

Queerscapes Terminalia Bristol Old City and Old Market

Sun 26th February 2023

A small but diverse group of LGBTQ writers walked a kind of semi-dérive, semi due to the fact we did have a desired finishing point.

We were keen to avoid the trap of it becoming a queer history walk and so much of our conversation along the way was about how we as LGBTQ+ individuals related to the city, what places and districts were important to us and why. Our stories, our geographies.

Our drift effectively started in Leonard Lane a narrow alleyway with double yellow lines! From that point on, attendees took it in turns to choose the direction at each junction, though with our end point in mind. (pic)

You will see from the map of our drift, that we followed a large portion of the city wall, interestingly without being totally aware of that fact. We thought about this boundary and what it might have meant in the past, what it means now for queer people. We looked out for the boundary markers set into walls and buildings along this part of the route (pic) The group also particularly liked a set of steps built into the wall, a portal between inner and outer. (pic).

Our walk crossed the old city boundary at the site of the old Newgate Prison, and we did pause to remember the hundreds of people that had been imprisoned there for being homosexual.

At this point we dropped down a few metres to Bristol Bridge and the natural boundary of the river and then followed it round to Old Market, traditionally and still today, one of the main LGBTQ+ areas of the city. The street, which we think is the start of the old main road to London, has for hundreds of years been the site of often beyond the pale wheelings and dealings and trades just beyond the old city. We considered what the area meant for us today.

We finished in the Old Market Tavern, a very old pub, still laid out traditionally, but also historically known as one of the oldest gay pubs in the city. What was interesting was that the younger attendees and those born outside the city had visited the Old Market district many times but did not know that this had been and still is in many ways, an LGBTQ pub. Here, we discussed how as queer writers we might use our relationship with the urban landscape in our writing.