Bristol Packet

BOAT TRIPS

History

Here are a few fascinating facts you can learn on our tours. This sheet can also be used as a classroom resource.

- A settlement has existed around the site of Bristol Bridge for over 1000 years and was originally known as 'Brigstow' meaning 'place of' or 'place by' the bridge. This was a natural crossing point at low tide making it an ideal location for trading and dwelling. Due to the local dialect and a habit of adding an 'L' onto the end of words, Brigstow eventually evolved into 'Bristol'.

- Bristol's harbour was a 'Drying Harbour' for most of its history causing ships to 'dry out' on the riverbed at low tide. Between the years of 1804 and 1809 a combination of dams, locks and canals were put in place to create the 'Floating Harbour' with a constant depth of 9.5m meaning that ships and boats no longer go up and down on the tide.

- Bristol played a major part in the transatlantic slave trade, with Bristol merchants financing over 2000 slaving voyages between 1698 and 1807. Travelling a triangular route, ships would leave Bristol laden down with bartering goods such as arms, metal goods and textiles which were exchanged for more than 500,000 enslaved Africans. The ships then carried the enslaved men, women and children to the 'New World' (Caribbean & Americas) where they were sold and put to work on plantations growing cotton, sugar cane and tobacco. These slave-produced goods were then transported back to Bristol where they were sold at a vast profit.

- Although the advent of the Floating Harbour made it easier for the loading and unloading of ships, leading to a significant increase in trade, this was relatively short-lived. From the mid-19th Century ships began to be built on a much larger scale, eventually becoming so large they could no longer navigate to the City. Bristol City Docks were closed to commercial shipping in 1975, since when the focus has shifted to leisure and tourism activities. The Harbour is now a thriving leisure facility used by thousands of locals and visitors all year round.

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