

Apron, unbleached cotton, 2012

This apron with its distinctive print comes from the CoExist 'community kitchen', a non-profit organisation which provided food-related educational activities and kitchen resources for local groups and individuals. The 'rustic' look enjoyed a new vogue at the turn of the century in reaction to the influence of computers and technological reproduction, and was associated with small scale independent enterprise and values such as sustainability, craft skills and community empowerment. Not-for-profit and Community Interest Companies enabled people to explore new ways of coordinating production and distribution of goods and services beyond the limitations of the competitive market which prevailed at the time.

Bristol Pound paper money, 2012

A rare first edition £B1, this note was found in the archives of a local artist, Jethro Brice. The Bristol Pound started out as a complementary local currency, designed to support independent business and strengthen the local economy by recirculating money within the city. It was the first city-wide local currency in the UK, and pioneered the use of electronic accounts and other features which enabled it to achieve unprecedented consumer participation. As much a cultural as an economic project, the Bristol Pound helped to foster a sense of local identity with independent business rather than large international operations.

Soil sample in plastic specimen pot, 2011

This sample was collected by a campaigner from the 'Blue Finger' region in the North East fringe of Bristol, to demonstrate the high quality of this Grade 1 agricultural land. Historically a market-garden area, it was under threat of development due to its proximity to the ring road and the M32 motorway artery. The area was home to a wealth of small projects such as the Sims Hill Community Supported Agriculture scheme, which introduced a harvest share as an alternative model for community-based food production. Local groups formed the Blue Finger Alliance to help preserve and revive the area for food growing and wildlife.

Honey jar, 2012

One of a small number of jars produced by Lawrence Weston community farm, a social and educational project on the edge of Bristol. The honey was so popular that for the first few years customers were limited to one jar per household. Projects like this, which focused on education, social inclusion, and community empowerment, helped lay the ground for the revival of urban food production on the scale we see today.

Assorted food packaging

Card, plastic. Early 21st century.

By the end of the 20th century, the majority of the global population lived in cities, while urban agriculture was still negligible. Food was grown elsewhere and shipped great distances before it was sold and consumed. For convenience, and to maximise the economic exploitation of resources and labour, food often reached the consumer in highly processed form, ready to be eaten immediately with little or no preparation. High-turnaround marketing practices and the lack of integrated systems management meant as much as a third of food products ended up as waste. This situation eventually gave rise to new projects aimed at reducing and redistributing waste food products. Meanwhile retailers competed for the attention of potential customers with the help of bright colours, shiny materials, promises, free gifts and special offers.

1. Pre-sliced apple. The fruit was rinsed with synthetised C vitamins to preserve its colour and flavour.
2. Dog treats
3. 'Chinese' style ready Meal

4. 'Weightwatchers' cookie bars. Body weight issues were widespread, and were attributed to a variety of causes, ranging from fat and sugar surpluses to processed food ingredients, lack of physical activity, emotional stress, anxiety and loneliness.
5. 'Kinder eggs'. A hollow chocolate treat with a mystery toy inside.
6. Pop-corn (puffed maize) an ancient Central American recipe modified for preparation in a 'Microwave' oven.
7. Instant 'soup' powder . Quick meals like this helped people cope with the fast-paced lifestyle.
8. Ice lollies. Packaging was often printed with designs in landscape on one face and portrait on the other, for flexible stacking on supermarket shelves.
9. Toothpaste. The promises on the carton were of questionable veracity.

Bicycle pedal, 2009

This discarded pedal appears to come from a cargo bicycle of the type used by early courier services in the Bristol region. Cycle delivery enabled rapid and sustainable distribution of produce across the city and was adopted by early urban food-growing initiatives such as the Severn Project. An ethical enterprise supporting recovery from drug and alcohol misuse, the project produced high-end vegetables and salads on disused sites and waste ground, selling to restaurants around the city.

Paper pastry bag, 2013

A paper bag collected at the 15th anniversary celebrations of the Corn Street Farmers' Market in June 2013. The first weekly market of its kind in the UK, Corn Street and others like it offered a direct route to market for many small businesses and local growers.

HHEAG volunteers at the GREENS market garden in Withywood, 2012 (photograph)

Established following an enquiry into the health and environmental needs of the local community in the late 20th century, Hartcliffe Health and Environmental Action Group was a local charity which worked to promote the mental health and wellbeing of local residents through positive life changes. The group ran courses such as horticulture, nutrition and healthy cooking, as well as growing and sourcing healthy food from local sources, bulk buying collectively to make quality food available at affordable prices. The photo was taken by one J. Drowley on the Get Growing Garden Trail, an event celebrating local food initiatives.

Designer's model for Solar 'tree' sculpture, mild steel, 2012

This item from the collections of the popular educator Dan Quiggin was constructed as a trial piece for a much larger public art installation at the Edible Futures nursery in Brislington. Designed by artist John Packer and built by community members in a series of workshops, the giant welded 'tree' structure supported an array of solar panel 'leaves' which powered a water pump irrigation system on the plot. Like many such projects Edible Futures sold high-end produce to restaurants in Bristol and focused on education and empowerment for food resilience and sovereignty.

Annotated Site Allocation map

One early scheme for urban food production involved the temporary lease of disused development sites to social enterprises such as the Severn project and others, who used the land to launch growing projects across the city. Apparently torn from a larger map, the document shows some of the disused plots provisionally earmarked for this purpose, perhaps in an informal conversation at the first stages of concept development.