

Stories on Brandon Hill

captured by Abdul-Khaliq Ahmed with thanks to insights provided by Professor Steve Poole

Brandon Hill, once known as St Brendon's Hill is a park situated near Bristol City Centre, in the Hotwells area. During the late 18th and early 19th century, Brandon Hill became a popular venue for public meetings, most notably with radical reformer Henry Hunt.

Henry Hunt was born 6th November 1773 in Upavon, Wiltshire and was a successful farmer and land owner before taking a house in Bellvue, Clifton in 1807. Hunt purchased a brewery near the bottom of Jacob's Wells Road which quickly became recognised for its unique tasting beer that was made from Hunt's farm barley. Hunt was very proud of his natural, organic ingredients.

HUNT's *Genuine* BEER.

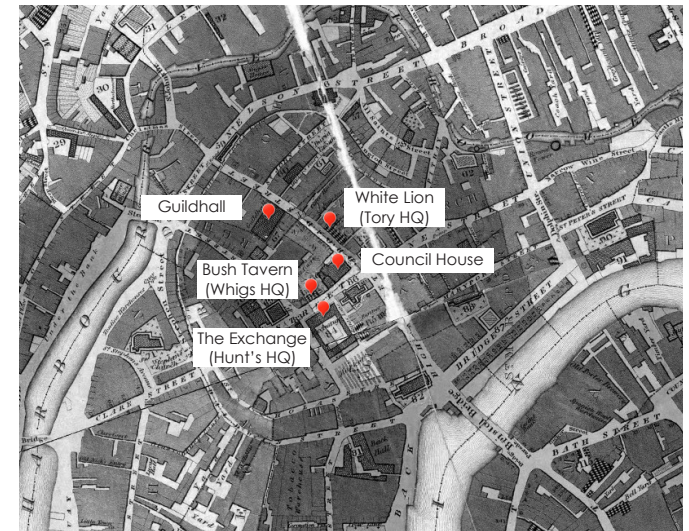
HUNT's first appearance in public life was as a *public Brewer*. In January, 1807, we find him advertising in the Bristol Gazette, that he had established a Brewery at Clifton.---"The Families of Clifton and Bristol," says he, "are respectfully informed, that they may now be supplied with *genuine* Table Beer, produced from the best malt and hops, and wholly exempt from *any other ingredient whatever*." He afterwards offered to make, and we believe did make, a voluntary Affidavit to the same effect. On consulting the Records of the Court of Exchequer, however, we find, that a very few months after the date of the above Advertisement, seventy gallons of *other ingredients* were seized from HENRY HUNT, of "the Clifton *Genuine* Brewery;" and were condemned in Michaelmas Term, 1807. This awkward little accident, it seems, gave the Bristol men a sort of distaste for Hunt's *genuine* Beer, and no great relish for his Affidavits; and the consequence was, that he shut up his Brewery, and turned *genuine* Patriot.---(*New Times*.)

I never heard such a tale!!! Sure this never can be our Orator, Henry Hunt. He, good man!! is honestly labouring day and night to keep our Constitution pure and unadulterated. The Brewer was day and night infusing poison into the Constitution of all his fellow-subjects.

Manchester: printed by C. Wheeler and Son.

Hunt's arrival in Bristol coincided with a by-election to parliament. During this period Bristol had two seats for Members of Parliament and electors had two votes. But in 1807, the Whigs and Tories put only one candidate each forward for election, as they had done many times before, resulting in both parties automatically gaining a seat without any need for a contest. This cosy arrangement benefited both parties significantly rather than having multiple candidates running which would trigger an expensive local election with uncertain results. Hunt, who had previously intervened against corrupt practices like these in Wiltshire, reacted by leading a crowd of supporters onto Brandon Hill where he announced that he would stand as an independent candidate himself at the next election to split the Whig and Tory coalition. In 1809 he sold the brewery and left Bristol but returned, as promised, in 1812 when a parliamentary election was called.

Hunt's gift for public speaking and his connection with the working class gained him much support, his name fast becoming synonymous with 'Liberty'. Raising doubts that the Whigs or Tories were the 'people's party', Hunt proclaimed himself a supporter of democratic radicalism and stood as an independent candidate forcing an election. Hunt represented the working class masses that demanded



parliamentary reform, universal suffrage, short parliaments and the ballot.

The map (above) shows where the existing political parties had established headquarters (map also available online [here](#)). Their closeness to one another, within striking distance of both the Guildhall where voting took place, and the Council House, where the local authorities sat, frequently led to fierce rioting at elections. So, when Hunt stood for election, his decision to set up his headquarters in the same vicinity as his competitors, did not calm matters and the 1812 election was one of the most violent on record. Though Hunt didn't win, this did raise issues of fairness of elections.

In 1813, Hunt stood unsuccessfully for election again.

December 2nd 1816, there was an uprising at a meeting addressed by Hunt in London, an attempted insurrection. This inspired Hunt to hold a mass meeting on Boxing Day on Brandon Hill demanding universal suffrage. Brandon Hill was believed to have been gifted “to the people” by Queen Elizabeth I with no restrictions on access, so it was a natural place for public meetings to be held. Hunt’s speech as per usual got the crowd fired up and motivated and they began to chant “Hunt and Liberty”! Hunt left Bristol shortly after the last time but was already nationally famous.

By the 1830s, Brandon Hill had become strongly associated with radicalism. Attempts to control Brandon Hill seemed slim because it was a space that could not be built on, barricaded, charged entry fee, fenced off or enclosed. But it did become a focal point.

In 1832, the Hill was the location of the Great Reform Dinner, which was famously gate-crashed. The dinner was arranged by the Whigs to celebrate the passing of the Great Reform Act 1832, which expanded the electorate. This allowed male property owners over the age of 21 the right to vote, while explicitly forbidding the vote to women (some of whom had previously been able to vote in certain circumstances). The dinner was to include representatives from the working classes,

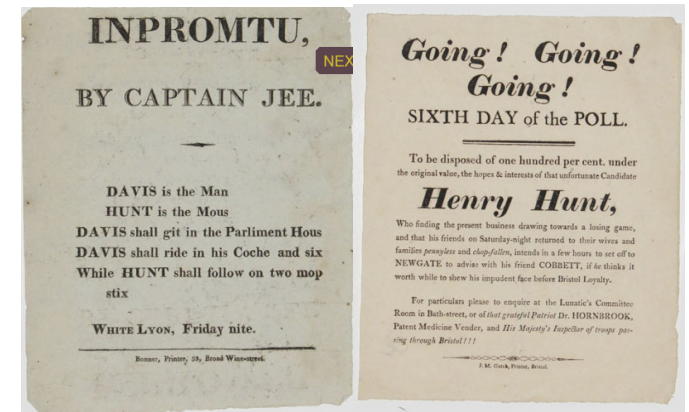
but they had to be recommended, and present a ticket. The event was disrupted by many from Hotwells Road, who stormed up the hill, danced on the tables, ate all the food, stole their puddings and rolled their beer down the hill (possibly beer from Jacob’s wells brewery that was once owned by Hunt).

From 1840 onwards, after the Hill had been adopted by the Chartist movement for further radical meetings, the Council ‘improved’ Brandon Hill with walls, footpaths and benches, disrupting the geography and opportunity for meetings leading to political dissent via imaginative landscaping.

Hunt died in 1835, but his tactics of mass-petitioning and non-violent rallies were later taken up by many Chartists.

For more fascinating insights into Bristol’s history and interactive heritage gameplay by Professor Steve Poole see:

- New book - Bristol from Below: <https://boydellandbrewer.com/bristol-from-below-hb.html>
- New essay - Locative gameplay and history from below: <http://www.tandfonline.com/eprint/ZEJPB8FZAKUabjuh8aq7/full>
- New apps - Romancing the Gibbet: Crime, history and poetics in the West Country landscape and RIOT! www.satsymph.co.uk
- Professor Steve Poole orating on Brandon Hill in a brisk breeze for the Radical History Group <https://www.brh.org.uk/site/events/the-brh-summer-party-on-brandon-hill/>



These rare survivors (above) of cheap popular printing handed out as flyers on Bristol’s streets, attack Henry Hunt and his politics. The authors or sponsors of these broadsides are anonymous (in one case a pseudonym, ‘Captain Jee’, is used), and they employ satirical verse or thinly-veiled metaphors to attack their opponent. Some are embellished with very basic decorative vignettes, to complement the letterpress. Hunt was imprisoned after the Peterloo massacre, 1819, when the cavalry was used to disband a peaceful demonstration resulting in eleven dead and hundreds injured. He was popularly regarded as a martyr of reform and took pride of place in the Chartist pantheon.

https://www.grosvenorprints.com/stock_detail.php?ref=27987#