The Myth of Edward Colston: Bristol Docks, the ‘Merchant’ Elite and the Legitimisation of Authority, 1860 – 1880

Dr Spencer Jordan

INTRODUCTION

On a cold morning in mid November, 1880, a large procession slowly wended its way through Bristol docks. Already there were large crowds out on the streets. At the head of the procession were almost fifty gentlemen wearing dark morning dress with top hats. Amongst their number were some of the city’s most powerful figures, dignitaries such as Elisha Smith Robinson (proprietor of E. S. & A. Robinson, printing and packaging), Thomas David Taylor (owner of the Bristol Times and Mirror) and Francis James Fry (partner in J. S. Fry & Sons, confectioners). Behind them came a procession of over one hundred young apprentices waving banners and wands. As the city bells rang out, the parade entered All Saints’ Church on Corn Street, the heart of the old mercantile district, gathering solemnly to place wreaths around the tomb of the eighteenth-century slave trader, Edward Colston.

Not far away, two similar processions were underway, each of them also carefully circumnavigating a prescribed route through the docks before attending a religious service in which the name of ‘Bristol’s most famous son’ was celebrated. The day finally ended with four large private dinners attended by over three hundred of the city’s elite, bringing to a close a social occasion of unprecedented size and significance.

At the centre of these celebrations were the four Colston Societies, the Grateful, Parent, Dolphin and the Anchor. Their function captures many of the issues discussed in this chapter. The annual Colston celebrations on 13 November were the most visible demonstration of the elaborate relationship that now existed between the city’s elite and the docks.

This should not come as a surprise. The docks, after all, had long been
associated with Bristol’s mercantile leaders. Yet by 1880 the importance of
the city’s docks was on the wane. New facilities at Avonmouth and Portishead
were having a noticeable effect on traffic navigating up the Avon to the old city
facilities. Bristol was also seeing a widening of its economic base, most
notably through the rise of a dynamic group of Liberal nonconformist
manufacturers, including the Wills, Frys and Robinson dynasties. For these
entrepreneurs, specialising in a rich variety of manufactured goods, including
confectionary, packaging, iron and textile manufacture, the docks and the
vestiges of mercantile trade were becoming less important as alternative
markets opened up through train and road infrastructure.
Perhaps then it is not surprising to find that by the mid nineteenth century, the
Colston Societies were still private and extremely limited in their membership,
barely registering on the wider social stage of the city. More surprising is their
sudden resurgence from the late1860s, reaching an apotheosis in the last
years of the nineteenth century at exactly the moment when the city port was
firmly set on a period of inexorable decline.
Understanding why, in the last third of the nineteenth century, hundreds of
prominent citizens came together to take part in the Colston parades and
dinners, in which the name of Edward Colston, and his association with the
docks, was piously venerated is at the heart of this chapter.

EDWARD COLSTON, MERCHANT VENTURER

Edward Colston was born on the 2 November 1636 in Church Street, Bristol,
to a successful merchant. During the Civil War, the family moved to London
and it was there that Edward slowly built up his own successful business,
trading a variety of commodities, including slaves, cloth, oil and wine across
both Europe and Africa. Although he did not return to Bristol to live, Edward
was made a member of the Society of Merchant Venturers and a burgess of
the city in 1683. He was a Tory and high–churchman, and was Member of
Parliament for Bristol between 1710 and 1713. During his lifetime he
established a number of Bristol almshouses and hospitals and gave liberally
to the Anglican churches in Bristol and London. Nonconformity however was
specifically excluded. He died on 11 October 1721 having amassed a fortune. As his will dictated, his body was taken back to Bristol and buried in All Saints Church in a specially commissioned tomb, designed by James Gibbs and carved by the renowned Flemish sculpture, John Michael Rysbrack. On his death further endowments were made to various churches, almshouses and schools.

This giving of charity in itself was nothing new to the city. With its prosperous mercantile heritage Bristol had developed a complex infrastructure of charitable funds and legacies long before Edward Colston. Robert Thorne (1492–1532), for example, accumulated great wealth trading with Spain which he left almost totally to the City of Bristol. By the early seventeenth century the contributions from Bristol’s merchant aristocracy were already regarded as especially high, one estimate suggesting they provided three-quarters of the city’s charitable funds. What was different about Edward Colston was not so much the scale of his largesse but rather the way in which it was ritually celebrated by Bristol’s governing elite. The formation of the Colston Societies, ‘to keep his memory green’, was a unique event, without parallel in Bristol’s history. Very quickly these societies became intimate parts of the city’s elite social and political landscape; and, just as Bristol’s governing families were riven with political differences, then so too were the Colston Societies (see Figure 1). The Parent Society (or Colston Society as it was originally called) was the first to convene in 1726; the Dolphin Society was formed by the city’s Tory faction in 1749; the non-partisan Grateful Society in 1759; and lastly the Anchor Society was established by the Whigs in 1769. As these societies developed, they became the focus around which the largely ad hoc benevelence of the city coalesced.

Yet for much of the first hundred years of their existence, these societies remained relatively small and largely private affairs, having little real impact on the wider city. Figure 2 shows the total annual collections made each year across all four Colston Societies, between 1769 and 1880. As can be seen, annual collections remained static until the early 1830s. Although thereafter increasingly volatile, the pattern is one of general stagnation.
This all changed from 1868 when the annual collections suddenly leapt into life. That year saw the biggest collection then achieved (£2,681), an increase of 140 per cent on the previous year’s total, the single largest annual increase since the early 1840s. From this date, the size and significance of the Colston processions and dinners began to grow in a way that was without precedent. This was not lost on contemporary observers, as the *Bristol Times & Mirror* makes clear:

Until a comparatively recent date none of the societies occupied that prominent position as places of oratorical display that they now do, nor were their proceedings reported to the extent that they now are. A retrospect of a very few years will show us the transactions of the four [societies] compressed into as many paragraphs in the local journals.vii

By the end of the nineteenth century, the Colston Societies had become part of a complex set of rituals and ceremony that involved a carefully prescribed itinerary of processions, dinners, and speeches on Colston’s birthday.viii The distribution of alms was now done through printed ballet papers, sent out to the many hundreds of subscribers. Some of this voting paraphernalia is shown in Figures 3–6. Perhaps most critically, however, the Colston Societies, and the wider tradition of Edward Colston and philanthropic benevolence itself, had fundamentally changed in their relationship with the wider city. By the late 1860s Edward Colston was no longer the preserve of what had in effect been four private gentlemen’s clubs. Instead, the tradition had been transformed, in part through the two local newspapers, the *Bristol Times and Mirror* and the *Western Daily Press*, which were able to reach out to the growing ranks of a new urban middle class. This telling and retelling of the Colston story took on an obsessive attention to historic detail that had not been apparent before; the parades and dinners themselves received careful elucidation and editorial comment, including the dutiful recantation of speeches and the names of those attending. Poems, songs and cartoons all became part of the annual commemoration in a way that was thoroughly new.
Figure 1, 'Who Said that Speech was only Silver?' Political Cartoon, 1904
Source: Bristol Times & Mirror, 15 November 1904, p. 3.
Figure 2 Total Annual Collections of the Colston Societies, 1769-1880

TOTAL ANNUAL COLLECTIONS
Colston Societies, 1769-1880

Figure 3 Programme for the Anchor Society Annual Dinner, 1896
Source: BRO 39463/7
FORTY-FIFTH ELECTION.

ANCHOR SOCIETY, 1918-19.

ELECTION OF NINE ANNUITANTS.

(The Annuities are of the amount of £13 per Annum to those under 70, and of £6 10s. per Annum to those over that age.)

Albion Chambers,
Bristol, 10th December, 1918.

Dear Sir,

The Voting Paper to which you are entitled is sent herewith. Please carefully to observe the directions, in order that your votes may not be lost.

Should you prefer leaving the application of your votes in the hands of the Committee, please return the form signed in blank with an intimation to that effect.

I am, dear Sir,
Yours faithfully,
H. C. LEONARD,
Hon. Secretary.

The Forty-Fifth Annual Election of Annuities will take place on Friday, the 20th day of December, 1918, at 2 o’clock.

Every subscriber of £1:1:0 is entitled to twenty votes for every guinea subscribed, which may be given to one candidate, or divided.

All voting papers must be sent in properly filled up and signed before One o’clock on Tuesday, the 17th day of December, 1918, to Albion Chambers, Bristol, after which day and hour they will not be available.

All votes recorded for unsuccessful candidates at this election will be carried forward to their credit at the next two succeeding elections, provided they are then eligible, but not afterwards.

No voting paper can be passed unless properly filled up with the signature and address of the subscriber entitled to vote; and if any alteration be made or a larger number of votes filled in than the holder is entitled to, the whole will be void.

The numbers and initials of the successful candidates will be advertised in the local papers on Saturday, the 21st day of December, 1918, and particulars of the voting will afterwards be furnished to subscribers on application.

[PLEASE TURN OVER.]
Figure 5 Printed Voting Paper, Anchor Society 1918
Source: BRO 39463/7

**ANCHOR SOCIETY ANNUITIES.**

**1918–1919.**

**FORTY- FIFTH ELECTION, DECEMBER, 1918.**

This Sheet to be sent in as addressed, not later than 
ONE o'clock on TUESDAY, the 17th day of DECEMBER, 1918.

The Owner of this Paper is entitled to 

**20 VOTES.**

### SECOND APPLICATION.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VOTES</th>
<th>CANDIDATES NAME.</th>
<th>VOTES</th>
<th>CANDIDATES NAME.</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>ROBERTS, SARAH</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>SLOCOMBE, BESIE JANE</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(E. P. FROST and JOSEY COLE)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(FRANK ROGERS, J.P., and G. Y. P handic.)</td>
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### FIRST APPLICATION.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>VOTES</th>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>ATWELL, MARY ANN</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(EDWARD BRIDGES, J.P., and W. LEONARD OLSHEV)</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>COUCH, MARY MARIA</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(EDWARD BRIDGES, J.P., and W. LEONARD OLSHEV)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>GUY, WILLIAM ELLIOTT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(FRANK W. WILL, J.P., and W. W. ELSOM, J.P.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>HANKS, HARRIETT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(A. BRIDGES and CROZIER &amp; CO.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>HILL, MARY JANE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(T. LEWIS, ALBRECHT H. W. THOWN, J.P., and ALBRECHT E. THOWN, J.P.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>JONES, MARTHA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(W. COLE and FREDY BALDWIN)</td>
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### DIRECTIONS FOR VOTING.

1. The Votes must be inserted in the blank columns headed VOTES, in the list of the Candidate's name in whose favour they are desired to be given, and the Signature and Address of the Subscriber must be added at the foot of this paper.
2. The whole of the above number of Votes may be given to one Candidate or divided.
3. If any alteration is made, or a larger number of Votes filled in than the Voter is entitled to, the whole will be void.

**Subscriber’s Signature**

**Address**
**Figure 6 Printed Election Results, Anchor Society 1918**
**Source:** BRO 39463/7

![Election Results](image)

**FORTY-FIFTH ELECTION.**
**ANCHOR SOCIETY. 1918-19.**

Particulars of **ELECTION** of NINE ANNUITANTS out of Thirteen Candidates.

### SUCCESSFUL

<table>
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<th>No. on List</th>
<th>Name</th>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Guy, William Elliott</td>
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<th>New Votes</th>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Mayo, Mary Ann</td>
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<td>—</td>
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**Totals:** 1476  23850  25326

**Note:** The Votes recorded for the Unsuccessful Candidates marked “No. 1” will be carried forward to their credit at the next two elections, provided they are then eligible.

H. J. WILKINS, President, 1918.
E. STANLEY GANGE, President, 1918.
WM. HOWELL DAVIES, Hon. Treasurer.
H. C. LEONARD, Hon. Secretary.

Albro Chambers, Small Street, Bristol, 20th December, 1918.
Yet the Colston Societies remained largely ineffective in terms of their actual relief of poverty. In 1885, for example, the Anchor had only 49 annuitants of £10 on their books; the Dolphin had 60 annuitants, 60 apprentices, with further relief given to upwards of 1,500 ‘indigent persons’; and the Grateful 39 annuitants with extended relief to a further 1,000 ‘poor and deserving married women in childbirth’.ix As a crude comparison, on one day in January 1885, there were officially 9,236 people receiving outdoor relief in Bristol district. Investigating Bristol’s poor the previous year, the Bishop’s Committee had concluded that an annual total of almost £200,000 was being spent on the relief of poverty from a variety of sources, including Poor Law relief (£55,500), almsgiving (£50,000), endowed charities (£50,000), and the Colston Societies (£3,000).x The Colston Societies received particular criticism in the subsequent report: ‘The higher interests of charity will not be served, it appears to the Committee, until … the total sum collected by the three societies is distributed on some general and well-conceived plan’.xi This sudden flourishing of private philanthropy, just as the limits of voluntary relief across nineteenth–century cities were being exposed, clearly requires an explanation.xii A counter-history could well argue that the Colston tradition should have been withering away inexorably from the mid nineteenth century, stamped out by intractable urban problems and the growing political power of the working class. Instead it was exactly at this time that the Colston Societies were in the ascent. It is to the answering of these questions that this chapter now turns. Crucially we begin by re-examining the relationship of the docks, and through the docks the symbolic figure of Edward Colston, with the city’s nineteenth century governing elites.

BRISTOL DOCKS IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

A dozen years ago [Bristol] was positively stagnant … Bristol was, in fact, passing through the local dark ages … Certain it is that since 1858 the city has been roused from a long lethargy, and is now full of life, vigour, activity, briskness and promise. We see signs of this re–
awakening everywhere, and the phenomena of resuscitation warrant the prediction that there is for Bristol in the near future a prosperity approaching to that which the city knew in the old time when her merchant venturers were in the van of English commerce—the pioneers of trade which her degenerate successors allowed others to monopolise.xiii

By the 1720s Bristol was only second to London as a major port, trading with all the significant North American and West Indian colonies, as well as pursuing older trade links with the Atlantic wine islands.xiv It was at this time that the power of the merchant elite reached its zenith, extending not only across the political sphere, including local government and Parliament, but also the social milieu of ritual and ceremony.xv Yet, as Morgan has shown, the second half of the eighteenth century was to see the gradual decline of this dominance, as other ports, most notably Liverpool and Glasgow, came into ascendency.xvi Although the city suffered from a shallow tidal river, Morgan is clear where the problem for this atrophy lay:

Inability to adapt to changing economic circumstances seems therefore to have been present in late eighteenth–century Bristol: it resulted from concentration, specialisation and an emphasis on the domestic market. The situation did not change rapidly thereafter: lack of adaptability imbued the whole commercial ethos of the city by the 1830s.xvii

Others have seen it less pessimistically. Atkinson noted that money received as compensation after the Abolition of Slavery Act in 1833 was used to help finance what has been called a period of ‘Grand Design’ during the 1830s and 40s.xviii This included the building of the Great Western Railway, and the establishment of the Great Western Steamship Company and the Great Western Cotton Factory in 1836. Harvey and Press underline this more optimistic assessment with their own survey of business innovation and adaptability throughout the period, noting the existence of what they call ‘community capitalism’.xix

More recently, Ollerenshaw and Wardley have shown that, although redolent with maritime associations, Bristol’s economy was in fact highly diverse, and
that it was this diversity that gave it strength and versatility. xx Manufacturing, service and finance sectors in particular helped sustain economic output from the middle of the nineteenth century—if the statistics of net registered tonnage of vessels entering Bristol are examined, they in fact show a steady, undramatic growth between 1850 and 1939.xxii

Whatever the truth in regards the health and diversity of Bristol’s economy, it cannot be denied that nationally Bristol’s port was in relative decline; indeed, by 1900 the port handled just 2.2 per cent of the total U.K. overseas shipping, placing the city ninth behind London, Liverpool, Hull, Southampton, Cardiff, Glasgow, the Tyne and Leith.xxii By 1900 the majority of imports, rather than being redistributed across the UK and beyond, remained within the local and regional economy of the south west.xxiii

The biggest threat to the city docks only arrived with the construction of Avonmouth and Portishead Docks in 1877 and 1879 respectively, a process later galvanised by the completion of the Royal Edward dock at Avonmouth in 1908. Even then, the city docks limped on well after the Second World War, finally closing in 1969.

For the period analysed in this chapter then, it is clear that Bristol was going through significant economic readjustment, especially after mid century. As the old Conservative mercantile elite slowly withered away, the city saw the rise of new entrepreneurial families, such as the Wills and Frys, many of whom were Liberal and nonconformist.xxiv Financially, however, the Corporation—owned city docks continued to remain a central pillar of local government, providing the council with a degree of financial freedom which other boroughs could only envy. Town councils such as those in Birmingham and Leeds, for instance, quickly came under pressure to municipalise key utilities as a means of providing additional income streams. As we shall see, Bristol and Liverpool could resist this pressure, should they decide to do so.xxv

Table One shows the income of Bristol Town Council, broken down into a number of categories, between 1835 and 1939.
Table One: Sources of Income of Bristol Town Council as a Per Cent of Total Annual Income, 1835-1939

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Borough Rates %</th>
<th>Manors and Estates %</th>
<th>Dockside Dues %</th>
<th>Markets %</th>
<th>Exchequer Grants-in-aid %</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1840</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>1850</td>
<td>41.4</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>5.7</td>
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<td>1860</td>
<td>28.5</td>
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<td>10.2</td>
<td>3.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>26.4</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>33.2</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>20.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>48.1</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>21.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>53.5</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>0.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>70.1</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>8.1</td>
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<td>1930</td>
<td>66.8</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.4</td>
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<td>1939</td>
<td>58.9</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Bristol Council Abstracts, 1835-1939

The amount of rates collected annually in Bristol remained almost static between 1835 and 1866. The total rates collected in 1838, for example, was £22,669; by 1865 this had increased only minimally to £25,879. Bristol was luckier than many of the new industrial towns in the fact that it had alternative ways of raising money. The Town Council was a wealthy landowner, for instance, and received significant income from its manors and estates.xxvi Dockside dues were also important, particularly after 1861, when the Society of Merchant Venturers (herafter SMV) finally surrendered the wharfage lease to the Council.xxvii This considerably increased the total income generated by the Council through dockside dues—in 1861 the wharfage came to £5,712, significantly higher than that collected for cranage, mayor and town dues (£2,864, £1,163 and £5,136 respectively).xxviii

However, the main characteristic of the Council’s financial structure between 1835 and 1866 is one of stasis. In part, this was a reflection of the market in which the Council operated: the population of the city in this period showed a
steady but undramatic increase;xxix furthermore the rateable base of the city was inert.xxx

Yet change was on the horizon. As Table One demonstrates, the period between 1867 and 1876 was one of remarkable discontinuity as income from dockside dues and property was spectacularly used to cut the borough rate. The total rates collected in 1867, the year the Second Reform Act enfranchised all male borough ratepayers, was £27,222; by 1868 this had decreased to £17,046; at the lowest point in 1870 total rates collected for the city amounted to just £4,155.

It certainly appears that from 1867 the Council began a policy of dramatic rate reduction, primarily subsidised by its increasing revenue generated through dockside dues and its large portfolio of properties. This winfall, of course, was favourably received by the city’s property owners. The rates had always incurred intense opposition; as a basic property tax it tended to ostracise the middle class who felt excessively targeted.xxi Bristol was no different from Leeds, Birmingham and Liverpool which all featured vigorous debates between ‘modernisers’ and ‘economists’.xxii The evidence presented in Table One is highly suggestive of a Council eager to reduce to as low as possible the proportion of its income derived from the rates at exactly the moment when the parliamentary franchise was extended to all male property owners: certainly, when faced with rising alternative incomes, in this case as a result of property investments and dockside dues, the Council’s immediate impulse was to reduce the rates rather than consider any overt plan of municipal investment.

This period did not last long, however. With the opening of alternative facilities at Avonmouth and Portishead (privately owned until 1884), dockside dues declined. In an effort to compete, the Dock Committee reduced city dues and abolish cranage. Forced to find other income streams, the total rate collected by the Council began to increase significantly from 1878.

The effect of this period on the wider development of the city was dramatic: throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Bristol’s local governance continued to be dominated by cautious parsimony. The city’s initial reluctance to accept its wider responsibilities within the field of sanitation and health provision, for example, its rejection of the municipalisation of
water, gas, trams and the later developments at Avonmouth and Portishead, together with its poor record over slum clearance and the provision of council houses, can certainly be interpreted as indictments against a Council doggedly pursuing the dictates of an economic liberalism. This persistence of individualism was in part sustained by the Council’s wealth in real estate and dockside leases: unlike cities such as Leeds, Bristol was able to hold–off the municipalisation of key utilities. In this sense, the experience of ports such as Bristol, characterised by ‘a belief in the concept of the “night–watchman” state’, and an ‘adherence to laissez–faire and liberal economic principles’, was often very different from that of the new industrial towns of the midlands and the north of England.

Clearly, the city docks cast a long shadow over Bristol, one that only started to fade towards the very end of the nineteenth century. Although Bristol saw economic change during the nineteenth century, with a movement away from maritime trade towards manufacturing and service-based industries, the port, and with it what Lee has called the ‘ideology of merchant capital’, persisted, as the quote at the beginning of this section shows. Despite political and religious differences, exacerbated by internal structural changes as new Liberal entrepreneurs came to the fore, the governing elite demonstrated remarkable cohesion in terms of this political economy—neither the old Tory families of the Goldneys and the Hares, nor the parvenu Liberals of the Frys and Wills, were keen to leave behind the tradition of economic individualism. When faced with rising income from the city docks by mid century, the consensus was to reduce the borough rate for short term political gain after 1867 rather than invest in the city’s inadequate infrastructure. Direct financial support and the permeation of an economic liberalism across the city’s governing elite: it was in these two ways that the city docks continued to have a wide and deep influence on Bristol throughout much of the nineteenth century.

Yet the impact of the docks on the city was more than economic. The docks had a history and with it a social significance, as the Colston Societies have already suggested. If we are to explore this, then we first need to turn our attention to the identity and characteristics of the city’s governing elite.
As we have seen, from the eighteenth century, Bristol’s traditional merchant elite declined. Though the speed of this was slow and intermittent, the city nevertheless witnessed a gradual widening of its governing class throughout the nineteenth century. As elsewhere, however, those drawn into Bristol’s elite were invariably members of the middle class. It was the middle class, for instance, who came to dominate local government at this time, spurred on through their belief in civic duty and responsibility. This alone ensured that as a class they came to possess enormous local political power and authority, reaching both wide and deep across the city.

Yet to what extent did the city’s elite actually operate as a single, cohesive entity? As Giddens notes, political power by itself does not necessarily equate with a homogenous ruling group:

In analysing the structure of elite groups we have to be concerned with their level of both ‘social’ and ‘moral’ integration.

As has already been discussed, the city’s elite structure was highly fractured along political and religious divides; paradoxically, its also been noted that in terms of political ideology, there was little real division across the ruling class. This sense of ideological homogeneity chimes strongly with studies undertaken elsewhere: although a complex issue, it is clear that ‘at certain moments of time … [the middle classes] did articulate a strong sense of collective interest’. This ‘collective interest’ consolidated around the attainment of a ‘series of ideal states of desirable existence that encompassed material life, family, work and community, in the face of a real experience that was often bleak and marked by enormous vicissitudes’.

Meller’s work on Bristol in the late nineteenth century concurs with this, only for her the influence of this ‘collective interest’ was actually more marked, even going to state that ‘Bristol’s middle classes appear to have exercised a social influence which was unprecedented’. Not only were the middle classes in Bristol particularly numerous, but they possessed a high degree of civic dynamism and vision compared to other cities, built upon an evangelical religious sub culture. Meller describes the 1860s as a ‘cultural renaissance’
for Bristol’s middle class, as bourgeois cultural influence permeated almost every aspect of urban life. It was in this environment that Meller noted the rise of a distinct elite culture, a phenomenon she called ‘social citizenship’:

In nineteenth–century Bristol, there was a remarkable social development, the formation of an elite, which united the powerful elements in the city’s social structure in a way which had never been achieved before.xlvi

Bristol’s middle class then appears riven with political and religious differences; yet in reality it was unusually cohesive in terms of its core beliefs and values. It was from this group that the city’s governing class were increasingly drawn as the old merchant families disappeared. Importantly, they operated through a discrete and identifiable landscape of organisations and societies. Indeed, for the nineteenth–century middle class, membership of these associations was the very web that bound their world together.

So powerful was the spatial effect of this associational culture that it was easy to perceive the nineteenth-century town as a coherent, integrated and above all bounded place, identified through both state and civil associations …xlvii

The associational characteristics of Bristol’s nineteenth-century elite were certainly complex yet an attempt can be made at reconstructing them through a cross-section of the city’s political and social organisations between 1835 and 1880.xlviii This has been done through the analysis of the collected biographies of the city’s governing elite, what Lawrence Stone was the first to call prosopography.xlix As a research method, prosopography has two broad aims: uncovering characteristics and patterns hidden beneath the surface of political action; and the analysis of change within societal structure and mobility.

At the centre of Bristol’s elite structure lay the high-status government appointments of MP, councillor, alderman, mayor, sheriff and justice of the peace; more peripheral, but important nonetheless, was membership of the school board and governorship of Bristol Board of Guardians. Yet around this political core were a dense matrix of social and cultural
associations. This included the presidency of the four Colston Societies, presidents and vice-presidents of the Bristol Chamber of Commerce, presidents of the Gloucestershire Society, presidents of the St. Stephen’s Bell Ringers, members of Bristol Municipal Charities, and all members and wardens of the SMV. Research suggests that a matrix of seventeen appointments lay at the centre of Bristol’s middle–class associational culture. These appointments of course were highly gendered with most of these positions closed to women. Indeed, many of the private societies remain male bastions to this day. As Davidhoff and Hall note of the nineteenth century, ‘this public world was consistently organised in gendered ways and had little space for women’.

Table Two: Relative Ordering of Seventeen Associations within an ‘Average’ Civic Career

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gloucestershire Society President</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board of Guardians President</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Board Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Councillor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Society of Merchant Venturers Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chamber of Commerce Vice-President</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anchor Society President</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grateful Society President</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Society President</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member of Parliament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Society of Bellringers President</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheriff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipal Charity Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice of the Peace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dophin Society Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alderman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Jordan, Development and Implementation, p. 82

The data of 1,438 individuals, with 5,649 links to the seventeen associations, has been collated to construct the ‘average’ career path shown in Table Two. Perhaps not surprisingly, the most high status positions, the mayoralty and a seat on the aldermanic bench, for example, occurred towards the end of a gentleman’s life. These structures, however, were not static, but changed over time; from the late nineteenth century the pattern began to unwind, a process that accelerated after the First World War. Between 1835 and 1860, just
twenty-one per cent of the men included in the study had associations with only one of the organisations listed here; between 1919 and 1939 this had risen to almost fifty per cent.iii

Hidden behind Table Two, however, is the bi-partisanship which underlay all associational patterns across the city. Table Three shows that for the period 1835-60 in particular, the depth of the political divide was significant, Tory appointments dominating the Dolphin, Grateful, Parent, Ringer, Gloucestershire and the SMV societies, but also those holding the positions of sheriff, mayor and alderman. Liberalism only had a dominance on the Bristol Board of Guardians, Bristol Municipal Charity Board and among the presidents of the Anchor. The Bellringers, Gloucestershire, Dolphin, Parent, Grateful and the influential SMV were all private organisations devoid of the large Liberal element within the city.

In contrast, for the period 1861-90, Liberalism was on the rise. This was a reflection of a new cohort of business leaders who had risen to prominence by the 1860s, gentlemen no longer linked directly to maritime trade, those in the manufacturing and service sectors, for example, such as Elisha Smith Robinson, Thomas David Taylor and Francis James Fry, and often of Liberal nonconformist persuasion. It was in the last third of the nineteenth century that many of these entrepreneurs rose to some of the highest positions within the political landscape, including mayor, alderman and MP.

This section has shown that the governing classes in Bristol were divided by religion and politics. This in itself was nothing new, of course—Bristol, like other cities and towns, had a long tradition of factional strife. Yet, the ideological difference between these groups tended to be small. Even when the city witnessed the rise of a new cohort of nonconformist Liberal entrepreneurs from the 1860s, transforming the city’s associational patterns, the political consensus was not especially threatened, at least at first. As Gorsky notes in his study of trustees of the Municipal Charity Board, “There were certainly some differences in religious and socio-economic background, but it is not clear that these added up to an ideological divide …”.liv

Yet, if the city’s ruling elite suffered increasing structural issues from within their own ranks, they faced even greater challenges from outside. Not only
was Bristol’s population growing, finally recognised with the municipal boundary extension of 1897, but the electoral parameters of the political landscape were expanding as increasing numbers of the working class obtained the vote after the Second Reform Act. These phenomena had a very real effect on local oligarchical lines of power, and saw the return to prominence of the docks and the merchant venturers, not economically as we’ve already examined, but rather culturally, as an attempt to bolster and cement together an increasingly heterogenous middle class and as a means of legitimating power—holding at a time of increasing political instability. And key to this was the contested figure of Edward Colston.

THE MYTH OF EDWARD COLSTON

We shall hear in the Commercial Rooms and other public resorts, above the babul hum, Of “How Goes Sugar?” and “What’s the price of Rum?”, the enquiries, “Where do you dine this evening?” – “Whom do you mean to support?”, “Who are to be at the Dolphin, who at the Anchor, who at the Grateful?”

As we’ve seen, the power of Bristol’s governing elite was not affected through political structures in isolation. Of equal importance were the social and cultural spheres. And it was here that Bristol’s maritime heritage, as expressed through the life of Edward Colston and the Colston Societies, found a new life.

The presidents of each of the four Colston Societies were at the heart of elite associational patterns; the appointment was high status, attracting members from Bristol’s leading families, including the Wills in the Anchor, Miles in the Dolphin, and the powerful Hare and Lucas families in the Parent. The Colston Societies were voluntary charitable societies. Yet, as has been shown, they embraced a high degree of ritual and display grounded on a clear framework of belief and ideology. Indeed, ritual and ceremonial have come to be understood as but one aspect of a community’s political dynamic. Sociologists, anthropologists and historians have all added to a canon of work which has broken down conventional notions of power, perceiving ceremonial as a critical method by which an elite could impose and legitimate their authority. Such ideological imposition has been usefully described as a
‘mobilisation of bias’: that ‘set of predominant values, beliefs, rituals, and constitutional procedures that operate systematically and consistently to the benefit of certain persons and groups at the expense of others’.
Table Four: Political Characteristics Across Seventeen Associations, As Percentage of Membership, 1835-1890

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Guardians</th>
<th>Commerce</th>
<th>Dolphin</th>
<th>Anchor</th>
<th>Grateful</th>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Ringers</th>
<th>Gloster</th>
<th>Sheriff</th>
<th>JP</th>
<th>Municipal</th>
<th>SMV</th>
<th>Mayor</th>
<th>Council Aldermen</th>
<th>MP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1835-60</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Guardians</th>
<th>Commerce</th>
<th>Dolphin</th>
<th>Anchor</th>
<th>Grateful</th>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Ringers</th>
<th>Gloster</th>
<th>Sheriff</th>
<th>JP</th>
<th>Municipal</th>
<th>SMV</th>
<th>Mayor</th>
<th>Council Aldermen</th>
<th>MP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1861-90</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Jordan, *Development and Implementation*, p. 91
As Cannadine has shown in his study of the Colchester Oyster Feast, the form and function of a ritual could be irrevocably intertwined with the socio-economic base of a community. In the same way, it is possible to understand Edward Colston, not as a static eighteenth century inheritance, but rather as a cultural artefact whose form and meaning had distinct temporal qualities reflecting the vagaries of dominant bourgeois ideology.

This concept of an ‘invented’ tradition is not new. According to Hobsbawm, ‘Invented tradition’ is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past.

As Barnes states, the dominance of any elite in society ’is based on the power concentrated in their hands, and resides in the pattern of the distribution of knowledge throughout the entire elitist society’. Yet communication is central to the effective transference of this knowledge: ‘Reliable communication is actually constituted by people themselves: it occurs, to the extent that it occurs, when people respond alike to signs and symbols, act alike on the basis of rules and instructions’. In this sense, such civic rituals can be interpreted as being ‘imposed’ or ‘invented’, existing as conduits through which power structures are both augmented and, of course, challenged.

The rapid rise of the Colston collections shown in Figure 2, and the increasing prominence and attraction of the dinners after 1850, suggest a growing need for conspicuous benevolence within Bristol at this time. To help answer why it is important to understand charitable giving as a ritual in itself, one often used as a means of legitimising the unequal distribution of power.

Thus the charitable gift to the poor in an unequal society was a skilful mechanism; it had to be to mask its presumption. The very fact that it did not challenge the inequalities it presumed to alleviate, nor was able to realise the social transaction in which by definition the recipient was invited to reciprocate, required an ideology which located the value of the charitable relationship in the onus it placed on the presumed
'character' of the selected recipient, and in the glory it reflected on the 'generosity' of the donor.

This need for legitimising unequal powerholding became especially important after the passing of the Second Reform Act. As we’ve seen, the Act enfranchised all male borough ratepayers for parliamentary elections (previously, only those with property worth £10 a year had the vote). Bristol's electorate jumped to 22,921, an increase of 48 per cent on the 1867 total, representing 62 per cent of the adult male population. The greatest increases were in St. Philips (In and Out) and Bedminster, both highly industrialised wards with a significant proportion of skilled artisans. Thereafter, electioneering was fundamentally changed as the city’s parliamentary campaigns became centred on the factory through high profile visits and speeches.

It is no coincidence that the rapid growth in popularity of the Colston charitable tradition occurred at this time of political rupture. This was no time for a governing elite to be politically and ideologically divided. The Colston Societies offered a means by which the city’s entrenched political and religious differences could be publically brought together through the unified veneration of Edward Colston and the city’s mercantile tradition. Aspects of Colston’s life that jarred bourgeois sensibilities were quietly dropped. From the 1860s Colston was represented more as a general figurehead of self-made wealth than a paragon of the city’s slaving heritage while his fervent Anglicanism was superceded by a less denominational mantle. As Tovey pontificated in 1863, perhaps in emulation of Thomas Carlyle’s homage to biography in Hero and Hero Worship:

We do not hear that he was suddenly enriched by legacies, or by other adventitious source. To his precise business habits – his judgement – careful management, and, above all, his economy and simplicity of living, without that ostentatious luxuriousness which distinguished his contemporaries, may be attributed the accumulation of his wealth.
At times, the veneration of Colston’s name could take on cultish overtones. The fact that the following quote is from a pro-Liberal, nonconformist newspaper makes it all the more remarkable:

A life of integrity, of blameless piety, of unbounded benevolence, and of godlike philanthropy was the life of the good Edward Colston. His name is enshrined in the great heart of prosperity, and encircled with a wreath of undying fame.\textsuperscript{lxvi}

By the late 1860s the celebration of Edward Colston’s name was reaching extraordinary levels. There were three reasons for this. First, the Colston Societies clearly offered a structure through which the governing elites’ political and religious differences could be lashed together at a time of increasing social and political change. Second, the ‘tradition’ legitimised the ideology of individualism, both morally and economically, as a political system. And third, the ‘tradition’ augmented the right of limited but sustained private relief organised and distributed by those considered the city’s moral and economic leaders. The ability to depict Colston as both ‘merchant prince’ and ‘moral saint’ (linking neatly with Carlyle’s contemporaneous notions of ‘Hero as King’ and ‘Hero as Priest’) was central here.\textsuperscript{lxvii}

By the 1860s Edward Colston had come to encapsulate a golden period of Bristol’s heritage when the rich treasures of mercantilism had made the port a citadel of opulence and power. For many of the city’s bourgeoisie this aspect of the Colston myth was a principle characteristic. The representation of Colston as ‘merchant prince’, the parades, dinners and collections, allowed the city’s political and economic elite, many of whom were no longer directly connected to the docks, to pose as the natural inheritors of Colston’s mantle. The encroaching political economy of utilitarianism was rationalised by Bristol’s middle class as merely the continuation of the pious and exalted traditions of the city’s first merchant.

Yet at the heart of this phenomenon lies a paradox already alluded to: while the port remained a symbolic allusion of the city’s wealth and prosperity, it was exactly at this moment that the economic character of the city was undergoing a transformation. With the opening of new deep–water facilities at Avonmouth and Portishead, the separation of the city from her maritime trade
had never been so great, a trend which was to continue until the eventual closing of the city docks in 1969.

**Limits and Constraints: Elite Power Beyond 1880**

You may say just what you like,
I am sure the Bristol strikes will touch the greedy masters on the raw;
For the men and women too, have found out what to do,
They ought to have done it long before.

The impact of the Colston Societies on the wider community, and in particular the working class, is far more difficult to gauge. Yet, if the implicit purpose of ceremonies and rituals such as those associated with Edward Colston was to secure the authority of an increasingly heterogenous governing class, then any success was shortlived. The period 1860-80 was a golden period for the city’s fathers; after that, things began to unravel very quickly. By the final quarter of the century the economic liberalism of the council chamber was generating significant social distress, particularly amongst the working class. The existing municipal boundary which had remained unchanged since 1835 was anachronistic, leaving large swaths of the population disenfranchised. Working conditions within the city had not greatly improved and there were still issues over the acceptance of unionised labour. Pay tended to be low and the hours long, and the unions had made little headway in confronting the business leaders over these issues. The overall impression created by these and other issues was of a city that had stagnated, dominated by a governing class increasingly introspective and isolated.

The outcome was perhaps inevitable, given the increasingly aggressive stance of the city’s labour organisations. 1889 saw a devastating series of strikes across the city that temporarily closed some of Bristol’s leading businesses, including Barton Hill Cotton Works, Fry’s, Robinson’s, and the Broad Plain Soap Works. Low wages was the dominant issue as was union representation. If there was a moment when the city’s more progressive Liberal leaders could have reached out to the workers then this was it. Yet,
despite weeks of protest, the business elite stood firm, Tory and Liberal united in their opposition, and many of the worker’s demands were not conceded. Protest and industrial disruption continued into 1892. This culminated in Bristol’s Black Friday when the dockers went on strike over the use of non-unionised labour. Protest immediately spread to other factories again, in a familiar pattern. On 23 December a demonstration of thousands was charged by cavalry, wounding many. The Conservatives and Liberals successfully vetoed a Council resolution asking for the Home Secretary to investigate the affair. Perhaps no other event demonstrated how far the relationship between the workers and the business leaders of the city had collapsed.

It is clear then that by the 1890s the authority of the governing elite had become constrained by very real limitations as a more aggressive and determined working-class movement came to the fore. The municipal boundary extension of 1897 finally began a process which was to see the overhaul of local government, and with it the very structures of elite authority which the figure of Edward Colston had in part been used to bolster.

Conclusion

Throughout the nineteenth century, the intimate relationship that had previously existed between Bristol and its city docks was steadily unravelling. As profitable overseas trade in slaves, tobacco and sugar dwindled, the city’s port came to rely predominantly on coastal trade. For the group of manufacturers in the ascent by the 1860s, it was access to these domestic markets that was paramount. Predominantly Liberal, nonconformist, they formed a notable contrast to the ‘old money’ of the merchant venturers. Yet, in terms of what mattered, on issues of the economy and on the distribution of political power, the city’s elite displayed a cohesive front. The Second Reform Act has been shown to be a critical moment. Any extension of the franchise was seen as a threat to the political consensus. In the case of Bristol, the elite were not slow on drawing on what remained of the
economic and cultural potential of the city docks to bolster and legitimate their authority. For a brief period after 1867, income from dockside dues, rather than helping fund a programme of municipal reform, was used for short-term gain by helping to bring the borough rate down to its lowest recorded level for all property owners, many newly enfranchised by the Second Reform Act. Concurrently, the tradition of the philanthropic Colston Societies underwent a transformation. The annual collections saw a significant increase as did the visibility and complexity of the parades and dinners. The conclusion from these developments is a clear one—the city docks as an economic and cultural entity was critical in the attempted legitimisation of elite power holding at a time of increasing political instability and uncertainty.

As has been argued, the period 1860 to 1880 should perhaps be seen as a golden period for the docks. But if so, then it was a fleeting renaissance. By 1880 dockside dues had been seriously affected by the deepwater facilities at Avonmouth. The borough rate increased significantly as a result, while the value and role of private philanthropy was steadily undermined. The Third Reform Act of 1884, and then the much–delayed extension of Bristol’s municipal boundaries in 1897 and again in 1904, transformed the political and social make up of the city for good.

Within such a large new hinterland, the city docks continued to shrink in importance. In 1895 the statue of a brooding Edward Colston in Colston Avenue was erected, yet it could not hold back the wave of change unleashed after the First World War. He is still there, staring forlornly out across the traffic in the direction of the open sea, but the city docks have long gone.

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ii For detail about Edward Colston, his life, and the Colston Societies, see T. Garrard, *Edward Colston, the Philanthropist, His Life and Times...* (Bristol, 1852); S. G. Tovey, *Colston, the Philanthropist; Memorials of his Life and Deeds* (Bristol, 1863); E. G. Clarke, *Concerning Edward Colston of Bristol and London, Merchant, and his Anniversary, With Some Facts and Figures* (Bristol, 1877); H. J. Wilkins,
Edward Colston [1636-1721]: A Chronological Account of his Life and Work Together with an Account of the Colston Societies and Memorials in Bristol (Bristol, 1920); and H. J. Wilkins, Edward Colston [1636-1721]. Supplement to a Chronological Account of his Life and Work... (Bristol, 1925).

iii Garrard, Edward Colston, pp. 469-78.


vi The data is smoothed using a three year moving average, and adjusted for inflationary change.

vii Bristol Times & Mirror, November 13 1865, p. 3.


ix Western Daily Press, 1 November 1885, p. 1.

x Report of the Committee to Inquire into the Condition of the Bristol Poor (Bristol: W. Lewis & Sons, 1885), pp. 179-80.

xi Condition of the Bristol Poor, p. 178


xiii *Western Daily Press*, 18 October 1869, p. 3.


xvii Morgan, *Bristol and Atlantic Trade*, p. 222.


xxii Neal, *Port of Bristol Volume Two*, p. 26

xxiii Neal, *Port of Bristol Volume Two*, p. 34.

xxiv Jordan, *Development and Implementation*, ch. 5.


xxvii Dockside dues included the town and mayor’s dues, cranage and, after 1861, wharfage. Manors and estates included all of the council’s city properties but also the estate at Portishead and the manor at Hinton. In 1850 city rents were bringing in £7,540; Portishead estate, £1,269; and Hinton, £1,011. Markets included all the council-owned markets, the most significant of which were the Exchange and St. Nicholas’ market (bringing in £2,575 in 1850), and St. James’ market (£437). The source for these data are the Bristol Council Abstracts, 1835-1939, at the BRO (no reference number).

The population recorded in the Census of 1841 was 122,296. This had increased to 182,552 in 1871.

The rateable survey of Bristol in 1851 recorded 10,909 rateable properties with a total rateable value for the city of £222,072. In 1871 rateable properties were recorded with a total value of £300,564. These surveys can be found in BRO: 1851 (BRO 04250 (1)) and 1871 (BRO 04252 (1)).


In 1877 the Guardians of Bristol Union wrote to Bristol’s Medical Officer of Health highlighting two areas of especially dire accommodation. D. Davies, *Report of the Medical Officer of Health ... As to Two Areas Within Their District, Alleged to be Unhealthy for the Purposes of the Artisans’ and Labourers’ Dwelling Improvement Act* (Bristol, 1877). This criticism was compounded by the restrained criticism of two reports in the mid 1880s, the first was commissioned by the *Bristol Mercury*. Anon., *Homes of the Bristol Poor By the Special Commissioner of the Bristol Mercury* (Bristol, 1884); and the second was the Bishop’s Report, *Condition of the Poor*.


xxxviii Morgan, *Bristol and Atlantic Trade*.


xlii D. Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class: The Political Representation of Class in Britain, 1780-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).


xliv Nenadic, ‘Victorian Middle Classes’, p. 266.


The Gloucestershire Society was founded in 1657. A president was annually elected, and a committee appointed consisting of past presidents; subscribers contributed to a fund intended to relieve distressed women, and provide funds initially of about £4 for apprentices. Similarly to the Colston Societies, an annual service was held at one of several locations. See H. Bush, *History of the Gloucestershire Society, Compiled by Henry Bush, in 1854, With Further Notes by Francis F. Fox, in 1899, and F. Richardson Cross, in 1921* (Bristol, 1921).
The beginnings of the Society of St. Stephen’s Ringers is shrouded in mystery. Tradition has it that Queen Elizabeth was so charmed by the bells of St. Stephen during a stay in 1574 that she promised to give the Society a Charter. Two events were the central to the Society's calendar: Michaelmas Day, when the Master, Senior Warden and Deputy Warden were elected; and 17 November which, being the anniversary of Queen Elizabeth, was celebrated with a banquet. See H. E. Roslyn, *The History of the Antient Society of St. Stephen’s Ringers* (Bristol: St Stephen’s Press, 1928); and J. Latimer, *The Annals of Bristol in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries Vol. 1* (Bristol, 1900), pp. 74-75.

lxv S. G. Tovey, *Colston, the Philanthropist; Memorials of his Life and Deeds* (Bristol: T. D. Taylor, 1863), p. 19.


lxvii Carlyle, *Heroes and Hero-Worship*.

lxviii *Western Daily Press*, 26 October 1889, p. 5. A song sung on Saturday’s labour demonstration.


lxxi In the distress of early 1886 for instance the mayor, Charles Wathen, advertised for 50 men for Messrs Meakin, Dean and Davies, contractors. A large group of 200-250 proceeded to the factory from which 50 men were selected; the rest marched to the Mansion House, loitering until they saw the mayor’s state carriage which they followed before dispersing. *WDP*, 3 March 1886, p. 3. Three days later representatives of the unemployed were rather ruthlessly interrogated by the full council chamber before it was decided to set up a fund to aid relief. Representatives of the city’s leading families led the way: the mayor donated £100, W. H. & H. O. Wills £50; J. S. Fry & Sons £50; Miles, Cave, Baillie & Co £50; C. T. Thomas and Bros. £50; and Harvey & Sons £50. *WDP*, 6 March 1886, p. 3.

lxxii The city-wide dispute of 1889 involved, among others, Frys, Robinson’s, Broad Plain Soap Works (C. J. Thomas & Bros. Ltd.), Great Western Cotton Works, Bathurst Oil Cake Mill, Hudden & Co., and city gas workers, dockers, scavengers, carters and warehousemen. *WDP*, 26 October 1889, p. 5. Low wages was a dominant concern. Fry & Sons eventually conceded in early October to a 1 shilling increase. *WDP*, 23 October 1889, p. 5. Christopher Thomas Brothers agreed to end the practice of docking two pence a week from employees wages to pay the Medical Officer of Health’s salary. E. S. & A. Robinson’s would not concede to the demands of the original 36 machine boys that left the factory. However, they were allowed to continue with their jobs after the ‘settling’ of the dispute.