

"Truly it felt like Year One"



A Guided Tour of Angela Carter's 1960s Bristol

"Towards the end of the sixties it started to feel like living on a demolition site—one felt one was living on the edge of the unimaginable"

Angela Carter, one of the 20th century's most acclaimed novelists, came of age as a writer in post-war Bristol. Carter, and her first husband Paul, moved to Royal York Crescent, Clifton, in 1961, some months before the Cuban Missile Crisis, and left in the year of Woodstock, 1969.

From the crescents and terraces of Clifton, Carter could look out over a horizon bombed-out and derelict, but also booming with reconstruction schemes. She was fascinated by the people she met, in the ale-houses, cafes, markets and parks. Many of them were to appear as characters in the three novels known as 'The Bristol Trilogy,' written during Carter's years in Bristol.

In a society in flux, Carter could imagine other possibilities for a new future world. There are elements of both the utopian, for example in the hopeful ending to the 1968 novel *Several Perceptions*, and the dystopian, with both *Shadow Dance* and *Love* revealing the darker side of the 1960s.

Take a tour through Clifton and Hotwells, and revisit the places and counterculture that inspired Angela Carter's writing, in a society undergoing transformation and renewal so profound, that she declared: "Truly, it felt like Year One."

"...everyday life, even where I was living, in Bristol, took on the air of a continuous improvisation... the particular leafy and graceful bit of Bristol where I lived attracted festal behaviour. Carpe diem. Pleasure."

1. Royal West of England Academy



The novelist studied art in the 1960s at the West of England College of Art which was in the same building as the RWA. It was therefore fitting that the first major exhibition to celebrate her work in relation to visual art and her connections to the city, *Strange Worlds: The Vision of Angela Carter*, was hosted there 50 years later, in 2016-17.

2. Bristol Museum and Art Gallery



Both the Museum in Queen's Road and Bristol Central Library feature in Angela Carter's first novel, *Shadow Dance*, published in 1966. Morris Gray, a main protagonist, takes to visiting the "echoing coolness of the city museum." He is particularly impressed by the "Romany caravan all baroque paintwork and engraved mirrors, with a stuffed tabby-cat curled on the steps," and his favourite exhibit "the reassembled skeleton of an Irish elk."

3. The Berkeley



Now a pub, this former café was one of Angela Carter's regular haunts when she studied English Literature at the University of Bristol. Here, she caught up with her friend Neil Curry, with whom she ran the University literary society and compiled a short anthology called *Vision*. He later fondly commemorated her presence in the Berkeley Café as one of the recipients

of his *Some Letters Never Sent* poetry collection "after the hours we spent there."

Her friend Susannah Clapp recalled in *A Card from Angela Carter*:

"And in the Berkeley Café she chatted to situationists and anarchists. As we sat in her kitchen in April 1991, ten months before she died, Angela said these anarchists had had more influence than anyone else on her politics."

The café that features in *Shadow Dance* is based on The Berkeley:

"The management finally decided to drag the place by its ears into contemporaneity. It was forced, against its will, to become a coffee bar."

4. University of Bristol English Department, Berkeley Square



Angela Carter began her undergraduate degree in English Literature at the University of Bristol in 1962. At that time, the English Department was located in the Alfred Marshall Building, at 40 Berkeley Square. In 1965 she completed her dissertation on "Some Speculations on Possible Relationships between the Medieval Period and 20th Century Folk Song Poetry," a title that reflected her continuing preoccupation with folk music.

5. Brandon Hill Park & Cabot Tower



Brandon Hill is the setting for the opening and final episode of Angela Carter's novel *Love*. Troubled character Annabel felt the "magic strangeness of the park" and enjoyed its "overgrown paths with nervous pleasure." At the park's centre, swaddled in greenery, is Cabot Tower, one of Bristol's most prominent landmarks. While it identifies the city's role in the origins of transatlantic colonialism, Brandon Hill is also held with affection by Bristol's radical historians as the site of political gatherings for the reform movement, anti-slavery and Chartism, through to striking workers in Carter's day during the 1960s. Pick a fine day for a fantastic view of the cityscape from the tower; the park below is also an excellent place to read an early Angela Carter novel.

6. The Lansdown



Folk music was an important part of Angela's creative life during the 1960s. She and her husband Paul Carter began the "Folksong and Ballad Club" in 1964, with sessions that ran in the upstairs room of The Lansdown on alternate Fridays. She sang ballads, and also became a proficient concertina player during the mid-1960s. While she drifted from the folk scene after leaving Bristol, the colourful drama and passion in the stories woven into ballad tradition surely influenced her writing thereafter.

7. Saville Place



This was home to Angela Carter's friends John and Jenny Orsborn. The artist John Orsborn was believed to be in part the model for Honeybuzzard, the dominant character in *Shadow Dance*.

8. No 38 Royal York Crescent



Angela and Paul Carter lived in the ground floor flat at 38 Royal York Crescent from 1961-1969. Bristol is never named as the location for the novels in the Bristol trilogy. However, extracts such as the following, from the 1968 novel *Several Perceptions*, are unmistakable descriptions of the panorama that can be glimpsed from Clifton:

"At the foot of the hill of crescents and terraces flowed the river with a barge or boat upon it; here the city dock and all the cranes and warehouses reflecting themselves in stretches of dark water; there white lines of the flyover buzzing with traffic; the prim and inexpressive grids of housing estates; and surrounding everything a rim of sweet green hills, low and round as if Joseph and Charlotte had moulded them from plasticine."

9. The Somerset



During the 1960s The Somerset was a focus for members of the local counterculture, described by Angela

Carter as "provincial bohemia." It was one of the favourite locals of several of her friends and no doubt patronised by the novelist herself. Pub regular at that time Mike Hamlin recalls that the pub attracted "a relaxed hippyish clientele," who would gather for discussions and to read underground newspapers such as the *International Times* and the *Black Dwarf*. The Somerset (which sadly closed in 2019) was also handy for the celebrated Troubadour folk club, at adjacent 5 Waterloo Street.

10. The Bristol Fringe



Formerly known as The Greyhound, this pub at 32 Princess Victoria Street is the setting for much of the action in Carter's 1966 novel, *Shadow Dance*, where it features as The Gloucester. During the 1960s, it was another venue associated with alternative Bristol. Angela and Paul Carter and their friends regularly drank at The Greyhound where they would have rubbed shoulders with Keith Floyd the TV celebrity chef, who opened his first bistro in the same street, and his friend, Bob Baker, the Bristolian scriptwriter whose productions have included episodes of *Dr Who* and *Shoestring* and co-authorship of several Wallace and Gromit classics for Ardmans Animations. Several of the characters in *Shadow Dance* are based on people Angela met in The Greyhound.

Devised by Stephen Hunt, Marie Mulvey-Roberts and Charlotte Crofts, based on Stephen's book *Angela Carter's Provincial Bohemia* (Bristol Radical History Group) and drawing on research at UWE by Zoe Brennan published in Marie's book *Literary Bristol: Writers and the City* (Redcliffe Press). Supported by funding from UWE Bristol. In partnership with the *Angela Carter Society*. Photographs 8 and 11 supplied by Bristol Archives. Cover drawing by Christine Molan. Design by Richard Grove.



11. Cornwallis Crescent



The historic Cornwallis Crescent was home to several of Angela Carter's closest friends. Among them were Janet and Peter Swan (a notable Bristol artist). Corinna and Nick Gray lived on the ground floor at number 11. Corinna, who reverted to her family name, Sargood, became one of Angela's key creative collaborators as the illustrator of the two *Virago* books of fairy tales that the writer compiled in the 1990s. Their neighbours and friends at number 9 were Barry and Sue Flanagan. The former, the famous sculptor, was one of the great characters of the area. The poet John James fondly remembered him as a "dandy flaneur", who "would saunter out from his apartment on Cornwallis Crescent and stroll for miles of an evening" frequenting the "bohemian haunts of Bristol."

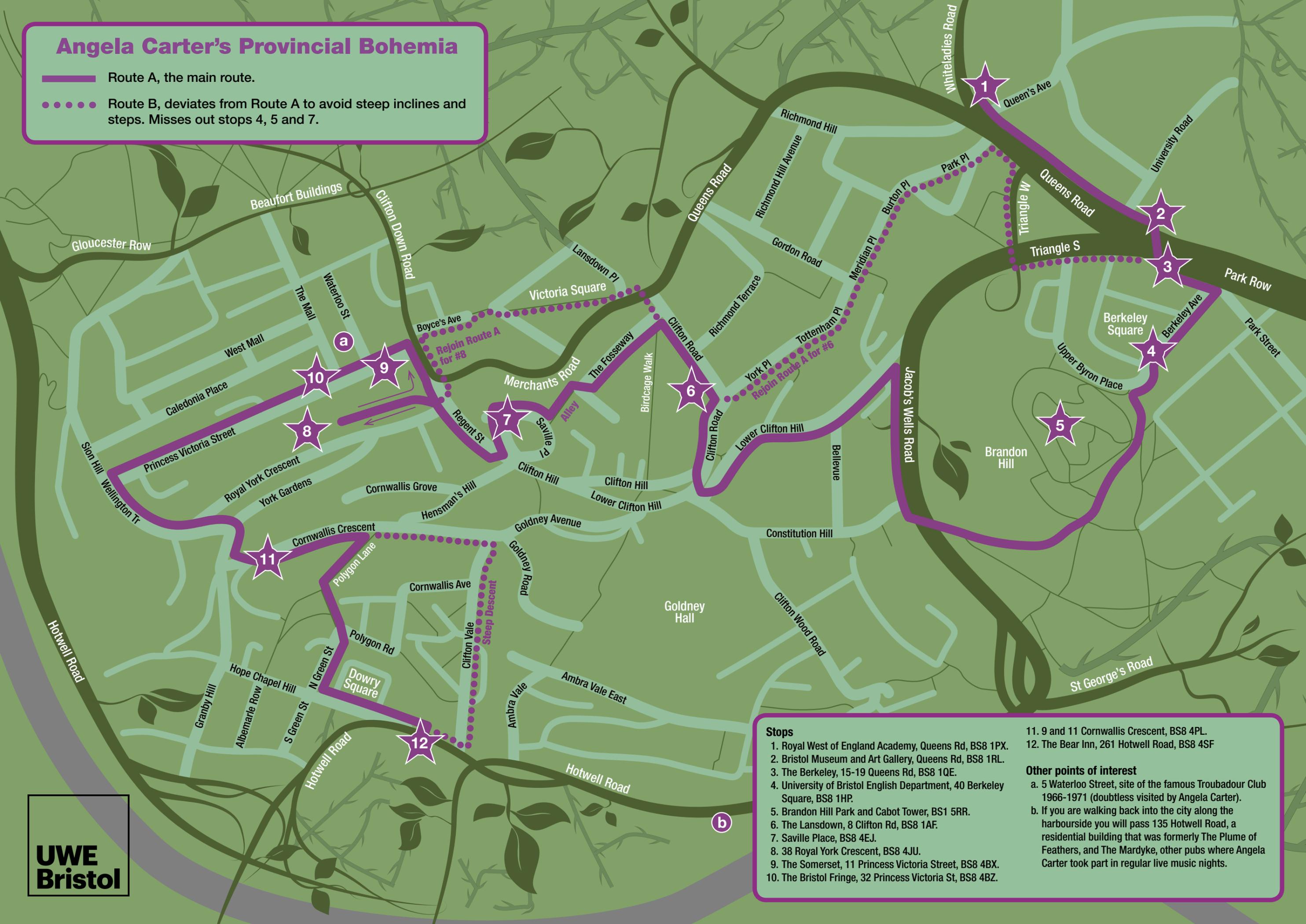
12. The Bear Inn, Hotwells



Angela's husband Paul Carter was a key figure in the English folk revival. Together, they began a regular folk club called "Ballads and Broad-sides" at The Bear in Hotwells. They had also taken part in an early Aldermaston March and the folk revival further connected them to the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and the trade union movement through a travelling culture festival called Centre 42.

Angela Carter's Provincial Bohemia

-  Route A, the main route.
-  Route B, deviates from Route A to avoid steep inclines and steps. Misses out stops 4, 5 and 7.



Stops

1. Royal West of England Academy, Queens Rd, BS8 1PX.
2. Bristol Museum and Art Gallery, Queens Rd, BS8 1RL.
3. The Berkeley, 15-19 Queens Rd, BS8 1QE.
4. University of Bristol English Department, 40 Berkeley Square, BS8 1HP.
5. Brandon Hill Park and Cabot Tower, BS1 5RR.
6. The Lansdown, 8 Clifton Rd, BS8 1AF.
7. Saville Place, BS8 4EJ.
8. 38 Royal York Crescent, BS8 4JU.
9. The Somerset, 11 Princess Victoria Street, BS8 4BX.
10. The Bristol Fringe, 32 Princess Victoria St, BS8 4BZ.

11. 9 and 11 Cornwallis Crescent, BS8 4PL.
12. The Bear Inn, 261 Hotwell Road, BS8 4SF

Other points of interest

- a. 5 Waterloo Street, site of the famous Troubadour Club 1966-1971 (doubtless visited by Angela Carter).
- b. If you are walking back into the city along the harbourside you will pass 135 Hotwell Road, a residential building that was formerly The Plume of Feathers, and The Mardyke, other pubs where Angela Carter took part in regular live music nights.