PORT OF BRISTOL SERIES

THE PORT OF BRISTOL IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

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The Port of Bristol in the Eighteenth Century is the fifth of the pamphlets on local history issued by the Bristol Branch of the Historical Association through its Standing Committee on Local History and is the first in a special series concerned with the port. It is larger than the pamphlets in the general series and contains more illustrations. A generous grant from the Port of Bristol Authority has made it possible to keep the price of the pamphlet down to three shillings and sixpence, and the Branch wishes to acknowledge the help and encouragement it has received from the Docks Committee and the General Manager of the Port.

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Other pamphlets on the history of the Port of Bristol and related topics are in preparation and will be issued in the Port of Bristol Series in due course.

The series as a whole is planned to include new work as well as authoritative summaries of work which has already been done, and it is hoped that it will appeal to the general public as well as to students and school children. The four pamphlets already published are *The Bristol Hotwell* by Vincent Waite, *Bristol and Burke* by P. T. Underdown, *The Theatre Royal: the first Seventy Years* by Kathleen Barker, and *The Merchant Adventurers of Bristol in the Fifteenth Century* by E. M. Carus-Wilson. The next in the general series will be *Thomas Chatterton* by Basil Cottle. Other titles under consideration are Bristol and Slavery; the steamship *Great Western*; the Britol Riots; Bristol Castle; Reform Movements in Nineteenth Century Bristol; Mary Carpenter and the Reform School at the Red Lodge; the Bristol Coalfield; the Bristol Corporation of the Poor.

The pamphlets, with the exception of the special series on the Port, are issued at the modest price of two shillings in the hope that they may have a wide circulaion. They can be obtained from most Bristol booksellers or direct from the Bristol Branch of the Historical Association. It would be a great help if as many people as possible would place a standing order for future productions with the Honorary Secretary of the Local History Committee (Miss Ilfra Pidgeon), Bristol Branch of the Historical Association, University of Bristol.

THE PORT OF BRISTOL IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

by Walter Minchinton

I—THE TRADE OF BRISTOL

The eighteenth century was Bristol's golden age. For most of this period, except for London, Bristol was the leading English port. It occupied a key role in overseas commerce and at the same time it was the focus of the economic, social and cultural life of much of South Wales and the south west of England. Already in the seventeenth century the second largest port in the country, Bristol had, by growing faster than Norwich, become the second largest town in England in 1700. It continued to grow in the eighteenth century and its population rose from about 20,000 in 1700 to 64,000 in 1801. This expansion of the city is still clearly visible on the face of Bristol. Queen's Square was laid out, the Corn Exchange was erected and St. Thomas Church was built. Across the Froom there was new building around the Lord Mayor's Chapel, of which Orchard Street is the best surviving example; while to the north of the city St. James Square was formed. Later in the century, buildings began to push further out, Park Street was built and the Pinneys moved into residence in Great George Street. In the speculative building boom at the end of the century, Royal York Crescent was begun and Clifton gradually assumed the appearance of cultured elegance which is still to be seen. As the evidence of the successive maps of Bristol shows, it was in the eighteenth century that Bristol really broke out of the bondage of the mediaeval city and began to colonise the surrounding countryside. And not only in Bristol and Clifton but further afield at Stapleton, Frenchay and Mangotsfield, merchants' houses were built.

The dynamic for this expansion was provided by the growth of trade and by the increase in industrial activity in the city which was the concomitant of the commercial boom. For long Bristol had been an important seaport, most of its trade being carried on with markets near to hand in Ireland, France and the Iberian peninsular. During the eighteenth century Bristol merchants continued to engage in these trades but her pre-eminence in that century was based on new trades, on the growth of transatlantic commerce. From about the mid-seventeenth century, trade with Virginia, the Carolinas and the West Indies had begun to grow. The tonnage of shipping entering the port from the West Indies

rose from 1,900 in 1670 to 5,200 in 1700: in 1659/60 14 ships came from Virginia, in 1699/1700 the number had increased to 29. And to the sugar and tobacco trades, as a result of the Act which permitted anyone to trade with Africa on payment of a ten per cent tax on imports and exports, was added in 1698 that most contentious of trades, the slave trade. The pattern was set for the following century. Rum, slaves, tobacco, and sugar were the main ingredients of Bristol's prosperity in the eighteenth century, with sugar the most important.

The best index of the growth of Bristol's trade in the course of this hundred years is provided by the figures of shipping using the port. In 1687 240 ships cleared from Bristol, thirty years later in 1717 the number had increased to 375 and in 1787 448 vessels left Bristol in a year. And the figures of shipping entering the port tell the same story of expansion: in 1700, 240 vessels arrived from ports outside Great Britain, whereas the total in 1787 amounted to 485. But these totals understate the growth of trade since the size of vessels rose during the century. In 1701 the average tonnage of ships owned by Bristol merchants was 105 tons, by the end of the century it was 144 tons. The tonnage of shipping using the port of Bristol therefore shows a greater increase than the number of ships. In 1700 the total tonnage of shipping entering the port was 19,878 tons, in 1791 it was 76,000 tons. Commerce was the mainspring of Bristol's activity. Here where "the very clergy talk of nothing but trade and how to turn the penny,"[1] commented a contemporary observer, "all are in a hurry, running up and down with cloudy looks and busy faces, loading, carrying and unloading goods and merchandizes of all sorts from place to place; for the trade of many nations is drawn hither by the industry and opulency of the people."[2]

Throughout the century, the most constant overseas trade was with Ireland. Vessels traded with all the Irish ports, the greatest number being concerned in the trade with Dublin and the ports of southern Ireland—Cork, Limerick, Waterford and Youghall. At the beginning of the century about 70 vessels, at the end between 100 and 120 were employed in the carriage of dairy produce, salted beef and pork, linen and yarn, leather, hides and timber to the city and in supplying Ireland with manufactured goods and colonial products. The ports of southern Ireland also served as victualling stations for Bristol ships in the oceanic trades. A number of the vessels which left Bristol for Africa, the West Indies or the mainland American colonies called at an Irish port for provisions, water and sometimes linen and yarn before they set out on their long transatlantic voyages. Although neither risky nor spectacular, the Irish trade provided a solid basis for Bristol's eighteenth-century commerce.

If the Irish entries were the most numerous, the West Indian were the most important. While some ships engaged in roundabout trades via Africa or North America, many vessels sailed directly between Bristol and the West Indies. In *A West-India Fortune*, Richard Pares gave an excellent picture of the Nevis trade (as well as of the Bristol sugar market). Though almost all the West Indian islands fell within Bristol's orbit, the trade with Jamaica dominated Bristol's West India trade. The outward cargo consisted of articles for the clothing and maintenance of white and negro, for the furnishing of their houses, the construction of their mills and distilleries and the cultivation of their lands and the manufacture of its produce. Molasses, rum, cotton, dyewoods and other goods found their place in the return cargoes but the most important item was sugar which was refined in the twenty or so sugar houses in Bristol. Bristol imported 12,330 hogsheads of sugar in 1770, 16,416 hogsheads in 1780, 18,700 hogsheads in 1790 and 19,381 hogsheads in 1801. In 1788 the goods sent to the West Indies were valued at between £250,000 and £300,000 and the return cargoes at about £800,000. At this date the trade employed between 70 and 80 ships of from 200 to 350 tons burthen and about 1,500 seamen.

Of the trade with the mainland of North America, the plantation trade was the most important. From Virginia, Bristol imported tobacco and iron, and from South Carolina, rice, skins and naval stores were obtained. The trade with the temperate colonies was smaller and of a more miscellaneous character. Bristol ships were also to be found in the Newfoundland fisheries. A few brought their cargoes of fish and train oil directly back to Bristol but most of them carried their cargoes to Spain, Portugal or other destinations in the Mediterranean. They returned to Bristol with oil, fruit and wine. In addition there was some direct trade from Bristol to the Mediterranean. Of chief importance was the cargoes of wool from Spain for the west of England cloth industry.

Bristol also carried on trade with more traditional markets in north-western Europe and the Baltic. Paper, steel, wine and brandy, linen and other fabrics came from Rotterdam, Dunkirk or Hamburg, while timber, naval stores and iron were the chief imports from Stockholm, Riga, St. Petersburg and Danzig. The exports to these places were very small and ships trading with these areas either went in ballast or carried a cargo of plantation goods.

Finally there was the part played by Bristol in the Atlantic migration of the eighteenth century. Both the plantation colonies and the West Indies had an acute shortage of labour at this time which was relieved through the agency of English merchants who transported slaves from the coast of Africa and free immigrants, indentured servants and convicts from England—the former a flood,

the latter a trickle by comparison. For a brief period in the middle of the century when the Africa trade was regarded as "the principal and most considerable branch belonging to the city," Bristol dominated the trade. But as Bristol had wrested the leadership from London, so in its turn it had to yield to Liverpool. The number of Bristol ships in the trade declined from a peak of 52 in 1739 to between 22 and 33 a year in the third quarter of the century. In the last decade, Bristol's interest fell right away and only a total of 29 vessels sailed for Africa from the port in the decade between 1795 and 1804.

In the course of the century, there were no major changes in the direction of Bristol's trade but there was a shift in emphasis. The Virginia and Africa trades waxed and waned and fewer ships came to be employed in the Newfoundland fishery. Other trades, among them the Spanish trade, grew in size and all the time, the Irish trade continued to play a significant role in the life of the port. But though widely extended, as the following table shows, the dominant feature in Bristol's eighteenth century trade was its participation in West Indian commerce. The vessels engaging in that trade were larger and their cargoes more valuable than in any other trade.

DISTRIBUTION OF BRISTOL'S OVERSEAS TRADE, 1700-1801[3]

(a) Ships IN

	1700	1787	1801	
Africa	—	15	2	
Europe	79	179	93	
Ireland	68	161	116	
West Indies	55	71	70	
North America	38	44	85	
Others	—	30	22	(17 Channel Isles)
TOTAL	240	485	386	

(b) Ships OUT

	1717	1787	1801	
Africa	8	30	6	
Europe	86	120	38	
Ireland	118	139	109	
West Indies	76	73	73	
North America	73	68	63	
Others	14	18	25	(20 Channel Isles)
TOTAL	375	448	314	

During war, trade proved for some merchants less attractive than privateering, to which they turned in the hope of windfall gains

Early in the century at least, privateering was surrounded with an aura of glamour, as this song of the *Blandford* Privateer suggests:

Ye seaman who've a mind to go in pursuit of new adventure,
Repair on board the Blandford with Captain Stonehouse enter,
Who cruizing goes to meet his foes, such pastimes sure must please us,
We'll prizes make of all we take; this will to fortune raise us.

Most famous of the Bristol privateering voyages was that of Woodes Rogers who, with his two ships the *Duke* and *Duchess*, circumnavigated the world between 1708 and 1711. These were but two of the 123 Bristol vessels which sailed as privateers between 1702 and 1713. During the War of Austrian Succession 92 privateers put out from Bristol; during the Seven Years' War, 162; and during the War of American Independence 157 Bristol vessels carried letters of marque. But thereafter Bristol merchants seem to have lost their ardour for this hazardous undertaking and during the whole of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars only 63 Bristol ships sailed as privateers.

Apart from the vessels engaged in overseas trade, the Avon was thronged with market boats and coasting craft which, in the days before the railways and the improved roads, provided the main transport for goods from one part of Great Britain to another. In 1788, a contemporary estimated that "upon the coasting trade from the various ports of England Scotland and Wales, exclusive of the navigation of the Severn, about one thousand three hundred vessels of various burthen arrive annually." Towards the end of the century, the Bristol directories provided a timetable of the sailings of these vessels. The Severn trows for Bewdley, Bridgnorth, Frampton, Gloucester, Newnham, Stroud, Tewkesbury, Upton and Worcester left from the head of the Quay on every spring tide; the market boats to Caerleon, Chepstow and Newport arrived each Wednesday and departed each Thursday; the "constant coasters" sailed at given times for ports as far distant as London and Greenock as well as to all the ports within the Bristol Channel. Each had its special part of the quay, of which the Welsh Back is perhaps the most vivid reminder.

Supplementing the water-borne commerce was that carried by road. Although the improvements of the eighteenth century increased the ease of road communication, there was a considerable volume of road traffic before these changes took place. Bristol stood at the meeting point of five main roads. Neither the clay lands of the vale of Berkeley to the north nor the flats of Somerset to the south had roads which were passable in all weathers, but the three roads to the east, to Tetbury and Oxford, to Chippenham and London and to Bath and Warminster were in better condition. By these roads, Bristol merchants, Defoe tells us,

maintain carriers just as the London tradesmen do, to all the principal countries and towns from Southampton in the south, even to the banks of the Trent north; and tho' they have no navigable river that way, yet they drive a very great trade through all these countries.[4]

Though dearer than water transport, road carriage was both safer and more regular. By 1750 there were ninety-four carriers plying to and from the city to Leeds, Nottingham and other distant towns and an even more extensive service was in existence by the end of the century. Standing at the centre of this web of land and water communications, Bristol was the commercial capital of the west. "If we consider domestic trade, or inland Navigation," Campbell stated in 1774, "Bristol is without rival."[5] Her geographical position considered widely in this manner as a regional centre was the second source of Bristol's importance.

By land and river and sea, the produce of its hinterland was brought to Bristol which served several functions. First of all, it was the main market for agricultural produce. Of the grain crops, wheat came chiefly from the Midlands, barley from west Wales and Gloucestershire and oats from Cardigan and Carmarthen. Dairy produce and meat came chiefly from South Wales while regular supplies of vegetables were brought from the Vale of Evesham and the vale of Glamorgan. Bristol was also a market for industrial raw materials. Timber came from the Forest of Dean for shipbuilding, teazles from Somerset for the textile trades, wool from Milford or Cardiff for the Cotswold woollen industry, and tin from Cornwall for the tinplate works in South Wales or the Midlands. For these commodities, Bristol served as a distribution point. Other cargoes of raw materials were brought to Bristol to supply the needs of local industries, which also used materials brought from overseas. Even at the end of the eighteenth century, Bristol was "not more a commercial than a manufacturing town."[6]

Among its industries, sugar refining, based on an imported raw material, kept fifteen or sixteen sugar houses generally at work and a distilling industry had grown up alongside them, which produced spirits both for export and for sale at home. There were eleven glassworks in the city by the end of the century. They made glass bottles in which beer, cider, perry, wine and Hotwell water were sold and they also produced large quantities of window glass which they supplied to the west of England, to south Wales and to America and Ireland. Hard white soap, made in Bristol, was held by contemporaries to be superior to any made in England. The copper and brass works at Baptist Mills made wire and ornaments for the Guinea trade, copper sheets for sheathing ships and copper pans for sugar making. Bricks and tiles, made locally, were, it is said, the chief ballast of all the West India ships. In St. Phillip's

there were iron foundries for casting all kinds of iron utensils and cannon as well as a leadworks which produced sheets and pipes.

Along the banks of the Avon there were some yards and slips used for shipbuilding and the repair of vessels. James Martin Hilhouse (founder of the firm now known as Charles Hill & Son) had his yard towards Hotwells; Sydenham Teast and William Blannin built ships at Wapping (Bristol); and Richard Tombs had his yard on Dean's Marsh. In addition there were a number of other boat builders. No returns of shipbuilding in the port exist until the end of the century but from one which survives we know that between 1787 and 1800, 176 vessels with a total tonnage of 22,644 tons were built. Most of them were small but some large vessels were also launched, including one of 458 tons in 1790; of 403 tons in 1794; of 402 tons in 1799; and of 464 tons in 1800. In addition fourteen vessels were built for the Royal Navy in these years. By 1804 there were 123 shipwrights employed in the trade there. Clearly Bristol was a shipbuilding centre of some importance at this time.

Amongst the other industries which were carried on in the city were woollen cloth, silk, lace, sailcloth, earthenware and tobacco. Many of these manufactures benefited from the cheapness of coal and other fuels which were available locally. Some of these industries used imported raw materials but all contributed to Bristol's outward trade, whether overseas, coastwise or by land through the west of England and the south-west Midlands.

It was the combination of participation in a lucrative import trade in tobacco, sugar, rum and other plantation products and in an export trade based on local industries and the products of her hinterland which made Bristol in the early eighteenth century, as Defoe described her, "the greatest, the richest, and the best port of trade in Great Britain, London only excepted." And he went on to add:

> "The merchants of this city not only have the greatest trade, but they trade with a more entire independency upon London than any other town in Britain. And 'tis evident in this particular, (viz.) That whatsoever exportations they make to any part of the world, they are able to bring the full returns back to their own port, and can dispose of it there.
>
> This is not the case in any other port in England."

Thus Bristol's prosperity depended not only on her oceanic commerce, it also derived from her position as "the metropolis of the west."

But Bristol's prosperity depended rather on her imports than her exports, on the tobacco, sugar and rum brought from beyond the seas. With the growth of Britain's extra-European trade, her commerce had flourished. By the end of the eighteenth century,

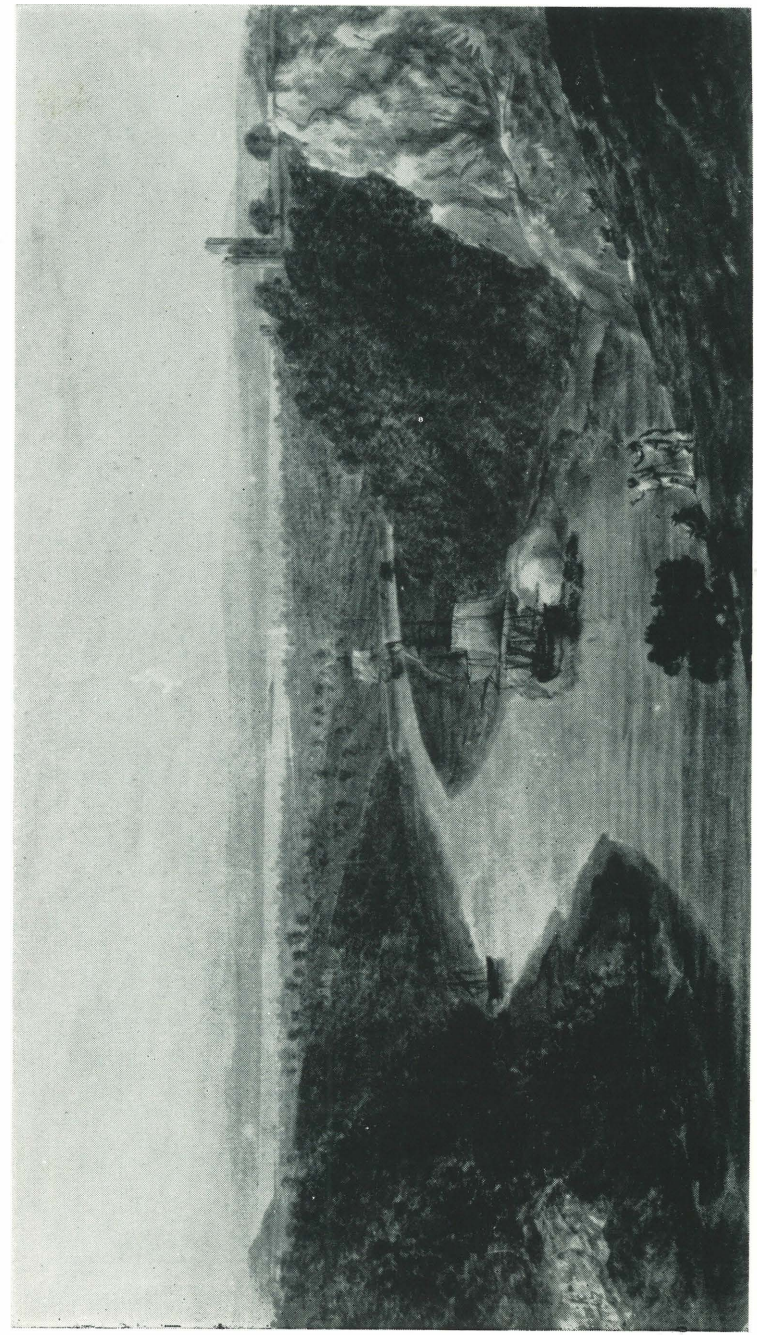
however, although her merchants carried on transactions widely across the seas, her trade had become dangerously concentrated on the West Indies. As her commerce grew less rapidly than that of her rivals, by 1800 she had already lost her position as the leading outport. Consequently Bristol entered the nineteenth century with less confidence than she had entered the eighteenth.

II—THE OPERATION OF THE PORT

From this discussion of the nature and direction of Bristol's trade in the eighteenth century, we can now turn to consider how the port operated. Let us follow the passage of a ship coming from overseas to the port of Bristol. Sailing up the Bristol Channel, she would probably pick up a pilot off Lundy or Ilfracombe, though occasionally some of these pilots went into the English Channel to Penzance, or into St. George's Channel and over to Ireland. There was keen rivalry to board vessels and sometimes the pilots demanded exorbitant sums as fees. Occasionally vessels ran aground while under the charge of the pilot. To deal with such matters, the Society of Merchant Venturers ordained that pilots should board vessels only when invited to do so by the master. Further, the Society laid down a scale of charges and decreed that complaints of misconduct should be examined by the haven master, one of the port officials appointed by the Society. In 1782 he reduced the charges claimed by William Capper for the pilotage of the brig *Two Friends,* from £11 1s. 5½d. to £8 19s. 6½d. since William Capper was "an idle man and frequently in liquor." The following year the Society considered a complaint against John Dickens, pilot, "for running on shore below Minehead a Spanish vessel, *San Joseph y Animas,* which became a loss occasioned by his conduct as pilot." Found guilty, Dickens was suspended from his office as pilot. Not till seven years later was he reinstated.

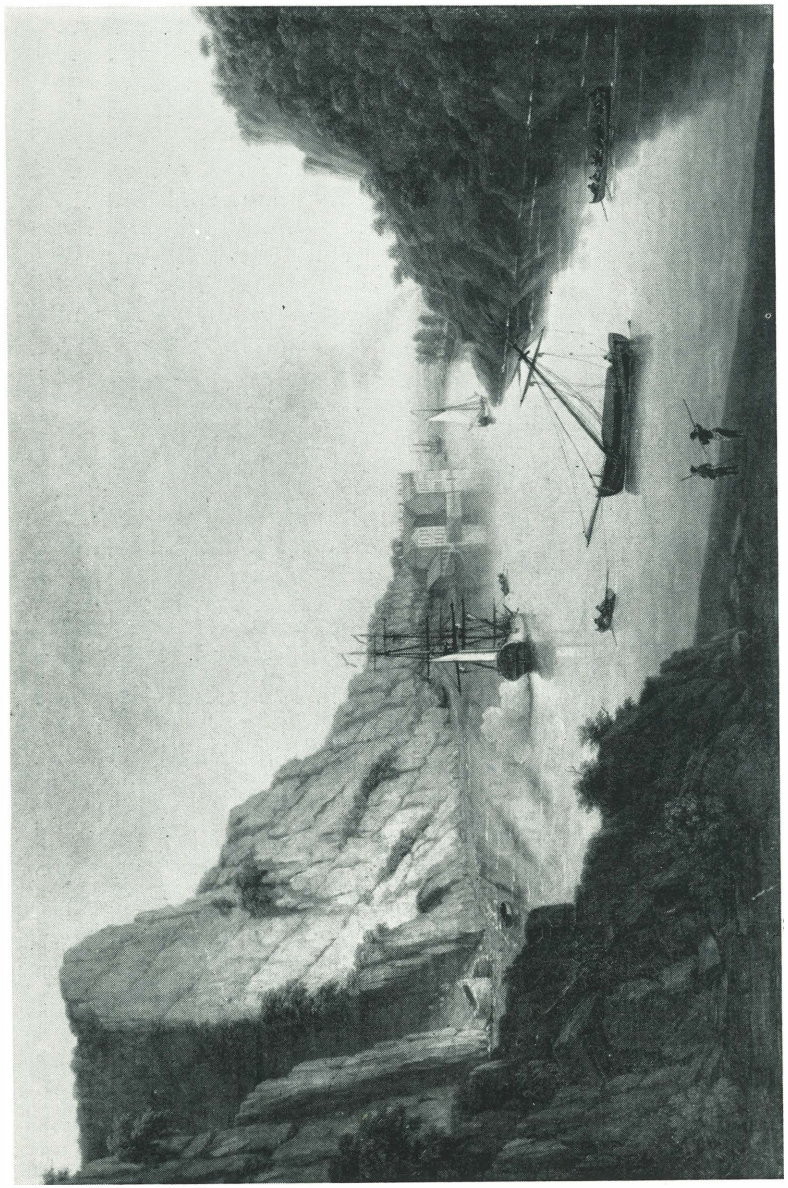
Most of the pilots lived, as they still do, at Pill, then known as Crockerne Pill, a village on the Somerset bank of the Avon about a mile from its mouth. Candidates for the office were examined by the haven master who reported to the Society of Merchant Venturers. In turn, the Society made its recommendations to the Common Council of the city, which made the appointment. Like other official posts, the appointments came up for formal renewal each year. When the pilots were too old for work they were given a superannuation allowance by the Council. In the course of the eighteenth century, the number of pilots increased. This provides a rather crude index of the expansion of the trade of the port. In 1748 there were 14 pilots, in 1757 24, in 1770 34, and in 1784 45.

A landmark on a vessel's passage up the Bristol Channel was Flat Holme, where a lighthouse was built in 1737. Seventy feet high and visible for 7 leagues, the lighthouse remained in private



City Art Gallery, Bristol

View from Durdham Down, 1787, by Nicholas Pocock. This shows a vessel being towed up the Avon.



City Art Gallery, Bristol

St. Vincent's Rock and the Hotwells, c.1756, by Thomas Smith.

hands until it was taken over by Trinity House in 1823. Passing the island brought the vessel within the limits of the port of Bristol which in 1724 were defined as extending from

> "the westernmost parts of the Channell eastwards to Aust in the county of Gloucester and from the said Holmes southwarde athwart the Channell to a place called Uphill which is included and from thence along the coast of shoar eastwards in the county to Gloucester hath been for many years past a creek place called Holes Mouth in King Road up the river Avon to the said city of Bristoll, together with the severall pills lying upon the said river. And we doe further certifye that a place called Bechesley scituate on the north side of the river Severne in the country of Gloucester hath been for many years past a creek and belonging to the said port of Bristoll and we doe conceive the same fitt to be continued."

These limits remained in force until they were more clearly defined by the Bristol Channel Pilotage Act (47 George III c. 33) of 1807.

On the way up the Channel the vessel may have sighted the revenue cutter on patrol but she came under direct customs control if she dropped anchor in the sheltered waters of Kingroad to await a favourable tide to carry her up the Avon. There she would be boarded by one of the 45 tidewaiters of the customs service who would remain on board till she comes to the quay. His job was to prevent goods being smuggled ashore and to check the goods which were unloaded by some of the larger ships into lighters which carried them up the Avon to Bristol. Kingroad, the roadstead off Portishead, was one of the two roadsteads used by shipping to and from the port of Bristol. Here there was room for about 30 vessels to anchor in safety, "the ground being so good that it very rarely happens in the severest gales, that a ship drags her anchor." As well as incoming ships, vessels outward bound waited here for a wind or for the purpose of taking their crews and passengers on board.

The other anchorage was Hungroad about three miles from Kingroad which a vessel would reach after entering the Avon and passing Crockerne Pill. Here almost all the timber ships from the Baltic discharged, sending their cargoes to Bristol in rafts or in lighters. Here, too, some vessels careened and here vessels waited for favourable tides. For the security of vessels lying there, mooring rings were provided. In 1728, for example, £600 was spent on moorings for 14 ships. Periodically, too, work had to be carried out to prevent the road-stead silting up. In 1745 when "an engine" was employed, almost £300 was spent in removing shoals.

Not till a licence was obtained from the haven master were ships permitted to move up the serpentine course of the Avon and then

only when the tide was high enough. Indication of this was given by a post set in the river at Hungroad. When this post was covered, vessels could begin their passage up the Avon. On its way a vessel passed the dock at Sea Mills. Encouraged by similar attempts in the Thames at Rotherhithe in 1696 and at Liverpool in 1709, Joshua Franklyn and a group of Bristol merchants had constructed the third wet dock in the kingdom at a cost of approximately £9,600 between 1712 and 1717. Although the dock provided a safe anchorage, it never found favour with the majority of Bristol merchants who considered it to be too far from the city. It was therefore little used save as a base for privateers during the War of Austrian Succession (1739-48) and the Seven Years' War (1759-63) and by a short-lived whaling enterprise organised by some Bristol merchants in the 1750s. Ships were sent out each year from 1749 to 1758 when the trade appears to have ceased. No further use was found for the dock which in 1779 was reported as being "utterly abandoned".

Because of the swiftness of the current, the crookedness of the river and the fitfulness of the wind through the Avon Gorge, sails were rarely of any use, so most ocean-going vessels were assisted in their passage by towboats (see Plate 2). Small vessels often needed only one boat, but larger ones required eight or ten boats each, with from one hundred to one hundred and fifty men. Some idea of the scale of charges is given by the following account, in this case of a vessel passing down the Avon.

Ship *Blaze Castle.*

To Robert Parkhouse, pilot — Dr.

1773		£	s.	d.
March 11th	From Bristol to Pill 9 boats and 29 men	5	2	6
	From Pill to Kingroad 6 boats and 14 men	4	3	0
	To my pilotage from Bristol to Kingroad		15	0
	To an assisting pilot		5	0
	To 1 boat and 10 men new berthing the do		11	6
	To the pilot staying on board 2 days		6	0
	To 1 boat and 4 men rowing the captain on board	5		6
	Total	11	8	6

In the course of the eighteenth century the cost of pilotage rose; in 1714 the fee for a vessel of 200 tons was 12s.; in 1800 it was 20s.

Soon after passing Sea Mills, a vessel entered the narrow gorge at St. Vincent's Rock which extends for two miles to Hotwells. Here vessels sometimes became stranded. After Hotwells, the valley widens considerably at Rownham, where on the eastern bank William Champion in 1765 built a wet dock, able to accommodate

"thirty-six sail of the largest ships which frequent the port." Alongside were two graving docks suitable for shipbuilding. The cost of construction outstripped Champion's resources and he was forced to offer the docks for sale in 1770 when they were purchased by the Society of Merchant Venturers and became known as the Merchants Docks. Though much nearer to the centre of the city than the Sea Mill Docks, merchants were still reluctant to use them. To secure some business for their dock, the Society in 1776 sponsored an Act of Parliament "to remove the danger of fire amongst the ships in the port of Bristol". This prohibited the landing of timber, tar, etc. except at the Merchants Dock where the Society was empowered to erect warehouses for the purpose. The dock was declared a "lawful key for the landing of all sorts and kinds of timber including mahogany, planks and boards, deals and stones, tar, pitch, rosin and turpentine in whatever quantities the same shall from time to time be imported". The incendiary activities of Jack the Painter who set fire to ships and warehouses in Bristol in 1777 "frightened the people out of their senses" and underlined the need for fire precautions. But the Act proved difficult to enforce and attempts were made to evade it. In 1779 Paul Farr drew the attention of the Society to the fact that a ship belonging to Deidrich Meyerhoff laden with timber had moored at the Quay. Farr added "unless such ships as these are compelled to land their cargoes at the Dock we might as well have been without the Act at all". When approached, Meyerhoff agreed to move his ship to the dock. But the timber merchants continued to be dissatisfied with the position and in 1787/8 brought the case of the *Roehampton,* a vessel which had unloaded at the dock, before the Society. They alleged that timber fetched a lower price at the Dock—staves 10s. per 1,000 less and timber 2d. per foot—and that in consequence the vessel made a loss of £77 because it landed its cargo there instead of a profit of £22 10s. if the timber and staves had been landed at the Quay, "a mortifying experience for the proprietors".

The Society of Merchant Venturers found the dock a no more profitable possession than did Champion. Extensions carried out under the 1776 Act were expensive and revenue fell short of expectations. In consequence, too little was done to keep the dock in good order. In 1789 Robert Claxton wrote to the Master of the Society complaining of "the shameful state of the floating dock . . . The Society," he said, "cannot expect to be paid for vessels lying afloat if they are really lying in mud". The Merchants Dock proved of less value to the port of Bristol than its sponsor hoped.

A vessel carrying neither naval stores nor timber, continued past the Merchants Dock to what Shiercliff writing in 1793, with perhaps excessive local patriotism, called "one of the finest mercantile

havens in Europe". Then as now, ships came right into the heart of the city. This sight invariably aroused comment from visitors to Bristol. Thus Alexander Pope wrote in 1739:

> . . . in the middle of the street, as far as you can see, hundreds of ships, their masts as thick as they can stand by one another, which is the oddest and most surprising sight imaginable. This street is fuller of them than the Thames from London Bridge to Deptford, and at certain times only, the water rises to carry them out; so that at other times, a long street, full of ships in the middle, and houses on both sides, looks like a dream.[10]

A ship was directed where to berth by the haven master, the chief port official, who was responsible for the "superintendence of the port". His duties included the control of the pilots, the enforcement of fire regulations, the issuing of licences to ships over 60 tons to permit them to come up to the quays and, as ballast master, the control of ballast. Each year he accompanied the committee of the Society of Merchant Venturers to inspect the port and the river. Sunken vessels, the attempts of merchants to extend their private wharfs, and the detritus of industrial enterprises (lime kilns, brickyards, glass houses, quarries and leadworks) all gave rise to complaints about the safety of navigation. In 1797, for example, the Merchants sent a petition to the city Council complaining that:

> There are considerable breaches in the banks of the river Avon on the south-east side, the lowest breach being nearly opposite the floating dock, the next breach nearly opposite the Limekiln Dock and the third breach considerably below the Glasshouse.

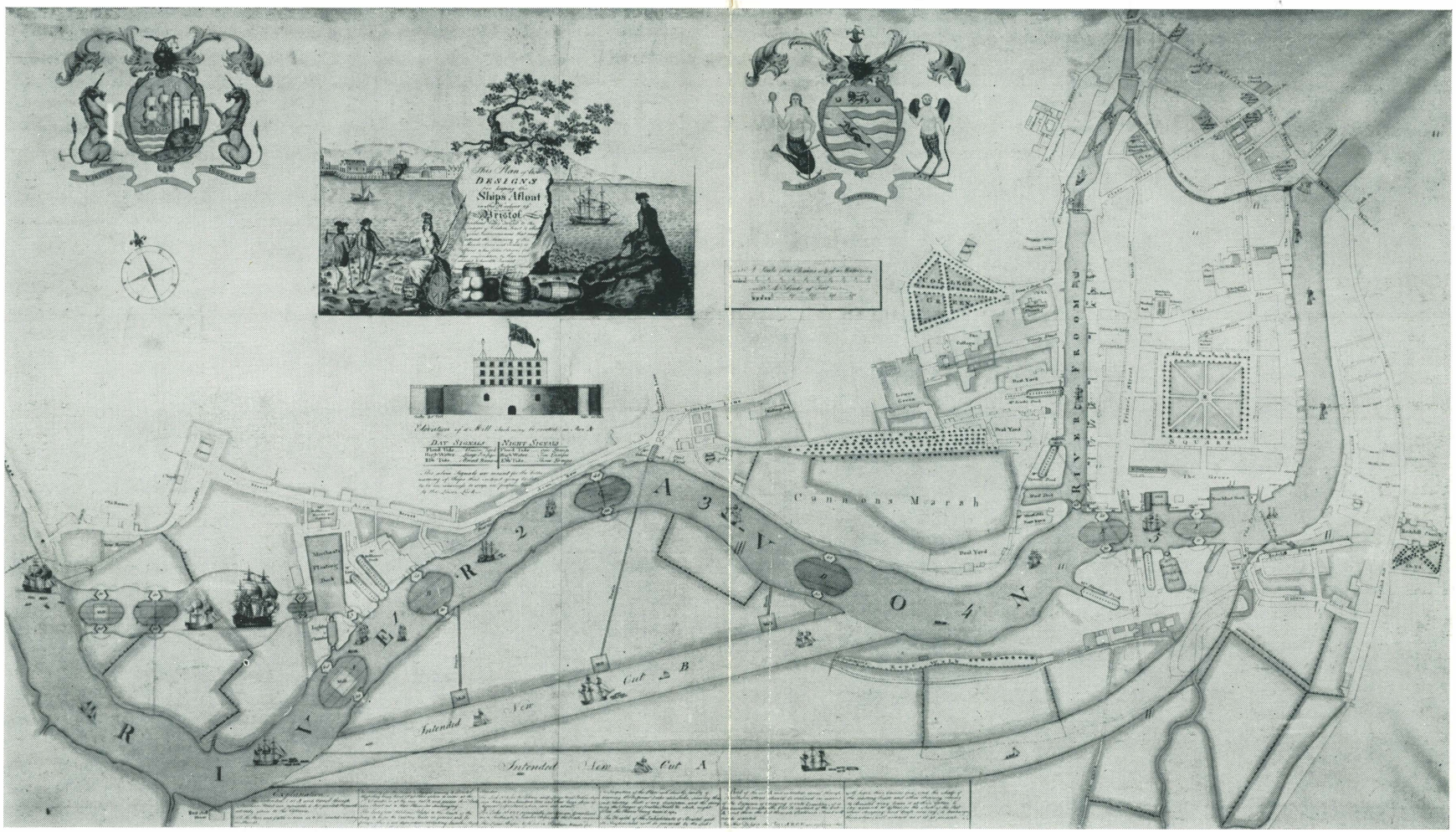
They added "That the navigation of the river Avon is materially affected by such breaches". The haven master, together with the inspector of nuisances and the quay scavenger, had a constant battle to maintain the port facilities.

To assist the haven master, there were two other officials: the water bailiff, responsible for the regulation and management of shipping on Bristol Back, Redcliff Back and the banks of the Avon, and the quay warden who carried out the same functions on the Quay, St. Augustine's Back and, towards the end of the century, the new quay at Clifton. They levied a toll of 5s. on ships over 100 tons and 2s. 6d. on ships under 100 tons, and this formed part of the income of the Society of Merchants.

The ships which unloaded at the quays were afloat when the tide was high but they rested on the mud bed of the rivers when the tide ebbed. Large ships were not completely water-borne except at high water for about six days every fortnight. The great tidal range of 45 feet at Bristol severely restricted the periods during which ships could come up to the quays. As a contemporary report stated: "In every alternate week no ship of burthen can

Bristol Harbour, showing the Cathedral, 1786, by Nicholas Pocock.
City Art Gallery, Bristol

PLAN OF PROPOSED PORT IMPROVEMENT SCHEME 1792



The plan of two designs for keeping the ships afloat in the harbour of Bristol (without being subject to the danger of freshes, frost and other great inconveniences that might attend the damning of the rivers Avon and Froom) is offered to his fellow citizens for their consideration by their most obedient and humble servant
Richard Tombs Cannons Marsh Dock Yard April. 1792

Apart from showing how Mr. Tombs proposed to improve the harbour of Bristol, this plan also shows in detail many features of the eighteenth-century port. In particular, the position of the various docks, the rope walks and the position of the cranes can be seen. The drawing of the vessels show them being towed by towboats.

Broad Quay, Bristol, early eighteenth century, attributed to Peter Monamy.
City Art Gallery, Bristol

come up to, or go from Bristol, but those inward bound are obliged to remain either in Kingroad or Hungroad from the time of their arrival till the period of the spring tides and the outward bound at the Quay till the like opportunity. The floodtide in Kingroad runs about five hours, at Hungroad about four and a half, and at Bristol only three and three quarter hours". Despite these limitations, "ships of the greatest burthen, fully laden" were able to come up to Bristol. And certainly merchants preferred ships to come right into the port because they claimed goods were liable to be pilfered from lighters and that they got a poorer price if they unloaded cargo elsewhere.

Once the ship had come to the wharf, unloading could begin. By the mid-eighteenth century, most of the wharfs were equipped with cranes for this purpose. In 1774, it was reported that there were 14 cranes available, including "a building, erected on fourteen pillars of cast iron, called the Great Crane . . . a curious piece of mechanism, constructed by the ingenious Mr. Padmore". (Plate 7) Most of the cranes were erected by the Society of Merchants or by their lessees but a few were owned by the city. The craneowners paid the Society or the Common Council for their leases and collected the cranage dues which they paid over to the Society after deducting their commission. From 1773 to 1805, the new receipts of the cranage averaged £1,123 a year, a valuable source of revenue for the Society.

The unloading of the vessels was checked by the "hungry and nimble-handed harpies at the Custom House" to use a contemporary description. The principal offices of Customer, Controller and Collector provided useful sinecures for supporters of the Government. The Royal Librarian, for instance, became Controller for Bristol in 1782. These offices were carried out by deputies. In addition there was a large staff at the Custom House, newly built in Queen's Square in 1711. Of these the weigher was responsible for weighing all goods on which duty was levied by weight while the gauger assessed the contents of irregularly-shaped containers taxed by volume. Loading and unloading was checked by the landwaiters, who had huts by the cranes The details of inward and outward cargoes were entered by clerks in large parchment volumes, known as the port books, which still survive in an incomplete series to 1784. Each quarter a summary of the customs receipts of the port was made and each year the port books for foreign and coastwise trade were sent to London to the Receiver of the Customs.

The main business of the customs officials was the administration of the customs system—the recording of imports and exports, the collection of duties and the payment of drawbacks. These last were payments which were made on imported goods which had paid

a duty when they were re-exported—to-day the use of bonded warehouses has reduced the importance of drawbacks. The revenue system was extremely complicated. It was based on the book of rates of 1660 but these rates were considerably amended and altered by later enactments. The high rates of duty encouraged evasion by fraudulent statements or by smuggling and the complexity of the system gave rise to disputes between merchants and customs officials. Many of these were about the classification of goods. In 1739, for example, some merchants protested that soap which had been brought from Leghorn had been taxed as French soap and not as Italian soap. It must have required considerable expertise to distinguish Italian from French soap, and in this particular case, the situation was complicated because the vessel did not come straight from Leghorn to Bristol but called in at a French port on the way. Perhaps the customs officials were right after all—or perhaps the merchants had carelessly omitted to make the right financial arrangement with the customs officials. Another frequent cause of disagreement was about particular provisions which were in force for a fixed period. On each occasion there were complaints from merchants that because of some eventuality or other they had not been able to load or unload their cargoes within the stated time.

With the coasting trade the object was not the direct collection of customs dues—for ordinarily no such dues were collected—but the prevention of fraud and evasion in the payment of customs for goods exported to or imported from foreign countries. The government wanted to ensure that goods in coastal craft were in fact carried coastwise: the shipper that imported goods, on which he had already paid duty, should not be chargeable a second time when he carried coastwise. The main device was the issue of cocquets in return for a bond given by the shipper which was cancelled when a certificate that the goods had been landed at an English port was produced. In 1729 it was decided that cargoes from Cardiff and Newport to Bristol did not require cocquets and bonds because the vessels did not have to go into the open sea but trade to other ports remained under this control for most of the eighteenth century. Coastwise cargoes, like imports and exports, were entered in the port books.

In addition to their primary function of collecting revenue, the customs officials had to carry out various other duties. In particular they were responsible for administering the provisions of the Navigation Laws. The regulations that the "enumerated commodities," which included sugar, tobacco and dyewoods, should not be shipped directly from the colonies to a foreign port were required to be enforced. The customs officers had also to check that ships in the colonial trade were either British or plantation-

built and that three-fourths of their crews were British. They had also to see that vessels in the Newfoundland trade carried a proportion of "green" seamen since this fishery was expected to serve as a nursery for seamen. Details relating to the tonnage, place of construction and ownership of British and colonial shipping had to be recorded by the customs. Further, these officials were responsible for the enforcement of regulations relating to quarantine (vessels from the Mediterranean were particularly involved) and for seeing that embargoes on the movement of ships—usually imposed to secure men for the navy—were obeyed.

Inevitably the custom officers were criticised, particularly because the system of deputies did not make for efficient administration and effective control. In 1718 it was alleged by former officers who had been dismissed that the "customs revenues (at Bristol) had been prejudiced and diminished by corruption, avarice and unskilfulness". But on examination it was reported that "though Bristol is the greatest port of business next to London, yet by their diligence, care and example, a strict discipline is preserved in that port, the books and accounts regularly kept and returned, the King's money remitted and the merchants' bonds paid from time to time as they fall due". There were several more general complaints levelled at the Customs: that ships were allowed to unload at private wharves instead of at the legal quays, that the official hours of daily business were too short, and that the customs fees should be abolished. But only the complaint about hours eventually received favourable consideration.

When the goods were unloaded from the ships or lighters, they were usually taken to the merchants' own stores, or to one of the city warehouses, though sometimes they were left on the quayside to become an obstruction and a cause of complaint. The principal warehouse was the Back Hall, owned by the Corporation. Its management proved troublesome early in the century when a manager ran the hall for the Corporation and it was then decided to farm out the lease. Rates were laid down for storing goods in the cellars and lofts of the building. In addition, in the course of the century, sheds were erected on the quays for the storage of goods,. At the end of the century ten warehouses, financed by a tontine,[11] were erected at the head of the Quay.

The loading and unloading of ships and the carriage of goods about the city was done by the porters who had become incorporated as a city company in 1671. As with the pilots, while the Common Council was ultimately responsible for the control of the porters, it referred many of the matters concerning them to the Society of Merchants who were more immediately concerned. They helped to draw up the disciplinary code and the schedule of wages and they dealt with various other problems which

arose. In 1740—a war year—the porters petitioned against "the putting up of more cranes on the key of this city" because of the poverty of the company and "the great decay of commerce and navigation". They alleged that "by putting up of cranes above 60 poor families would be fatally ruined".

In addition to the cranage and pilotage dues already discussed, which were payments for particular services, every vessel using the port had to pay dues. On the ship itself anchorage and moorage charges were paid to the Society of Merchants, and mayor's dues were paid to the city. These fell particularly heavily on ships which made frequent short voyages. On the merchandise carried in the ships, the Society of Merchant Venturers levied wharfage dues and the Common Council town dues. The system was complicated and its origins obscure, but its incidence can be illustrated from the account book of the snow *Africa,* a vessel of 100 tons. The total charges paid by that vessel in 1775 were:

	£	s.	d.
Reporting at the Custom House		2	6
Milford light, 1d. per ton; Holmes light 1½d. per ton; Bridge tax, 2½d. per ton.	2	1	8
Anchorage and moorage etc.		18	4
Mayor's dues and key warden's dues	2	5	0
Cranage		4	4
Pilotage	6	13	1
Total	£12	6	11

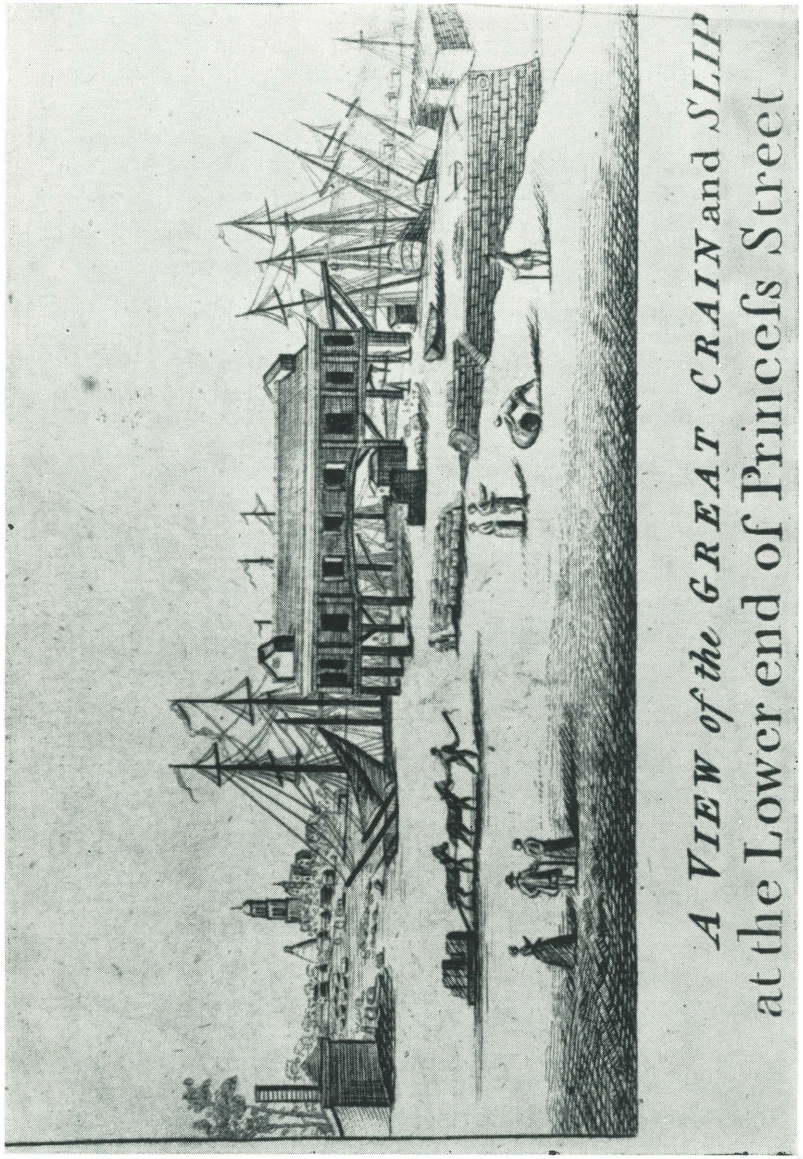
Thus shipping paid a contribution towards the provision of lighthouses and the construction of the new Bristol Bridge, erected between 1764 and 1768, as well as toward the operation of the port.

Inevitably with this complicated system of dues, there were attempts at evasion. One such is recorded in the accounts of the mayor's dues for 1792. The entry reads:

> Daniel Beeby of Dumfries for voyage 1 May 1791 when Beeby imposed on Isaac Matthews, the water bailiff, by producing a false register for 59 tons though the register at our Custom House stated 63 tons. Made pay 40s. this 19 April 1792.

Apart from attempts to avoid payment, there were more straightforward attempts to question the legality of the various levies. At one time or another in the course of the eighteenth century, wharfage, cranage, the mayor's dues and the town dues were all challenged. Unfortunately we know too little of the reasons which

View of Welsh Back and St. Mary Redcliff, 1787, by Nicholas Pocock.
City Art Gallery, Bristol



The Great Crain.

prompted the particular actions. In 1735 a number of the leading merchants refused to pay the mayor's dues, claiming these dues were not an ancient and laudable custom but a recent imposition. Thereupon the mayor, Lionel Lyde, sued one of the defaulters, William Hart & Co. and secured a judgment which upheld the legality of the dues. But this did not settle the issue and the right to levy these dues was challenged, again unsuccessfully, in 1788 in the case of Edgar v. Lewis. Despite these two defeats, a third attempt to test the right to levy these dues was made in the early nineteenth century. And, on this occasion a reduction was achieved.

The challenge to the other three dues was made in the 1770s. Henry Cruger, John Mallard and William Miles contested the town dues, Henry Cruger and William Miles the wharfage dues and William Miles endeavoured to get the cranage rates lowered. Only the first action was taken to court. Cruger alleged that "the town dues had within fifty years advanced more than treble and that if continued at the present level must put a stop to the trade of the town". It may be that he was speaking not of the town dues alone but of all the dues levied in the port. The case was a protracted piece of litigation in the course of which John Mallard became bankrupt while Henry Cruger, now M.P. and alderman, entered no defence. Eventually in 1787 judgment was given in favour of the city which then began slowly to collect the arrears of dues. On this broad issue of the incidence of the dues, the city was divided, the opposition stating that "the dues are trifling in comparison with the profits of the trade and never prevented any ship coming to the port".

There is nothing unusual in a port financing its government in this way. Before the existence of the modern rating system, it was the obvious solution. But Bristol in the eighteenth century seems to have evolved a more burdensome system than other ports. There has been no adequate discussion of the problem of port charges in terms of income and expenditure, so it is difficult to assess fairly contemporary allegations about them. The available evidence seems to suggest that the port charges at Bristol were higher than in some other ports. And it therefore seems fair to conclude that to the other factors making for the relative decline of the port must be added the heaviness of the port charges. Certainly the apparent arbitrariness of the dues aroused criticism.

> Therefore be it enacted, to end all dispute
> About Town or Mayor's Dues, that whene'er it shall suit
> Our sage corporation in Council to sit,
> They may manage the Town dues as they shall think fit.

III—PORT IMPROVEMENT

The growth of Bristol's trade led to congestion in the port and from the end of the seventeenth century there was pressure for port improvement. From 1661 this was the responsibility of the Society of Merchant Venturers who leased the quays from the City. In 1690 the lease had been renewed for a period of eighty years on condition that the Society extended the quay wall along the Frome and erected more cranes. Some of this work had been carried out by 1712 when the Society of Merchants were granted a renewal of the lease until 1791 in return for surrendering, to facilitate street improvements, the Rope Walk which they owned. Further alterations were then carried out. The Great Tower, which had originally been erected for the defence of the city and which had for a long time been a considerable obstruction on Broad Quay was purchased and demolished in 1720 and separate accommodation was provided for particular trades by 1725. A wharf was built on Welsh Back for "the landing of corn and other goods out of market boats and other vessels" and a separate quay was built on St. Augustine's Back for timber and naval stores. On his visit to the city in 1739, Alexander Pope noted that further construction had been carried out and that "the quay went half way round Queen Square".

Noteworthy as such development was, it lagged behind the demand for accommodation. In periods of rapidly growing trade, there was usually a shortage of space at the quays. In December 1755, a committee of the Common Council reported that "no human prudence could prevent the growing danger to ships without provision were made for further room, the want whereof doth greatly endanger the safety of the ships, and by which they daily sustain considerable damage". The fall in trade during the Seven Years' War temporarily removed the pressure and the Society of Merchants were reluctant to carry out further improvements with such a relatively short period of their lease to run. Their lease was accordingly renewed in 1764 on condition that the Society extended the quay on the east bank of the Froom and on the north bank of the Avon to Welsh Back and built a new quay at the Grove and on St. Augustine's Back on the west bank of the Froom. In the following years these works were built, so that Shiercliff could report in 1793 that accommodation at the quays

> "is upwards of a mile in extent, reaching from St. Gile's Bridge to Bristol Bridge and is all the way embanked by a firm wall coped with large hewn stone, from which to the front buildings is such a considerable breadth, without interruption, as to make it one continued wharf. It goes under several distinct names, the part of it from Bristol Bridge to the turn of the river opposite Redcliff Parade is called The Back; and

> from hence following the course of the river downward is called the Grove . . . from hence to the mouth of the river Froom is called the Gibb."[12] Finally along the bank of the Froom itself was the Broad Quay.

But even this extensive building programme did not completely solve the problem of accommodation because of the long period which some ships required for loading and unloading. Periodically the Court of Quarter Sessions attempted to deal with this problem and in 1770 laid down that "all ships laden with tobacco should discharge their cargoes in forty working days: all vessels from other foreign parts in 21 working days and all vessels bound for foreign parts should take in their loading in eighty working days". Thus anything from seventeen to twenty weeks was allowed between arrival and departure. Nearly twenty years later there were complaints that the quays were occupied by ships awaiting sale, thus preventing their use for legitimate trade.

It may be that a quicker turn-round of ships would have helped reduce the congestion in the port but this was only part of the problem which faced shipping using the port of Bristol. As the size of vessels in overseas trade rose it came to be recognised that the great tidal range of the Avon was a constant threat to the safety of large heavily laden vessels and that the harbour formed an inadequate anchorage. In the preamble to the Dock Act of 1803 the situation was well-described:

> Ships and vessels lying at the quays are by the reflux of the tide left dry twice in every twenty-four hours, which prevents many foreign vessels and others of a sharp construction from frequenting the port.

From about the middle of the eighteenth century some interest was shown in remedying this situation. In February 1758 the city Council advertised "for persons to survey the rivers Avon and Froom, and consider of proper measures for making some convenient part thereof into a wet dock". But no action followed. Six years later, in the post-war boom a meeting of merchants at the Guildhall on 25 July 1764 resolved to raise £34,000 to carry out a scheme for keeping the ships in the harbour afloat. But many merchants were not enthusiastic and only about £10,000 was obtained. This initiative was not without effect, however, for the Society of Merchants and the city Council thereupon agreed to commission a report on the practicability of making "the quays and part of the Avon a wet dock". John Smeaton was then engaged to produce a plan. His proposal was the comparatively simple one of building a dam across the Froom and making that part of the harbour a dry dock. Meantime William Champion had been building his dock. As a result of this experience he put forward a more far-reaching proposal, published in 1767, of

constructing lock gates across the Avon below its confluence with the Froom thus making the whole of the port a "floating harbour". But the estimated cost of these schemes appeared so great—Smeaton's was to cost £25,000 and Champion's between £30,000 and £37,000—that the expense was sufficient to quash the enterprizes. Moreover, those opposing port improvement employed an engineer, W. C. Mylne, to discredit Champion's scheme. Mylne reported that £60,000 "would scarcely suffice to carry out the design". Other alternatives were discussed in a brief flurry of controversy in the local paper, *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal,* but the division of opinion amongst the merchants and other interested parties was sufficient to secure inaction.

No further proposals were made for twenty years. The Society of Merchant Venturers found its attentions—and its finances—absorbed by the problems which followed the purchase of Champion's Dock on the right bank of the Avon near Rownham in 1770 for £1,420 and the securing of the Act in 1776 "to remove the danger of fire amongst the ships in the port of Bristol" in an attempt to force merchants to use the dock more. Then the outbreak of the War of American Independence led to a reduction of trade and to a preoccupation with other matters. The upsurge of English foreign trade after 1785 led to a general interest in the extension of dock accommodation in which Bristol shared. At a meeting of the Society of Merchants in 1787, William Miles, a leading merchant, revived the question of port improvement. Accordingly fresh plans were invited and between 1787 and 1790 reports were made by three engineers, Joseph Nickalls, William Jessop and John Smeaton again. These were considered by the Society of Merchants in 1791. By that date the Merchants had recognised:

> That the harbour is by nature inferior to that of many British ports, and that local shipowners are not on an equal footing with those of other ports, either as regards security of ships whilst in port, or as to ease and expedition in discharging and loading. That from the same cause the ships of strangers and the charters of such ships are under similar inconveniences. That the losses sustained by these causes amount to a very large sum annually.

Their resolution went on to suggest that the continued prosperity of the port was linked with the question of improvement, and at the same time they endeavoured to meet the criticisms of the opponents of such schemes. They stated:

> That the existing great inconveniences may be remedied without impediment to trade, or injury to health or property by erecting a dam across the Avon at the Red Cliff, and by cutting a canal, with locks and sluices, in Rownham Meads, agreeably to the plans of Mr. Smeaton and Mr. Jessop, and by

> adopting such of Mr. Nickall's provisions as shall be deemed expedient.

They also tried to allay fears about the cost of the scheme, stating:

> There is every reason to believe that the whole expense of executing this improvement, and of indemnifying those whose property may be injured, will not be greater than the advantages acquired by it will much more than counterbalance . . . and that such adequate revenue will be produced by the proposed bridge over the dam, and by a tax on shipping not exceeding the dock rates paid at Liverpool, calculating only on the present trade of the port which the improvement will doubtless considerably increase .

This resolution of the Society of Merchants was referred by the Common Council to a committee which endorsed the proposals in December 1791. In the following years, between 1791 and 1793, other plans were put forward, including those of Richard Tombs, the Bristol shipwright (see Plate 4) and William Milton, Vicar of Temple Church, Bristol, but the "spirit of unambitious caution" continued to animate discussions of port improvement in Bristol. With trade booming, the opposition became more vocal but although more vessels suffered damage in the harbour nothing was done. Eventually in September 1793 the Society of Merchants proposed that an Act for the improvement of the port should be promoted in the next session of Parliament. The Society agreed to "contribute to so desirable an object to the utmost of its ability should the corporation be inclined to co-operate" and it proposed that work should be carried out by commissioners or trustees for the general good and not for private profit. Jessop then made another report but the necessary legislation was not secured and again war intervened. Politics, parsimony, lethargy and conservatism defeated all attempts to improve the port of Bristol in the later eighteenth century.

With the French Revolutionary War came a decline in trade which underlined the need for improvement. Bristol merchants had virtually withdrawn from the African trade, and now her West Indian commerce showed signs of decline. At the beginning of the new century, *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal* recorded on 29 March 1800 that "several cargoes of West Indian and American produce have recently been imported into this city from Liverpool." The need for action was urgent. In 1800, William Miles again persuaded the Society of Merchant Venturers to confer with the Common Council. Concurrently between July and November 1800 three improvement schemes were put forward by James Palmer, J.T., and J. A. Wright. But still the city Council procrastinated and only a further enquiry from the Society of Merchant Venturers

about "the scheme of damming the river" in July 1801 stirred it into activity. William Jessop, who had made an earlier proposal in 1788, was asked to report on the various schemes for the improvement of the harbour. He found all the plans so far put forward unsatisfactory and submitted a new proposal of his own for a basin at Canon's Marsh. But as the quays at the Grove and the Back were not included in this plan, it was rejected. Jessop was thereupon asked to submit a further scheme which should include all the quays within the harbour. This new plan, based substantially on a plan drawn up by William Milton in 1791, which Jessop put forward in 1802, provided for the creation of a Floating Harbour and the digging of a new course or "New Cut" for the Avon. This was substantially on the lines which were subsequently followed and its appearance is familiar to Bristolians today. Jessop's plan was quickly accepted by the Merchant Venturers on 25 August 1802 when they resolved to support the application to parliament for a bill to authorise the improvement of the harbour. Both the nature of the proposals and the cost of the scheme, estimated at £300,000, aroused determined opposition throughout the city. But the declining trade of the port lent a feeling of urgency to the proceedings which had been absent when previous proposals had been considered. A Dock Company was founded in 1802 and a Dock Act (43 Geo. III c. 140) authorising the implementation of Jessop's scheme was secured in the following year. But still opposition continued. A number of leading merchants, including Bailey, Bright, Gibbs, King, Protheroe and Pinney, attacked the Dock Bill when it was considered in Parliament, and John Pinney continued his opposition after the passage of the Act. In 1807 he fiercely condemned the proposal of the Dock Company in face of rising costs to charge a duty on all commodities brought to Bristol coastwise and to raise it on all other articles. "The poor planter," he wrote, "does not escape. He is to pay 2s. instead of 1s. per hogshead on his sugar and other produce."[14] But Parliament disregarded his protest. Meantime the work of construction had begun in 1804 and the Floating Harbour was completed in 1809 at a cost of £600,000, twice the original figure. Harbour improvement had at last been achieved. The Floating Harbour and the New Cut transformed the port of Bristol.

IV

Towards the end of the eighteenth century the position of Bristol as a port began to decline, a decline which continued into the nineteenth century. For this there were a number of reasons. First, its importance as a metropolis of the west had been founded on a network of predominantly river and sea communications. The construction of canals in the north Midlands in the later eighteenth

century shifted the outlet of trade away from Bristol, and goods which formerly came south for export now went to Liverpool. Then, while Lancashire, the hinterland of Liverpool, was the theatre of the classical period of the industrial revolution, there was no comparable industrialisation of the south-west of England and the development of Swansea and later Cardiff and Newport took away the trade of south Wales from Bristol. Overseas, Bristol lost ground in the West Indian trade while the American trade did not recover after the War of Independence. In addition, part of the explanation is to be found in the attitude of leading Bristol merchants. In the later eighteenth century, they seem to have been less aggressively competitive than their rivals in other ports. As Richard Pares has written:

> It would not have been very genteel for fellow members of a small dining club, connected together by the marriages of their children, to wage war to the knife by cutting freight rates or instructing their captains to snatch consignments from each other's ships or to utilise some of the other weapons in the armoury of competitive enterprise.[15]

Though considerable attention has sometimes been given to the question of port improvement, this factor seems to rank less highly than the others already mentioned. The shift in the economic centre of gravity of Great Britain was the main cause of the relative decline of Bristol as a port, the other factors merely contributed to it. The trade of Bristol did not recover when port improvement took place, it recovered when new staples were found. And whatever the relative weight to be assigned to each, all such factors were cumulative in effect. By the end of the eighteenth century, Bristol had, as a result, surrendered her position as the second largest city in England and the second most important port. Though her population and trade had increased in the course of the century, both had expanded less rapidly than those of her rivals in a period of rapid economic growth. By 1800, her golden age was at an end.

A Note on Nicholas Pocock, 1740-1821

Pocock is exactly the right person to illustrate a pamphlet on the port of Bristol in the 18th century. Born in Bristol, the son of a merchant, he became the master of vessels, owned by Richard Champion, Bristol merchant and friend of Burke, sailing from this port to the West Indies and South Carolina. Some of his logbooks of these voyages illustrated by Pocock with drawings of sailing vessels, still survive in the National Maritime Museum. Later he abandoned the sea for art. He exhibited at the Royal Academy 1782-1815, mostly pictures of naval battles. A founder member of the Old Watercolour Society, he died at Maidenhead.

NOTES

1 See E. H. Meyerstein, *Chatterton,* p. 20.

2 Thomas Cox, *Magna Britannia et Hibernia*: *Somersetshire* (1720-31), p. 745.

3 As the figures in this table are drawn from different sources they are not strictly comparable but they do indicate the general trend. The figures for 1700 are from British Museum, Add Mss 9764 fos. 115-6; for 1717 from Public Record Office CO 390/8C; for 1787 from W. Barratt, *The History and Antiquities of the City of Bristol* (1789), p. 190; and for 1801, derived from Bristol Reference Library, Bristol Presentments (in C. N. Parkinson, *Trade Winds,* p. 67).

4 *A Tour Through England and Wales* (Everyman edn.) II, 36.

5 J. Campbell, *Political Survey of Britain* (1774), p. 147.

6 F. M. Eden, *The State of the Poor* (1797), II, 183.

7 *A Tour . . .*, II, 36.

8 The two islands, Steep and Flat Holm, in the Bristol Channel.

9 Or creeks.

10 *Letters to Martha Blount,* ed. Elwin and Courthope, p. 326.

11 A form of loan by which the shares of the participants increase as subscribers die until the last surviving subscriber gets all.

12 *Bristol and Hotwell Guide,* pp. 59-60.

13 Reprinted in C. Wells, *A Short History of the Port of Bristol,* pp. 28-9.

14 Letter to James Tobin of Nevis, 13 April 1807 cited by C. M. MacInnes, 'The port of Bristol' in *Essays in British and Irish History,* ed. H. A. Cronne, T. W. Moody and D. B. Quinn, p. 208.

15 *A West-India Fortune,* p. 212.

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