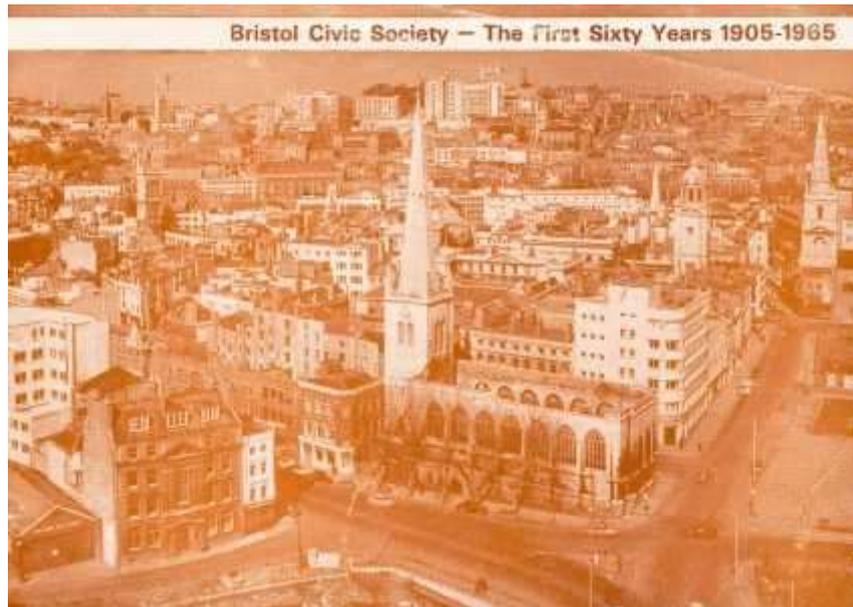


# Bristol Kyrle Society

In 1965 Vincent Waite produced an account of the history of the Bristol Civic Society from its origins as the Bristol Kyrle Society in 1905. This account is reproduced below.

Cover: View from the top of the Robinson 15-story office block.  
Photo: Reece Winstone.



Bristol Civic Society  
(incorporating the Bristol Kyrle Society)  
The First Sixty Years 1905-1965



Reprinted from Bristol Building and Design Centre Journal May 1965

Vincent Waite

The First Sixty Years - Bristol Civic Society  
1905-1965

# The Early Years

It was a meeting of the National Union of women workers in York which first suggested the idea of the Bristol Kyrle Society. The conference had discussed various ways of beautifying towns and cities, and the Bristol delegates returned home fired with a desire to do something practical of this kind for their own city. Miss Mary Clifford, with the support of Professor G. H. Leonard, suggested the foundation of a local society for the purpose, and on May 23rd, 1905, a meeting was held to decide on the best means of launching this project.

The meeting was well attended and the idea was warmly approved; the main discussion centred around the choice of a suitable name. Finally it was recalled that the Kyrle Society of London, founded seventy years before, had much the same aims and objects as this proposed Bristol Society, and the name Bristol Kyrle Society was unanimously agreed upon. The original London society had been named after John Kyrle, the "Man of Ross", who had devoted his life and his modest fortune to charitable objects and to beautifying his native town in Herefordshire.

The objects of the Bristol Kyrle Society were presented in five sections—to preserve beautiful and historic buildings in Bristol and "to discourage dull, mean, monotonous building in the future"; to improve waste spaces by planting trees and shrubs, and providing seats; to encourage the cultivation of flowers in yards and small gardens, in window boxes, on tops of walls, on railway cuttings and embankments; to cultivate the love of nature generally, and persuade schools, clubs and other organizations to help preserve the trees, flowers and wild life of the neighbourhood; and finally to organize lectures (*note: Lectures and organized visits to places of interest have continued to provide a focal point for meetings and discussions right up to the present time and, for many members, constitute one of the most interesting and important aspect of the Civic Society*), open-air concerts, to provide literature, and generally to influence public opinion in the City to appreciate natural beauty and art intelligently.

Anyone in general agreement with these objects could become a member of the Society for a modest minimum annual subscription of one shilling. These aims, for a newly-formed society, might seem some what Utopian perhaps reminiscent of William Morris's "News from Nowhere" and of his fight against the sin of destroying the beauty of natural environment. but the Society was careful to stress that its intention was not to relieve anyone of proper responsibilities, but rather to offer suggestions and advice, "particularly in those parts of the City where at present the inhabitants have the least chance of helping themselves, and where, in dull and depressing surroundings, life may be enriched by new interests, and where some beauty may be brought to their doors without any very great cost".

Again, for present-day readers the wording of this quotation may have an out-of-date ring, and the sentiments expressed may ever so slightly suggest the overtones of an era of unconsciously patronising charity when "the poor, if virtuous, were for ever curtsying to the ground, except when expiring upon truckle-beds, beseeching God to bless the young ladies of The Grange or The Manor House, as the case might be". (*note: Austine Birrell: Hannah Moore*)

But the fact remains that the Bristol Kyrle Society was founded at a time when many people in Bristol did indeed live in drab and depressing surroundings, and it was founded in a true spirit of practical civic altruism, as its later history shows.

The first Report of the Society appeared in October 1906 and described the first year of the Society's life as "uneventful-but if there is not much to chronicle relevant to the Society it is due partly to its youth, partly to the fact that much of its work is done by influencing others to take action".

An elaborate membership card had been designed for the Society by the Bristol artist, R. E. J. Bush. Its motto was a suitably expanded version of the City's Virtute, Industria, Pulchritudine. Against a background of the Suspension Bridge and a suggestion of Leigh Woods was a circle of evocative Bristol scenes-sails of a ship; the 'Norman Arch'; St. Stephen's church tower; and in the foreground (an ironically unsuspected gesture to the future) the replica High Cross on College Green which the Bristol Civic Society in later years was to do so much to try to preserve.*(note: The future of the Avon Gorge was later preserved by further gifts of land to the National Trust).*

It was appropriate that Leigh Woods should form part of the background on the membership card; the possible fate of a large tract of this beautiful area had been a source of concern to the Society for some time.

Some of it was, to use the menacing modern expression, ripe for building development. It was therefore with no small pride and gratitude that on January 7th, 1909, the Society was permitted to announce to the Press that by the generosity of George A. Wills (afterwards Sir George Wills) some eighty acres of the Woods, including Nightingale Valley, the Plateau and the Encampment, had been purchased and presented to the National Trust for the enjoyment of the public. In addition, a capital sum had been set aside to provide interest which could be applied to the future upkeep of the land and woods. A Committee of Management was to be formed, and the Kyrle Society was invited to nominate a representative member.

For the next five years the Society continued "quietly to influence the course of some events without necessarily appearing as critic or censor" and this influence was often exercised in a practical way. Bulbs were presented to Mothers' Meetings for distribution among householders in poorer parts of the City; a number of window-boxes were supplied to Tucker Street ("one of the least beautiful of Bristol's roadways"); and flowers and cuttings were given to those who already possessed window boxes. Later the Society extended this form of help and gave framed pictures to a number of schools and clubs in the City.

One continual complaint recorded in early Reports strikes a familiar note today-the complaint of senseless vandalism by young people. To improve the somewhat unsightly walls of the Public Baths in the Rope Walk, the Society had planted a number of Virginia Creeper plants, but determined malicious attacks of street urchins uprooted all of them except one. This kind of damage was obviously a constant current problem.

There was also a sorry destruction of flowers, trees and shrubs in the recently acquired Leigh Woods, and the Society was reduced to uttering the despairing hope that one day "with the kind co-operation of parents, teachers and employers of young persons the time will come when the beautiful Avon Gorge will be left undisturbed by further desecration-when trees in City parks and woods will be valued, and flowers no longer uprooted in mere wanton destruction". It is depressing to read of the same kind of deliberate destruction in the newspapers today.

On the other hand, another feature of pre-1914 Bristol which the writer remembers, and which was criticised by the Kyrle Society, seems scarcely credible in these days of shortage of houses. Then there was hardly a single street in residential areas which did not have a number of empty houses, and these all displayed an ugly rash of house agents' bills plastered over their windows, and "unsightly and irregular rows of Notice Boards: To be Let or Sold". The Society tactfully complained to the principal local House Agents who apparently gave the Committee a sympathetic hearing, and expressed "a wish to remove what is clearly a blot on our urban landscape". Subsequent Reports do not reveal whether this wish resulted in any practical action.

The Society received some well-deserved encouragement in its early days when the Committee wrote to the Great Western Railway Company to suggest that the Company should plant some trees along the edge of their new siding in Anchor Road. If this could be done, it was pointed out, "a particularly dull view of the gas works, etc., will be blotted out, much needed shade given, and the railway side of the road will be brought into harmony with the other beautiful surroundings of the south side of the Cathedral". Probably no-one was more secretly surprised than the members of this twelve-months-old babe of a Society when the GWR accepted the suggestion and generously planted one hundred poplars on the site (1906).

In 1914 when the Society's local concern was still the continued selfish and thoughtless damage to trees and flowers in the City, and while members were considering one improbable suggestion that young Boy Scouts and Girl Guides should undertake the task of protecting Leigh Woods from hooligans, international affairs were moving towards a crisis. Finally the storm broke and Europe was plunged into the cataclysm of war.

Civic concerns were now swallowed up in national needs, but the Kyrle Society managed to maintain its existence in spite of the necessary curtailment of its activities. In 1916 the Committee was asked if the Society could do something to brighten up some three dozen YMCA huts on Salisbury Plain. The Society readily agreed and some members were sent to inspect the huts, and the Great Western Railway provided a useful quantity of their more gaily coloured posters. In addition the Society arranged for weekly supplies of flowers to be delivered to the huts.

This ready help brightening up the YMCA huts on Salisbury Plain led to an appeal for a further collection of pictures to be sent to a Field Ambulance Hospital in Flanders, and to YMCA huts in the Battle Area. The Committee immediately set to work, and it is recorded that "thousands of pictures were despatched to France". Yet another collection was sent to the Headquarters of the WAACs in Whiteladies Road, and to the munitions factory at St. Philip's. During these war years the Kyrle Society must have collected and distributed an impressive number of pictures; it is interesting to speculate what ultimately happened to this vast quantity of engravings and coloured prints which once helped to recall to soldiers in squalid surroundings far from 'Blighty' some memories of pre-war days and a more civilised way of life.

On June 28th, 1919, the Germans signed the ill-fated Treaty of Versailles. The First World War was officially over, and the civic life began slowly to resume activities which had been in abeyance for the duration. During the early years of the war the Kyrle Society had decided to postpone their Council meetings and to retain in office the existing members of the Executive Committee until such time as the Council could meet after the conclusion of the war.

Shortage of paper and difficulties of printing had also led to the decision not to print any Society Reports after 1914, but by 1923 these Reports were once again being distributed to members and the Society was in full operation, although the Committee was "anxious to obtain additional support in membership so as to increase the influence of the Society in dealing with the important matters which come before them. Additional income from subscriptions is also imperative if the work is to be effectively carried on".

In these post-war years the Society was particularly anxious to influence the young in "what is most beautiful in nature and in art". The Committee continued to supply bulbs to various schools and in 1922 the Society arranged for a hundred local school-children to be admitted free to the final rehearsal of a musical concert in the City. Another venture was an arrangement with the Bristol School of Architecture for talks to be given to children about Bristol's buildings of historic or architectural interest.

Litter throughout the City was becoming a real problem. At every tram and bus stop there were piles of used tickets carelessly thrown away. Paper bags, orange peel and empty bottles were spread over the Downs and other public places in the City. As a result the Committee approached the Tramway and the Bus Companies in the hope that they would "fix receptacles in their vehicles for used tickets as an encouragement to citizens to keep their City tidy". In 1925 the Tramway Company wisely accepted the suggestion and had boxes fixed at each end of the trams, and the Bus Companies followed suit five years later. The Society expressed appreciation of this co-operation, adding hopefully "it now only remains for the public to use them".

The Society took an active interest in the restoration of St. Anne's Well at Brislington which for many reasons is one of the most interesting holy wells in the district. In 1922 the Well was blocked with rubbish and overgrown with weeds. Fortunately the Corporation afterwards acquired this interesting historical relic and the surrounding St. Anne's woods. Two years later the Kyrle Society (in co-operation with the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society) paid for a canopy of traditional Somerset design which was erected over the restored Well, and also suggested a suitable inscription.

During the same year the Society expressed concern when the Corporation felled a number of trees in the City, and they also criticised what they described as "the ungainly lopping and pruning of trees near roads and public places". The Corporation pointed out that this control of growth was often essential, and it is a characteristic mark of the Society's unbiased attitude that it quoted in its next Report the approving verdict of an expert from Kew Gardens who had been consulted and who "expressed the opinion that the method of pruning trees here is generally very satisfactory". Yet in spite of this judgement the Society could not resist the final comment that the Corporation seemed unable to think of planting anything but planes, limes and elms "would not a much wider variety of trees and shrubs flourish here, and add to the interest and attraction of the City?" The Kyrle Society's activities were nothing if not energetic and multifarious, as a glance at a selection of matters which engaged the Committee's attention during the five years 1925 to 1930 will show-the preservation of the house in Fishponds where Hannah More was born; the control of unsightly petrol pumps and glaring signs in the City; damage to the turf on the Downs by horses; the fixing of a tablet on a house in Park Row to commemorate the Bristol artist, Muller; the prevention of an extension to an already overlarge advertisement hoarding facing the Downs on Blackboy Hill; the removal of an ugly "Evening World" advertisement on the roof of the stand at the City Football ground at Ashton Gate which was visible from some of the most famous

viewpoints of the City; an appeal to the Council to prepare some uniform plan for the remaining alterations in Whiteladies Road, "the upper portion of which has already been damaged beyond repair"; alterations in the design of the Dressing Rooms to be built on the Downs; the siting of direction posts in the City; and correspondence with HM Office of Works about a corrugated iron roof placed over a building at the top of Colston Street.

During this busy period of the Kyrle Society's existence its members had been much exercised by the neglected condition of certain City squares and open places such as Brunswick Square; Savile Place, Clifton; Buckingham Place, etc. The problem of clearing them and then maintaining them was hopelessly complicated by the various proprietary rights vested in the owners of adjacent houses. The Committee spent much time and energy over several years trying to bring about an agreement between the various interested parties to co-operate in tidying up their respective areas, but eventually it was decided to allow the whole matter to drop until the Corporation had proper legislative authority to insist on proper care and attention being paid to private plots of this kind.

In one case, however, the Society's efforts were crowned with success. The neglected triangular plot of ground bordered by Park Place, the pro Cathedral and the back of Richmond Hill, was taken over by the firm of Lennard's which most generously agreed to bear the cost of laying it out as a garden and to provide for its future upkeep (1929).

The growing influence and importance of the Kyrle Society were reflected in the part it played when the belated building of the Cenotaph in Colston Avenue was linked with a plan for a new layout of this street and of the "Tramway Centre". (*note: The 'Centre' Gardens were not laid out until 1949*). Members feared, with some justification, that the alterations might be made piecemeal without an effective overall scheme for the improvement of the whole area. They hoped that the City authorities would commission an experienced planning officer to prepare a scheme worthy of the City, but as "encouragement did not come in this direction" the Society, in conjunction with the Design and Industries Association (Bristol Group), set about preparing its own practical scheme for the general improvement of the City centre "which is", the Committee maintained, "at present deplorably lacking in cohesion of plan, architectural dignity, and facility for the circulation of traffic". The proposals, accompanied by a detailed diagrammatic illustration, were offered to the Council "in the hope that they may be of real service in their task of improving, not only the City itself, but also its status among cities".

In 1936 the Society learnt with dismay of the decision to demolish the ancient Swan Inn at the corner of St. Mary-le-Port Street. It was felt that if only the Committee had known of this earlier the destruction of this fine old building might have been prevented. One good result of this regrettable loss was the formation, entirely on the initiative of the Kyrle Society, of a Committee to be known as the Council for the Preservation of Ancient Bristol. It was also suggested that the Society should compile "a list of ancient buildings in the City which for their architectural, historical or other values were worthy of preservation-a list which might be helpful to the City authorities in preventing further destruction of or damage to any of the City's treasured possessions".

At the beginning of 1939 while the Kyrle Society was again making an attempt to solve the problem of neglected, derelict squares and open spaces in the City, ominous political clouds once more gathered over Europe, and on the third day of September Britain was at war for the second time in twenty-five years. Like most other societies, the Kyrle Society realized

that wartime limitations such as the black-out, and the war-time duties and responsibilities of members made it impossible to arrange regular general meetings, but the Committee sent an annual letter to subscribers reporting any work the Society had been able to carry out. But unlike the 1914-18 period this war provided the Society with one issue of outstanding importance. On June 25th, 1940, the first bombs fell on Bristol, to be followed in November by the savage attack which left a trail of destruction in the central area of the City.

The Committee learnt with great satisfaction that the City authorities began at once to consider the problem of future rebuilding and reconstruction, and the Society declared itself ready to take part in any discussions about future re-planning. The City Architect addressed the Society on this subject and expressed in memorable words the members' own ideals; "Bristol should arise anew, noble and strong, beautiful and full of character, with no loss of tradition and glories. Surely it is well worth the struggle and the cost. We must build again-and build better".

The following year saw the formation of the Bristol Re-planning Association, and for the use of this body (on which the Society was represented by its Chairman) the Kyrle Society prepared a Memorandum setting out certain principles which it was thought should be borne in mind for the great task of rebuilding the City. In brief, the Society urged that the preservation of what remained of the City's ancient heritage should be of paramount importance; that all new building should reach a high level of design in which "adaptability" to special purposes would be achieved "without loss of grace and dignity in relationship to surroundings"; that the opportunity created by the demolition of property should in part be used to provide open spaces for rest and recreation and that in future, greater orderliness and aesthetic satisfaction should be obtained by bringing under the one artistic control of the City Architect many matters which had previously been the concern of various different departments.

For some thirty years the Bristol Kyrle Society had played a busy and worthy part in civic affairs but as the war continued it became clear to the Committee that the widespread destruction in and around the City; the reconstruction which would later be necessary; and the vital importance of careful re-planning called for a modification and extension of the original purpose of the Society and a much wider appeal to the general public of Bristol. After careful consideration and consultation a report was drawn up which recommended that the Kyrle Society should be merged into a new Society with an extended field of activity and wider aims covering the whole of the City and its neighbourhood. To place these proposals before the members a special General Meeting of the Kyrle Society was called on June 8th, 1943, and on the following day the Western Daily Press announced under the heading "A New Bristol Society to keep an Eye on Civic Development: A new Society was formed in Bristol yesterday to cope with the vital need for re-planning and civic development. It is the Bristol Civic Society, and incorporated with it is the old Kyrle Society founded in 1905. The Chairman of the Executive Committee outlined the constitution and said the organisation was to work in co-ordination with the Bristol Development Board, Bristol Re-Planning Advisory Committee, and the Council for the Preservation of Ancient Bristol".

Almost at once the new Society became involved in a vigorous controversy with the City authorities over the thorny question of the rebuilding of the bombed Wine Street/Castle Street area. The Committee was not particularly impressed with what plans had been put forward, but objected even more strongly to the extent of the area the Corporation wished to acquire by a compulsory purchase order. In a memorandum to the Ministry of Town and

Country Planning the Society pointed out that part of the Corporation's application referred to several hundred acres which did not need re-planning. It included an area of Georgian and earlier buildings of great character and charm-for example, Orchard Street, Berkeley Square, Great George Street, Redcliff Parade, and Queen Square, "all of them in healthy occupation and which it would be calamitous to destroy". The Compulsory Purchase Order was eventually reduced from 771 acres to about 245 acres, a reduction which the Society considered something of an achievement, but that was by no means the end of the controversy.

Meanwhile, as the Bristol Re-Planning Association had failed to achieve effective contact with the Corporation it was disbanded, and its interests were merged into those of the Civic Society. Fortified by this additional mandate the Committee pressed the Corporation to do something about the state of the "Centre" which was described as a disgrace to the City. "Although we realize that major works cannot be commenced at present", wrote the Society, "surely some effort should be made towards a general tidying-up of the area so as to secure a reasonable appearance of dignity". The Society was determined to make every effort to stimulate an active interest in civic affairs among school-children in the City. With this object in view it was decided to issue a terminal bulletin to schools which would give a summary of current civic affairs and other matters of local interest which the Society was dealing with. The first of these news sheets appeared in November 1948, and since then Our City has appeared at regular intervals and has deservedly proved one of the most popular and most useful contacts with younger citizens.

Always interested in permanent reminders of famous residents in the City, the Civic Society took the first steps in initiating the commemoration of Sir Humphry Davy's pioneer work in anaesthesia at No. 6, Dowry Square, where a plaque was unveiled by the Lord Mayor in 1950. Ten years later the Society sponsored another commemorative plaque which was unveiled by the Portuguese Ambassador at 38 Stoke Hill in memory of Eca de Queiroz, a famous novelist in his own country. He had lived in Stoke Bishop for some ten years during the time he was Portuguese Consul in the City.

The Civic Society had also to be occupied with more controversial matters. The Council's destruction or neglect of certain valuable historic buildings of the City suggested to some citizens, perhaps without justification, that some of the City Fathers "cared for none of these things". In 1950 it was learnt with surprise and no small indignation that the Corporation had demolished without any notice the Kingsweston Lodge and the towered Gateway at Penpole Point. Another strong protest was made when some time later the Education Committee destroyed the Cotham Tower, an interesting 18th-century folly. In no uncertain terms the Society expressed the view that "it is high time an Official be appointed to ensure that this kind of destruction and neglect of valued relics does not occur". The Society also made repeated requests to the Council to do something to preserve the Bath House at Arno's Court in Brislington-a delightful little "improved Gothic" building which was fast failing into ruin.

Aesthetic imagination must have reached its nadir in one suggestion seriously put forward that it might form the facade of a public lavatory. After this, and what might be construed as a suitable period of incredulous silence, the Society gladly gave its blessing to the removal of this treasure (with each stone numbered) to Portmeirion in North Wales (1957) where it has been carefully rebuilt, a romantic, picturesque addition to the Estate, and a standing reproach to the City which treated its preservation with indifference. With an equally jealous

eye the Civic Society was watching the fate of the High Cross and Queen Victoria's statue which were removed when College Green was lowered according to the plan of the architect of the new Council House. The Corporation planned to re-site the statue of the Queen on the roundabout at Prince Street. This proposed indignity aroused sharp and justifiable protests, and finally, after allowing the Queen to brood in solitary state over her fallen glory in a Corporation yard for a time, she was restored to a more regal position at the east end of College Green. The fate of the High Cross was not so happy. Repeated requests were made that it should be restored to its former position on College Green. Then it was discovered that the Cross, which had been stored in a yard, had been badly damaged by hooligans. The Civic Society led a public appeal to repair and re-erect it, but the Corporation refused to co-operate on the grounds of expense. In the end a number of public-spirited Bristolians obtained the remains of the Cross and erected a truncated portion of it in Berkeley Square-a generous gesture, but somehow an unhappy compromise. It seems to be a continual reminder that as Bristol lost its original mediaeval High Cross in 1763 through the indifference of Dean Barton, so the City Fathers ensured that history repeated itself with the replica Cross in 1956.

It would be wrong to imagine that controversy and wordy battles constituted the whole or even much of the Society's activities during this period. With undoubted relief the Committee dealt with more constructive work, including an important scheme connected with improving the miserable state of the Hotwell Road area. This road, the main approach to the 'Centre' for visitors from the south-west, was described as "a depressing string of delapidations and gloom, and certainly no credit to Bristol". Yet it was an area which had immense possibilities with features like "an open water-front, moored ships, views of the harbour and the Cathedral towers". To encourage public interest in a comprehensive design for the whole stretch of this important road the Civic Society invited the RWA School of Architecture to set as a design project for their students the new lay-out for the Hotwell area. and the Society offered prizes for the best schemes. The students were asked to design a development for high density, multi-storey housing, with adequate car-parking and other facilities. In spite of the technical building difficulties involved-chiefly because the site slopes steeply and tends to slip towards the Floating Harbour-a number of excellent plans were submitted (1960). The first prize was finally awarded to a girl student whose design was chosen by the judges because it was carefully related to the site; and because the internal plan of the blocks of flats was "original, imaginative, and carefully worked out". The City Council expressed its interest in the Plan, and promised to examine its proposals officially. Ultimately it was decided that it was unlikely that any re-development plan for this area could be pursued in the "foreseeable future", and the area remains derelict.

Disappointment at the shelving of this scheme was swallowed up in a recrudescence of the vexed question of rebuilding the devastated Wine Street/Castle Street area of the City. The Civic Society was gravely disturbed to learn that private developers were preparing plans for two buildings in this area. They immediately pressed the Corporation for a definite public statement on the future of this part of the City. They wanted to be reassured that there was going to be a comprehensive plan here, and not piece-meal development.

When on the following day the Corporation published their plan for the development of this area members of the Society immediately challenged the "departures of this new development plan from expressed previous intentions", and they requested that the proposed two buildings in High Street should be held up until the whole plan for the area

could be reviewed. When this request was refused a "last-ditch fight to save Wine Street" was prepared. A public meeting was held at which the Civic Society (together with other important local bodies) took a prominent part, and a petition was drawn up and later signed by 11,500 people in less than three weeks (1961). The controversy was given wide publicity on radio and television, and in the national press. As one London newspaper expressed it, "the whole of Britain should be watching the fate of this plan. For it strikes at the heart of a problem which citizens everywhere are facing-how to preserve our city centres as worthy monuments of the twentieth century". The President of the Royal Institute of British Architects offered to intervene, and the Royal Fine Arts Commission as a neutral body asked for a meeting with the Corporation to discuss the whole re-development scheme. In the meantime, the Minister of Housing informed the Civic Society that he now had no power to intervene in the dispute, and he refused a public enquiry "as there is nothing in which a public enquiry can be held". The Corporation for its part maintained that their scheme was indeed comprehensive and that the accusation of piecemeal planning was quite unjustified.

On the face of it the Civic Society had lost the battle but whatever may be thought about the rights and wrongs of the contending parties there is no doubt that a good deal of healthy, critical interest in the re-planning of their city was aroused among ordinary Bristol citizens. And the controversy, although it may have produced a certain amount of heat, caused no ill-will on either side. It was realized that, as one local newspaper once expressed it, "the Civic Society is a body of altruistic local opinion which lives up to the old expression that Bristolians sleep with one eye open. Whether or not the general public always agrees with the Society's conclusions on acts of civic commission or omission, they must at least have some sense of warm satisfaction in their voluntary watchdogs' timely barking". The Society, while regretting that the Corporation's decision was not to their liking, "wished to place on record that they have always been courteously received, and that the battle has been well and cleanly fought". Indeed, when a London newspaper attacked the Bristol Council as 'irresponsible' the Society was quick to dissociate itself from this attack and to pay a tribute to the attitude of the Corporation during what might have become an acrimonious quarrel.

The most promising result of this dispute was the wise decision of the Council to commission the eminent architect, Sir Hugh Casson to prepare development proposals for this controversial site. When his new plan with its exciting possibilities was made public in 1963 it won the instant approval of the Civic Society which commented, "citizens must regain an awareness of and a respect for their physical environment; and also a pride in permitting only what is best for their City".

The record of Bristol Civic Society and its parent Society, the Bristol Kyrle Society, is a worthy one, showing a steady increase in prestige and influence; but it is not enough to have only the interest and respect of Bristol citizens. The Civic Society also deserves their support. There is still much to be done: a carefully considered skyscraper policy must be worked out for the City so that tall buildings are properly sited to enhance the beauty of Bristol's many fine vistas; and plans must be made for the future of Ashton Court and of Kingsweston House. Recently (1964) the Society received the welcome news that the Planning and Public Works Committee has voted a sum of money towards planting some trees on the bald, dull expanse of grass which was once a College Green of character and beauty, and an impressive setting for the Cathedral; but an overall plan for the comprehensive re-development of the 'Centre' is still urgently needed. As the present Secretary of the Society has pointed out, "until we build with the imagination and logic with

which our ancestors built, Bristolians have little right to noise abroad the undoubted splendours of our City's inheritance of architecture".

Rapid growth of the City's population; the enormous increase in the volume of vehicular traffic; and the technical complications of modern urban development will present the Society with many problems in the future in addition to their concern to encourage improved standards of architectural design throughout the City, and to prevent the destruction of treasures of the past by neglect, indifference, or careless planning. It is this duty which was so aptly described by the Archdeacon of Bath in an address to the Kyrle Society in 1935 with words which provide a fitting conclusion to this necessarily brief and incomplete history "People may have learnt the preciousness of their possessions, and yet these possessions may slowly pass away-will pass away-unless there are persons strong enough and alert enough to defend them. In other words, it will sometimes be necessary to fight. When I say 'fight' I mean, of course, never in anger, never impatient, never in the spirit of imputing inferior motives to persons who may be acting quite honestly according to their lights; but always in a spirit of goodwill and friendliness. People do not deserve to have good things if they are not ready to fight for them."

# Presidents and Honorary Secretaries of The Bristol Kyrle Society and Bristol Civic Society

## PRESIDENTS

1905-1910 Dr. John Beddoe

1911-1912 Miss M. Clifford

1913-1924 Professor C. Lloyd Morgan

1925-1937 Professor G. H. Leonard

1938-1940 W. Melville Wills

1941-1946 Ellison F. Eberle

1947-1950 Sir George Oatley

1951-1958 Wilfred Leighton

1959 - Arthur Bryant

## HONORARY SECRETARIES

1906-1907 Miss Vickers

1908-1919 Miss L. P. Wills

1920-1921 Miss Rintoul

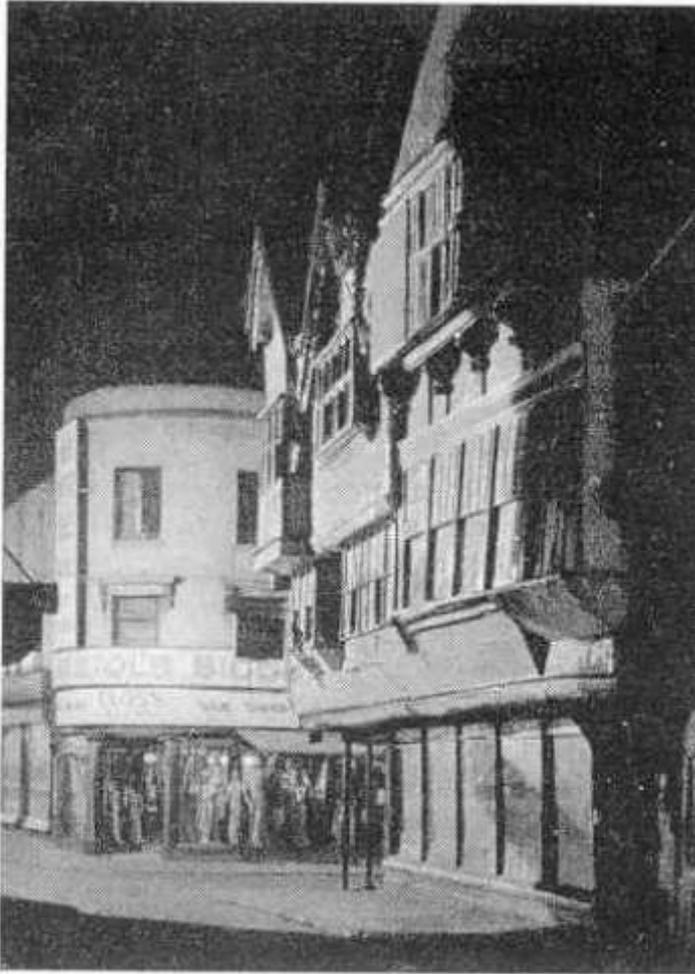
1922-1932 J. J. Simpson

1933-1945 John Cooke

1946-1948 Mrs. D. P. Dobson

1949-1960 A. Oliver Perkins

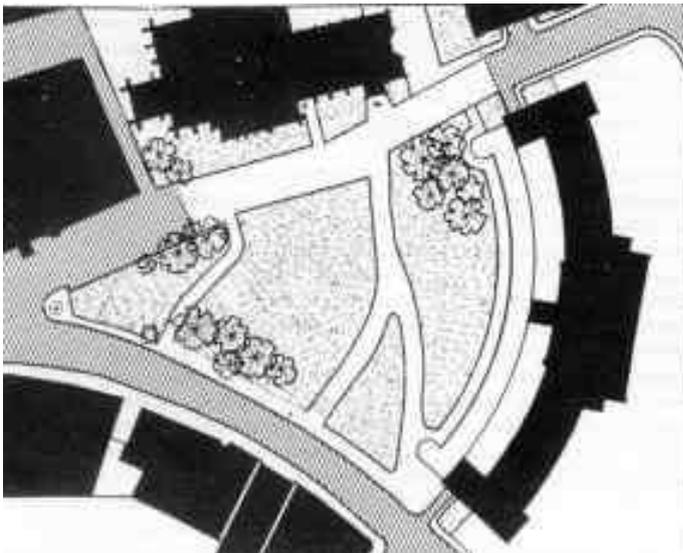
1961 - John W. Totterdill



The Swan Inn, St Mary-le-Port/Dolphin Street corner. Demolished 1936 for new shoe shop.

First built 1434, the gables seen were 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Photo: Reece Winstone.



The plan for College Green.



Students proposal for housing at Hotwells



The controversial central area of Wine Street and High Street.

Photo: Reece Winstone.

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James Briggs, February 2004.

## Addendum; Since 1961

PRESIDENTS. In the 1980s the post was abolished.

1961-1966 Arthur Bryant

1967-1976 Kenneth Nealon

1977-1982 Jack Miles

CHAIRMAN The post was established in the 1950s, but was not mentioned in Vincent Waite's book.

1956-57 Reece Winstone

196?-1965 Jack Miles

1966-1968 Ron Mildred

1969-1972 Bryan Little

1972-1974 Patrick Brown

1974-1975 Ron Mildred

1975-1979 Peter Floyd

1979-1982 Gordon Priest

1982-1984 Pamela Cobb

1984-1986 Richard Flowerdew

1986-1988 Gordon Tucker

1988-1990 James Briggs

1990-1992 Stan Godsell

1992-1994 Jerry Hicks

1994-1996 John Grenfell

1996-1998 Alan Elkan

1998-1999 Jim White (retired after 1 year)

1999 - 2005 Alan Elkan

2005 - 2006 Audrey Lennox

2006 - 2008 John Payne

2008 - 2010 Alan Morris

2010 - Stephen Wickham

### HONORARY SECRETARIES

1961-1965 John Totterdill

1965-1971 Christopher Marsden-Smedley

1971-1977 James Briggs

1977-1986 Gordon Tucker

1986-1991 André Coutanche

1991-1992 Vacancy

1992-1997 John Butler

1997- 2010 Gordon Tucker

2010 Vacancy