

Statements on the Colston statue

From the recent past....

BBC News 13 June 2014

A Bristol concert hall that shares its name with that of a 17th Century slave trader is considering a name change. Colston Hall bosses say the venue was named after the street it is on rather than Edward Colston.

Chief Executive **Louise Mitchell**, said: "We will be thinking very carefully about what we should call our new facility." The proposal comes as fresh calls were made over why Bristol has places bearing the slave trader's name.

Ms Mitchell added: "I think the time has come to do that and I think a time has come to put this matter to rest. "I think we should be looking to enhance the cultural life of our city rather than harking back to things which clearly are reprehensible, which none of us can condone."

A venue spokesperson added the name change was a long-term discussion as part of an ongoing fundraising campaign to build a new auditorium. Edward Colston invested in a slave trade company for 11 years and was an active slave trader.

He also gave money to charitable causes across Bristol. But there has been ongoing controversy about how he is remembered in Bristol due to his slave trade past.

A statue of Colston has an inscription, describing him as "virtuous and wise" without reflecting his role in slavery.

The issue has been reignited after former journalist, **Mike Gardner**, wrote to The Guardian questioning why Colston was celebrated in Bristol.

Mr Gardner said: "They're never going to rename everything, that's not possible, but on the statue there should be something that would at least acknowledge his role in the slave trade and the evil deeds he did."

Bristol City councillor **Simon Cook** said: "We should celebrate the diversity of the city which makes the city so vibrant and move forward from this issue. The council has said it was not aware of any plans to change the inscription on the statue or any plans to reflect the city's link with slavery."

Eugene Byrne (Bristol Times Editor)

29th September 2020 Bristol Post supplement

"I am not, and never have been, a member of the Colston fan club. I wrote articles in the 1980s and 1990s calling for the statue to go and for the Hall to be renamed. I may be a miserable old white bloke with high blood pressure (I believe this qualifies me as a 'gammon') but no-one can accuse me of being on the bandwagon that I actually helped to build."

Throughout the 1980s and 90s Eugene was a journalist and Deputy Editor for *Venue* Magazine in Bristol. He is now the editor of the *Bristol Post* local history supplement *Bristol Times*.

David Olusoga (Professor and TV Presenter)

10th January 2021 Desert Island Discs (24:30) BBC Radio 4

Speaking about the Edward Colston statue:

“I wish it had been removed 20 to 30 years ago by the authorities, and it would have been if there had not been people in Bristol determined to defend the life of a mass murderer.”

11th January 2021 *Bristol Post*

In a review of his appearance on Desert Island Discs (BBC Sounds) Olusoga repeated his support for protestors who toppled the statue of 17th century slave trader Edward Colston and pushed it into the city’s harbour:

“I think his statue pretended that the only story about him was his philanthropy,” he said. “Undoubtedly he was a man who gave lots of money to Bristol, but that money came from slavery. And that statue told one side of his story and denied the existence of his victims. I think that was an appalling thing to have on public display. It was always something that bothered me about Bristol and I think Bristol is a better place without it.”

No British city is more wilfully blind to its history than Bristol. Having lived in Liverpool and London, two cities whose connections to slavery run deep, I can say that Bristol stands head and shoulders above the competition in its capacity to obscure its past and obfuscate its history. (Olusoga 2017)

I was told, in hushed tones, by one of the first black people I got to know in Bristol, about the statue of the slave trader down in the city centre. As a historian, I inevitably began to read about Colston’s role in the Royal African Company (RAC), the most prolific slave-trading company in British history. He was an investor and a board member of the RAC, eventually becoming deputy governor, and during his period it is estimated that about 84,000 Africans were shipped to lives of misery and torment in the Americas. Of that 84,000, only about 65,000 reached the plantations. About a quarter, 19,000, perished chained to the slave decks of the RAC’s ships. Slave traders such as Colston called these deaths “wastage”.

Knowing all this and seeing Colston every day, there on his pedestal – combined with the city’s wealth and Georgian pomp, which was intimidating for someone from my background – made me feel that this was a city I would struggle to ever call home. (Olusoga 2020)

Marti Burgess

12th October 2018 *The Telegraph*

Marti Burgess, a Trustee of the Black South West Network, who, at the start of this year, became the very first black member of the Society of Merchant Venturers, described in 2018 the impact the statue had on her:

“I walk past it every day in my hometown and it looks like we are wanting to celebrate somebody who did what he did, and as someone of Jamaican descent, we shouldn’t memorialise someone who made money off the backs of enslaved Africans.”

"Wherever you go to other parts of the world, you see a lot of recognition of history, and I was shocked at how much they've got to challenge you as a tourist or visitor, from somewhere like Germany or Poland to America"

Thangam Debbonaire (MP for Bristol West)

12th October 2018 *Bristol Post*

"Edward Colston statue should be removed says Bristol MP"

In 2018, during Black History Month, Thangam Debbonaire, the MP for Bristol West, called for the removal of the statue during an event at City Hall, saying:

"Having statues of people who oppressed us is not a good thing to be saying to black people in this city... Edward Colston did many things, but he was not completely defined by that, and it's an important part of saying to black people in the city 'you are welcome'."

Statue's fall (Sian Berry)

7th June 2020 Twitter

"Orderly" people seldom make history, Home Secretary. I'm sorry, but justice is what happened to the statue and was long overdue. I really hope no-one faces action as a result of determinedly carrying out this important act of protest.

Statue's fall (Caroline Lucas, MP)

8th June 2020 Twitter

Pulling down a statue which glorified a man who enriched himself by enslaving thousands is not "thuggery" Those of us opposed to racism won't stand for Priti Patel's attempt to delegitimise the overdue toppling of a statue which caused daily offence to so many people in Bristol.

Statue's fall (Sir Keir Starmer, MP)

8th June 2020 Twitter/France 24

Keir Starmer, the leader of the main opposition Labour party, said it was "completely wrong" to pull down the statue in that way. But he said that in view of Colston's role as a top official in the Royal African Company in the late 17th century, it should have been removed "a long time ago" and put in a museum. "This was a man who was responsible for 100,000 people being moved from Africa to the Caribbean as slaves, including women and children who were branded on their chests with the name of the company he ran," he told LBC radio.

Statue's fall (Lewis Hamilton)

8th June 2020 Twitter/France 24

British Formula 1 icon Lewis Hamilton threw his weight behind the protesters, writing on Instagram: "TEAR THEM ALL DOWN. Everywhere." "Edward Colston was a monster who bought, sold and traded Africans, human beings, and forced them into slavery until they died. I'm proud of the activists and organisers in Bristol," he added.

Statue's fall (David Lammy, MP)

8th June 2020 Twitter/France 24

I don't ever condone criminal acts. I have seen too many burnt buildings, burnt cars, people who have lost everything, in riots. But it is shameful to treat a slave trader like Edward Colston as an icon. The statue should have come down a long time ago in a democratic way.

Statue's fall (Molly Scott Cato, South West MEP)**11th August 2020 Twitter**

Just as the images of the toppling of the statue of Edward Colston went around the world from Bristol, so the movement for reparations is gaining ground in that city, the city that shamefully invented the triangular trade. Green Councillor Cleo Lake has called on Bristol Mayor Marvin Rees to support calls for an All-Party Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry for Truth & Reparatory Justice to 'acknowledge, apologise and instigate reparations for the Transatlantic Traffic of Enslaved Africans'. A former Lord Mayor of the city, she was swift to remove a portrait of Colston from her office and she intends to take the struggle on by submitting a motion to council not just supporting the national inquiry but also requiring the Merchant Venturers – inheritors of the wealth and power of slavery in the city – to be excluded from all future decision-making. Senior church leaders at Bristol Cathedral have said they 'need to look closely and urgently' at the future of a huge stained glass window dedicated to slave trader Edward Colston. The presence of the window has long been the subject of controversy, with the cathedral previously resisting pressure to remove it over the past few years.

'Reaction to toppling of slave trader statue' video published June 13th 2020 on YouTube**Ex Colston Girls' Student**

...and we'd have to wear his favourite flower on our blazers, we'd have to sing his favourite hymns and we'd have to eat a Colston bun and give 5 pence, it was all tradition and we weren't allowed to even discuss really what we did, where he got his money from and we all kind of knew it was all very hushed down and that was really quite difficult for all of the students to know what we were celebrating but with these hushed closed doors. So yeah, to see that happen yesterday, unfortunately I wasn't there but oh my gosh it was the most elating thing'

Ross Wilson, Bristolian

'It seemed such a formidable presence and yet the lifting of it and the moving of it seemed quite effortless. But it has taken the younger generation, I kinda think it for them to calve their future in a city that promises better returns and actually stands up in solidarity to injustices that have been a hallmark for 100's of years in the city, the social and racial inequalities and injustices – so it did feel like a new dawn'

Marvin Rees elected Mayor of Bristol

A 'piece of historical poetry' ...

John Amaechi former NBA basketball player and Psychologist on *This Morning* ITV June 8th 2020

'I find it convenient that people are able to separate so clearly so long as there's 100 years or so between the time of their existence and now. To separate so clearly between the misdeeds of a person and their contribution. I find it intriguing that nobody is calling for a statue of Jimmy Saville despite what he did for charity because they know you can't separate out a serial predator from his gifts'

Phillip Schofield 'was it right that it ended up in the harbour?'

John Amaechi 'I would have preferred a recycling option'

***The Felling of Colston* – a documentary on the Edward Colston statue and BLM in Bristol July 5th 2020**

Daniel Edmunds Speaker Bristol BLM protest June 7th 2020

'I love this city. I'm incredibly proud of this city and to see the ripple effect its' had. I remember coming back home from the protest and my friends in Oakland and Tennessee were messaging me about it...it literally went round the world before I had gotten home....and so this small city in England that a lot of people didn't even know existed, to have that type of impact, it really does speak to the beauty and the power and the influence that Bristol has....Yes he contributed money to the city, Adolf Hitler contributed money to Germany, where are we going with this conversation...bad people do good things....people say if it wasn't for Churchill I'd be speaking German right know, which is probably true, but recognise that I am speaking English right know and that's not my native tongue'

David Olusoga

'I know people who are of West Indian heritage who live in Bristol, who talk about the genuine emotions they feel when they walk under the statue of the man who was the governor of the Royal Africa Company, the company that transported more of their ancestors into slavery than any other company in British history. I believe them when they say it hurts them, that they feel humiliated by Colston on his pillar'

'The statue says he's a 'wise and virtuous son', he's not wise, he's not virtuous...he's a killer'

Nelson – Bristol Resident

'this has been going on too long, too long, I've got grandchildren now – that's a lot of people man, that's a lot of pain. I've been passing that statue for years, it's evil, evil...and it was the young kids again...look how far they dragged it....look at how far they pushed it....look where it ended up'

Tiffany – One of the organisers of the Bristol BLM protest:

'We really did make history that day, as a community, as Bristolians'

Lanie – Street Mural Artist

'it was a powerful, sad but beautiful day. I felt lucky all day which is ridiculous, but I felt lucky that I was able to spend the day protesting and I was allowed to do that and I wasn't beaten by the police, or racist citizens, that went through my mind particularly looking at America and the fight for equality, for black lives'

Interview with Dr Shawn Sobers (University of the West of England): on BLM, Colston' statue and the role of the arts against racism https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gcf83dUNZ_o

'I wasn't there on the day of the march...so I first heard about the Colston statue falling, a friend messaged me and said it had fallen, I was like what! Really? You know it's definitely a wow, gosh moment and then she sent me a link to it and I looked at Facebook there was the link to it falling'

'I was giddy with it really, is this really going on? It was an unbelievable wow moment and I was gobsmacked, it was really like watching television.....I didn't even think it would happen on that day it just hadn't crossed my mind really. You know I've been working on issues related to the Colston statue for over 20 years, television documentaries, I've written about it, I've published about it.....so to see it come down it's like well good on 'em, we've been trying to get this thing down for 20 years. It's really important to say the statue is a symbol, the statue is not gonna end racism...but it's a symbol of how the city wants to tell its story, how it wants to be seen, part of the fabric of the city. I wrote a paper last year and it looks at the statue and different artists that responded to the statue. There's a particular painting by Tony Forbes in the M Shed gallery. It's a very powerful painting.....I first interviewed Tony Forbes about that painting 20 years ago when he made it and he talks very explicitly about how in the painting he's on a ship, The Mathew, owned by Cabot, and Colston's statute is behind him on the ship and it's dragging him into the river Avon with chains tied around him....the statue which is the effigy of Colston was literally killing Tony Forbes the artist.

'The only way the statue could have ever redeemed itself would have been to have a plaque on there which talks about the honest, other story about Colston's involvement with the Royal African Company and the slave trade. But we tried, Madge Dresser and other historians in the city have tried to re-write that plaque and the council were onboard and then too many people got involved and then it got denied, that was just a couple of years ago and there's been other people trying, going through a legal process – in the end the people spoke for themselves, in the end the people took it on themselves - it was very targeted, they didn't take down anything else that day they could have done, there's Colston Hall, there's lots of other things called Colston within reach, but they went there very specifically, they took down the statue, put it in the river and carried on the march and then went home.

So I was very proud of them, I have to be honest, I thought yeah! They did it perfectly'

Guy Hampton, Head Teacher, Hampton Court House Independent School - whole school Assembly via Zoom June 9th 2020

'A symbol of injustice for many was the statue erected in Bristol at the end of the 19th century to honour Edward Colston. But where did he get his money from? Well much of it was from the transportation and the buying and selling of slaves. Which, to modern sensibilities, it is offensive to see a statue erected in honour of such a man. On Saturday, in full view of the police, the statue was pulled down and rolled into the water, into the harbour. The Home secretary Priti Patel.....said 'the actions were shameful and has warned those responsible you fill face justice....'

Curiously the police commander in charge that day, Superintendent Andy Bennett, commented later that he could see criminal damage taking place in front of him and yet he ordered his police officers to stand back and do nothing and in a statement he said 'Whilst I do not condone criminal damage of any sort I fully support the actions of my officers they responded with common sense, sound judgement and in the best interests of public safety, and he went on 'can you imagine scenes of police in Bristol fighting with protestors who were damaging the statue of a man who is reputed to have gathered much of his fortune through the slave trade'. This officer knew what the correct police response would be, but he chose not to act and he would argue that he asked himself not what the correct legal response was but what he felt was the right thing to do. The officer has been vilified by some, by encouraging turning a blind eye to lawlessness, by failing to control the crowd.

My question for you is ‘if you were the commissioner of police what would you do? If one of your officers failed to enforce the law; failed to stop criminal damage taking place by allowing the protestors to roll this statue into the water. What action would you take? Did this police superintendent do the right thing?....then you might ask, once the protestors are identified and brought to a criminal; court before a jury what might happen then?

This is one for you all to discuss today with you family and friends.

Richard Eddy Conservative Councillor Bristol City Council

Bristol Post 23rd July 2018

Speaking of the proposed ‘corrective’ plaque on the Colston statue:

"I have never been a believer in taking the law into one's own hands. However, if this partisan and nauseous plaque is approved, I cannot find it in my heart to condemn anyone who damages or removes it"

Two years later BLM demonstrators followed Eddy’s advice and removed the “partisan and nauseous” statue altogether.

University of Bristol Labour Club

7th June 2020 Twitter

We wholeheartedly endorse the destruction of Edward Colston’s statue. May he rot at the bottom of the same harbour his slave ships docked in for many years to come. We also use this opportunity to call on Bristol University to come clean about its history

Link to the full statement:

https://docs.google.com/document/u/0/d/1jNHoUqnLuwdiS_H9JII8RAyP30kjEzv63_R38Uv6-Ro/mobilebasic

BCfm (Local Radio Station)

7th June 2020 Twitter

As Bristol’s first community radio station we have been at the forefront of the campaign to rename The Colston Hall and to have Edward Colston’s statue removed from prominent display. We succeeded with the former, with the Hall soon to emerge with a new name. We cannot however take credit for, nor have even predicted the Colston statue’s forced toppling and re-location which occurred today. Hundreds of years of cruelty, inequality, indifference & procrastination towards our black brothers & sisters have led to the demonstrations that have been taking place across the globe. The whole world is looking on at our city and many will be asking what’s next? Only history will tell but we hope it will be both an opportunity and a catalyst for change.

Marvin Rees Mayor of Bristol

8th June 2020 Twitter

We’re preserving Black Lives Matter signs left at the former site of the Colston statue so we can tell the story of this historic moment for our city at M Shed museum

Sadiq Khan Mayor of London

Sky News 8th June 2020

‘I think our Home Secretary and our Prime Minister should try and walk in the shoes of a black person in Bristol who on a daily basis sees somebody commemorated, celebrated who was a slaver.

Who was responsible for enslaving 84 000 here and around the world, and throwing overboard 20 000 innocent, black men, women and children and I find the lack of empathy from our Prime Minister and Home Secretary breath taking’.

Marvin Rees mayor of Bristol

LBC Radio 8th June 2020

‘We’ll go and retrieve the statue at some point and more than likely take it to a museum where we understand history, it tells us the story, it gives us the opportunity to interact with history, to grapple with it and we’ll put it in a place where we can understand the statue. Understand what it meant in the time it was on the plinth, understand what happened around it, grappling with history like that does not mean you support or oppose but grappling with history is what we must do as we move forward to build our future.’

Bristol City Council job advert, Commission on Race Equality-Commissioner, Voscur job website closing date Aug 27th 2020

Today, the current awareness of the impact of Covid-19 on BAME communities, the global reaction to the murder of George Floyd, and the toppling of the statue of Colston provides a context in which recognition of racial injustice is at its highest for many years. It is against this background that CoRE must provide leadership in addressing structural and systemic racism.

Dr Kehinde Andrews interviewed on LBC

June 7th 2020

Dr Andrews ‘This was a long-standing campaign ‘Colston Must Fall’ to bring down the statue.

Interviewer ‘so people have been saying they want to get rid of this statue for years and years?’

Dr Andrews ‘Yeah, it’s not new thing and it reminds us that the protests aren’t just about police brutality in America it’s about racism here and Edward Colston really does represent the deep links to racism and slavery in the UK’

Interviewer ‘What’s your view on the statue?’

Dr Andrews ‘I think it’s time, about time if we want a modern society that represents where we are now we need to get rid of these statues and monuments to the past, Edward Colston was a slave trader why would you want to support and revere a slave trader?’

Roy Hackett (Veteran activist and one of the organisers of the 1963 Bus Boycott)

I do not agree activism wise in this great and good strategy for Countering Colston. The events of 7th June 2020 were that of people power. I am interested in hearing and amplifying ordinary person’s voice as they process events for themselves, which is what I have undertaken to do. Isn’t it incumbent on all of us to make sense of this monumental event for ourselves?

As I write this down names we came up with I am conscious these are all middle age older people like ourselves, which is fine but the march was full of young people and certainly from my interactions with younger people at the plinth on Monday many of whom said they were on the June March and from my presence at the plinth on 1st August I have personally witnessed how this

younger generation affirm vis a vis Black Lives Matter and brutal annihilation of George Floyd, their understanding of the corrosive and enduring effect of racism as a stain on all our humanity

There are many narratives to account for the city's woes and people have different experiences, takes and agendas for the toppling. For me it is justifiable damage which has succeeded in the statue being placed where it belongs: a museum. This damage cannot equate with the enduring damage inflicted in our midst. The lack of humanity afforded the memory of black African lives, brutalised and murdered through the activities of Bristol merchants, factors and plantation owners how they are bigged up in monuments, memory yet crimes against humanity ignored underplayed.

The persistence of white supremacy as an ideology; how this rears its ugly head in attacks and murders in the city, the persistence of racial and social inequalities and disadvantage .

Some Expressions of support obtained for the Colston 4 from passers-by, January 4 2021 2.00pm at the Emancipation plinth.

Anon: 'May light be always on your side, and justice prevail'

Anon: 'At least I won't have to see that fucking slave trader on my way to work anymore'

Jemima (age 12): Black Lives Matter X heart X heart

Joe (age 30): I want to send my gratitude to the people who participated in the toppling of the Colston statue. It was never an erasing of culture but creating a better informed history. I think Marcus Rashford should be up there, (on the plinth) someone of colour to reflect our multi-racial society.

Chris Smith: Power to the people. Equality is Quality.

Ros Martin, artist, playwright and activist

11 January 2020

We take control of colonisation and slavery's transatlantic narrative and legacies in our city through our actions of repair, reflection, remembrance the calling forth and honouring of African ancestors, whose blood and brutalised lives in plantation in the Caribbean and Americas built up the wealth of this city.

Linking past and present we can vision a better future, one in which we move from being mere bystanders to calling out and actioning a more just Bristol for all.

The toppling of the Colston statue on 7th June is the unfinished business of a now discredited memory of slavery in the city tainted in monuments to the so called 'great and good of the city', epitomising all that is self-serving and disingenuous about the wielding of power, not just in the past but currently in our midst.

Thank you for pulling down the statue, such a burden lifted. Onwards in struggle.