



Bristol Post

Tuesday, April 28, 2020

A TOUCH OF COLOUR:

More old photos get the colourising treatment, this time from the 20th century - Picture Past, Pages 4&5

PICTURE OF THE WEEK:

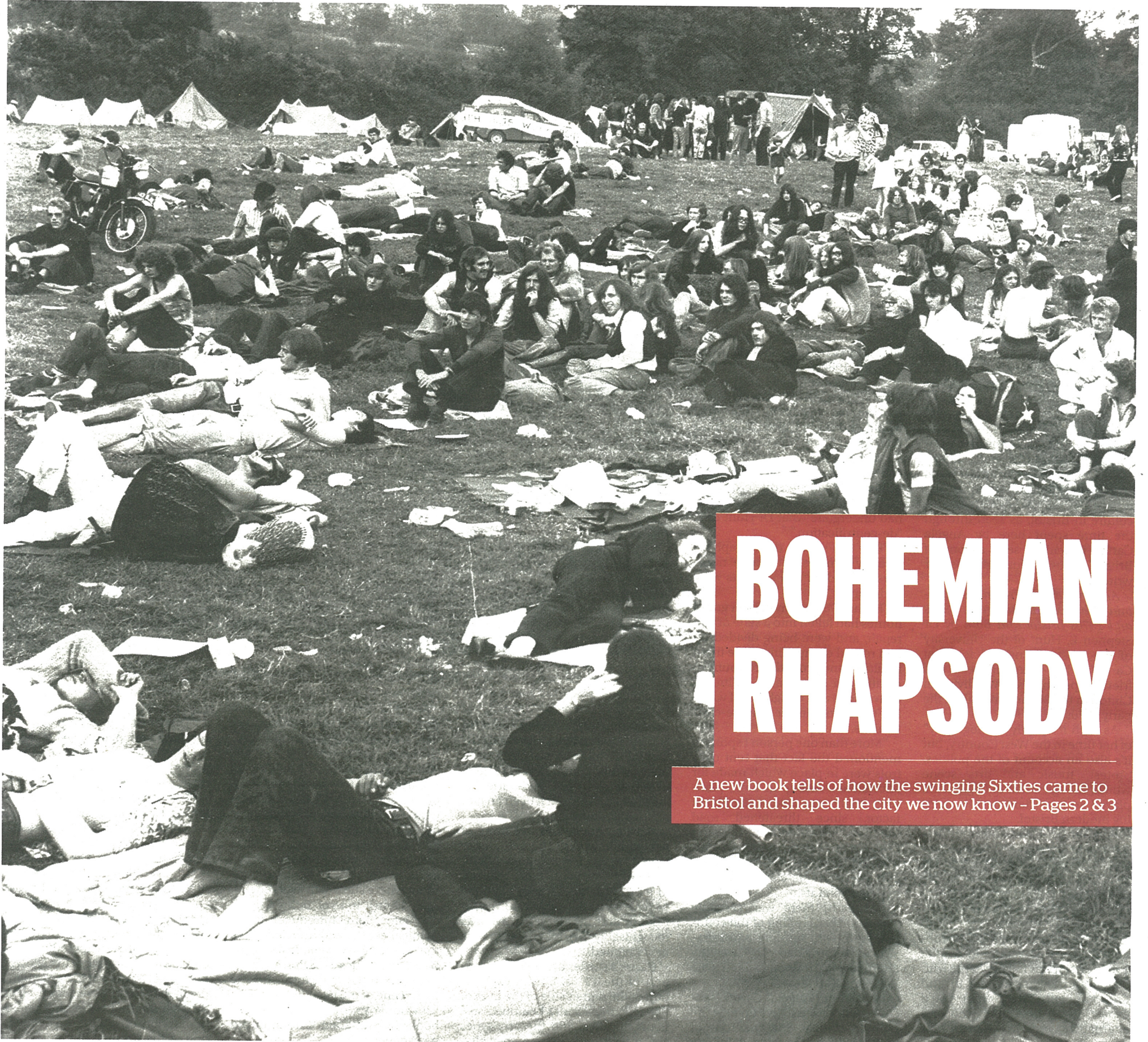
Beating night-blindness while using up a glut of vegetables, we bring you carrot powder in the making - Page 7

LATIMER'S DIARY:

Our columnist suggests resurrecting the World War II Holidays at Home, and hosting the Gramophone Van - Page 8

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BOHEMIAN RHAPSODY

A new book tells of how the swinging Sixties came to Bristol and shaped the city we now know - Pages 2 & 3

'A provincial Bohemia' How Clifton's

A new book about the time novelist Angela Carter spent living in Bristol and Bath is not just an author biography, but a splendid account of how the Swinging Sixties came to Bristol. **Eugene Byrne**, our man tuning in, turning on and falling over, reports.

DID you know that Keith Floyd, budding Clifton restaurateur and future TV star, took part in an anti-Vietnam war film scripted by Bristolians Bob Baker and Keith Martin, who would later create "radio detective" *Shoestring* as well as episodes of *Dr Who*?

Did you know that the Berkeley Café on Queens Road used to be a meeting place for local hippies and acid-heads? And that one of its frequent customers was a man who once walked around Clifton in a suit made of newspapers and whose racing tips always had the customers rushing off to the bookies because he was never wrong?

Or were you aware that there was a local cult, made up initially in the Lansdown pub as a joke, called Mojoism, which gathered a fair number of followers fascinated by the idea that Mojoist poetry was so powerful you had to shield yourself against it? (It's OK. None of the people behind it had any idea what all this nonsense was about either)

These are just a few of the yarns and nuggets in the first proper history of the 1960s and 70s counterculture in Bristol, as seen through the time spent here by Angela Carter, nowadays seen as one of Britain's most influential postwar writers.

Angela Carter's *'Provincial Bohemia: The Counterculture in 1960s and 1970s Bristol and Bath'* by Dr Stephen E. Hunt of the University of the West of England looks at Carter's life, experiences and friendships while she was living in Clifton in the 60s and in Bath in the early 1970s.

As such it's partly a "biography" of her time in the West Country, but it's also an account of the politics, protest, music and arts scene which, though small to begin with, played an important part in shaping modern Bristol.

Folk music, CND and anti-Vietnam war campaigns, student activism, feminism, anarchism and art all fed into a "scene" which was one of the most vibrant in the country outside of London - Carter called it a "provincial Bohemia".

Anyone under the age of 50 probably has some vague idea that 1960s Bristol was full of people with beads and kaftans tuning in and dropping out. That's what you'd expect, given how many hip and alternative types live here nowadays.

But for anyone who was here at the time, the memories are more likely to be of an altogether more mundane place, where new concrete office blocks sprung up next to bomb-sites, a place where many, many more people worked in factories than nowadays, making anything from cigarettes to Concorde.

If there was ever a Summer of Love in Bristol, the *Post* must have missed it. The only photo in the *Post* library captioned "Flower Power" is of a daisy-garlanded hippo at Bristol Zoo. You have to work quite hard to find local news stories of drug-taking.

But this was the Bristol that Angela Carter dwelled in for nine years.

Carter and her first husband Paul were almost middle-class clichés of the early 1960s. They were into folk music, socialism and banning the bomb. When they moved here it was almost inevitable that they would end up in Clifton (a ground floor flat in Royal York Crescent).

Clifton in the 1960s was popular with educated younger incomers who would in due course oversee its gentrification. But at the time, it had undergone what Dr Hunt calls "de-gentrification."

"Due to a shift in demographics, wealthy families with large numbers of children and servants were in decline.

"By the 1960s many of their grand homes had fallen into a state of disrepair, and were being divided up and rented cheap. This made them available and attractive to younger, creative, in some cases politically active, sons and daughters of working-class and lower middle-class families.

"More than one person I spoke to mentioned the fact that rent controls were in place which made for affordable housing. In Bath, planning blight was also a significant factor, since threatened road schemes drove down property prices and making similarly opulent buildings available to squatters and lower-middle class and working-class tenants.

"[In Bath] there was certainly also some bankrolling of the counterculture with funding and infrastructure provided by wealthy alternative patrons such as Charlie Ware and Karl Jaeger."

In Clifton, Angela Carter self-consciously tried to live up to some Bohemian ideal. She aped one of her heroines, the singer Juliette



Members of Bristol CND going to demonstrate at Aldermarston in the early 1960s

Greco, and dressed in black. One of Hunt's interviewees also tells us that for a while she was never to be seen without an enormous grey handbag which, said friends, looked like it had once been an elephant's scrotum!

Her first novel, and two more of her earlier works, *Shadow Dance* (1966), *Several Perceptions* (1968) and *Love* (1971) are often referred to as the "Bristol Trilogy" as they were written when she was living in Clifton, and all are set in what is recognisably Bristol, though it is never named.

Carter's stories are not a celebration of the 1960s, but an exploration of the darker side of the lives of the folk musicians, beatniks, students, hippies, and the arty types she would have known so well -

people for whom ideals of love and peace could, and sometimes did, spill over into pointless casual sex and startling violence.

Carter's Bristol was often a place of junk shops, dingy cafes and pubs with overflowing ashtrays, but other places appear - Cabot Tower and Brandon Hill, the sparkling new Mecca Leisure Centre in Frogmore Street, with its Locarno Ballroom where she briefly worked.

Dr Hunt's tour of Boho Bristol, and later Bath, introduces us to political causes and artistic scenes that Carter knew well, from Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament marches to the folk clubs and the rock scene of the later 1960s.

In doing so, he doesn't just use books by and about Carter, or old newspaper articles.

"The most interesting part was speaking to people who knew Angela Carter personally, and who moved within similar circles in Bristol and Bath.

"The whole project started following a conversation with one of the novelist's old drinking friends from the 1960s, Dave Lawton. Sadly, this was at the funeral of Heathcote Williams, himself one of the great characters of the English counterculture. Dave was one of many people I spoke to who knew Angela before she left Bristol in 1969, and who were incredibly generous with their time. This allowed me to get some of the first-hand detail that could never be revealed through internet research alone. A description of what it was like sitting in the Carters' flat, anecdotes

hippies helped shape modern Bristol

Author's own story snuffed out in its prime

ANGELA Carter (1940-1992) was born in Eastbourne, but spent her early childhood living with her grandmother in Yorkshire to escape wartime bombing. On leaving school she followed her father's profession and became a journalist on *The Croydon Advertiser*.

At the age of 18, she later recalled, "I looked like a 30-year old divorcee. I was shy, immature, insensitive, selfish, pain-in-the-neck, way-out and terribly unhappy. I didn't even have the self-confidence to get away with being a pain-in-the-neck. In my condition then, being a reporter was a contradiction in terms."

She met Paul Carter, an industrial chemist who introduced her to folk music and induced her to go on Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament marches with him.

They married in 1960 and she followed him to Bristol, where he had secured a teaching job, not long afterwards.

As a journalist, she naturally applied for a job on the *Post*, but was turned down. She was also rejected by the BBC and George's bookshop.

According to one of her biographers, her reaction was: "I must strive to be an artist, after all," though in later years she certainly contributed articles to the local papers.

She enrolled to study English Literature at Bristol University, specialising in medieval literature, as she disliked the 1960s fashion for relevance, realism and social comment in literature. She always preferred fairy tales and magic and derided the contemporary fashions in fiction as the "eat up your broccoli" school.

Her first novel, *Shadow Dance*



(sometimes also known as *Honeybuzzard* from the name of one of its principal characters) was written during one of the university summer vacations and published in 1966, to some critical acclaim.

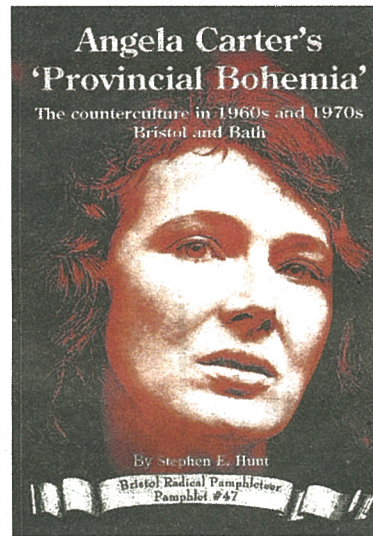
Two more followed quickly, *The Magic Toyshop* (1967), which is probably her best-known work, and *Several Perceptions* (1968).

The latter book won her a literary prize which had to be spent on foreign travel, and in 1969 she moved to Japan - to join a lover, she said. She and her husband were divorced on her return in 1972.

On her return from Japan she lived in Bath for a while before moving to London and living with potter Mark Pearce, whom she married in 1991, some years after they had a child together.

Carter wrote a number of other novels, now far less realistic than her earlier work and in tune with the fashion for "magic realism" of the late 20th century. She also collaborated with film director Neil Jordan in filming her story *The Company of Wolves*. She also wrote the script for a film version of *The Magic Toyshop* which came out three years later.

It was really only after her death of lung cancer at the age of just 51 that her reputation began to grow.



Top, sun worshippers at the Glastonbury Free Festival in 1971. Bottom left, Royal York Crescent, Clifton, where Angela Carter and her husband lived in the 1960s. Bottom right, the cover of the book Angela Carter's 'Provincial Bohemia'

and jokes and who some of the characters in her first novel were and where the events took place."

Some will tell you that Bristol, and perhaps Canterbury, were the only English places outside of London which saw the emergence of any visible alternative culture in the 1960s and 70s.

Was there something in the water? What made Bristol so special? Dr Hunt cites all manner of different possible influences. The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament politicised a lot of young people, and it inspired a whole cultural scene that evolved in parallel, including folk music. But technical developments came, too, such as amplified music and even offset lithography.

"Such factors brought rebellion

and new forms of creativity together, making for elements of an 'alternative' society, many aspects of which have since become mainstream.

"All of these changes were evident in the Bristol counterculture and were embraced by Angela Carter over the years. The Carters and their friends marched at Aldermaston and were not just consumers but a driving force behind the local folk revival scene.

"By the later 1960s Angela Carter was watching local performances by Bob Dylan and The Who and reviewing them for the local papers. Rock bands such as the likes of East of Eden, Magic Muscle and Stackridge emerged from the crescents of Clifton and surrounding streets."

Bristol also went along its own path, parallel to but separate from,

London. Hunt emphasises that the city was psychologically much more distant from London back then as the English section of the M4 wasn't completed until 1971.

"It was far enough from London to develop its own cultural scene, yet near enough for to-ing and fro-ing so that there was an exchange of people, ideas and general grooviness."

One result of this was the free festival scene: "The ... Victoria Park free festival in Bath in 1970 and the 1971 Downs festival in Clifton were two of the first in England. Following Woodstock, these were pioneering countercultural events launching an era that probably reached its peak with the Stonehenge People's Free Festival of 1984 and its unhappy demise fol-

lowing the so-called "Battle of the Beanfield" the next year."

While Angela Carter left, many of those who were part of the scene in the 60s are still around, and would go on to creative careers.

One of Hunt's interviewees was scriptwriter and filmmaker Bob Baker. He grew up in St George and trained as a stonemason but ended up in Clifton. He worked on *Some People*, Clive Donner's 1962 feature film about the Bristol music scene. He also worked with Director John Boorman, who worked for the BBC in Bristol during the early 1960s making documentaries such as the legendary *The Newcomers*, featuring Bristol writer A. C. H. Smith, Alison Smith and playwright Tom Stoppard.

For Baker, anything seemed pos-

sible in Clifton in the 60s: "There was an air of almost repressed art, people that desperately wanted to do things but hadn't thought they could do it, somehow the 60s let them free. The Beatles were the example of the dawning of the greatness of the working-class grammar school boy, they had the grounding in working-class but then had the imagination to take it further and I felt I was one of those. I'd gone to a secondary modern school."

» *Angela Carter's 'Provincial Bohemia': The Counterculture in 1960s and 1970s Bristol and Bath* by Dr Stephen E. Hunt is published by Bristol Radical History Group, price £10 including p&p. For details and online sales, see <https://tinyurl.com/ybrpm2as>

Pictures: Bristol Post/Mirrorpix