Mapping the City

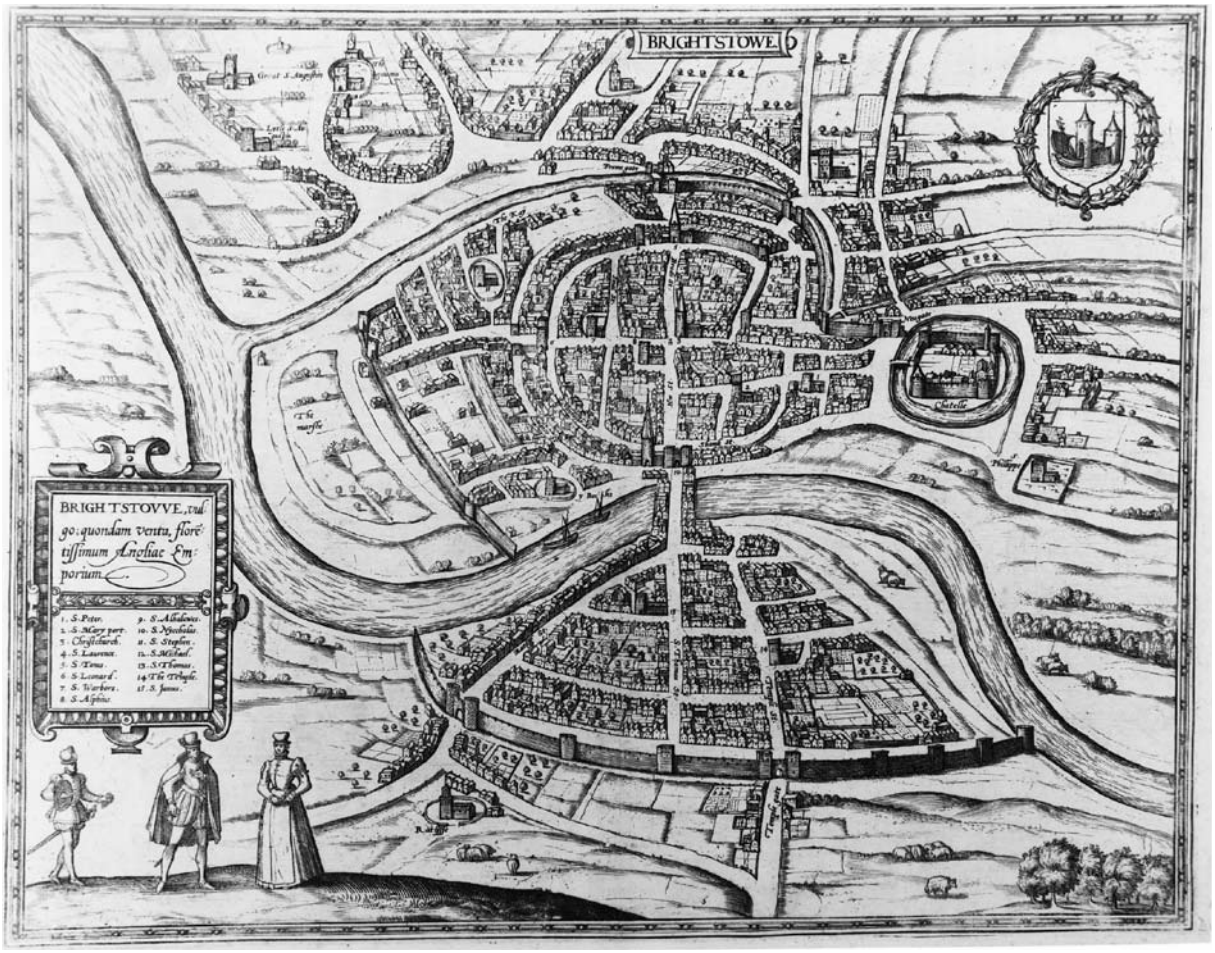
The earliest-known representation of Bristol in map-form is found in Robert Ricart's 'The Maire of Bristowe is Kalendar' (1480-1508), the first detailed chronicle to have been produced of an English provincial town. This shows a bird's-eye view of the city walls and gates, and the four principal streets - High Street, Wine Street, Corn Street and Broad Street - meeting at the High Cross. Ricart, the town clerk, was asked to compile the calendar by the newly appointed mayor, William Spencer, and it provided an invaluable resource for local officials.

It included lists of Bristol's mayors, sheriffs and bailiffs from 1217, a guide to official procedures, and information regarding city charters (documents setting out particular rights and privileges). Another important figure of this period – and someone whom Ricart may have consulted while writing his chronicle – was the Bristol-born chronicler and geographer William Worcester who produced his own detailed survey of the city. By the fifteenth century Bristol's mercantile success had made it the most important English town after London and York.

Bristollia.

Above: Map of the city showing the High Cross from The Maire of Bristowe is Kalendar *(Bristol Record Office).*

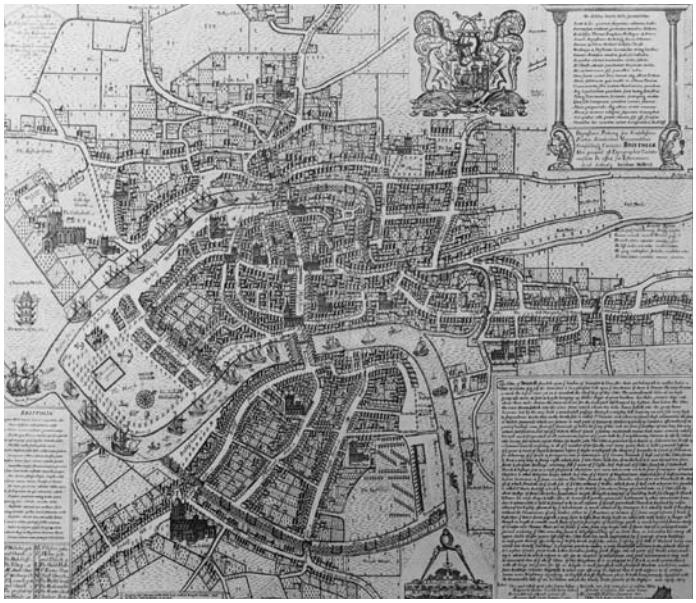
Opposite: Georgius Hoefnagle's plan of Brightstowe (1581) (Bristol's Museums, Galleries and Archives).



Two significant Bristol maps of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are Georgius Hoefnagle's plan of Brightstowe (1581) and James Millerd's 1671 'delineation of the famous citty of Bristoll'. Hoefnagle's engraving was actually an inaccurate copy of an earlier survey by William Smith (1568), its mistakes perpetuated in subsequent maps. According to the Bristol chronicler John Latimer (1824-1904), the city's population was around 10,000 people at this time. The map was reproduced in Georg Braun and Franz Hogenberg's *Civitates Orbis Terrarum* (1572-1617), the first published collection of town plans from around the world. Braun allegedly added drawings of people in local dress to the maps because he thought this would stop them being used as invasion-plans by the Turks whose religion forbid them to look at representations of the human form.

Millerd's plan marked a transition between the traditional high-angled, bird's-eye view of a city and the measured plan-view surveys of the eighteenth century. The advantage of the bird's-eye perspective is that it can convey more detailed visual information. It also provides an opportunity for mapmakers to demonstrate their artistic skills. However, its scale and orientation can be inconsistent, and it can therefore be inaccurate for reference purposes. Millerd's map includes seals swimming in the harbour, people on board ships and some individually identifiable buildings. It was first reproduced for popular use in 1673 and featured an attractive border illustrated with further drawings of key buildings in the city including the Custom House, Corn Market and St Mary Redcliffe. Such buildings were the source of civic pride. Bristol was then on the brink of economic expansion and set to become the second biggest town in England. Many of the former open places within the city had been built on and the Marsh to the west of the old walls was being developed by the Corporation (it would later become Queen Square). By 1700 the population had reached an estimated 20,000.

John Rocque's 1742 map is thought to be the first accurately measured survey of Bristol. It was printed on separate sheets in a strict geometrical plan form, rather than as a bird's-eye view. Rocque, a Hugenot émigré whose family had fled persecution in France, had gained his early experience in surveying by designing houses and gardens for the English nobility. He was renowned for his attention to detail in his work. The 1700s were considered by some as Bristol's golden age, with the population trebling, manufacturing and dockside activity booming, and impressive building projects taking place. This prosperity was largely dependent on the slave trade.



Left: James Millerd's 'delineation of the famous citty of Bristoll' (1673), based on his plan of 1671 (Bristol's Museums, Galleries and Archives).

Below: Scaled-down version of John Rocque's 1742 plan (1750) (Bristol's Museums, Galleries and Archives).

Opposite: William Lander's map of Bristol (1840) (Bristol's Museums, Galleries and Archives).

In 1835 the city boundary of Bristol was extended to include the suburbs of Clifton and Bedminster, and the parishes of St Paul, St James, and SS Philip and Jacob. William Lander produced an electoral map as a way of helping voters to decide whether their residences fell within the qualifying area for the Bristol constituency, one that extended seven miles distance from the official city boundary. The Reform Act of 1832 had introduced wide-ranging changes to the electoral system, including increasing the size of the electorate and granting new parliamentary seats to the large cities that had developed during the Industrial Revolution. Bristol's population was around 105,000 at this time.

In 1791 the British government instructed the Board of Ordnance (the equivalent of today's Ministry of Defence) to undertake an accurate survey of the British South Coast in anticipation of a possible attack from France. The first Ordnance Survey (OS) map, produced in 1801, was of the county of Kent, and the organisation was soon established as the country's principal map-maker. The OS map specially created for the meeting of the British Association of Science held in Bristol in 1930 showed the city on the verge of major expansion, its population set to rise above 400,000. Indicative of the heavy industrialisation in and around the city at that time, the map includes collieries, potteries, and gas, soap, lead, chemical, glue and varnish works. It is among the collection of historic maps on display in Bristol's City Museum and Art Gallery.

The award-winning Bristol Legible City (BLC) system was launched in March 2001. It comprises unique Bristol-specific way-finding products, including signage, street furniture, maps, artworks and i-plus touch screen consoles. There is also an associated clutter reduction programme. BLC helps people to find their way more easily, and to better understand and experience the city. The on-street maps give a 'heads-up' view of the area, oriented according to where they are situated, rather than on the usual North-South basis, making them more straightforward for pedestrians to read. The maps also include three-dimensional illustrations of landmark buildings, going back to the more traditional bird's-eye perspective seen in earlier maps. BLC was developed at a time when Bristol was undergoing a period of major regeneration and was closely linked to marketing initiatives that promoted Bristol as an attractive, accessible, connected and creative city that was safe and welcoming to visitors. The official Bristol population figure from the 2001 census was just over 380,000.

You can read more about mapping the city on the Great Reading Adventure website at www.bristolreads.com

Bristol Legible City on-street map at College Green with detail (Jamie Shaw).