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Audio trails launched in Gloucester

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A series of audio trails are bringing Gloucester's rich history to life.

They have been produced by Gloucester Civic Trust and are aimed at residents and tourists alike.

The trails feature commentary on the historic sights of Gloucester, as well as actors bringing voices from the past back to life.

There are four walks around the city centre, taking in more than 50 places of interest.

A fifth walk, which will be aimed at families, is currently being produced.

The tours include the former home of banker Jemmy Wood in Westgate Street, the old Crypt School in Southgate Street and the Bishop Hooper memorial in St Mary's Square.

Trust spokesman Hugh Worsnip said: "We are launching four audio trails, but they are not just commentaries.

"They include voices from the past and sound effects, which really bring the history to life.

"The commentaries have been done by Civic Trust member Alan Morgan, while his son Jeremy has produced the final versions with the effects and music.

"You can either pick up a handset from St Michael's Tower, or you can download files from our website to play on an MP3 player or mobile phone."

Alan Morgan said he had his scripts checked by local historian Philip Moss to ensure they were accurate.

He added: "Given time and imagination, these trails let people learn about the hidden secrets of the city, and the characters from the past."

Councillor Chris Witts, the Mayor of Gloucester, attended the launch of the scheme, which cost £35,000.

He said: "When I first heard about this I thought what a wonderful idea.

"It is great, Gloucester is such an historic city, you need to keep that history alive, and these walks help towards that. Visitors often say to me, 'You need to do more to promote Gloucester's past', and these tours are one way to do that in a digital age."

Marilyn Champion was responsible for overseeing the scheme's launch for the Civic Trust.

She said: "I must thank our sponsors on the scheme, the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Summerfield Community Trust and Gloucester City Council."

The headsets for the walks can be purchased for £5 from St Michael's Tower on the Cross, or from the Tourist Information Centre in Southgate Street, with a map included.

The headsets must be returned after the audio trail is completed.

Alternatively, the trails can be downloaded digitally by visiting the trust's website at www.gloucestercivictrust.org.

There are four audio tours available, all within the city centre.



KEEPING PAST ALIVE: Mayor Coun Chris Witts with the handset.

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There are a total of 58 sites of interest highlighted by the tours.

More than 30 voices are used on the four tours to help bring the city's history to life.

Historic sites featured on the tours include:

Bishop Hooper's Memorial, which marks the spot where the cleric was burnt to death in 1555.

Gloucester Cathedral, which dates back to 1089.

Old Crypt Schoolroom, which began providing free education in the city in 1539.

Blackfriars Priory, the most complete survival of a mediaeval Dominican priory in Britain, dating back to 1239.

Citizen reporter Dave Thomas gives his personal view of the tours:

Having lived in the centre of Gloucester for nearly 15 years, and having written about and visited most of the historic places, I thought I knew most things about the city.

However, two minutes into the audio trail, I realised just how wrong I was.

Strolling along Eastgate Street, the commentary revealed the Guildhall, opened in 1892, had been built to replace the old municipal headquarters, The Tolsey, which had originally stood at the Cross.

The city leaders left the old building as the noise from the street outside made it impossible to conduct their business – a tale I was unaware of before the tour.

From there, I was treated to history stretching back nearly 2,000 years, taking in the Roman remains in Eastgate Street, the Greyfriars priory, and the old Crypt Schoolroom in Southgate Street.

The school provided free education in the city as early as 1539, another fact unknown before taking the tour.

The tour, which includes the voices of actors and sounds of the past, really brought our rich history to life for me.

So, whether you think you know it all or not, this is certainly a worthwhile and entertaining way to learn more about the city of Gloucester.

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