BRISTOL

The Kalendars' Guild, a fraternity of laymen and clerics, had its chapel in All Saints Church and a house close by for its prior, who was charged with the duty of maintaining a public library and giving regular instruction therein. The main business of the city as a whole was still transacted in the Guildhall, though the Mayor held his court every weekday at the Tolbery. Practical charity was as much the concern of merchants and craftsmen as it had once been that of feudal magnates, and the fifteenth century saw the building of a number of new hospitals as well as the maintenance and sometimes recreation of existing ones. John Gaywode, business associate of Canynges, left money to no less than nine almshouses in his will (1471). Canynges himself founded a new one on Redcliff Hill, and after his death (in 1474) his executor William Spencer, in accordance with the terms of his will built another, dedicated to the Trinity, in Lewin's Mead opposite the Grey Friars. Richard Foster founded one by Redcliff Gate, and John Foster (mayor in 1481–2) built one at the top of Steep Street for eight poor men, five poor women and a priest; each had a separate room and a garden, and there was a chapel attached, dedicated to God and the Three Kings of Cologne. Nor was the care of the poor left to wealthy individuals. Some of the crafts made special provision for their members over and above the outdoor relief commonly expected of them. Thus the weavers and tuckers had their own almshouses, and in the ancient hospital of St Bartholomew a new Fraternity of Mariners was established (1445) which maintained a priest and twelve poor mariners. At the end of the fifteenth century Bristol's pre-eminent position among England's provincial towns seemed assured. Indeed a shrewd Italian, visiting England in 1500, declared that, except for York, there was no other really important town outside of London. Yet at that very moment its exports were showing an ominous downward trend. Exeter's trade was bounding as the Channel became safe from piracy and inward clothing towns like Taunton shipped thence instead of through Bristol as formerly; increasing quantities of West of England cloth were going through Southampton, for sale in the Mediterranean; and London, above all, was drawing away the West of England trade as the great principal outlet for English woollens. Thus while England's exports as a whole were still soundly based than that of many another port, for her many and varied industries from bell-founding to cloth-making — and still more dyeing and finishing — gave her an enviable measure of stability, and her trade was for the most part in the hands of her own citizens. Moreover, with her excellent harbour and her superb geographical position, she

remained a great regional centre, supplying a region where wealth, and therefore the demand for raw materials and consumer goods, was continuing to grow. Nor was there any decline in the enterprise of her merchants and mariners, as once again, from about 1480, they sought new routes for their commerce, this time westwards across the Atlantic. But it was to be many long years before voyages thither yielded such dividends as to cause an expansion of the city of Bristol comparable to that between 1500 and 1560.33

THE SIXTEENTH AND SEVENTEENTH CENTURIES: THE ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

In the two centuries following the accession of Henry VII the citizens of Bristol were closely connected with a series of momentous events at home and abroad. Outstanding among them were the discovery of the New World, the foundation of the Spanish and Portuguese Empires, the Reformation and the Counter Reformation, the price revolution and the creation of a new social structure in sixteenth-century England. In the next century there was the revolt against authority of all kinds, the colonization of North America and at home the Civil War with the final establishment of the principle that England was to be governed by law. In economic matters there were the far-reaching effects of the astonishing growth of London, which had been accused as early as the 1780s of having 'eaten up all the rest of the town and havens of England'. To all these upheavals Bristol's citizens adapted themselves with remarkable success. Although there were years of depression, even for disaster for some or all of the city's inhabitants, on the whole the period was a prosperous one and triumphantly so after the restoration of Charles II, when the enterprise of earlier generations was rewarded in full measure. Economic changes were accompanied by a growth in population and notable social and religious changes which gradually brought about considerable alterations in the city's street pattern and the appearance of its houses. By 1700 its society had long been secularized and its government re-organized to meet contemporary needs; its merchant elite, increasingly influenced by dissenting opinions, had provided with exceptional generosity for the education of the young and the care of the old; had established the most advanced system of poor relief in the country; had re-orientated its foreign trade towards the Atlantic and revolutionized its inland trade, so that the city could be said to be the best port after London. Even as early as about 1639 Bristol had seemed to Peter Mundy 'a little London' for merchant shipping and great and well-furnished markets, and later Pepys wrote that he found the place 'another London' and that one could 'hardly know it to stand in the country'. And so it is not surprising that Bristol merchants appeared to contemporaries to act with all the gravity, pomp, pride, and self-assurance of those of the capital, and that they aspired to obtain for their mayor the title of Lord Mayor, then enjoyed only by London and York.34

One of the immediate effects of the Reformation and the Dissolution of the religious houses was the creation by a royal charter of 1542 of the Bishopric of Bristol and the grant of the title of City to the ancient town. This charter recognized the end of the independent jurisdiction once enjoyed by St Augustine's monastery over its precincts and tenants in the town and of the Hospitaliers over Temple Fee. Arthur's Fee and the Berkeley's famous Redcliff Fee had long been absorbed, except for the Castle Precinct which remained independent until 1560, the municipal

32 For the Tolbery see Rieart, 84; N and T, ii, 106, and Appendix I; for the Kalendars, ibid. ii, 90; Kenyon and Hadcock, 421; Wm Wore., 56, 52. The tailors' guild had a hall off Broad St and their fraternity chapel of St John the Baptist was in St Ewen's (BAO 4954 (1), Wm Wore., 115); as was that of the goldsmiths (Chantry Book of St Ewe'n, 330). For the halls and guilds generally, see Rieart, 77, and GRR, 117–6. The City Council sometimes met in the vaulted hall beneath the chapel on the Bridge.

33 Canynges' almshouse on Redcliff Hill (see efs. in his will and in Gaywode's) was founded, according to Tannen, in 1442. Clay's date of 1442 seems improbably early. The almshouse built after his death (see Wadley, Willis, Wm Wore., 140; cf. GRR, 66) in the present-day Mead was sometimes called 'Spercey's' or 'Leon's'. Richard Foster was probably the Ric. Foster who was mayor three times (1460–2, 1466–7, 1467–8) and whose will is dated 1470; his almshouse is mentioned in Gaywode's will. For John Foster's almshouse see GRR, 175; St Mark's Cart. 121–2 and App. iii; John was a ship-builder and traded actively to Iceland and elsewhere. For the weavers' and tuckers' almshouses beneath their halls in Temple Street see 'Tanner aq. cit. 483; Leland, vi, 89; RG 43 xiii, 86; John Tenwycke's will 1468 (PRO, PCC Will 4 Doggetts). For the Fraternity of Mariners LRR, 169–91; cf. N and T, ii, 200.

34 Carus-Wilson and Coleman for export figures; Carus-Wilson (6), 20 and passim; and (1), ii, nos. 205, 209; Roddick, op. cit. as above in n. 94; D. B. Quillin, Geog. Jnl v, 89; Carus-Wilson (6), 213; Lat. ii, 405–6 citing letter of Bishop Coulston (1681); J. N. L. Baker in The Lilies of the Norths, ed. A. Jessop (1890), para. 177; Lat. ii, 405–6 citing letter of Bishop Gough (1801); J. N. L. Baker in Historical Geography of England before 1800, ed. H. C. Darby (1961 edn), 587.

The City Council sometimes met in the vaulted hall beneath the chapel
officers now exercised control in theory at least over the whole County of the City. The new charters, with the earlier comprehensive one of 1499 and the later charter of 1581, completed the formal setting out of Bristol's oligarchic constitution and so provided the necessary framework of good government for which she was long noted. Since 1499, the mayor and five aldermen (each being the head of a ward), had formed a small 'cabinet', which could take prompt decisions and guide the council of forty-three burgesses. This 'cabinet' and council were composed of the most substantial citizens, men who had proved themselves in the world of business and affairs—the merchants, the retailers and manufacturers such as grocers, mercers, haberdashers, victuars, soap-boilers and sugar-makers. By their ability and their philanthropy they kept the goodwill of the populace.38

Combinatively little is known about the trade of Bristol under the Tudors. In 1540 Roger Barlow commented on its 'grete trade and many ships belonging to hit'. Judged by its contribution to the subsidies of 1536–7 it was still the second wealthiest town after London, but it is evident from many sections of the community were encountering difficulties. It was because of poverty, for example, that Redcliff parish was granted a fair in 1529, and troubles over foreign trade led to a plea in 1512 from certain merchants for a grant of incorporation. Commerce, they said, was being disastrously affected by 'the meddling of ignorant artificers' and others. Thus was born the Society of Merchant Venturers which was to play a dominant role in the city's affairs for years to come. In the first fifty years of its life it had to contend with foreign wars, piracy, and severe competition from other ports, especially that of London. In 1596 the Common Council could with justice assert that London merchants had not only taken away much of Bristol's south-European trade but that they were also monopolizing the inward trade within ten miles of the city, which it described as 'this now poor place'; two years later Lord Burghley could speak of Bristol as a decayed town within ten miles of the city, which it described as 'this now poor place'; two years later Lord Burghley could speak of Bristol as a decayed town with London. In 1596 the Common Council could with justice assert that London merchants had not only taken away much of Bristol's south-European trade but that they were also monopolizing the inward trade within ten miles of the city, which it described as 'this now poor place'; two years later Lord Burghley could speak of Bristol as a decayed town along with Chester, Newcastle, Hull, and others. Nevertheless, there was clearly a less gloomy side to the picture. Many citizens were still making fortunes, as their wills reveal, some very: possibly like their contemporaries at King's Lynn by large-scale smuggling; if others went to seek better opportunities in the capital, such was the strength of local patriotism that they often eventually left their money to the charities for the poor of their birth-place. Its reputation in any case remained high: Camden's judgement was that the Elizabethan city 'could justly claim the chief place' after London and York.39 By the 1650s there were clear signs of a revival.

A Tudor development which now began to bear fruit in abundance was the deliberate encouragement of voyages of discovery across the Atlantic, first with the aim of finding new outlets for Bristol trade and then with a view to colonization. Since at least 1680 or so there was a small but active group of far-sighted merchants who risked their capital in such ventures, fitting out Bristol ships and engaging Bristol mariners. John Cabot himself was largely financed by them, and the Hakluyts with their mercantilist theories naturally found ardent support. Merchants like the Thones were followed by such active promoters of colonization as John Whiston, Robert Aldworth, and John Guy, the first governor of Newfoundland. Not surprisingly Sir Fernando Gorges, called the father of English colonization in North America, chose the Great House on St Augustine's Back as a base for his operations in the 1640s and after. Of the greatness of the overall achievement of the merchants and adventurers Thomas Fuller in his History of the Writhe of England (1662) had no doubts: they were, he wrote, 'possessed with a public spirit for the general good; aiming not so much to return wealthier as wiser; not always to enrich themselves, as to inform posterity by their discoveries... they have sown experiments, with great pains, cost, and danger that ensuing ages may freely reap the benefit thereof'.39

It was in fact in the coming decades that the full reward came. Earlier in the century the city's trade was mainly carried on with her traditional European markets, though her ships had also been actively engaged in carrying Puritan emigrants to Virginia, New England, Maine and Massachusetts in the period 1620 to 1640, as well as in trade on a small scale. After the suspension of commerce caused by the Civil War this traffic was intensified, and Bristol began to play a principal part in the transatlantic trade. Between 1654 and 1686 more than ten thousand indentured servants—their names are recorded in the city's archives—sailed from the port in response to the demands for labour from Virginia, Maryland, Newfandland, New York, Pennsylvania, and the West Indies. But this is but one aspect of the extraordinary service rendered by her to the New World. She had the necessary mercantile organization and drive as well as the ships and long-established links in connexion to enable her to become a principal distributing centre for the increasing volume of colonial exports—mainly tobacco, sugar, cotton, timber, and rum—and to meet the insatiable demand of the planters for manufactured goods. Above all, as Roger North, the city's Recorder observed, she had enterprising citizens, not only merchants, but petty shopkeepers who 'would venture a bale of stockings or a piece of stuff in a cargo bound for Nevis or Virginia'. Trade with the West Indies and the American mainland was developed to such an extent in the second half of the century that Bristol's fame was spread throughout the American continent and more than thirty places there came to be called after it. This new interest by no means diminished her old trade with Europe; on the contrary it gave it a new impetus. In 1645 the Society of Merchant Venturers had obtained an important charter which opened to its members the trade of the Eastland, the Russia, and the Levant Companies as well as that of the Merchant Adventurers of London. Armed with this charter and the advantage of established links with the transatlantic markets, Bristol's merchants were able after the Civil War to set about expanding her re-export trade as well as the export of her own manufactures. The whole pattern of the city's commerce was thus altered. To Spain and to other European countries she sent foreign goods such as tobacco, wine, raw sugar, ginger, and a great variety of English goods including coal and other minerals, as well as every sort of textile, now gathered from as far afield as Manchester.
register the great increase in exports and imports during the century, both to and from America and Europe; but they give only a partial picture for as in the sixteenth century there was undoubtedly a vast amount of smuggled goods that never paid any tax.64

The overseas commerce of Bristol excites the imagination, but it was in part the dramatic growth of its manufactures which made the great expansion possible. Among the old established industries, the greatest – the woollen industry – was still important though clearly on the decline, and fortunes were being made from white-soap-making in the sixteenth century and later as they were in the time of Richard I. In 1154 Sir Robert Thorne was said to have had ‘all the rule of it’ and to have bestowed the ‘greatest alms ever given in Bristol’. But in Charles I’s reign the restrictions imposed by the London patentees and excessive taxation soon reduced the Bristol soap houses from eleven to four.65 Ship-building, on the other hand, after a period of decline was prospering, though at the close of the seventeenth century it was already feeling competition from ports such as Chester and Liverpool. It benefited from the overall growth of commerce and particularly from the oceanic trade which led to a demand for ships of large tonnage. As Secretary for the Navy, Pepys was an informed observer and he noted with delight the Royal Navy frigate of eleven hundred tons, then building in the Marsh; and before 1683 the Dean and Chapter had disposed of the cannon’s Little Marsh as a ship-building yard. Understandably, this was followed by an episcopal complaint that the noise and stench from the workshops was ‘an intolerable nuisance and damaging to his health and comfort’.66

Chief among the new industries was sugar refining. Alderman Robert Aldworth, using sugar imported from the Azores, the Madeiras, and Brazil, set up the first known sugar-house in the grounds of his own mansion near the church of St Peter, while Knight’s refinery on St Peter’s Hill, which could readily be put to the

42 For emigrants and indentured servants see McGrath (3), nos. 120, 127-32; Lat. ii, 147, 401 (Quaker emigrants to Pennsylvania in 1681); Macleod, Gneatfr, 48-71. For commerce see McGrath (3) and (4) passim and especially (2), xx, xxx–xxxvi, xxxvii, (3), 401; (5), 224 (the depression of the 1620s); (6), 225-6 (3), 279-95 (statistics of imports and exports) and (1) 277-78; cf. R. Davis, A Commercial Revolution (BBHA, 1967), 9-36. For smuggling see above.

43 For the woolen industry see R. Perry, BGAC 145 (1943), 73 sqq.; for Irish competition see McGrath (3), nos. 161, 165. For medieval and later soapmakers see Seyer, ii, 14; Waddington, Wills, passim; The Company of Soapmakers, 1562-1624 (BBR K, 1950), ed. H. E. Matthews, 4-9. The sharebrokers were also threatened by the parenters and indeed all merchants and shopkeepers were up in arms against the ceaseless interference by commissioners and purveyors. Lat. ii, 150-31, 146.

44 McGrath (5), no. 203; Lat. ii, 98-9, 128-9, 502; J. W. Powell, Bristol Privates and Ships of War (1925), 17-17; R. Davis, The Rise of the English Shipping Industry in the 17th and 18th centuries (1936), 1; D. C. Coleman (Naval Dockyard), Ev. HR vi, 1935, p. 158 states that only at London and Bristol were there private yards ‘which could readily be put to the Navy’s assistance’; cf. pp. 157, 152 for warships built in Bristol period; see also map 1, Pepys’ Diary, op. cit. 159.

45 Lat. ii, 441; J. V. Hall, levant (1949), 110 sqq. For Evelyn’s comments see Diary of John Evelyn, ed. E. S. D. Beer, iii, 110-1. For tobacco imports partly re-exported see statement in Commons in 1679 that of the 6000 tons of shipping possessed by Bristol half was employed in the trade.

46 For emigrants and indentured servants see McGrath (3), nos. 120, 127-32; Lat. ii, 147, 401 (Quaker emigrants to Pennsylvania in 1681); Macleod, Gneatfr, 48-71. For commerce see McGrath (3) and (4) passim and especially (2), xx, xxx–xxxvi, xxxvii, (3), 401; (5), 224 (the depression of the 1620s); (6), 225-6 (3), 279-95 (statistics of imports and exports) and (1) 277-78; cf. R. Davis, A Commercial Revolution (BBHA, 1967), 9-36. For smuggling see above.

47 For the woolen industry see R. Perry, BGAC 145 (1943), 73 sqq.; for Irish competition see McGrath (3), nos. 161, 165. For medieval and later soapmakers see Seyer, ii, 14; Waddington, Wills, passim; The Company of Soapmakers, 1562-1624 (BBR K, 1950), ed. H. E. Matthews, 4-9. The sharebrokers were also threatened by the parenters and indeed all merchants and shopkeepers were up in arms against the ceaseless interference by commissioners and purveyors. Lat. ii, 150-31, 146.

48 McGrath (5), no. 203; Lat. ii, 98-9, 128-9, 502; J. W. Powell, Bristol Privates and Ships of War (1925), 17-17; R. Davis, The Rise of the English Shipping Industry in the 17th and 18th centuries (1936), 1; D. C. Coleman (Naval Dockyard), Ev. HR vi, 1935, p. 158 states that only at London and Bristol were there private yards ‘which could readily be put to the Navy’s assistance’; cf. pp. 157, 152 for warships built in Bristol period; see also map 1, Pepys’ Diary, op. cit. 159.

49 Lat. ii, 441; J. V. Hall, levant (1949), 110 sqq. For Evelyn’s comments see Diary of John Evelyn, ed. E. S. D. Beer, iii, 110-1. For tobacco imports partly re-exported see statement in Commons in 1679 that of the 6000 tons of shipping possessed by Bristol half was employed in the trade.

44 For emigrants and indentured servants see McGrath (3), nos. 120, 127-32; Lat. ii, 147, 401 (Quaker emigrants to Pennsylvania in 1681); Macleod, Gneatfr, 48-71. For commerce see McGrath (3) and (4) passim and especially (2), xx, xxx–xxxvi, xxxvii, (3), 401; (5), 224 (the depression of the 1620s); (6), 225-6 (3), 279-95 (statistics of imports and exports) and (1) 277-78; cf. R. Davis, A Commercial Revolution (BBHA, 1967), 9-36. For smuggling see above.

45 For the woolen industry see R. Perry, BGAC 145 (1943), 73 sqq.; for Irish competition see McGrath (3), nos. 161, 165. For medieval and later soapmakers see Seyer, ii, 14; Waddington, Wills, passim; The Company of Soapmakers, 1562-1624 (BBR K, 1950), ed. H. E. Matthews, 4-9. The sharebrokers were also threatened by the parenters and indeed all merchants and shopkeepers were up in arms against the ceaseless interference by commissioners and purveyors. Lat. ii, 150-31, 146.
THE SIXTEENTH AND SEVENTEENTH CENTURIES: TOPOGRAPHICAL AND SOCIAL CHANGES

The great development in inland and foreign trade and the general expansion of the economy sketched above could not fail to leave its mark on every aspect of the city's social and physical structure - on the size and distribution of its population, on its houses, on the public buildings, secular or religious, on its industrial buildings and on the port itself with its quays, wharves, and cranes. It is not possible to make more than a rough estimate of the population in 1500 or to trace with any precision the stages of its growth in the two following centuries, but the national trend was upwards during the sixteenth century and it seems likely that this was so at Bristol and that numbers may even have doubled between 1500 and 1700. 47

Possibly there was some increase in the late Middle Ages for the town escaped the worst effects of plague and trade decline which afflicted most others; certainly there was immigration of apprentices in the early decades of the sixteenth century from neighbouring counties, Wales and Ireland; and in 1444 the population was at least twice that of the shire town and river port of Gloucester. Growth is also implied in the charter of 1381 by which the number of aldermen and wards was more than doubled and when the city was described as ampla et populosa. Commercial stagnation, recurring outbreaks of plague and the disaster of Civil War all caused temporary checks to growth. Nevertheless it would seem that by 1700 there was substantial: the population then has been estimated at twenty or twenty-five thousand. This increase was not on the extra-ordinary scale of that of London, nor apparently was it as great as that of Norwich, but it must be remembered that all enumerations, taxation lists, and the estimates based on them are likely to be particularly unreliable in a crowded sea-port with a mobile population, many poor, and a strong tradition of resistance to authority. Furthermore, already there were many living just outside the city boundaries in suburbs which were physically and economically a part of Bristol though not yet so officially. 48

An increasing differentiation in the social structure also became evident in this period: as the numbers of the well-off middle class grew so did those of the small tradesmen and craftsmen, of the poor and very poor (i.e. those listed by Gregory King as cottagers, paupers, vagrants, gypsies, thieves, and beggars). This was partly reflected in the distribution of the city's inhabitants in its various parishes. The parish returns of 1544 and a levy of 1574 clearly demonstrate the predominant position in numbers of communicants and in wealth of those in the ancient city and its suburbs on the north side of the Avon over those on the south side. Numbers were nearly three times as great on the south side and the four northern wards were nearly seven times wealthier than the south ward of Temple and Redcliffe. The majority of rich merchants and traders naturally favoured the central areas where they could live in close proximity to the seat of government - the Tolsery, the Guildhall, and to the main markets and best shops. But the expansion to the east in the parishes of St James and of St Philip and St Jacob, as well as to the west in the parishes of St Stephen and St Nicholas - the area of the quays - is also noticeable. By 1700 very few rich families lived on the south bank. Leases of houses indeed in Temple, Tucker, and Redcliffe streets reveal that clothworkers with their racks were still there in force in the Middle Ages, but now there was no Canynges or his like. Temple in fact had become a distinctly poor quarter in spite of new industries having been sited there. On the north bank St Werburgh's little parish with its fashionable Small Street was clearly very prosperous, St Augustine's was both outstandingly rich and populous, while the parish of St Philip and St Jacob was definitely a poor-class quarter. 49

The Dissolution of the monasteries played an important part in these changes. Their buildings, gardens, orchards or farm lands, ringing the town on the north bank, and those of the Hospitalers, the Hospital of St John the Baptist and the Augustinian Friary on the south bank passed mostly into secular uses. The chief exception were the buildings and property of the Abbey of St Augustine. The Abbey church, or part of it, for the nave was destroyed, became the Cathedral church of the Holy and Undivided Trinity, and was renamed the Trinity College; part of the Abbey buildings became the Bishop's residence, and the monastery's property round about it and scattered through the city was transferred to the new diocese. The City Corporation early adopted the royal antieclerical policy and in 1533 chose Thomas Cromwell as its Recorder; in due course it became, as might be expected, the chief secular beneficiary of the sales of monastic lands. By 1548 it had obtained from the Crown Gaunt's Hospital with its surrounding land and most of its country estates; the buildings and possessions of the Carmelite and Franciscan Friars, of Magdalen Nunnery, and of the Hospitalers. In addition, it also purchased the valuable estate of Lord Lisle (once owned by the Berkeley's) and small amounts of property in the city held by various religious houses from outside. The price of over £2,000 was raised with great difficulty, but the city was well-rewarded for its foresight, for by 1604 when land values had risen steeply its estates had trebled in value.

The chief private buyers were a former mayor of Bristol who bought the Dominican Friary, and Londoners. St James's Priory went to a merchant, St John's Hospital to Dr Owen, the King's physician, and so on, but much of this property was later re-sold to Bristol merchants. Along with the sites of the religious houses and their lands a great deal of house property in the city and its suburbs also changed hands, for throughout the centuries there had been a constant flow of bequests of tenements to religious houses outside the city as well as to local ones. With the suppression of the chantries in Edward VI's reign yet more land was secularized. This time the Corporation was less successful in its purchases, being able to buy no more than the chapel of the Assumption on Bristol Bridge. The endowments of the twenty or so other suppressed chapels were largely dissipated. Fortunately, the chapels of the Three Kings of Cologne and of the Holy Trinity, both attached to almshouses, for which the Corporation was trustee, were not included in the sale of chantry estates. 50

The transfer of religious property to secular ownership had little immediate effect on suburban growth: rebuilding was largely confined to the old town until after the Civil War, for it was national policy that owners of property must rebuild decayed houses in the main streets or on any vacant plot which had once been built on. This duty was specifically imposed on Bristolians by Parliament in 1540; the Corporation was ordered to act, failing action by the owners, for such houses 'might be repellingly witted with such uncleanesse and filthe with pestes, sellers, and

47 J. Cornwall in Ec. HR (1962), 57 and (1963), 32; Apprentices Books, pt 1, 1532-42 (BRS xiv, 1948), ed. D. Holleis, 1957; Lat. i, 23 (The number of 'houseing' persons - no clergy, religious or children being included - recorded in 17 parishes in 1544 was 5,876, St Augustine's was omitted); Charter (i), 11, 126 (1581 charter). For the census of 1607-8 which enumerated 105,474 persons see N and T, iii, 273.
48 For plague see Lat. i, 62, ii, 19, 22, 30, 196, 333; local chroniclers record 3,000 deaths in both 1563 and 1645; The population of Bristol in 1565 (BRS xiv, 1968); E. Ralph and M. E. Williams, Population in History, ed. D. V. Glass and D. C. E. Evanlyn (1965), 192; Lat. iii, 6. For the very high incidence of plague in large cities see E. A. Wrigley, Population and History (1969), esp. p. 96 ('between 1/6 and 1/4 of the population of a great city might die'), and p. 114.
50 Lat. i, 21, 60; Ralph and Williams, op. cit., passim and of: parish assessments for the proposed rate of 1650 and land tax of 1653; Lat. ii, 273, 462. The Hearth Tax (E 179/161/172) of 1670 records the highest numbers of poor in the wards of St James, St Mary Redcliffe and Temple. For fuller's leases etc. see BAO AB (1), 21, 34 etc.
52 Charter (s), 20-30, 84-116; Gaunt's chapel was first used by French Protestant refugees (Evans, Chron.) and later it became the mayor's chapel; the chapel of the Assumption was demolished in 1644; R. J. Fletcher, A History of Bristol Cathedral (1932), passim.
vaults lying open to the greate peril... of the habitants and others. Moreover, any desire on the part of the well-to-do to seek less crowded quarters, have a more spacious and modern dwelling, and avoid civic dues by living on the outskirts was curbed by an ordinance of 1566 imposing a fine on anyone who went to live in the suburbs or the country. The continued concentration of most dwellings within the medieval walls is in fact graphically demonstrated in William Smith’s perspective map of 1568. Though a crude small-scale work, its very simplicity serves to focus attention on the survival of the original Saxon and Norman street pattern north of the Avon, dictated so largely by its walls, and to point the contrast with the ribbon development in the twelfth-century burgal foundations south of the Avon in the feudal fees of Redcliff and Temple. It emphasises too the continued value to the Elizabethan city of its walls. Apart from possible military uses, to be violently put to the test in the next century, they were with their double-gated narrow gateways a most necessary protection to the trader from ever present dangers; an acute Italian observer commented that there is no country in the world where there are so many thieves and robbers as in England — and the city’s wealth was a tempting target. Walls and gates were also needed to keep out the infected in time of plague, and until the commutation of tolls in 1546, it was at the gates that tolls were collected. Gates and turrets also served as private dwellings or for such purposes as a school almshouse, while the wall walk was an essential part both of watch and ward and of the citizens’ good health, for it afforded them a quick escape to its airy height from theSummer heat of the fetid narrow streets. Another striking feature of Smith’s plan is the amount of open land outside the wall: on the north side of the Avon it shows the Marsh as open land; further west the wide open space of College Green, planted with trees, and orchards surrounding St Augustine the Less and Gaunt’s; to the east and north the suburban churches of St Philip, St James, and St Michael — all looking rather like village churches on the city’s fringe. Outside the wall south of the Avon there are but a few houses round St Mary Redcliff and outside Temple Gate. 54 However, it must always be remembered that such a small-scale plan inevitably gives an over-simplified picture. By the time of the next actual survey, undertaken by Millerd in 1673, there had been considerable suburban expansion and many important topographical changes. Before the Civil War halted all development plans, the modernization of old houses and new building was accompanied by various general improvements, which included the re-organization of parish and ward boundaries. Among the notable tasks undertaken was the removal of rubbish dumps from the Marsh and the laying out in 1624 of a bowling green for ‘gentlemen and merchants to recreate themselves on’; archery butts for the use of the citizenry in general had long been in existence there. Visitors afterwards remarked on the ‘pleasant’ and ‘delightful’ Marsh and observed how the company of the town walked there in the evening. Another squaill part of the city which was improved was the Castle precinct, ‘covered with little cottages piled on the head of one another’. It was bought from the Crown in 1650. For long the main medieval buildings had been ‘tending to ruin’, fragments had been let off as hovels for the ‘lewd persons’, and outside Temple Gate. It is remembered that it had once been the Abbey cemetery, a rout of ‘disorderly persons’ playing games there all day and every day. Other complaints were that the School House was used as a tennis court, the Cathedral as a common passage to the Bishop’s Palace and houses in the cloisters, and that the prebends’ dwellings were mostly let to lazeny. The military visitors from Norwich, however, were not so censorious: they noted a ‘fayre and large college yard, beautified with many shady trees and most delightful walks, about which stand many stately buildings [i.e. the Bishop’s Palace, the houses of the Dean, the Chancellor and the prebends] wherein many gentlemen and gentlewomen of note and rank do live’.

When war broke out, as Bristol held a key strategic position in the West of England she became a coveted prize for both contenders. Her site, in the midst of surrounding hills, was quite untenable in the changed military conditions of the seventeenth century; so the Corporation’s first task, after strengthening the neglected fortifications of the Castle and the city walls, was to build a new line of fortified earthworks to join up the hills on the periphery, and to construct several forts. The walls of the great Norman keep were found to be very strong — twelve feet thick and not mineable as they were built on rock. When its battlements had been repaired and its surrounding walls, it was the military view that the Castle was defensible against any attack. Work on the new outer line of the city was continued by the Parliamentary forces after they had been admitted at the end of 1642, and after again July 1643 by the royalists under Prince Rupert and his military engineer, the noted Bernard de Gomme. The latter was responsible for the great pentagonal Royal Fort, which probably replaced the earlier small Windmill Fort. The city’s buildings sustained great damage during the sieges of 1643 and 1645 and contemporary comment was that ‘its people seemed more like prisoners than citizens’, being brought so low with taxations; that the streets were ‘noysome’ and the houses ‘nasty’. The churches too, both during and after the war, suffered from use by the military and the iconoclastic attentions of the Puritans; the lead was stripped from the roof of the Bishop’s Palace which was converted use as a malt-mill. The Bishop and his wife, then with child, were ‘barbarously’ ejected by order of Parliament. With the return of more settled conditions the citizens took energetic steps to restore and expand their city. The development of the Castle site was taken in hand after the demolition of the Castle in 1656. The Council leased building sites within the old precinct on the line of Castle Street, as it came to be called: this new street with a gate and bridge over the...
Castle ditch superseded the former tortuous one round the Castle and by giving direct access to all the important main roads to Gloucester and London made a valuable contribution to Bristol's traffic problems. Another site to be developed was that outside Lawford's Gate. Here many cottages were put up by landowners to the annoyance of the Council, oppressed by the fear that the increased number of poor would greatly impoverish the city. This extension of one of Bristol's earliest suburbs soon became the most populous and disorderly of all and when plague raged, the most afflicted. Other private owners built houses in the Horse Fair area and the inhabitants obtained licence to give additional access to them by making a new gate through the city wall and a new bridge over the Frome, provided it allowed the passage of boats. They acquired the name of Needless Bridge and Gate. Millerd's map pictures some of this building, but it gives no answer to the question of how the poor were housed. Apart from the technical difficulties of depiction, such information formed no part of Millerd's purpose - the glorification of his native city. The squa'lled hovels of the poor, still less of the very poor, were no matter for civic pride and of no interest to merchant or other visitors. What he does call attention to is the suburban growth. He records that in the few years before 1675 Bristol had been 'augmented in most parts', but especially on the west and north-west sides where the slopes of St Michael's Hill had been 'converted into coney: buildings and pleasant gardens' making a 'beautiful addition to the suburbs'. From this hill-top Camden, long ago, had admired the delightful prospect of the Elizabethan city with twenty: fair churches and the harbour full of ships. Now, in 1667, from outside Frome Gate a vintner's generosity provided steps up the precipitous incline - a way that was re-named Queen's Street. On the western edge of the city, the Marsh, damaged during the war, had again been improved, while on its north-east side plots had been leased out into what was to become the fine King Street. 38

The increase in the number of inhabitants and the expanding economy forced the problems of the maintenance of a pure water supply and of sanitation in general to the fore. Since early medieval times the city had been noted for the purity of its water and Leland in his Itinerary of 1543 much admired its system of conduits. Well-off and public-spirited citizens were accustomed to leave bequests for their repair and the Corporation, in the post-medieval period, began to assume more responsibility, though the role of the citizens was long exercised some degree of control, but the multiplication of such trades in the city, and a growing awareness of the dangers of pollution, made the necessity for control more urgent. There was a natural tendency for tanners, soapmakers and others needing water to seek the river banks and this, especially on the crowded north bank, led to trouble and compelled the Corporation in 1700 to take the radical step of obtaining an Act of Parliament to prohibit rubbish being thrown into the river or deposited on its banks. Among the new industries guilty of pollution were lead, copper, and glass-making. The Corporation also laid it down when leasing land under Marsh Wall that the houses built were not to be used for such trades, and it even took steps on behalf of the Newgate prisoners to end the stench from the curriers' pits near the Gate. 39

The whole problem of sanitation was complicated by the growing crowds of homeless vagrants. In times of scarcity especially, the number of beggars attracted by the city's wealth and supplies of food assumed tragic proportions: in 1648-9, for instance, the Corporation shipped hundreds of starving Irish back to Ireland. Nevertheless, despite all drawbacks and bitter complaints from time to time of filth in the alleys and on the quays, and of the state of the Frome (said in the early seventeenth century 'only to be cleared by the winter floods of refuse and the contents of sewers') there is no doubt that contemporaries regarded Bristol as a particularly clean place, especially so in comparison with London. The Elizabethans were of one mind on this point - Smith inscribed on his plan of 1608 that there was 'not any sickne that cometh from any house, but all conveyed under ye ground'; Michael Drayton in his Poliphilus and Camden in his Britannia both wrote of her as the healthiest of cities. Even at the end of the seventeenth century, when the use of coal had become universal for domestic purposes and heavy and other industries had so increased in number, Millerd could still praise the city's pleasantness, scoured through by the tidal Avon and with its streets cleared of all 'noisome filth and uncleanness' by its sewers. 40

The street pattern was in general certainly old, but the houses lining the main roads were far from being so: in the period under review it is probable that the centre of the medieval city was largely rebuilt. Among the public buildings added or re-modelled were the Mayor's Tolzey or Comptoir, the Merchants' Place of Assembly or Tolzey, many halls of trade companies, charitable institutions, churches and non-conformist chapels. The mainspring for the plans for building a grander Council House was doubtless the re-organization of municipal government after the 1542 charter and a consequent enhanced civic pride. It was erected on the site of the civic Tolzey and on the south aisle of St Ewen's church in 1512-2. It was here that the mayor held his court and the Common Council its meetings and many a feast of spiced cakes and wine. Other civic improvements were the erection of the Merchants' Tolzey and of covered markets. The former was built on land belonging to All

---

9 The Great or Military House, believed to have included the medieval royal state apartments, was preserved: Lat. ii, 238. See also ibid. ii, 272-3, 276, 300, 307, 317.

38 See below ma; Lat. In, 93; for bequests for the repair of conduits see Wadley, Wills, v, 92; for the paving of streets see Adams's Chronicle (compiled?) 1623-48, ed. F. F. Fox (1910), v, 92; for Temple conduit see Wills, ii, 73.

40 For Irish beggars Lat. ii, 13-14, 102. For the use of coal see J. U. Nef, Rise of the British Coal Industry (1910), i, 79.
Saints' vestry in Corn Street and adjoined the church; its penthouse was the same length as the civic one opposite and was also colonnaded. Chief among the markets were the Great Meat Market, with its freestone gateway, the covered Meat Market (the New Market), and the Corn Market—all built between 1572 and 1623.62

As for the charitable institutions their growth was phenomenal. Even before the Reformation the burghal aristocracy, well in advance of their class in most other towns, had endowed almshouses on a generous scale; after it immense sums were poured out by wealthy men, and women too, and also by those of modest fortunes, for schools, prisons, and the relief of the poor and sick.63 First of the schools was the Free Grammar School of 1532, housed in the ancient St Bartholomew's Hospital; the Cathedral Grammar school, a royal foundation on the lines of St Paul's School in London, followed in 1541; towards the end of the century Queen Elizabeth's Hospital for poor boys and orphans was founded in imitation of another London school (Christ's Hospital), and in 1644 came a revolutionary step—the endowment of a school for girls, the Red Maid's school. Already education had been encouraged by the founding of a Public Library, the first in the country after that at Norwich. The last of the seventeenth-century benefactors to schools was Edward Aldworth, whose Great House on St Augustine's Back was not actually opened until the next century.64

Care for the old and sick was on the same generous scale: by 1700 at least six new almshouses had been set up and the older ones further endowed. The seventeenth century also saw a remarkably liberal experiment in the treatment of the able-bodied poor. Hitherto they had been provided for in parish workhouses, but John Careys central workhouse, established in the Mint in 1696 and later named St Peter's Hospital, was the first of its kind in the country. It was to set the pattern for future poor-law administration throughout England. The Hospital adjoined Aldworth's old sugar-house and the first Board of Guardians held their meetings in his Great House.65

There was lavish expenditure on beautifying the interiors of parish churches in this period, but otherwise comparatively little of the charitable wealth found its way into the coffers of the Anglican church. This is especially interesting when one considers the relatively few parish churches built in the Middle Ages. Even Gloucester had more while Norwich had forty-three and York thirty-nine. There was considerable expenditure, however, on the building of non-conformist chapels. When Bishop Carleton began his crusade in 1674 to extirpate 'everything papist' he had been provided for in parish workhouses, but John Careys central workhouse, established in the Mint in 1696 and later named St Peter's Hospital, was the first of its kind in the country. It was to set the pattern for future poor-law administration throughout England. The Hospital adjoined Aldworth's old sugar-house and the first Board of Guardians held their meetings in his Great House.65

There was lavish expenditure on beautifying the interiors of parish churches in this period, but otherwise comparatively little of the charitable wealth found its way into the coffers of the Anglican church. This is especially interesting when one considers the relatively few parish churches built in the Middle Ages. Even Gloucester had more while Norwich had forty-three and York thirty-nine. There was considerable expenditure, however, on the building of non-conformist chapels. When Bishop Carleton began his crusade in 1674 to extirpate 'everything papist' he had been provided for in parish workhouses, but John Careys central workhouse, established in the Mint in 1696 and later named St Peter's Hospital, was the first of its kind in the country. It was to set the pattern for future poor-law administration throughout England. The Hospital adjoined Aldworth's old sugar-house and the first Board of Guardians held their meetings in his Great House.65

Useful and in some cases imposing as these public buildings were, it was above all the private dwellings and the chief inns which gave the city its rich and magnificent appearance. Outstanding among the many splendid Elizabethan houses was the Great House erected by John Young (later Sir John), a wealthy country gentleman who desired a city residence. He purchased the Carmelite Priory, then in a ruinous condition, from an alderman and built a new house of Pennant stone quarried close by at Stoney Hill; it was laid out round three sides of a quad­

rangle, had two storeys and attics, and some forty rooms. Its grounds, in which the smaller Red Lodge was built, with their terraced gardens and orchards spread up to the later Park Row. Another fine mansion house was built by a London tailor on the site of St James's Priory. Yet another became famous as the home until his death in 1654 of Robert Aldworth, one of the richest and most charitable of the Bristol merchants, and it later became the local Mint House and afterwards a part of St Peters Hospital. These great houses with their extensive grounds were all in the suburbs, but most civic leaders and merchants preferred to live at the centre of affairs.67

The problem of increased numbers and higher middle-class standards in comfort appears to have been largely met in the main central streets by building upwards to a height of four or five storeys and more.68 Many Elizabethan and Stuart houses remained until the nineteenth century as witnesses to the architectural splendour of the time. The upper storeys with their elaborately carved barge boards and dormers were gabled and fitted out with cupolas, dormer windows, and dormer towers.69 The dwellings on Bristol Bridge were especially noted for their 

For almshouses see below Appendix II; for the problem of the poor in general see C. Wilson, Trans. RHE, 5th ser, 9, 94-98. He comments 'Bristol was surely the most benedictive place in England'. For St Peter's Hospital see Lat. ii, 173-80. The Friends' Workhouse in New Street was opened in 1668 and continued in operation until at least 1799 (BG.45 xxiii, 87).
The most fashionable of all streets perhaps was Small Street. There lived Alderman Kitchen whose house was sufficiently grand to serve as lodging for the Earl of Leicester; later the Creswick family had a very fine mansion here where official visitors, including royalty, were entertained. The splendour was maintained, even increased after the Restoration: Colonel Aldworth, Town Clerk, for one, had a mansion in Broad Street which with its grounds spread over two later streets. Nicholas Street was chosen by Alderman Whitson and Aubrey records that ‘he kept a noble house and did entertain the peers and great persons that came to the city’ in a dining-room which was the ‘stateliest of any’. Indeed, the interiors of the houses of the barguil patriciate were often far more splendid than their outsides and were, as a French visitor and Aubrey thought, like palaces. They were the patrons of Bristol’s craftsmen, of the men for instance who made Alderman Langton’s remarkable drawing-room on the Welsh Back: its pillared doorway was inlaid with ivory and mother of pearl. Many of the numerous inns must also have been fine buildings, for the better-class ones were far more than hostels, being used for all kinds of public occasions such as the taking of deposits or the entertainment of distinguished official visitors. Often they were owned by wealthy citizens: an Elizabethan city chamberlain built the ‘Mermaid Tavern’ in Broad Street and Mayor Oliffe was landlord of the ‘Three Tuns’, where the Papal Nuncio once dined.[16]

Intermixed with all the new or re-modelled houses many old-fashioned and humble ones of two or one storey certainly remained in the less fashionable main streets and, of course, in the back streets where they must have prevailed. Some were thatched at least as late as 1574 when an ordinance forbade its use, and many could only be described as squalid and out of repair.[17] Yet all in all Bristol was a place of great beauty. On this natives and visitors from Roger Barlow onwards were agreed. He wrote of the ‘sumptuous bridge’, Brayton in felicitous verse of the city’s ‘fair building’ and ‘admirable grace’, Camden found it so fair that it fully corresponded ‘to the name of Brightstowe’, and Milther summed up local patriotism with a Latin panegyric, translated here as: ‘This city sublime, spacious, faithful, pleasant and glorious . . . protects the district, ’hates wrong-doing, keeps peace’. THE GOLDEN AGE AND AFTER: 1700-1828

The eighteenth century opened gloriously for Bristol was soon to outdistance her old provincial rivals – York and Norwich – and become in Defoe’s words of all cities in the kingdom ‘the greatest, the wealthiest, London excepted’. [18] Already wealthy and in point of commerce superior to any town apart from the capital, the freeing in 1698 of the African trade from the control of the Royal African Company and the legalization of the voyages of the interlopers opened immense new fields to her enterprising traders. Her geographical position on the West coast gave her an advantage even over London and enabled her to wrest from it the major share in the development of the transatlantic and African commerce. [19] Her ships now began to be engaged in the notorious triangular voyages of the African slave traders as well as in direct trading with the West Indies and with North America, especially with the plantation colonies. Because of the severe labour shortage on the plantations, the slave trade was generally accepted as indispensable until the last decades of the century. In 1745 Bristol ships carried about seventeen thousand slaves and for a short period in the mid-century dominated the trade. Her ships carried mixed cargoes of goods – textiles, heads, trinkets, muskets, pistols and so on, which were partly of Bristol manufacture – to the Guinea coast; there they loaded up with black slaves, crossed the Atlantic and then returned to Bristol with mixed cargoes, principally of tobacco, timber, cotton, rice, rum and above all of sugar.[20] The additional wealth derived from this branch of her trade affected every aspect of the city’s life: it stimulated the growth of its manufactures, of its European and internal trade, of its population, and these in turn entailed the physical expansion and rebuilding of much of the old city, beginning even in the early decades of the century.

Alongside these new developments, the city’s traditional European trade, though continually interrupted by war, remained prosperous. As in earlier periods the Iberian Peninsula and the Mediterranean countries were good customers, notably for cargoes of coal and train oil. Bristol ships returned loaded with miscellaneous goods for the use of her own industries and citizens and for redistribution to the West of England. Northern and Western Europe were other chief centres of trade, but since it was the least affected by war, the most constant part of her European trade was that with Ireland, especially with the southern ports and Dublin.[21]

The city’s industry advanced equally successfully. Because of her plentiful supplies of coal, her heavy industries expanded rapidly – lead works and gunpowder, zinc and copper smelting, iron founding for casting cannon and all kinds of iron utensils, while at Baptist Mills the largest brass-making foundry in England was set up. Her commerce and the ready accessibility of timber naturally ensured that ship-building, with the related manufactures such as the making of ropes and sailcloth, should continue to be a major undertaking. For the most part the vessels built either for commerce or the Royal Navy were small, but before 1811 the shipyards at Canons Marsh and Redcliff had built the St Vincent (four hundred and ninety-three tons), the largest West India man so far launched, and the Nelson – a monstrous three-decked vessel of six hundred tons. Nevertheless, the yards had by then been outdistanced by those of other ports and Bristol came eighth in the list of the largest ship-building ports after London.[22]

Chief among other industries was sugar-refining; there were sixteen refineries and their products were exported all over the world; an offshoot were the distilleries, some already established at the end of the century. Her geographical position on the West coast gave her an advantage even over London and enabled her to wrest from it the major share in the development of the transatlantic and African commerce. [23] Her ships now began to be engaged in the notorious triangular

---

[16] Lat. i, 53 ii, 49-51, 104, 115, 331, 409, 446. Sir HenryCreswicke’s inventory mentions 13 chambers, 2 long galleries, the hall, dining room and kitchen: McGrath (3), no. 196. For John Whiston’s inventory see ibid. no. 193. For Langton’s house see N and T, ii, 257; iii, 58.

[17] For inns see Late ii, 338, 368, 382, 445. For others see ibid. subject index and McGrath (5), Wadley, Willis, 219 and passim: W. Leighton in BGAS liv (1944), 177 note 90.

[18] Lat. i, 58, 56b, 382, 445. For others see ibid. subject index and McGrath (5), Wadley, Willis, 219 and passim: W. Leighton in BGAS liv (1944), 177 note 90.


