

# River Avon Trail

## Interpretation Project Bulletin



picture Bristol Records Office, historical information Bath Central Library

above: New Bridge, just outside Bath, built in 1734. It replaced the original ford, which was dug out. This was one of the last engineering works on the Avon to allow the passage of boats and barges between Bath and Bristol. This bridge was again 'improved' in the 1830s and it is this later version which you see today.

### The Avon Navigation

At Bath, not far from Pulteney Bridge the River Avon meets the Kennet and Avon Canal. This waterway links the Avon to the Thames and is just one of dozens of canals or sections of 'canalised' river that were built between the early 18th c. and the coming of the railways, a century later. On rivers such as the Avon ancient fords (as at Saltford or Swineford) were excavated and water levels raised with weirs and locks.

The new waterways brought change - goods and commodities could travel to new markets. The Avon was opened to commercial traffic in 1728. Stone quarried around Bath could now be used in Bristol or Dublin. Cargoes of coal could come up the Avon from Shropshire or South Wales.

Kingswood coal miners destroyed the lock at Saltford in 1738 angered by these threats to their livelihoods. The owners of collieries at Radstock, worried about competition in their own best market, Bath, commissioned their own waterway, the Somersetshire Coal Canal.



It was also an era of new thinking, William Smith 1779-1839 a surveyor for the Somersetshire Coal Canal, pondered on the layers of different rocks revealed as the canal was cut through the landscape as well as the sequence of fossils found in the rock. He noticed that the same sequence was to be found in many places. This led to Smith publishing the world's first geological maps of the area around Bath and later the whole of the British Isles.

*A path along the river through Bristol and Bath*

### New name, new logo

The River Avon Trail is the new name for the Avon Walkway. Many thousands of people have enjoyed the riverside path since it was established in the 1980s.

The new name recognises that the path isn't only used by walkers. In recent years, many sections have been upgraded for cyclists as well as for walkers, whilst the route between Conham and Hanham is now a public bridlepath permitting horse riding.

### Who manages the Trail?

The Avon Valley Partnership, was established in 1993 to address various issues relating to the management of open space, recreation and sustainable transport in the vicinity of the River Avon between Pill, near the mouth, and Bath. This broad partnership comprises local authority officers, environmental organisations and local interest groups.

#### the partners -

Avon Gorge & Downs Project •  
Avon Valley Railway • Bath &  
North East Somerset Council •  
Bristol City Council • BTCV •  
Countryside Agency • Easton  
Community Centre •  
Environment Agency • EnVolve •  
Forest of Avon • National Trust •  
North Somerset Council •  
Saltford Reach Environment  
Group • South Gloucestershire  
Council • Sustrans •



## Fossil or Miracle?

St Keyne was a 6th century Welsh princess who may have given her name to Keynsham. Her legend says that she was extremely beautiful but fled her homeland to escape her many suitors. At Keynsham, she was given worthless, snake-infested land on which to found an abbey. But through the power of her prayer and her purity she was able to turn the snakes to coils of stone. This was a talent she shared with St Hilda of Whitby who overcame similar problems in much the same way.

The coils of stone were the ammonite fossils that are found in limestones throughout the world, and are commonly uncovered around Keynsham (and Whitby as well). Ammonites thrived in the warm shallow seas of the Jurassic period, about 150 million years ago. The stone is made up from layers of debris on the ancient seabed – the remains of small animals – into which the shells of ammonites have also fallen.

The pious may have wished for a miraculous explanation for the ammonite but the unscrupulous were quite prepared to profit from their beliefs. Medieval craftsmen carved snakes' heads onto ammonites and these were sold as 'relics' of the saints.



drawing reproduced courtesy Frederick Warne & Co

*The type of limestone in which you find ammonite fossils was named 'Lias' limestone by William Smith (see over), a name which probably came from the quarry men around Keynsham – 'lias' coming from the word 'layers' as said in a West Country, Keynsham accent.*

*In 1810 William Smith was asked to restore the flow of hot water to the Roman Baths in Bath which had dwindled away. He was permitted to open up the Hot Bath Spring and found that the spring had not failed but had flowed into a new channel. The tallow candles used by his workmen melted in the great heat but Smith was able to restore the water to its original course and the Baths filled more quickly than before. See <http://www.brlsi.org/wsmith.htm> - for more information on William Smith*

*Based on scientific evidence it is thought that the water that issues from the Bath Hot Spring was rainwater that has taken up to 10,000 years to sink up to 2km underground, where it is heated by high temperature rocks and rises to the surface through a fracture/fault system. The water from the Bristol Hotwells has a similar chemical composition, and it has been suggested that the fracture system links the two sites.*

*Thanks to the Bath Central Library for information about New Bridge and Andrew Mathieson for geological information and guidance.*

## WALKS, TALKS & EVENTS

You can use the bulletin and the website to publicise events in your area, such as walks or talks related to the River Avon landscape.

### Saturday 11th September

#### Doors Open Day - Bristol

There are a number of River Avon related sites to explore including the Redcliffe Caves, the Underfall Yard the SS Great Britain. Buildings include Dockside Cottages in the Cumberland Basin and a new office block at Temple Meads. All sites are free to visit. There is also ferry service between some of the sites. Sites open 10am - 4pm. Leaflets at Tourist Information Centres, download [www.bristol-city.gov.uk](http://www.bristol-city.gov.uk) or ring 0117 922 3719

### Friday 10th & Saturday 11th September

#### Doors Open Day - Saltford Brass Mill

The only surviving complete brass mill on the Avon. Come and see how water power was used to hammer brass into pots and pans. Friday 10am-4pm / Saturday 11am-3pm, no charge. Brass Mill signposted from Shallows car park. On the Friday children from Saltford Primary will be creating a large willow sculpture inspired by the river.

### Sunday 19th September

#### Treegazing - Castle Green, Bristol

Looking and learning about trees with Tony Titchen. 1.5 hours. Meet at park entrance by Bristol Bridge 2:30pm. Steps, rough ground and inclines. Dogs on leads welcome. Please call 01275 848629 to book.

## The River Avon Trail Interpretation Project

During the autumn we will be installing 15 interpretation boards along the Avon between Pill and Bath, publishing the new guide book as well as adding much more information to the website.

We are compiling the material for the boards, guidebook and website now but it is not too late to let us have any information that others might enjoy about the Avon and the places it passes through. See the website [www.riveravontrail.org.uk](http://www.riveravontrail.org.uk)

There will be only one more bulletin in which we want to give you a round-up of the community and schools projects which have been happening along the trail.

But you can still use the next bulletin and the website to publicise events in your area, such as **walks, talks and events** related to the River Avon landscapes.



*above: Roman carving in Oolitic Limestone from the Roman Temple at the Baths, now in the Bath Museum*

**The deadline for the next bulletin - Friday 22nd October.**

**Contact us - by post -**

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