

# Dark secrets, dirty deeds and doubloons

If it's half term, it's time to introduce the kids to Bristol's piratical heritage, and help is at hand, as Eugene Byrne discovers.

**D**EAR LIVESY  
*The ship is bought and fitted.  
She lies at anchor ready for sea.  
You never imagined a sweater  
two hundred tons; name Hispaniola  
... only the crew trouble me until  
the day I get paid my pay. Fortune  
brought me the very man that I  
required ... an old sailor who keeps a  
public-house, knows all the seafaring  
men in Bristol, and had lost his  
health ashore. I engaged him on the*

*spot to be ship's cook. Long John Silver, he is called, and has lost a leg*

"She lies at anchor, ready for sea ..." If you're a true son or daughter of the port of Bristol, Squire Trelawney's letter from Bristol's Old Anchor Inn should send a shiver along your timbers, belive me.

With half term drawing up on us to start now, you may be looking about for fun and (sort of) educational things to do with the kids.

Obviously all young Bristol land-lubbers need to be told of their city's piratical history sooner or later, and one part of call this time is the Treasure Island Story Walk, courtesy of Show of Strength's Treasure Island Story Walk.

In Robert Louis Stevenson's classic yarn, Bristol is where Squire Trelawney found and fitted out the good ship Hispaniola, where Long John Silver ran a pub called The Spyglass,



■ Gerard Cooke and Nadia Williams of Show of Strength's Treasure Island Story Walk. The Merchant Venturers' Almshouses in the background, on the walk's starting point. Photograph: Zuleika Henry

and where young Jim Hawkins stepped off the coach from Devon to set sail on the greatest adventure of his life ... see, see, see for Captain Flint's buried treasure!

Led by a professional actor in period costume, the walk promises pirates and buccaneers, hidden spy holes, dark secrets, dirty deeds and lashings of doubloons.

Supported by Bristol Festival of Ideas and part of Bristol Walking Festival, the walk has been created by Show of Strength in association with the Long John Silver Trust, creators of Bristol's Treasure Island Trail ([www.longjohnsilvertrust.co.uk](http://www.longjohnsilvertrust.co.uk)). The Treasure Island Story Walk runs from Saturday May 27 to Sat-

urday, June 4 every day at 2pm and 4pm, and is suitable for families with children aged eight and over. Price: £9 adult/£5 child/£20 family + 2 children. Duration: 1hr 30 mins. No booking required; meet at the start time at the Merchant Venturers Almshouses at the junction of King Street and Prince Street (BS1 4DT). Ffi: [showofstrength.org.uk](http://showofstrength.org.uk)

## Ten things you (probably) didn't know about Bristol and Treasure Island

JUST to set the scene, we asked Show of Strength and the Long John Silver Trust to tell us some of their favourite "Treasure Island" facts, and here they are:

### 1. The Admiral Benbow

"Treasure Island" starts in Devon, at the Admiral Benbow inn, the home of young Jim Hawkins. But it's a name with roots in a real person. Admiral Benbow was a 17th century naval officer and privateer, the polite word for a pirate - who sailed from Bristol. And in the 21st century there are still Admiral Benbows around - there's one in Penzance.

### 2. Trelawney

In the book, Squire Trelawney comes to Bristol from Devon, to find a ship and fit it out for the voyage to Treasure Island. A real Jonathan Trelawney from Cornwall became Bishop of Bristol in 1835. Thirty years later he was one of seven bishops imprisoned in the Tower of London by the Catholic James II. "And shall Trelawney die, and shall Trelawney die, then 20,000 Cornishmen will want to have the revenge which they have sought." But the Cornish were still exhausted from the Civil War, and there was no march on London. The Bishops were charged with seditionibus libel - and acquitted. The church bells rang in Bristol, fires were lit and in Cornwall they fired canon. Soon after William of Orange took over the throne and James II fled, never to return.

### 3. Blackbeard

There's even a link with Blackbeard, the most infamous pirate in the world - who came from Bristol. Israel Hands is a pirate in "Treasure Island" - he's the coxswain who takes over when the mate, Mr Arrow, mys-



• 1911  
Illustration of Long John Silver, Cap'n Flint and Jim Hawkins

terically vanishes on the voyage. Israel Hands was a real pirate, a shipmate of Blackbeard's, and may also have come from Bristol.

### 4. Dead man's chest

In "Treasure Island" the pirates sing:

*Yo-ho-ho and a bottle of rum!  
Drink and the devil had done for the rest.  
Yo-ho-ho and a bottle of rum!*

Robert Louis Stevenson got the

idea for this song from Charles Kingsley author of *The Water-Babies*. In another book, Kingsley included Dead Man's Chest as an island in the West Indies. Stevenson later said, "*Treasure Island* came out of Kingsley's *At Last: A Christmas in the West Indies* (1871), which got the 'Dead Man's Chest' that was the seed."

Charles Kingsley, like Jim Hawkins, came from Devon and later moved to Bristol - where he was educated at Bristol Grammar School. And while Jim Hawkins left Hotwells to

for Treasure Island, Charles Kingsley stayed in the city where, at the age of 12, he witnessed the Bristol Riots in Queen Square in 1831.

### 5. The Spyglass

Long John Silver was a Bristol man, who kept an inn called The Spyglass, in the docks. Stevenson is thought to have based The Spyglass on the Hole in the Wall of Welsh Backs - still there today. Hole in the Wall is a sort of spy hole, or abutment, that allows you to look out without being seen. Ports were dangerous places then and the spy hole - which is unique to Bristol - allowed you to keep a watch for the big galleons or slave traders, who frequently dragged away likely suspects and forced them on board to work as crew.

### 6. Barbecue

Bristol's Long John Silver leaves The Spyglass to join the Hispaniola as ship's cook - where his nickname is 'Barbecue'. Stevenson wrote the book in the 1880s, but set it over a century earlier. Surely the mid-1700s were a bit early for barbecues? But he did say he had a taste for meat, so Stevenson got it right - although he doesn't mention what kind of meat. Barbecue didn't mean sausages, and it didn't mean burgers either at least not the usual kind. 'Barbecue' was pirate slang for human meat - what you might be reduced to if you were cast adrift and starving.

### 7. The Captain

Squire Trelawney appoints Captain Smollett to sail the Hispaniola. Robert Louis Stevenson's hero was another writer, Tobias Smollett, whose novel 'Humphry Clinker' begins with letters from Hotwells to Bath.

### 8. Ben Gunn

The "Treasure Island" castaway Ben Gunn is based on another fictional character from Delfoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. Crusoe in turn was based on a real castaway: Alexander Selkirk, a marooned sailor rescued by Woodes Rogers, a privateer (that polite word for pirate again) who lived in Queen Square. Woodes Rogers' ship, the *Reindeer*, sank off the Welsh Backs - still there today. Hole in the Wall was a sort of spy hole, or abutment, that allows you to look out without being seen. Ports were dangerous places then and the spy hole - which is unique to Bristol - allowed you to keep a watch for the big galleons or slave traders, who frequently dragged away likely suspects and forced them on board to work as crew.

### 9. The Parrot

Captain Flint is Long John Silver's parrot, and her favourite words are, "Pieces of Eight! Pieces of Eight!". But she may have heard plenty of good Bristolian too, as the salts in the salt houses. In Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* castaway Ben Gunn had time in Bristol he might have given her some Bristol lingo - maybe, 'Alright my lubber?'

**10. The Admiral Benbow (again)**  
The unusual locations in *Treasure Island* are clear, but where was the Admiral Benbow? Stevenson says Jim Hawkins' home was by the sea in Devon, and he travels overnight to Bristol in the mail coach. The Admiral Benbow Inn, he tells us, was in Black Hill, Colston Bassett, home of Kit's Hole. There are two Black Hills on Dartmoor - both some distance from the sea. Dartmoor also has a Kit's Hole, near Lydford Gorge, again some miles inland. So it looks like the book location is probably like his "Treasure Island". Although Stevenson later said the Admiral Benbow was not far from Barnstaple - so somewhere on the North Devon Coast.