

Know Your Place

Learning and Sharing Information
about Historic Bristol



Background

The Bristol Historic Environment Record (HER) is maintained by the City Design Group within the Bristol City Council planning department. Prior to the Bristol Historic Web Map Project the HER had a limited online presence, although there has been several successful community engagement projects including school projects and collaborative involvement with the City Design Groups' Conservation Area Appraisal programme.

Recent developments in national planning policy (ie PPS5) and the Localism agenda place a greater emphasis on communities;

- defining what is appropriate development in their neighbourhood and
- identifying assets of local value.

The emerging Bristol Local Development Framework refers to the requirement for new developments to be designed with reference to the local context. A city-wide character analysis has not yet been undertaken for Bristol, although the ongoing programme of Conservation Area Character Appraisals is being undertaken in partnership with a variety of local amenity groups and is making a major contribution to our understanding of place.

The objectives of the City Design Group in relation to the historic environment are;

- to enable local communities in Bristol to undertake their own local context analysis, building on the successful Conservation Area Appraisal partnerships,
- to ensure that these context studies directly contribute to the Historic Environment Record (HER).
- to use the context analysis studies to identify assets of local value and thereby begin the development of a Local List.

In order to achieve these objectives it is essential that the Local Authority and the local communities have the appropriate skills and tools to develop this understanding of place.

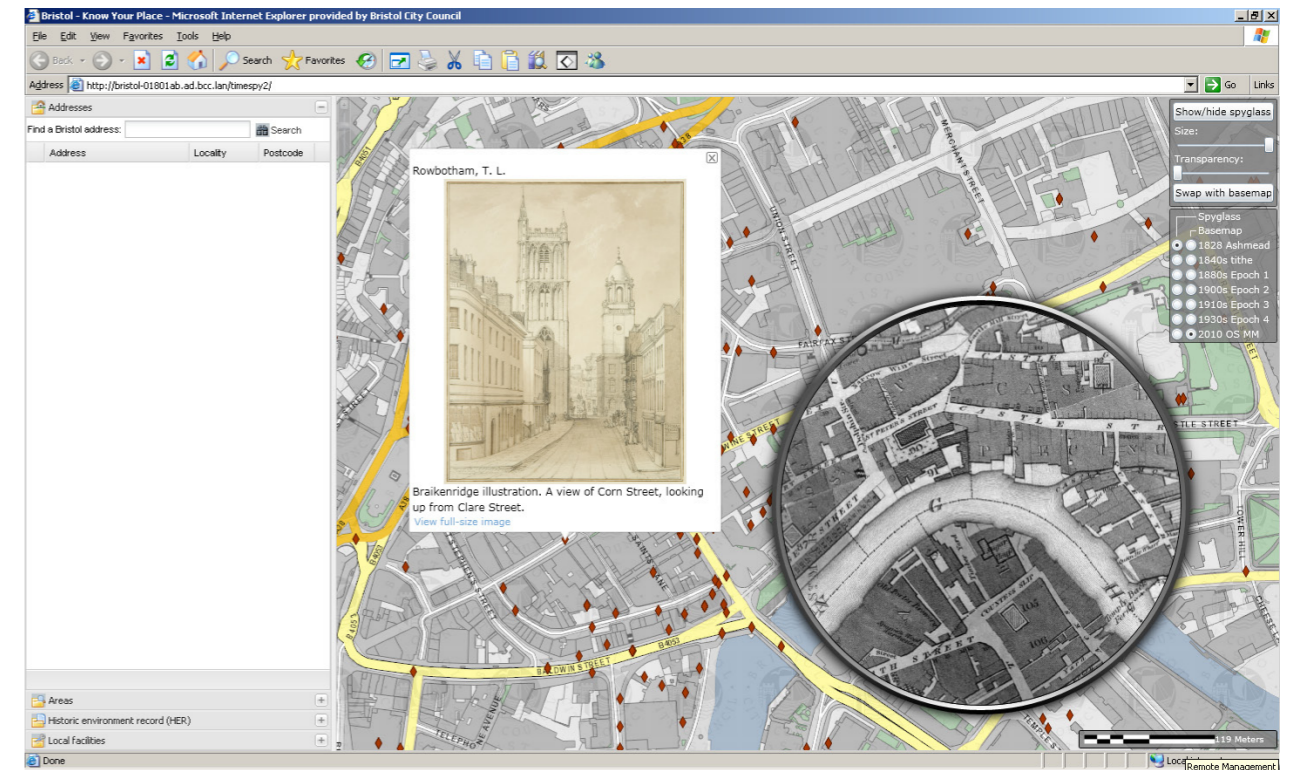
In July 2010, the City Design Group secured funding from English Heritage's National Heritage Protection HER 21 programme to begin the Bristol Historic Web Map Project.

The aim of the project was to create a website that would form part of the toolkit required to meet the above listed objectives.

This project proposed to;

- provide online access to many of the historic maps held by Bristol Museums, Galleries and Archives particularly the tithe maps covering the modern administrative area of Bristol City Council,
- enable users of the resulting website to overlay these historic maps on modern mapping,
- link the maps to illustrations in the Braikenridge Collection, a unique collection of building and street images drawn in the early nineteenth century,
- allow public web access to the HER,
- create a website with the facility to accept direct data input from members of the public for validation by the HER.

Community volunteers were to be involved throughout the project particularly with the entry of data from historic archives.



Know Your Place provides access to a variety of images and information from the historic archives. The spyglass tool enables the direct comparison of historic maps to the modern landscape.



Recent launch event where the website was demonstrated. Public were able to view some of the original maps.

Partnerships

A variety of partnerships were essential to achieve these project aims and objectives. The HER worked with;

- The Bristol City Council's Geographic Information Systems (GIS) team,
- Bristol Museums, Galleries and Archives and
- various local community groups and volunteers.

The HER provided the GIS team with a brief based on the objectives for the website and maintained an ongoing collaboration throughout the development of the web resource. This liaison permitted easy monitoring of the website development as demo versions of the site were live on internal servers from early in the project.

Access to historic archives was a key component of the project to enable wider understanding of the historic development of Bristol and to encourage greater use of the final website. Much of the material for the website required professional scanning or digital capture including the title maps that needed to be sent to a specialist scanning unit because of the size of the original documents. The Braikenridge Collection images needed to be digitally photographed by a member of the Archives staff because the original images are too delicate for general handling. All of this required the agreement of the archive curators and co-ordination within the project timetable.

Contacts with local groups were established through existing networks such as the Conservation Advisory Panel as well as smaller local community groups. A programme of data collection was agreed with community groups at the project start up meeting. In addition to this, advocacy about the project through the regional groups established contact with individuals who volunteered for other tasks such as map image stitching.

Communication

The ongoing dialogue with the community groups formed the principal project advocacy and directly contributed to the success of the project. Most of this communication was through email so relatively few meetings were required. This dialogue also ensured that there was a wide network of people interested in the final website who acted as advocates to groups that had not been directly involved.

One of the key successes in the project timetable was our 'Communities and the Historic Environment' conference that was organised by the project team. This conference was held mid way through the project and provided a discussion forum so that an early demo of the site could be presented for community comment. The conference also attracted wider groups such as neighbourhood improvement groups, some of which gave presentations at the conference, sharing their experience of promoting pride of place through heritage related themes.

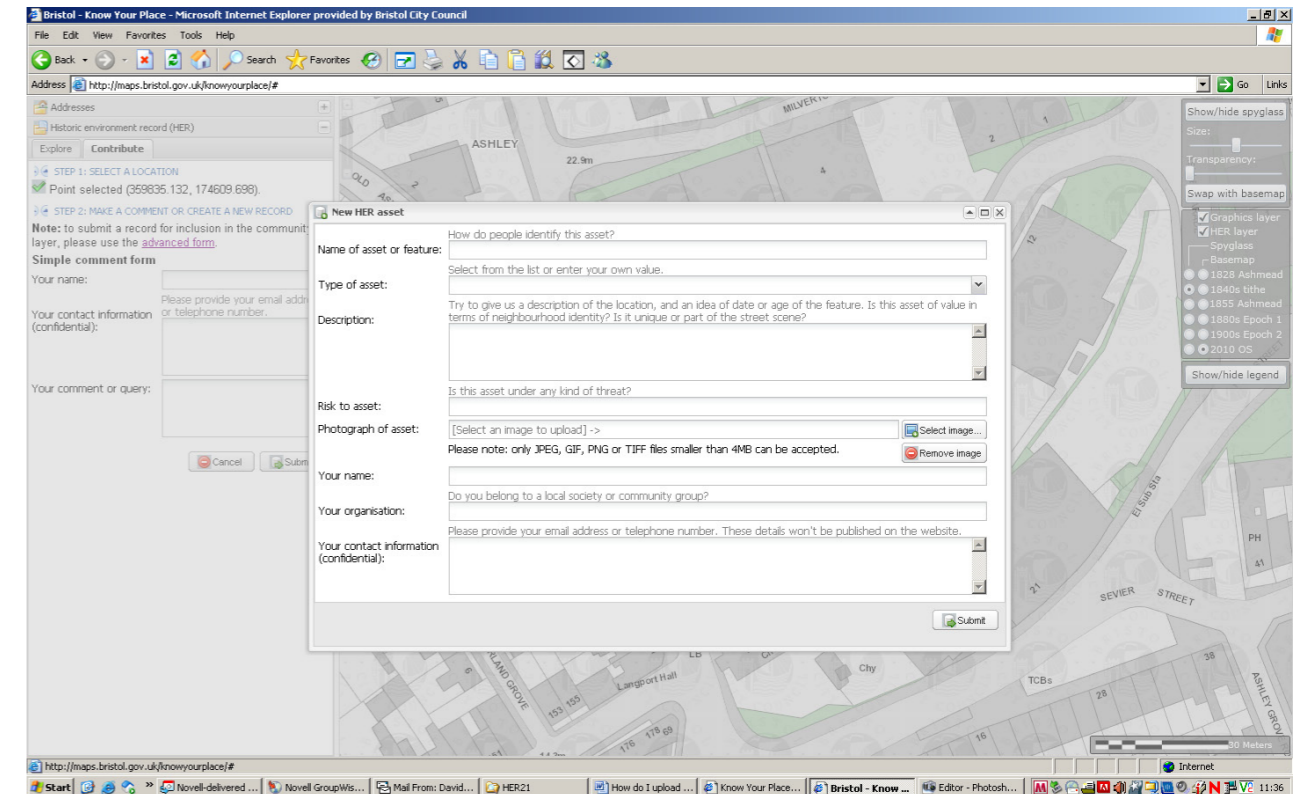
End product

The final website entitled 'Know Your Place' provides access to high quality historic mapping and links it to a variety of related heritage data so that it can be used and queried by a wide audience.

Users can contribute directly to the site through a simple comment box or an advanced contribution form that allows images to be uploaded. Both of these contribution formats load the data directly into the HER database.

As well as the HER and historic mapping, Know Your Place provides access to all heritage related data held by the Local Authority including Listed Building data and Conservation Area boundaries.

The use of standard GIS software throughout the application means that further layers can be added as required.



Know Your Place allows members of the public to upload information and images to the website through a 'Contribute' form. This information is added directly to a database for validation by the HER officer before it is published to the live website.



The Old Custom House on Welsh Back, Bristol in 1823. Hugh O'Neill Braikenridge Image Layer.

Launch, evaluation and further development

The website was launched at a well attended public event held at the Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery on March 16th 2011. Councillor Anthony Negus, executive member for Strategic Housing and Regeneration, opened the event that received a full page feature in the local press the following day. The site was widely promoted through a variety of blogs including the Guardian online and the day after the launch the website was visited 2700 times.

Know Your Place has also been embedded as one of the primary tools for delivering the City Design Initiative that defines the work programme of the City Design Group. Workshops are being held for community groups as part of this initiative to demonstrate the use of the website in developing local context analysis and the creation of informed neighbourhood plans.

To date the biggest users of the website have been Council Officers such as Planning Officers, Customer Services or Archivists in the Record Office, although feedback from members of the public, school teachers and Councillors has been emphatically positive.

Know Your Place has become a living resource that encourages wider learning and sharing of information about historic Bristol and will continue to develop and promote positive Localism.

The website promotes the HER to a wider audience and;

- encourages wider understanding and appreciation of the historic environment,
- promotes informed debate and decision making in respect of development proposals and
- is a powerful plan making tool that will contribute to the development of better neighbourhoods.



Know Your Place was launched at a public event at the Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery.



City Design Group
Planning and Sustainable Development
Bristol City Council
Brunel House
Bristol BS1 5UY