

Bristol (1941-1943)

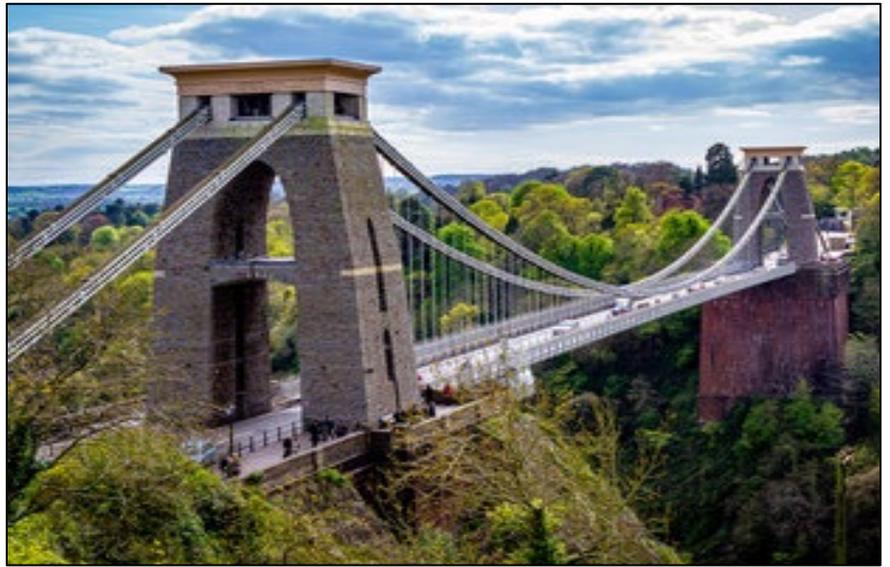
[Numbers in brackets correspond to the numbers on the map below.]

[1] **The Coppice.** In October 1941 Barbara had to register for war service, and in December she took a job with the Censorship in Bristol. Hilary was working for the BBC in Bristol and living in a large house called The Coppice [now called Leigh House, on North Road, Leigh Woods, Bristol BS8 3PL], on the west bank of the River Avon opposite the city. The other occupants included Honor Wyatt and her children. Honor was in the process of divorcing her husband Gordon Glover, and Barbara fell madly and painfully in love with him while the two women became very close friends. Barbara observed that life at the Coppice was like something out of Chekhov.

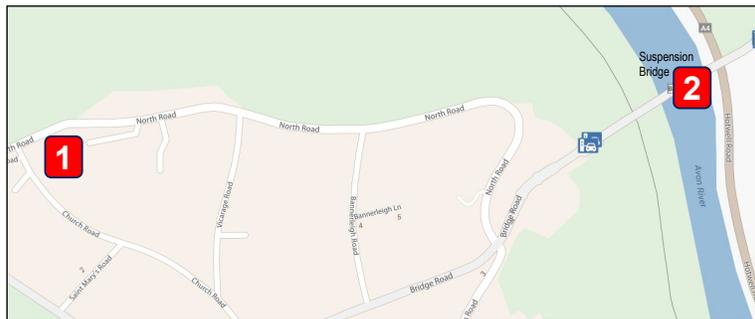
Hilary and I ... have taken a share in a big house in this most select residential district of Clifton – a really beautiful position, high up over the Suspension Bridge with the woods in front of us. We share with two families, who work with Hilary, and there are altogether six children so we know all about communal living, though the house is big enough for us to have our own sitting room and to keep ourselves to ourselves if we want to. We cook all our own meals as domestic help is nearly impossible to get now... (Letter to Henry Harvey, AVPE)



[1] *The Coppice (now Leigh House)*



[2] *Clifton Suspension Bridge*



[2] The landmark **Clifton Suspension Bridge**, opened in 1864, was designed by the famous Victorian engineer Isambard Kingdom Brunel. It spans the Avon Gorge between the Clifton neighbourhood of Bristol and Leigh Woods, site of the Coppice. Barbara would have made the 1.7-mile journey to the Censorship by bicycle or on foot most days; she mentioned walking home at night across the bridge, ‘lovely in the moonlight.’

[3] *Today on my way home I discovered a beautiful pre-Raphaelite tomb. I had got to the top of the hill into Victoria Square when I was suddenly filled with a desire to go along the paved stone alley leading to St Andrew's Church. So I walked into it with my bicycle... And towards the end of this alley on the right hand side is the pre-Raphaelite tomb. A square, box-like affair supported by angels at the corners, and the angels are beautifully Rossetti with flowing hair parted in the middle. I can't remember who is buried there. I must notice next time I visit it, for I feel sure there will be a next time. At the end of the alley one comes upon the church, a dramatically empty shell, blitz, of course. (AVPE, 1 February 1943)*

I often pass the pre-Raphaelite tomb, or rather the path leading to it, but I have never been there again. But I will go one day. You (reader) may say, Why do you make such a thing of it all?... Well, what about your own life? Is it so full of big, wonderful things that you don't need tombs and daffodils...and occasional readings from Matthew Arnold and Coventry Patmore? (AVPE, 23 March 1943)



The parish of St Andrew's, Clifton, dates to the 12th century; the third church on the site, built in 1819-20, was destroyed on the first night of the Bristol Blitz, 24th November 1940, and the 'dramatically empty shell' that remained was demolished in 1958. The paved path through the graveyard, called Birdcage Walk, is covered by an arch of intertwining lime trees. The pre-Raphaelite tomb is that of Legh Richmond, d.1862, son of a Bedfordshire clergyman and writer of the same name.

[4] The **Royal West of England Academy's** grand Victorian building was occupied by the Censorship and other government offices during the War. Barbara describes looking out the large first-floor windows towards the Victoria Rooms directly across the road, as one still can today – food and drinks from the small café may be taken out onto the balcony.

Every time I go past the big windows leading on to the balcony I stand for a moment and look out over the stone lions, towards the Victoria Rooms and the 18 bus stop. Lately I have begun to realise that I do this and I ask myself sardonically – 'Well, and what do you expect to see?' What I do see is sometimes sunshine and crowds of people, other times the rain glancing off the lions and few people. Always a rather dreary prospect. (AVPE, 27 January 1943)

[5] Hilary Pym Walton worked at **BBC Broadcasting House**, Bristol, two blocks down Whiteladies Road from the Censorship offices at the RWA.



[4] The Royal West of England Academy (WWII Censorship offices)

