



A photographic day out

(Arnos Vale / Totterdown)

I originally proposed a day out on the August Bank Holiday (26 August, 2019) and suggested as a destination an area of Bristol where I feel there are a lot of places of interest to photographers within a very short distance, yet maybe not one of the most frequented areas. Not surprisingly, many of the people who might have been interested in coming along were not available on the Bank Holiday, so I have proposed an alternative date: Saturday 2 November, 2019.

(heading photo: Simon Meeds)

The basics

I don't want to set up a strict timetable for the day but there may need to be some fixed points in it. Here is a guideline.

- 10:00 - Meet at Paintworks - Visit the Royal Photographic Society exhibition (Sugar Paper Theories)
- 11:00 - Visit the Martin Parr Foundation exhibition (The English seen by Tony Ray-Jones)
- 12:00 - Time to wander photographically around Paintworks

- 12:30 - Lunch at Bocabar
- 13:30 - Optional photographic visit to Totterdown, depending on ability and how time is going
- 14:30 - Arnos Vale - photographic interest, exhibitions and café
- 17:00 - Possible return to Bocabar for a drink and a chat or say our goodbyes

I'd love to know who is interested in going but I particularly need to know whether you would like lunch at Bocabar so that I can book tables. It would also be interesting whether you want to visit the RPS exhibition and if so whether or not you are an RPS member or a "concession" (full-time students, unemployed, over 65s, disabled and carer) - this may allow me to work out whether any group discount that is available will benefit us. Please send details to me at simonmeeds@yahoo.co.uk.

A few things to note:

- Full price entry to the RPS exhibition is £5, £3 for concessions (currently no other pricing details are published on the website)
- MPF exhibitions are always free entry
- Bocabar menus can be found [here](#).
- The obvious walking route from Paintworks to Totterdown involves a long and steep flight of steps. The alternative, along steep streets is longer. Depending on who is on the trip and how much time we have, this may affect whether we go there at all as a group although there's nothing to stop adventurers going it alone of course
- The café at Arnos Vale stops serving hot food at 3pm and closes at 4pm. The cemetery closes at 5pm.
- Read on for further details

Transport

Now we get to the most challenging part, how to get there. In principle there is no problem getting to the area by car but parking is somewhat limited. Here are the options I know about.

- Parking at Paintworks. There is a small public car park (drive into Paintworks and follow the signs), however it is limited to three hours. It could be suitable if you plan on staying for just part of the day or if you arrange to move your car later.
- Parking at Arnos Vale. There is a small amount of parking space in front of the Spielman Centre (enter from Bath Road, turn left onto the drive, bearing right all the time around about two thirds of the carriage sweep's circumference. The parking is in front of the second large building you come to on your left). As far as I know there is no limit to parking here but it seems a little unfair to park there all day if we are only there for some of it.
- There seems to be a sort of lay-by, or really a piece of rough ground, outside the St. Mary Redcliffe cemetery which is directly opposite Arnos Vale, on Bath Road. I can't see any restrictions but please check for yourself if you park there.
- Most of the roadside parking in the vicinity is limited to one hour but there are two exceptions which seem to be unlimited though well used by residents: one is outside the terrace of imposing though mostly scruffy houses on Bath Road directly opposite Paintworks and the other is Edward Road, which is opposite the entrance to the Roman Catholic Cemetery, just past Arnos Vale heading East on Bath Road.

There are good alternatives to driving. If you are able to walk about a mile then taking the train to Temple Meads and continuing on foot is one. A train from Parkway (expensive parking), Patchway or Severn Beach (an enjoyable ride but slower) are good options (maybe other stations depending on where you live but those are my main options).

Some of you may be used to parking and riding into Bristol either from The Mall at Cribbs or from the Portway.

If you need to get closer, then buses are an option (some of you may even have bus passes!). There are bus stops at intervals along Bath Road including ones which are particularly convenient for Paintworks and Arnos Vale Cemetery. The ARnos Vale website tells me that Bus services 1, X39, 57, 178 and 349 are the ones to take. I can't vouch for that information being up-to-date.

According to the timetable I saw, as an indication, a bus from Cribbs Causeway to Arnos Vale Cemetery on Saturday morning takes about one hour, and the return in the evening is about the same. Of course combining train and bus could also be useful.

Where?

I have summarised the area under the title Arnos Vale / Totterdown. I feel there are three specific areas of interest within a very short distance: [Arnos Vale Cemetery](#), the residential area of [Totterdown](#), and [Paintworks](#). Here is a brief summary of what I believe is of interest at each of these places - there may be more; let us know if you aware of any.

Paintworks

Originally dating back to 1850 Phoenix Wharf, as it was known, was a paint and varnish factory built by Bristol paint makers, Colthurst & Harding. Extended and altered over the next 100 years, it was taken over by Courtaulds and fell into decline as manufacturing became centralised elsewhere. The whole 12 acres had been assembled by the 1930s.

As buildings were vacated from paint making they were let out to other users. Eventually all paint manufacture ceased and the site became known as Central Trading Estate.

The site then changed hands several times, the various owners sharing one common theme, lack of interest and lack of investment. By the time Verve bought the site in 2003 much of it was empty, some for 15 years. Someone called it "vertical rubble" at the time.

The current scheme was drawn up and despite initial suspicion from the Local Authority consents were granted and work commenced in 2004.



A residential area of Paintworks (photo: Simon Meeds)

Paintworks began as a genuine attempt to regenerate a mixed use district centred primarily on a sense of community and in so doing provide a model for others to build on elsewhere. From the beginning Paintworks steered away from slick marketing and fashion-conscious styling. The aim was to create something simpler, more substantive. Much of the first phase was let or sold by word of mouth.

Ashley Nicholson's initial concept sketches included walkways, the desire to place different uses side by side and to open up communal areas within the buildings.

The area is a mix of residential and business use together with the Bocabar bar and restaurant, an exhibition space, and particularly of interest to photographers: the [Royal Photographic Society](#) and the [Martin Parr Foundation](#). Apart from these definite attractions I believe there are photo opportunities around the site with some interesting architecture, views to the Avon and possible human activity depending on what events may be taking place. A new phase is currently being developed and is in the process of demolition. I don't know how that will have progressed by November but it may also be of interest.



Interesting modern architecture at Paintworks (photo: Simon Meeds)

I'd suggest we meet at Paintworks in the morning; things start to open at 10am. Both the RPS and the Martin Parr Foundation will have exhibitions open on 2 November.

The exhibition at the RPS will be [Sugar Paper Theories - Jack Latham](#). Sugar Paper Theories sees Bristol based photographer Jack Latham, immerse himself in the most controversial murder investigation in Icelandic history, the Guðmundur and Geirfinnur case. From meeting key protagonists to locating and photographing key sites of the investigation, the project brings together original photographs with a range of archival and documentary materials to explore the fundamental relationship between photography and truth.

Sugar Paper Theories has only previously been exhibited at Reykjavik Museum of Photography. The show presented at The Royal Photographic Society is an enlarged version, with new work created especially for this exhibition. The entry fee will be £5 (£3 for concessions). Based on observation of previous exhibitions, there may be group discounts and entry may be free for RPS members but that isn't yet explicit for this exhibition on the website and from past observation group discounts would only benefit those otherwise paying full price entry.

The exhibition at the Martin Parr Foundation will be [The English seen by Tony Ray-Jones](#). The Martin Parr Foundation will revisit, highlight and share the important contribution Tony Ray-Jones made to British documentary photography in this brand new exhibition.

“Tony Ray-Jones was one of my initial inspirations. His imagery showed me what was possible photographing my own country.” – Martin Parr

Entry to exhibitions at the MPF is free.

There's nothing currently announced for the [Paintworks exhibition and event space](#) on 2 November.

There should be time for people to explore Paintworks but I would suggest that we reserve table(s) for lunch in the restaurant at [Bocabar](#), perhaps at 12:30 or 1pm? Again I would need numbers at some point.

Totterdown

Most people are probably familiar with [Totterdown](#) whether they have visited it or not. It has been featured on television in programmes such as [Being Human](#), [A Life of Grime](#), and no doubt many others. Its main features are steep streets and colourful terraced houses though it also provides some great views over Bristol. Vale Street, although very short, is alleged to be the steepest residential road in England.



Steep streets and colourful houses in Totterdown (photo: Simon Meeds)

Arnos Vale Cemetery

You're asking me to visit a cemetery? Well, yes.

The first time I came across Arnos Vale was before I even moved to the Bristol area. The cemetery was in an entirely run-down state. During the 20th century it had fallen into disrepair and local groups began campaigning for its restoration. In 1987 the owner disclosed plans to exhume the bodies and develop the site for housing. I came across the cemetery when it was championed by [Lucinda Lambton](#) in the 2003 television series [Restoration](#) which offered money for the site considered most

deserving of help with its restoration. Unfortunately it didn't win the series prize but since then there has been a lot of work done to maintain and improve the site while encouraging wildlife as well as visitors.



Order at Arnos Vale (photo: Simon Meeds) - the parking facilities have since changed.

The cemetery was designed by [Charles Underwood](#) in the style of a Greek [Necropolis](#). Within a few years of its opening in 1837 it became the most fashionable place to be buried in Bristol.

There are many interesting tombs, including [notable figures](#) such as [Raja Rammohun Roy](#) (instrumental in the campaign against [sati](#) and child marriage in India), [Billy Wedlock](#) (Bristol City footballer, grandfather of [Fred](#)) and [George Müller](#) (Christian evangelist and the director of the Ashley Down orphanage). Several buildings still exist including the gatehouse which is home to the gift shop and books of remembrance and the [Spielmann Centre](#) with its café, exhibition about the cemetery and event space.



Dereliction at Arnos Vale (photo: Simon Meeds)

Apart from these attractions there is the whole of the 48 acre cemetery to explore... shady corners, dereliction, elaborate monuments and wildlife. The cemetery is open until 5pm and sunset on 2 November is at 16:42, so there should be an opportunity to capture some changing light, particularly if it is a fine day.

If I can help any more with your specific questions about travel or anything else then please don't hesitate to contact me at simonmeeds@yahoo.co.uk.