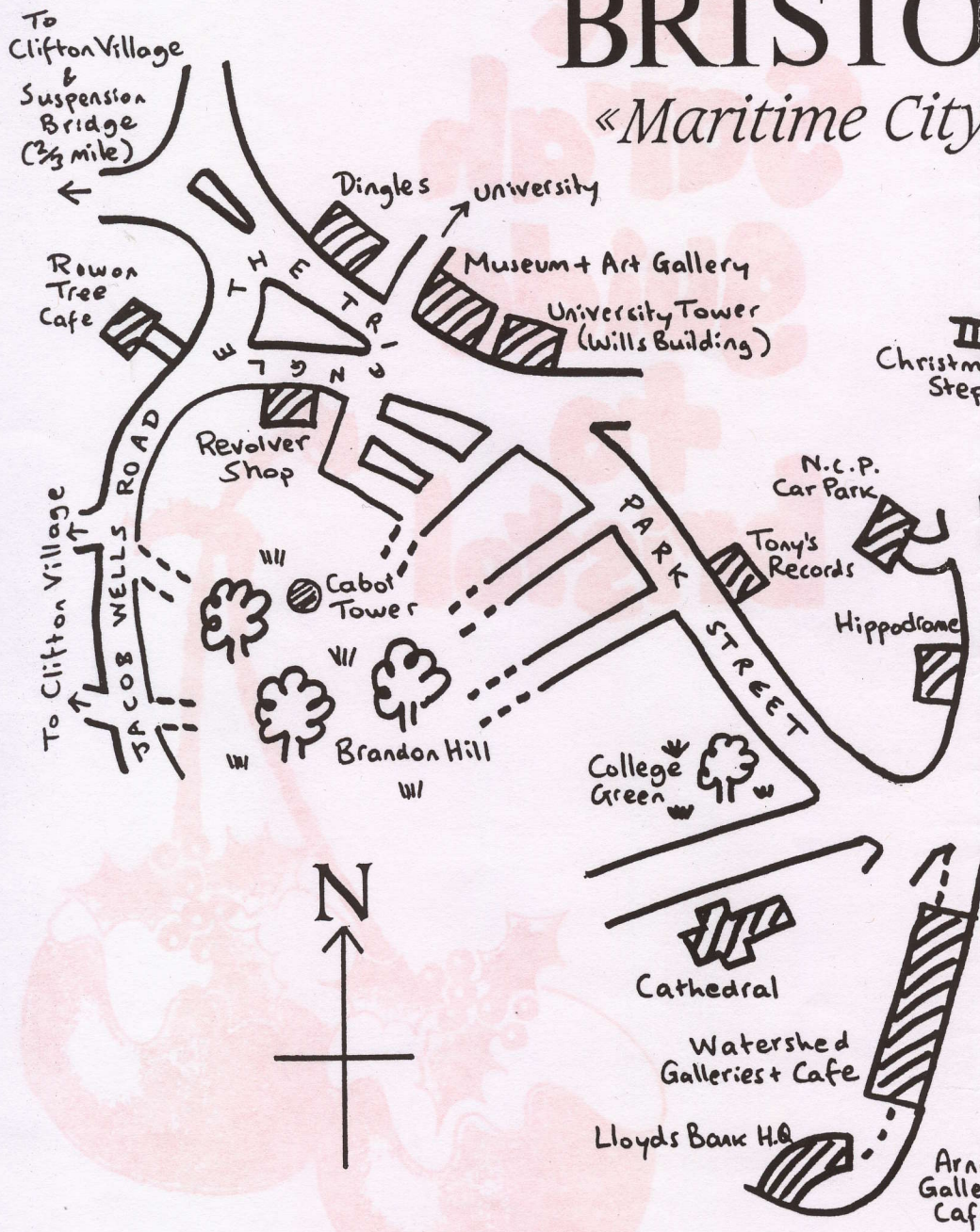


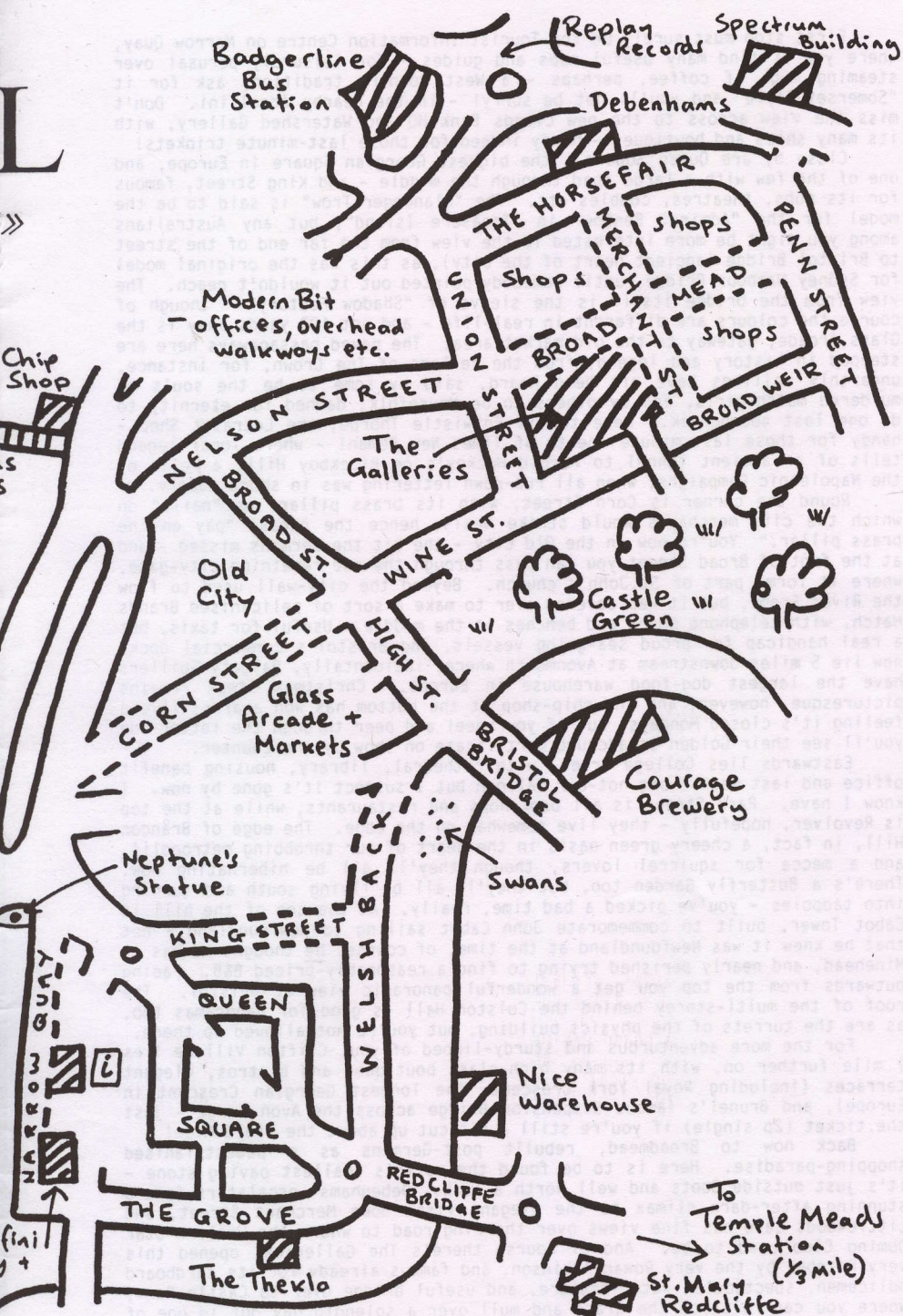
BRISTOL

«Maritime City»



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First stop must surely be the Tourist Information Centre on Narrow Quay, where you'll find many useful maps and guides - for leisurely perusal over steaming mugs of coffee, perhaps - a West Country tradition, ask for it "Somerset-Style" and you'll not be sorry! - in the nearby Arnolfini. Don't miss the view across to the new Lloyds Bank HQ and Watershed Gallery, with its many shops and boutiques - handy indeed for those last-minute trinkets!

Close by are Queen Square - the biggest Georgian Square in Europe, and one of the few with a large road through the middle - and King Street, famous for its pubs, theatres, cobbles etc. The "Llandoger Trow" is said to be the model for the "Admiral Benbow" in "Treasure Island", but any Australians among you might be more interested in the view from the far end of the street to Bristol Bridge (ancient heart of the city), as this was the original model for Sydney Harbour Bridge, until somebody pointed out it wouldn't reach. The view from the bridge itself is the sleeve of "Shadow Factory" - though of course the colours are different in real-life - and not 100 yards away is the Glass Arcade, gateway to the old market area. The paved passageways here are steeped in history and legend; from the cellars of The Crown, for instance, unearthly wailings have oft been heard, said by some to be the souls of murdered match-girls, and by others to be Mousefolk, damned for eternity to do one last soundcheck. Here too is Entwistle Thorpe, the Letraset Shop - handy for those last minute sheets of Times New Roman! - where local legend tells of an ancient tunnel to Harold Hockley's on Blackboy Hill, a relic of the Napoleonic Campaigns, when all rub-down lettering was in short supply.

Round the corner is Corn Street, with its brass pillars or "nails" on which the city merchants would strike deals, hence the phrase "pay on the brass pillar." You're now in the Old City - the bit the Germans missed - and at the foot of Broad Street you can pass through the one remaining city-gate, where it forms part of St. John's church. Beyond the city-wall used to flow the River Frome, but it was covered over to make a sort of pelicanised Brands Hatch, with telephone boxes and benches in the middle. Useful for taxis, but a real handicap for proud sea-going vessels, and Bristol's commercial docks now lie 5 miles downstream at Avonmouth where, incidentally, Dalgety-Spillers have the largest dog-food warehouse in Europe. Christmas Steps remains picturesque, however, and the chip-shop at the bottom has won awards; I've a feeling it's closed Mondays, but if you kneel and peer through the letter-box you'll see their Golden Breadcrumb certificate on show by the counter.

Eastwards lies College Green, with cathedral, library, housing benefit office and last week a big hot-air balloon but I suspect it's gone by now. I know I have. Park Street is all bookshops and restaurants, while at the top is Revolver, hopefully - they live somewhat on the edge. The edge of Brandon Hill, in fact, a cheery green oasis in the heart of our throbbing metropolis, and a mecca for squirrel lovers, though they'll all be hibernating now. There's a Butterfly Garden too, but they'll all be flying south and turning into tadpoles - you've picked a bad time, really. At the top of the hill is Cabot Tower, built to commemorate John Cabot sailing to Newfoundland - not that he knew it was Newfoundland at the time, of course, he thought he was in Minehead, and nearly perished trying to find a reasonably-priced B&B. Facing outwards from the top you get a wonderful panoramic view of Bristol. The roof of the multi-storey behind the Colston Hall is good for panoramas too, as are the turrets of the physics building, but you're not allowed up there.

For the more adventurous and sturdy-limbed of you, Clifton Village lies $\frac{1}{2}$ mile further on, with its many high-class boutiques and bistros, elegant terraces (including Royal York Crescent, the longest Georgian Crescent in Europe), and Brunel's famous Suspension Bridge across the Avon Gorge - just the ticket (2p single) if you're still a bit cut up about the Field Mice!

Back now to Broadmead, rebuilt post-Germans as a pedestrianised shopping-paradise. Here is to be found the world's smallest paving stone - it's just outside Boots and well worth a look. Debenhams' escalators form a stunning after-dark climax to the elegant vista down Merchant Street, and Littlewoods cafe has fine views over the ring road to where the Western Star Domino Club used to be. And of course there's The Galleries, opened this very October by the very Rowan Atkinson, and famous already for its cardboard policemen, spectacular water-feature, and useful bridge over to Castle Park, where you can relax on the grass and mull over a splendid day out in one of the world's greatest cities. Actually, it's probably a bit cold for that.