

Early beginnings

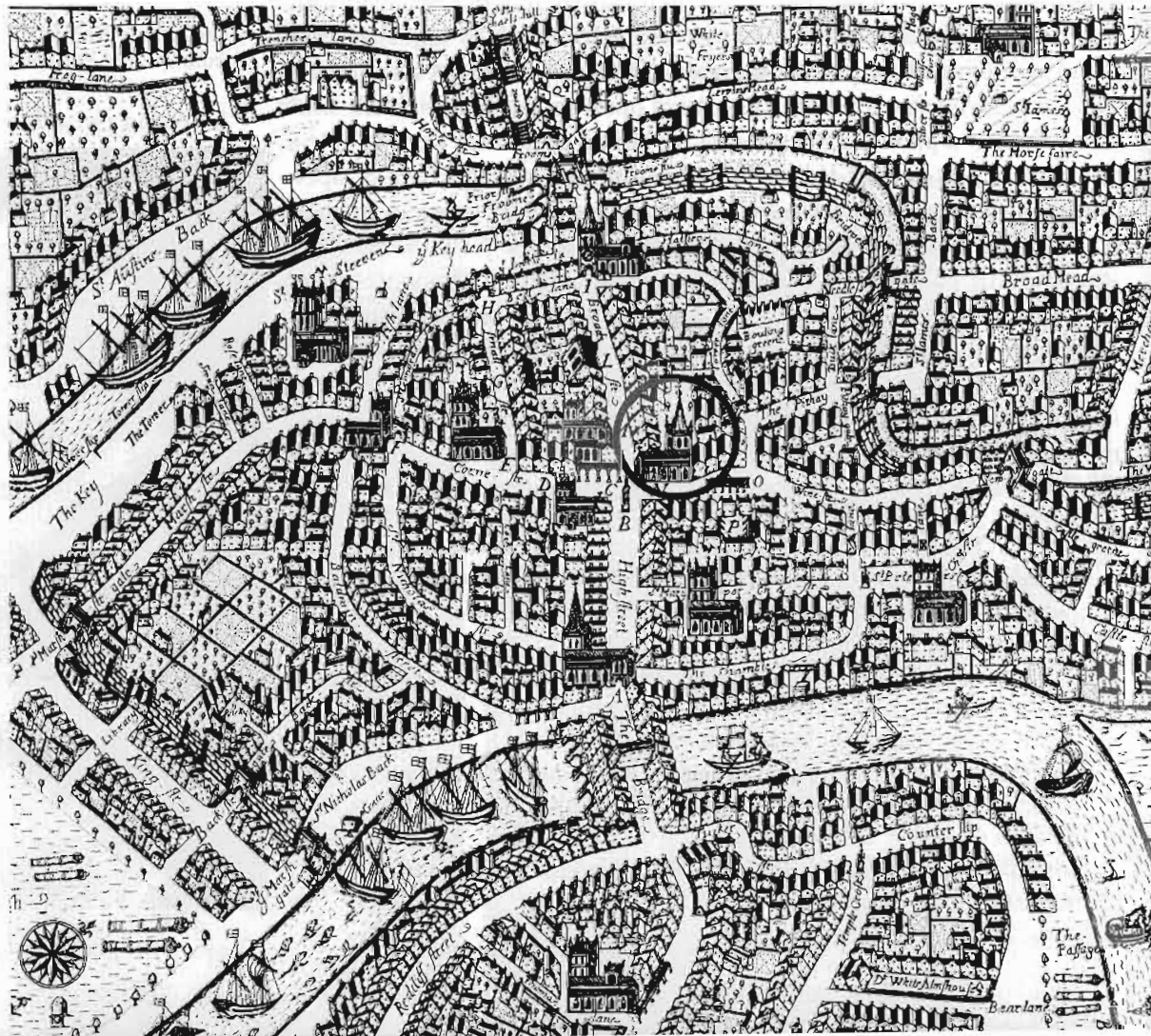
A map of Bristol drawn about one hundred years before the map below



Most cities are very old. They may have started as villages and small towns hundreds of years ago and grown to their present size over a long period of time. We saw what London looked like almost 2000 years ago in the drawing on page 9. In very old cities and towns like this the buildings are of different ages and styles.

The place where the city started, which is called its 'site', is usually in or near the present City Centre. There were probably very good reasons why the first site was chosen, though we can rarely be absolutely certain what these were. Near the original site is where the oldest buildings are likely to be found. Not many of the very old buildings are likely to remain today. Perhaps there will be a bit of the city wall or castle or church. Nearly all the ordinary houses will have vanished long ago. We can find out about the past of a city from old buildings or the remains of them that still exist. We can also learn a lot from old maps, drawings and photographs.

Millerd's plan of Bristol, 1673. The same church is circled on the photographs opposite, and on page 60



The early beginnings of Bristol are not known, but there are signs that a town called Brigstow existed over 1300 years ago. This Saxon name means 'a meeting place near the bridge'. The first bridge is thought to have been in the same place as the one shown on the map. The site of Brigstow was on slightly higher ground between the River Avon and the smaller River Frome. We cannot be certain why this site was chosen, but can guess that the high ground protected the settlement from flooding and was a good place from which to view the surrounding land. The Saxon settlers built walls around the settlement at an early stage. When the Normans invaded the area they built a castle on the site. The castle had been pulled down by the time Millerd drew his map.

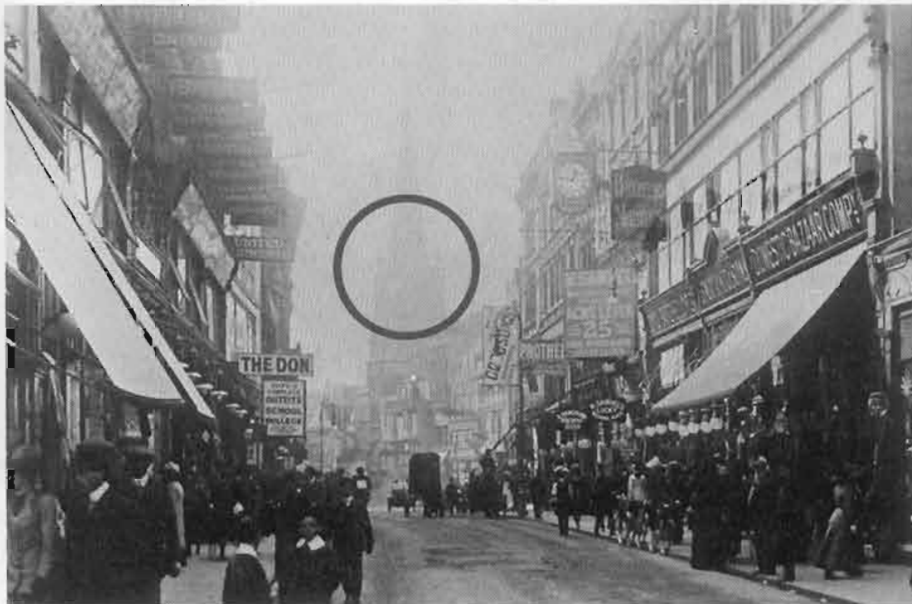
Bristol became a large port. Merchants in the city traded with West Africa and the West Indies and became very wealthy. Goods were taken to Africa, slaves transported from there across the Atlantic Ocean to the West Indies and tobacco, cocoa and other goods imported into the city. The town grew in size, and had many factories. As more people came to live and work there, new houses had to be built. Many old buildings were destroyed by bombs during the last war and by redevelopment since. But there are still about 60 timber-framed buildings built before 1700 in the central area, and many more from the following centuries a little further out from the centre.



Redcliffe Street, 1825: the curved street at the bottom of Millerd's map

Left, below: Wine Street, looking towards Corn Street, 1913

Below: Between Wine Street and Broadmead, 1921. Chocolate and cigarette factories were then in the centre of the city. Why were those products made in Bristol?



- 1 What are the signs on the map by Millerd that Bristol once had a castle and was a large port and market town, and was quite wealthy? What do you like or dislike about this sort of map?
- 2 Draw a simple map of the early site of Bristol and label to show the features that you think made it a good place to start a town.
- 3 Imagine you were a visitor to Bristol in the 1920s. Describe your impressions of the area around Wine Street and Broadmead.
- 4 Work out from the table how many extra people had to be housed in the periods 1800–1850; 1850–1900; 1900–1950. When was the greatest increase?

**Population of Bristol
1800–1950**

1800	70 000
1850	150 000
1900	333 000
1950	443 000