

# EDUCATION

LITTLE IS KNOWN OF WHAT EDUCATION WAS AVAILABLE IN BRISTOL UP TO THE LATE MEDIEVAL PERIOD, ALTHOUGH IT IS ASSUMED THAT A BASIC FORM OF SCHOOLING MUST HAVE BEEN PROVIDED FOR SOME MEMBERS OF SOCIETY AS THE MERCHANT CLASS WAS FAIRLY LITERATE.

In 1532 Robert Thorne, a business man with interests in the Spanish trade, was granted a charter to establish a free school for the sons of merchants and tradesmen on the former premises of St Bartholomew's Hospital, near Christmas Steps. The pupils of what would become Bristol Grammar School were taught maritime subjects as well as Latin, Greek, Divinity and some Hebrew. Thorne's brother Nicholas bequeathed the school his astrolabe and other scientific instruments. Bristol Grammar School, like other privately endowed schools in the city, also provided for the upkeep of orphans and offered opportunities to undertake apprenticeships. In 1767 it exchanged premises with Queen Elizabeth's Hospital School, which was then based on Unity Street, and later moved to Tyndall's Park. Queen Elizabeth's Hospital School was granted its charter in 1590 having been founded by the merchant John Carr to provide vocational training for poor and orphaned boys. The boarders wore distinctive blue-coated uniforms. The school has occupied its present site on Brandon Hill since 1847.



*Horace Davis Queen Elizabeth's Hospital (1934) (Bristol's Museums, Galleries and Archives).*





Red Maids' School, named after the wine-red uniforms worn by its pupils, was founded in 1634 using a bequest from the merchant John Whitson. It was one of the first girls' schools in the country and was originally set up to educate the destitute and orphaned.

A number of elementary schools run by charitable organisations were established in Bristol in the eighteenth century to provide basic education to working class children. Most were linked to the Church of England but non-conformists also developed their own schools including the Unitarians at Stokes Croft and the Congregationalists in Clifton. The premises of John Wesley's New Room chapel in Bristol, built in 1739, were used as a school for poor children and Wesley personally funded the opening of a boarding school in Kingswood for the orphans of miners.

Clifton College, founded in 1862, was established by some of Bristol's leading citizens who felt that the Grammar School was no longer meeting their educational needs. It was modelled on Thomas Arnold's famous Rugby School, and its first Headmaster, the 27-year old John Percival, shaped the college along liberal-radical lines. Masters were encouraged to treat pupils as if they were friends, a 'house' was provided for Jewish boys, and science was a key part of the curriculum. The school buildings were taken over by the military during World War Two and General Omar Bradley of the US Army made them his headquarters for the planning of the D-Day landings. Clifton College became a co-educational school in September 1987.

The 1870 Education Act established publicly funded School Boards that were responsible for providing elementary education to all local children. Among the earliest publicly funded schools in Bristol were Merrywood in South Bristol (1896) and Fairfield (1898). From 1902 the Boards were also responsible for secondary level education.

The University College of Bristol opened in October 1876, in part because of the efforts of Clifton College's John Percival. He had founded the Association for the Promotion of the Higher Education of Women in 1868, and University College was the first such establishment in the country to admit men and women as equals. With support from the Wills and Fry families, among others, the college was given full university status in 1909, becoming the University of Bristol. Henry Overton Wills III was its first chancellor. His sons, Sir George Arthur Wills and Henry Herbert Wills, paid for the erection of the Wills Memorial Building on Park Street, which was completed in 1925. The Wills family also presented the university with a number of other buildings including the Victoria Rooms, Goldney Hall and Burwalls.

In 1929 Winston Churchill became Bristol's third chancellor and throughout the 1930s the university's reputation steadily grew. The student population also expanded, particularly after World War Two, and today comprises around 12,000 undergraduates and 5,500 postgraduates. It is one of Britain's leading and most enterprising research-intensive universities, and one of Bristol's biggest employers.

The University of the West of England (UWE), formerly Bristol Polytechnic, can trace its origins back to the Navigation School founded by the Merchant Venturers in 1595, one of the country's first technical training institutions. The School became the Merchant Venturers' Technical College in 1894, which, in addition to providing the nucleus of Bristol Polytechnic, also provided the basis for the University of Bath and for the Faculty of Engineering of the University of Bristol. UWE was awarded university status in 1992.



Top left: Uniform of the Red Maids' School.

Top middle: Watercolour by W H Y Titcomb of Clifton College (c1900) (Clifton College). W G Grace scored 13 centuries while a pupil there and 13-year old A E J Collins scored a record-breaking 628 not out in 1899.

Top right: The Dorothy Hodgkin Building, a centre for medical research at the University of Bristol that opened in 2004, features arched windows which carry images created through sophisticated technology (University of Bristol).

Left: Reginald Bush Building the University of Bristol (1922) (Bristol's Museums, Galleries and Archives).