then placed in commemoration within the public realm, becomes an inherently unstable representation of collective identity. These objects are often no longer celebrated for the person they are depicting; indeed, as the case with Marc Quinn, the artist might themselves move to the fore, readjusting the values associated with the commemorative figure, reflecting a societal change away from the politics of the person to one of aesthetics. All too often, however, and also over time, both the artist and the depicted figure are soon leached of their meaning and importance. Britain's cities now contain countless overlooked sculptures that at best only register as urban landmarks, as spatial reference points to orientate unrelated everyday journeys by citizens. Symbolism has receded, and the different individuals involved in these sculptures' narratives become forgotten.





there. This emptiness has become its own kind of memorial, a monument in the most exact sense of the word, in that it displays the literal absence of Edward Colston – his riddance from Bristol, at last.

In this sense had there simply been a discreet removal of the slaver's effigy due say to the actions of Bristol's mayor, it would have been much less effective in creating a monument to monuments. A pre-emptory removal would no doubt still have been of interest to local, and possibly national, news, but such a course of events would never have drawn the attention of global media to the persisting colonial infrastructures that still simmer deeply within British culture at large. As a media spectacle the toppling of Colston was worth a million statues. It has made history.

## Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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