

# Bristol

## CIVIC SOCIETY



**100** years  
of campaigning for  
a better Bristol



1905 – 2005



# Foreword

Picture by Valerie Bennett.



**As we enjoy the history and sights of Bristol it is too easy to forget what might have happened. Without its Civic Society and environmental campaigners, the City of Bristol would be a much poorer and less attractive place. In the darkest days of Bristol's corporate philistinism – even before the onset of any formal public participation in the planning system – it was left to the leading lights in the Civic Society to bring attention to the threats.**

It now beggars belief when one describes the plans for a 'Riviera style' eight-storey hotel and car park in the Avon Gorge, stopped only after the foundations had been built, or the urban motorway that would have sailed over

the site of the SS Great Britain, the Floating Harbour and Brandon Hill, let alone the more recent battles for the heart of the city and its waterfront.

The Civic Society has had many heroes and we have much to be thankful for in the most dogged of them – the ones who may sometimes have been a real pain to the City Council, but who knew they were fighting for the city they love – and for the future generations that will hopefully be able to enjoy the fruits of their endeavours.

Let's hope that we are now moving into an era when in effect the whole city and its government becomes a civic society and we all work together for the future with proper respect for the past.

*George Ferguson  
RIBA President*

# Acknowledgments

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# A lightning tour of the

What we now know as Bristol Civic Society began back in 1905 as the Bristol Kyrle Society. It was named after John Kyrle, an 18<sup>th</sup> century merchant who devoted his life to beautifying Ross-on-Wye, his native town.



The Bristol Kyrle Society set out to beautify Bristol by preserving fine historic buildings, discouraging bad

new building, improving waste spaces by planting trees and shrubs and providing seats, encouraging the cultivation of window boxes and persuading schools and clubs to help preserve trees, flowers and wildlife.

Some things never change: the Kyrle Society was much exercised by the mindless vandalism of young people who deliberately destroyed young plants, trees and shrubs. Litter, too, was a continuing irritant.

In addition to improving the environment, the Kyrle Society also promoted public interest in the arts, arranging for schoolchildren to attend a concert and to be given talks at the Bristol School of Architecture about the city's interesting buildings.

Following the First World War, the Society began to play a larger role in the city, joining with the Design and Industries Association to prepare and present to the Council proposals for the improvement of the Centre.

It also worked for years – with sadly little success – to secure improvements to neglected squares and public green spaces.

A much fuller history of the Kyrle Society, written by Vincent Waite in 1965, is to be found on the Civic Society's website.

When the Second World War began, Bristol was heavily bombarded by the Luftwaffe, destroying much of the city, including its historic shopping area (which lay between Wine Street and Castle Street).

Mr Lionel Fox, Chairman of the Prison Commission, on a visit to Bristol prison, wrote in his diary for April 1945:

*'...I had my first sight of the ruins of Bristol. This exceeds anything of the sort I have yet seen except perhaps the worst part of the City of London.*

*'From Temple Meads towards the centre is just a normal badly blitzed area, though it was memorable to see the graceful grey lines of St Mary Redcliffe soaring unbroken from the rubble ruins all around.*

*'But the view from the centre up to the right, where the worst of the devastation fell, was astonishing – it surpassed even what I remember of Ypres at its most desolate. One looks up this broad slope and sees acre upon acre of mere rubble or broken breast-high brick, and out of this emerge the grey shells and battered towers of several ancient churches, upstanding against the sky and accentuating the scene as perhaps they have done since*

# first hundred years

*houses were built in brick and stone. For the rest, I was glad to find the Cathedral and College Green unharmed, though the beautiful Park Street leading up to the university was sadly gapped and battered. I wonder what sort of city will take the place of what is now irrevocably gone. It is a splendid opportunity.'*

## A new society

Mr Fox was not alone in seeing this opportunity. Following the blitz, it was clear that there was a tremendous amount of work

to be done to revive the city and bring it back from the terrible devastation it had suffered. The enormity of the task ahead was clear, and thus it was that in June 1943 the Kyrle Society merged into the new Bristol Civic Society, which was founded specifically to help with re-planning the ruined city and to carry out an extended field of activity.

As the Western Daily Press commented:

*'A new Society was formed in Bristol yesterday to cope with the vital need for re-planning and civic development.'*

Remains of Union Street after bombing, November 1940. Picture by Bristol Evening Post.



# The sleeping giant awakes

**Generally speaking, until after the end of the Second World War the public was expected to put up and shut up, and be grateful for whatever those in authority felt it appropriate to do with the city. Perhaps as a result of the desperate days that Bristolians had been through, however, there arose a groundswell of critical opinion, expressed by people who were not entirely happy with what was being planned for their city, and wanted their opinions to be taken into account.**

## A customers' revolt

As Sir Hugh Casson, the architect brought in by the Council as consultant on the future of the bombed-out area of Wine Street/Castle Street, and, later, on the future of City Docks, observed:

*'What has happened...is the beginning of a customers' revolt – a refusal any longer to be totally the victims of experts, a growing insistence on having more say in the shape of our surroundings.'*

This new, questioning spirit of the public found official expression in a 1967 government report called *People and Planning*. It established that the public should be involved in local planning, and be consulted about proposed developments and road plans.

From the 1970s onwards, Bristol Civic Society and like-minded allies successfully led the resistance to the break-up of cities in general and Bristol in particular. They challenged the pseudo-scientific principles of 'separate zones' and 'predict and provide' as justification for destructive new road schemes. In place of

these, the Society presented credible and attractive alternatives.

## A new era dawns

This was the dawn of a new era, one which has seen an ever-increasing growth in the importance and influence of public participation – although even now it is still not always as well-organised or as influential as it ought to be.

Nearly 40 years on, a Civic Society Broadsheet\* dealt with the 'river of new legislation, policy statements, guidance, regulations and codes of practice [which] flow towards Local Authorities and the public'.

Amongst this welter of government pronouncements one particular point occurs again and again: the key importance of involving local people in decision-making. This means actually involving the public in planning rather than just producing a plan and then 'consulting' them. Government has shown its commitment by providing a £350m grant over three years (2003–2006) to help local planning authorities promote public involvement.

We can only hope that this will result in a truly positive relationship between the local planning authority and the public, in place of the repeated pattern of the past forty years, when proposals for inappropriate development have often been followed by public protest – which has by no means always been successful.



\* Souls on Fire, written by Civic Society committee member David Farnsworth, January 2004



Front page, Bristol Evening Post.

## Some disasters that Bristol Civic Society, working with local amenity groups, helped to avert

### Post Office Tower

This 1972 proposal for a 300 foot tower block would have dwarfed the Old Vic Theatre, historic King Street and the old city. It was abandoned because of fierce public opposition to the scheme.

### Canon's Marsh

A huge, rigidly-zoned scheme for Canon's Marsh would have obscured views of the Cathedral and turned the best site in Bristol into a most unattractive quarter of the city. This scheme was thrown out by the City Council after a protracted and highly effective campaign.

### Avon Gorge Hotel

A proposed massive extension to the existing building would have destroyed the view of the Clifton Gorge and the Suspension Bridge. A lively national campaign eventually saw this proposal withdrawn.

### The Inner Circuit Road

This proposal would have entailed closing the City Docks and filling-in the Floating Harbour. The scheme was withdrawn following to powerful and sustained public objection.

# Campaigns past and present

## Historic buildings an obstruction to progress

**The first campaign waged by the Civic Society was against a proposal by Bristol Corporation to buy up and demolish some 771 acres (312 hectares) of buildings in the middle of the city. In order to redevelop the city comprehensively as a 'business zone', the Council proposed to demolish an area including Orchard Street, Berkeley Square, Great George Street, Redcliffe Parade, Queen Square and far more besides.**



### Vandalism or idealism?

Although this probably strikes the modern reader as shocking vandalism, it was an approach that was being adopted all over the country in this era of post-war reconstruction. Idealistic local authorities wanted to create a better world, with fine civic buildings in the middle of town and 'homes fit for heroes' in 'housing zones' on the outskirts.

Alas, their plans, however well intentioned, were often unsuccessful, and many beautiful old buildings were demolished to make way for ham-fisted and failed attempts to forge a brave new world.

### Death of a dream

A statement by the Civic Society pointed out that the threatened streets were full of fine historic buildings which 'it would be calamitous to destroy.'

Thanks to the subsequent campaign by local groups led by the Civic Society, the Council's compulsory purchase order was finally reduced to 245 acres (99 hectares).

Much to the City's chagrin, a 1948 government circular stipulated that land should be compulsorily purchased 'only for essential and immediate needs'. This lack of government support for comprehensive redevelopment meant that the Council had to drop its ambitious plans.

In the end, the total amount of land compulsorily purchased by the City Council was a mere 19 acres (7.69 hectares) in Broadmead for a new shopping development to replace the devastated former shopping area between Wine Street and Castle Street.

Thus died the Council's dream of a whole brand-new centre for Bristol.



Pictures by John Trelawny-Ross.



present



# The Civic Centre that never was:

*proposed redevelopment of the Castle Street/Wine Street area*

**Castle Street, Wine Street and the network of smaller streets between them were wiped out by Hitler's bombs. This once thriving and colourful historic shopping centre, where Bristolians loved to spend their Saturdays parading up and down and doing some leisurely window-shopping, was reduced to rubble. Some of it was eventually flattened and surfaced to provide a large open-air car park.**

## **A new Civic Centre for Bristol**

The Corporation's plan for the area was to turn it into a civic and cultural centre, including a museum and art gallery, a guildhall, a conference hall, a library of commerce and a college of technology.

The Council promised not to depart from this grand civic plan without public consultation.

## **A fragile promise**

Alas, this promise proved all too fragile: in 1958 the Council gave permission to both the Norwich Union and the Bank of England for new commercial buildings on the site.

This met with a furious reaction from the Civic Society, as well as from professional, political and commercial associations and the general public. The secretary of the Society wrote:

*'The Civic Society committee were unanimously of the opinion that the planning permission in principle granted to*



*commercial developers should be held in abeyance and rescinded.'*

## An eminent expert

Arguments about what to do with this important part of the city rumbled on and on, and – at the insistence of all the organisations and associations consulted – an outside expert, the eminent architect Sir Hugh Casson (who had been Director of Architecture for the 1951 Festival of Britain), was drafted in by the City Council to create a coherent plan for the area. This was accepted by the planning committee, but came to naught, stymied by lack of funds.

## Arrogance

An interesting sidelight is provided by a small news item in the September 1961 edition of the Bristol and Somerset Society of Architects' Journal. It reports on a meeting to discuss the

Council's proposals for the Wine Street area:

*'The Council spokesman would not discuss the Bank of England or Norwich Union buildings.'*

Would such arrogance and high-handedness be accepted without a murmur today?

## It's not over yet

At the time of going to press, the future of the Wine Street area is still unresolved. The Norwich Union and Bank of England buildings remain marooned and alone (although the other side of Bristol Bridge looks more compact and permeable to pedestrians).

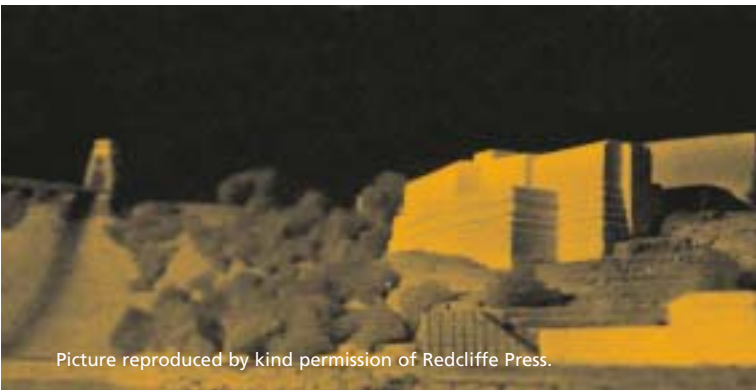


Wine Street/Castle Street, 1971.

[inset] Saturday shopping before the Second World War. Pictures by Bristol Evening Post.

# Splendid new car park for the Avon Gorge

**From this distance, it is hard to imagine that anybody could have thought it would be a good idea to build a 260-foot long, eight-storey building, comprising a multi-storey car park with a hotel extension on top of it, in the dramatically beautiful Avon Gorge right next to the Clifton Suspension Bridge – but they did.**



Picture reproduced by kind permission of Redcliffe Press.

What's more, in January 1971, outline permission for this monstrous development was rushed through by the planning committee so that the hotel-owners could benefit from an English Tourist Board grant of £1,000 per bedroom. The offer of this grant was about to expire, so the heat was really on.

## Alarm bells

The Clifton and Hotwells Improvement Society (CHIS) was the first amenity society to get wind of this planning application, and they lost no time in sounding alarm bells. A meeting of interested people was called and an action group, STAG (Save the Avon Gorge), was formed.

In no time at all, 174 individual letters were sent to the Council objecting to the proposal,

but this did not stop the planning committee from granting outline planning approval for the hotel extension.

## Strike!

Nothing daunted, STAG went national, invoking the power of the national press. In spite of a postal strike, letters from objectors to the Secretary of State calling for a public inquiry were delivered every other day to the Department for the Environment by STAG's very own courier service. No fewer than 1,200 letters were delivered.

The minister announced that he would be calling a public inquiry. Last-ditch attempts by the planning committee and the hotel-owner to get full planning permission for the hotel extension were thwarted at the eleventh hour by a direct intervention from the Minister of the new Department of the Environment.

## The Inspector's decision

The Inquiry was an impressive affair. The brilliant local QC Paul Chadd presented a strong case against the development, summoning as witnesses a host of Bristolians, as well as such distinguished national figures as the poet John Betjeman and architects J M Richards and Berthold Lubetkin.

In the end, the Inspector's report recommended that permission for the proposed hotel extension should be revoked.

*At the time of going to press, a new plan for the hotel is being mooted by the current owner. It involves creating a car park in the Gorge and building four new town houses on top of the ballroom.*

# City Docks? Fill them in!

In 1969 the Council announced it would promote a Parliamentary Bill enabling the City to withdraw navigation rights in the City Docks. The idea was to fill in large parts of the Floating Harbour to create more space for roads and commercial development.

## No more ships in the Docks

Although the proposed scheme was officially described as 'a lagoon system', it soon became all too clear that yachts and tall ships would be banished from the Docks. Bristolians, who have always had a great tenderness for the city's maritime heritage, didn't like this idea one little bit.

The Civic Society, Cabot Cruising Club, Inland Waterways Association, the Kennet and Avon Canal Trust and the Clifton and Hotwells Improvement Society came together at a public meeting which ended with objectors carrying a motion to abandon the Bill that would stop boats from using the docks.

Barrister Paul Chadd concluded a hard-hitting article in the Evening Post (22 August 1969) with the words:

*'It is wrong to embark on a vast outlay to destroy what any sane person wants to save.'*



## DODO in Bristol

Seasoned campaigner Jerry Hicks promoted the theory that an organisation called DODO (run by covert members of Dada\*) was subversively working (in the words of Tony Aldous, writing in *The Times*, 29 June 1971) to subject the city 'to every atrocity of bad planning and non-planning imaginable, in the hope that this ghastly example would bring public and planners elsewhere to their senses'.



DODO drawing by Jerry Hicks

The next step of the City Council was to hold a public poll after a campaign to persuade Bristolians that if the docks were ever to be enjoyed as a public space, the Bill had to go through. The council won: the majority of those polled supported the Bill.

\*Dada was a group of early twentieth-century artists and writers who used the absurd as a means of protesting against The First World War and the bourgeois society of the day. Among them were François Picabia, Marcel Duchamp and Tristan Tzara.



[above] Paul Chadd. Picture by Bristol Evening Post City Council planning proposal for the City Docks.

## The fight continues

In spite of this, the fight went on, moving from Bristol to the Houses of Parliament, where vigorous campaigning and distinguished advocacy ensured preservation of the entire water surface and navigation rights for recreational craft. Thus, the Bill was totally emasculated.

Having saved the docks from being filled in, the protestors demanded that a master planner be invited to prepare a study of the area.

## Outright criticism

Once again, Sir Hugh Casson was brought in. His report, published in 1972, included outright criticism of the proposed road scheme including an urban motorway, the Outer Circuit Road\*, which was to have cut straight across the filled-in Floating Harbour.

Casson also recommended the introduction of a public transport system geared to users' requirements.

*It is depressing to observe that we are still not within spitting distance of achieving that; indeed, there is a strong case for saying that public transport is in an even worse state now than it was 30 years ago.*

## From protest to positive action

The tide turned after the Bristol City Docks Group was founded from the people and groups who had worked so hard to prevent the concreting over of the Docks. Drawing upon the inspiring writing of Jane Jacobs<sup>†</sup>, they proposed a return to mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly cities for people. This group transformed the protest movement into a positive forward planning exercise.

\* The Outer Circuit Road, which was to have bridged the Floating Harbour, was killed off because the Ministry of Transport refused to finance it, influenced by yet another campaign in which the Civic Society played an important role. Nevertheless, the Outer Circuit Road remained an aspiration for many years.



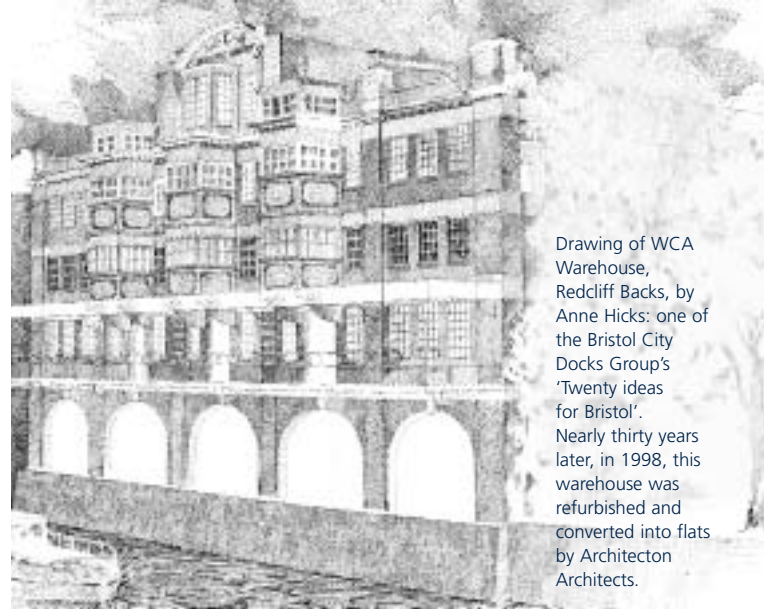
The Bristol City Docks Group produced a series of seven reports and ideas from the general public – exhibited at the City Art Gallery – for the future of Bristol and its City Docks. ‘Twenty ideas for Bristol’ was the first of many subsequent invitations to public visionaries.

At the same time, new life was brought to the Docks by the return of the SS Great Britain to the city of its birth. Bristolians were thrilled, though the Council was less certain, since the ship’s original dock was on the line of the proposed Outer Circuit Road.

Then, the popular Arnolfini gallery moved into W Shed (before its final move to the Bush warehouse), and when E Shed (now The Watershed) was saved from demolition, the future of the Floating Harbour was assured.

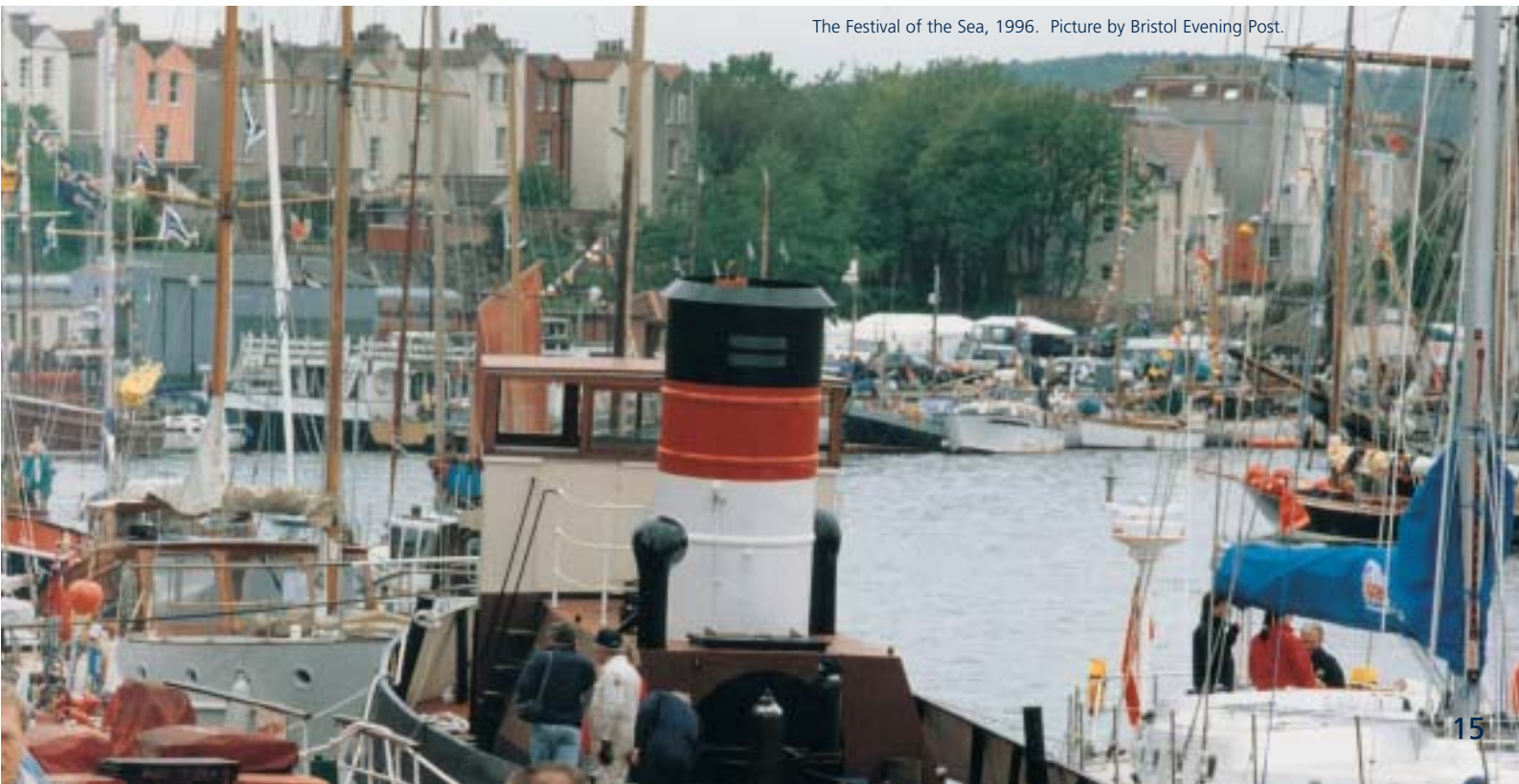
These events, together with enthusiastic public support for keeping the docks open,

helped decide the City Council to abandon the ‘Docks Bill’. Since then, many of Anne Hicks’ illustrations for the Bristol City Docks Group have become reality.



Drawing of WCA Warehouse, Redcliff Backs, by Anne Hicks: one of the Bristol City Docks Group’s ‘Twenty ideas for Bristol’. Nearly thirty years later, in 1998, this warehouse was refurbished and converted into flats by Architecton Architects.

† Jane Jacobs (born 1916) has written extensively on the subject of cities and how they function. She maintains that local initiatives work better than diktats from central bureaucracies, and that cities should consist of human-scale, sustainable communities.



The Festival of the Sea, 1996. Picture by Bristol Evening Post.

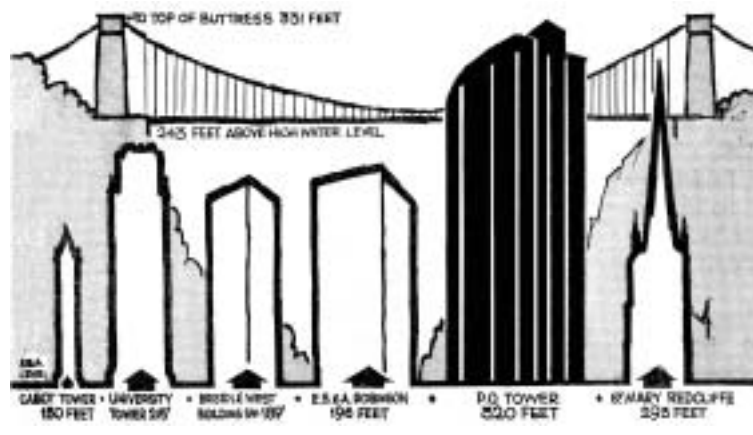
# A monster looms over King Street

Drawings by  
Jerry Hicks  
from Bristol  
Evening Post.

A proposal in 1972 to construct a 93 metre high slab block for the Post Office on the site of the Central Telephone Exchange, where it would dwarf the surrounding area including King Street, Queen Square, Corn Street and St Stephen's Street, was rapidly countered by a colourful publicity campaign. This included a scheme to fly barrage balloons at 93 metres to show the

general public just how tall the proposed tower would be.

The planning committee rejected the application, so the Post Office changed its plans – and found that its needs were adequately met by a six-storey telephone exchange in place of the proposed behemoth.



## A brief sunlit episode

**In April 1974, the County of Avon came into being, sweeping away the old boundaries and taking over the ancient City and County of Bristol.**

This was more than a symbolic change: it signalled the end of the post-war era, with its 'Brave New World' politicians and officers. A new breed of planners and politicians soon made itself felt, setting up formal links with the Civic Society and other amenity groups. Bristol won a Europa Nostra award for

development in the harbour, and the city's first Local Plan incorporated much of the 'mixed-use' thinking which is current today.

Sadly, this sunlit episode lasted only until March 1996, when the County of Avon officially ceased to exist. A new regime arrived, determined to secure development at all costs, leaving considerations of quality, appropriateness and the wishes of the public trailing behind in the dust.



# Canon's Marsh: Bristolians say NO

When in 1998 property developers Crest Nicholson launched a scheme, designed by architects Arup Associates\*, for the comprehensive redevelopment of Canon's Marsh, the City Council, as one of the joint owners of the Canon's Marsh site, advised councillors to vote in favour of the scheme. Little could the developers or the Council officers foresee the impassioned and furious reaction that these plans would stir up in the people of Bristol.

The proposed development would have been rigidly 'zoned', in the manner which was fashionable in the 1970s, keeping different uses away from each other. There was to be a zone for private housing, an office quarter, a massive commercial leisure centre including a casino, bowling alley, night club and multiplex cinema (of which Bristol already has a plethora) as well as a multi-storey car park.

## Outdated and unsuccessful

This was by now generally recognised as an outdated and unsuccessful approach to urban design; the current view is that all new developments should be mixed-use, with lively and attractive uses at ground level (shops, cafés, bars and restaurants), and offices and flats above. This approach keeps a development alive all the time, making it more vibrant and also more secure because of the 'natural surveillance' provided by residents living on the upper floors.



\* The architectural practice responsible for designing the Lloyds TSB building.

The proposed new buildings were up to seven storeys in height, very bulky, and would have obscured all views of the Cathedral from the south.

In an attempt to save the beautiful dockside from inappropriate and ugly development, a national publicity campaign was mounted by the Friends of Canon's Marsh. FOCM, in which the Civic Society played a key role, comprised hundreds of individual citizens as well as seven different local amenity societies.

### Massive publicity campaign

The FOCM campaign extended to radio, television and the local and national press. On the very day in January 2000 when the planning committee met to make a final decision on whether or no to give planning permission for the Canon's Marsh scheme, Simon Jenkins of The Times wrote a powerful article roundly condemning the proposed development.

FOCM observers in the Council Chamber watched with mounting excitement as, one after the other, members of the planning committee declared against the proposed scheme for Canon's Marsh. The voting was decisively against it, and at last the unpopular proposal was laid to rest.

Once this was out of the way, a master-planner, Ted Cullinan, an architect with a fine national reputation, was appointed as the result of a very limited public consultation exercise, to produce a new plan for Canon's Marsh.

At the time of going to press, the site is being prepared for the start of construction. The Cullinan masterplan plan will transform Canon's Marsh into a place that people will enjoy and want to visit. It will be far more humane and attractive than it could ever have been had the original, rigidly-zoned Arup Associates scheme been implemented.

## More trouble and strife down at the Docks

*The Docks have been the scene of much planning conflict around the turn of the twenty-first century – perhaps because, at long last, the huge potential value of waterside sites has been recognised by landowners and developers out to make a killing.*

*If the city were to take a firm line with developers and refuse to countenance any divergence from their own planning guidance, perhaps such conflicts would be fewer and further between.*

*As it is, developers put forward schemes which do not conform to the planning recommendations, and it is left to the Civic Society and others to try to defend our beloved city against inappropriate development.*

*At the time of going to press, two proposed developments in particular are hanging in the balance, the subject of lively public discussion and dissent: Wapping Wharf and the McArthur's Warehouse site (the latter lies behind the mooring of the SS Great Britain).*



The SS Great Britain in her dock. Picture by Bristol Evening Post.

*Both these sites were bought during boom times, so high land prices were paid by the developers. This means that, if the developers are to make a profit, they must squeeze into these sites the maximum possible number of saleable units. Inevitably this brings them into conflict with local residents and the Civic Society, who do not want very tall buildings in an area still dominated by ships' masts; furthermore, they do not think that the exceptionally high densities proposed for Wapping Wharf would create a pleasant environment or comfortable living conditions for the residents.*

## **Massive new development behind SS Great Britain**

McArthur's warehouse is a large, handsome brick building, constructed in the early twentieth century, but badly neglected. It may have been the warehouse's state of dilapidation that accounts for its not having been listed.

An application by the developer Quada to demolish the warehouse and replace it with a massive new mixed-use development was given permission in January 2001.

## Council's own planning guidelines ignored

It was surprising that the Council accepted this scheme, since the proposed new buildings, designed by Barlow Henley Architects, did not respect the guidelines set out in the Council's own Harbourside Planning Brief: they were taller than recommended; they created more than twice the suggested floorspace and they interfered with a variety of very important views of Brunel's ship SS Great Britain, its masts silhouetted dramatically against the sky. This interference was made glaringly evident by the use of computer-generated images, commissioned by the Civic Society.

The public was very unhappy when the planning committee resolved to grant outline permission for this scheme. A campaign involving the Civic Society and others resulted in the Secretary of State 'calling in' Quada's proposals. A public inquiry was held in January 2002, and in July of that year the Secretary of State rejected the Quada scheme on the grounds that it was out of keeping with the low-lying maritime nature of the surroundings, and that such bulky buildings behind the Great Britain would distract the eye from the funnel and masts of the ship.

The developer went away and got his architects to amend the proposal, making the buildings less obtrusive. The Civic Society still objected strongly to the proposal as being far too big for the site and having a damaging effect upon the setting of the SS Great Britain. When, however, English Heritage withdrew its objection, the Council narrowly agreed that the scheme should go ahead.



Picture by James Barke.

## Whopping development on Wapping Wharf

Right behind the Industrial Museum, the 4.15 hectare former NCP car park site has been bought by Umberslade, a developer who proposes to put up housing which would be more than 50% denser than any other new housing on the Docks.

The proposal is for between 500 and 700 residential units on a site which the local plan suggests might accommodate 200 units.

The four blocks of flats are crammed together so closely that there will be little privacy for residents – and all in the interests of maximising profits.

Local residents and members of the Civic Society have together formed the Spike Island Futures Group, which is arguing forcefully for the improvement of Umberslade's scheme. They want more green space, an element of social housing (not pushed out of the way at the back of the site), more space between blocks and a significant reduction in the ridiculously high density proposed.

# Negative? not us!

**The Civic Society is sometimes accused of being negative and opposed to progress. This could not be further from the truth, but we can see how the opinion may have come about.**

After all, when we are involved in a high-profile campaign, it is usually against what we consider to be an ill-judged development proposal, and it is as objectors that we come to public attention. Yet there is much positive work going on, too, aimed at encouraging development which enhances the quality of our environment.

## Environmental Awards

One example of positive action by the Civic Society is our annual environmental award

scheme, sponsored in recent years by SWRDA, The Institute of Physics Publishing, and Bristol Water, who are our centenary year sponsors. Every year, we ask members of the public to send us their nominations for the city's best new buildings, new public spaces and refurbishments of old buildings. A panel of judges decides which of these nominated projects deserve one of our awards, then there is a presentation ceremony attended by building owners together with members of the construction team. This event is always much enjoyed by those who take part, and is given extensive coverage in the Evening Post. The winners take away an elegant plaque to be displayed at the site for all to admire.



Pictures by  
Bristol Evening Post.



## The greening of Bristol

For close on 30 years, the Civic Society has contributed to the greening of the city by planting thousands of trees. It began in 1973 with the hugely successful 'Plant a tree in '73' campaign, and has encompassed planting throughout the city, including Easton Way and Greville Smyth Park.

The Society also played a leading role in mounting a national campaign (Save Our Sports Grounds) to protect playing fields from being sold off to developers. We briefed MPs and helped draft national Planning Policy Guidance No. 17. This, however, is a continuing battle.



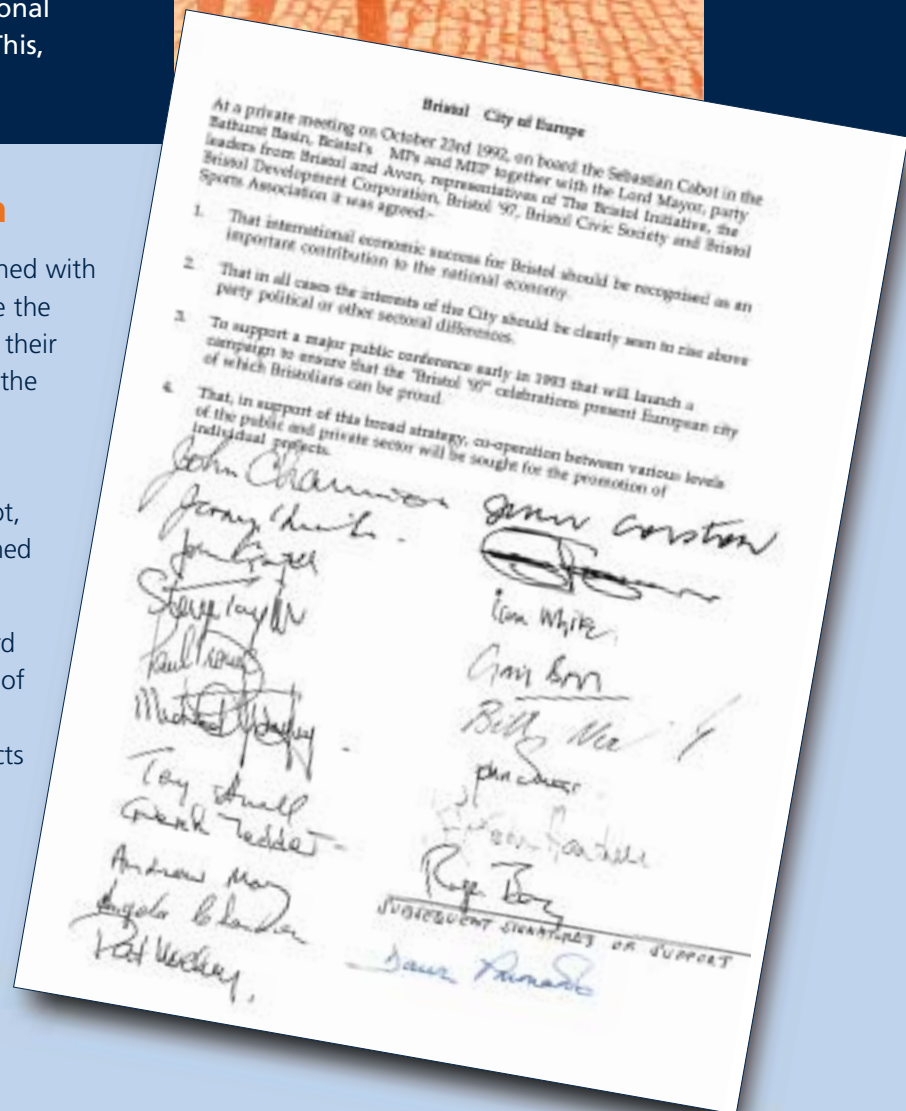
## The Bathurst Declaration

In October 1992, the Civic Society joined with the Bristol Sports Association to cajole the city's movers and shakers into sinking their differences and working together for the benefit of the city.

All these important people gathered together on board the Sebastian Cabot, moored in the Bathurst Basin, and signed the declaration shown on the right.

Amongst the signatories were the Lord Mayor, MPs and MEP, representatives of Bristol Civic Society, Bristol Sports Association, Bristol Society of Architects and Bristol Initiative as well as councillors, council officers and other important figures.

Never before (or since) has such an assemblage of important people agreed to set aside their disagreements and work together for the greater good of the city.



# The future

## Redcliffe – real public involvement at last

**It was in 2001 that the Redcliffe Futures Group was formed, comprising 16 local organisations, including several residents' groups, representatives of Bristol City Council and of the Civic Society.**

Together they worked out a radical plan for the regeneration of the traffic-blighted no-man's-land that is the Redcliffe area. Their new scheme will remove the traffic from in front of St Mary Redcliffe and create a fine new public square surrounded by a network of buildings, pedestrian routes and facilities for the community and for tourists.

These changes will serve to reunite Redcliffe, currently chopped up by roads, and re-create the tight street pattern of old Bristol, bringing Redcliffe back to life and turning it into a beautiful place where people will want to be.

## 'But will it ever happen?'

In July 2002, a public exhibition showing what the group had come up with was given an enthusiastic reception – but as the Redcliffe Community Forum commented, 'Exactly what we have wanted for years, but will it ever happen?'

At the time this book goes to press, two and half years on, there is still a major obstruction to the Redcliffe community's plan for the

regeneration of their locality.

This stumbling block is the refusal of the Transport Department to allow the removal of through traffic.

The delay is frustrating, but it seems that the tide of opinion in national government and amongst many in the City Council is beginning to turn. The Redcliffe Futures Group is a model of effective public involvement.



# How we work – the nuts and bolts

**Bristol Civic Society works on many different fronts at once, and we've found the best way to cope with everything that needs to be done is to split up into various different working groups, all of which report regularly to the Executive Committee. The groups are:**

- the **Planning Applications Group**, which keeps a keen eye on the register of planning applications, commenting upon on schemes which would be likely to have a significant impact on their surroundings. The group examines close on 400 applications a year, an enormously demanding task.
- the **Urban Design Group** (combined with the independent **LA21 Land Use Group**, affiliated to the Civic Society), which works to encourage attractive and sustainable new developments in Bristol.

The LA21 Land Use Group has recently produced a widely-admired guide to best practice in sustainable development. This guide (which has been adopted by national government) is aimed at members of the general public who want to become involved in planning the future of their own neighbourhoods. The guide helps by showing examples of what is possible in the real world.

Membership is represented on a Scrutiny Commission, the Select Committee on

Planning Reform and an advisory group to the Bristol Partnership.

- the **Amenity and Trees Group**, which concentrates on such fundamental matters as the condition of pavements, and the quality and condition of street furniture, while also monitoring Bristol's magnificent parks and open spaces. This group has organised tree-planting in streets, public areas and school grounds, going right back to the long-ago but not forgotten 'Plant a tree in '73' campaign.

The trees lining St Augustine's Reach are a fine example of the group's contribution to Bristol.

- the **Transport Group**, which considers all aspects of transport in Bristol, whether by foot, water, bicycle, road or rail. A successful transport strategy is one of the keys to making Bristol a more pleasant place, and a vital aim is to ensure that motor vehicles do not continue to dominate the city.

This group's publication, 'Go Public', inspired new thinking about transport throughout the country.

- the **Futures Group**, which runs our annual environmental awards scheme; this celebrates quality in new developments in the city.



The Futures Group produces and distributes our newsletter, organises visits and meetings for members and looks after publicity and exhibitions. The creative thinking generated by this group has an effect beyond the confines of the Society.

Whenever the Civic Society is 'seen' by the public (rather than working quietly and anonymously), it's probably because of the work of the Futures Group.

- In addition, we have a representative on the **Conservation Advisory Panel**. The advice of this panel is valued by the City Council.

- Finally, we have had a representative on the city's **Public Rights of Way Liaison Group** since it was founded in the late 1990s. The work involves attending meetings and making site visits to assess the current state of some of Bristol's hundreds of rights of way, and to comment upon any proposed changes.

These working groups are always delighted to welcome new members, so if you would like to join any of them, do please let us know.



# All hands on deck

**Although this is a history of the Bristol Civic Society, it would be a serious mistake to imagine that the Society works all on its own. On the contrary, as well as working with private developers in the early stages of proposed developments, the Society also has a long history of collaborating with other organisations, from the City Council to a wide variety of lively local amenity and special interest groups. The famous campaigns described in this booklet were the work of many hands.**

When something in the city cries out for public action, sometimes amenity, special interest groups, concerned individuals and the Civic Society come together as a new group with its own name, formed for that specific campaign.

For example, when Bristolians were campaigning against a very unpopular plan for the redevelopment of Canon's Marsh (see pages 17–18), a group called Friends of Canon's Marsh was formed to co-ordinate the campaign. It comprised a number of different local amenity societies:

- Brandon Hill Play and Development Group
  - Brandon Hill Residents' Association
  - Bristol Visual and Environmental Group
  - Clifton and Hotwells Improvement Society
  - Redland and Cotham Amenity Society
  - Sustrans
- and Bristol Civic Society.



This seems to be the regular pattern of public protest in Bristol, and it is highly effective because it makes use of the commitment, the hard work and the expertise of volunteers from all over the city.

In the past, the Society used to work by responding to City Council plans. Now, we produce pro-active strategies which are sometimes ahead of the field, both locally and nationally.

**We very much hope that you have enjoyed reading our book, and that it may encourage you to come and join us.**

## Bibliography

John V Punter, *Design Control in Bristol 1940-1990*, published by Redcliffe Press, 1990.

Gordon Priest and Pam Cobb, *The Fight for Bristol*, published by Bristol Civic Society and Redcliffe Press, 1980.

Vincent Waite, *The First 60 Years*, published 1965.

Bristol Evening Post archives.

## WHO ARE WE?

We, the Bristol Civic Society, are people from all walks of life who share a love of Bristol and a determination to see our city improved and enhanced, and to defend it from inappropriate development.

**The Society has been active – in one form or another – for 100 years.**

Different members derive different benefits from the Society. Some join to take part in the visits and meetings, and in order to give support to the Society's work to ensure that our city develops as well as possible. Others join one of the working groups and devote time, expertise and effort to forwarding the work of their group and the Society as a whole.



An independent force for a better Bristol

## WHAT DO WE DO?

- press for the highest standard for new buildings
- campaign for the preservation of important buildings and open spaces
- keep a watchful eye on new planning applications to guard against inappropriate new development
- campaign for an improved transport system and better public transport
- suggest improvements to the Bristol Local Plan - the official blueprint for all future development
- plant trees all over the city
- make annual environmental awards which recognise high quality new developments

At the time of going to press, the Civic Society is actively involved in:

- drawing up and promoting strategies for reducing traffic and pollution
- working in collaboration with local communities, developers, planners and architects to help achieve attractive and environmentally-friendly new developments. Current schemes with which we are involved are Redcliffe, Broadmead, Canon's Marsh and Wapping Wharf.



£4.99

[www.bristolcivicsociety.cjb.net](http://www.bristolcivicsociety.cjb.net)