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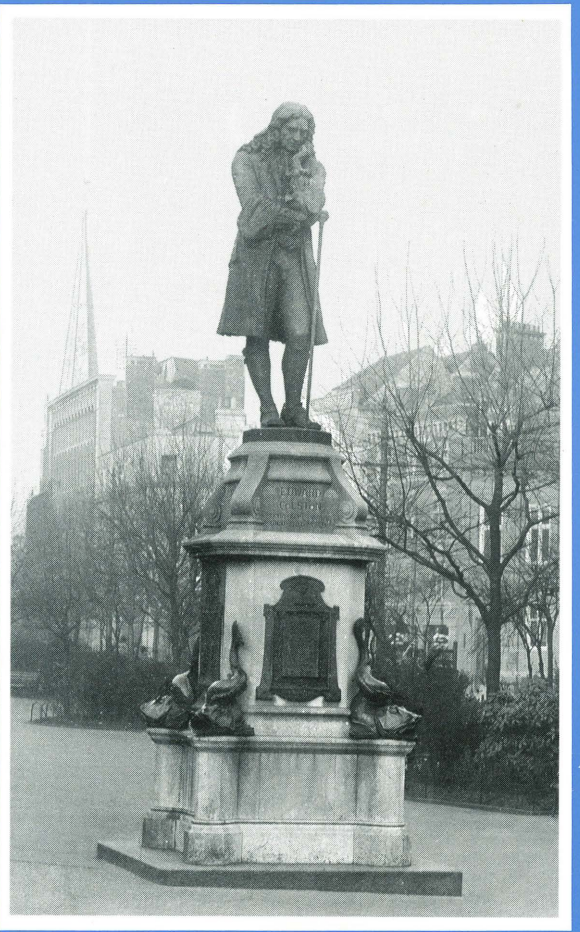
EDWARD COLSTON AND BRISTOL



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This pamphlet is the ninety-sixth in the series. The author, Kenneth Morgan, is a leading authority on Bristol's trade and commerce during the eighteenth century. He is Professor of History at Brunel University and his numerous publications include *Bristol and the Atlantic Trade in the Eighteenth Century*, an authoritative account of the subject which was published by Cambridge University Press in 1993. He has also written a pamphlet on *John Wesley in Bristol* for the Bristol Local History Pamphlet series (no. 70, 1990).

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Cover Illustration: Statue of Edward Colston erected on the Centre in 1895 in the small park created after the River Frome had been culverted over *(Bristol Record Office)*

EDWARD COLSTON AND BRISTOL

Wherever one casts one's eye in Bristol, it is difficult to escape the legacy of Edward Colston. Various streets and the city's main concert hall are named after him; two schools and some of Bristol's best-preserved almshouses bear his name; and the bronze statue of his figure, leaning over a tall cane, stands in the middle of Colston Avenue in the city centre. It is fitting that there should be so many reminders of Colston in modern Bristol, for he was the most famous philanthropist born in the city who contributed to local charities and education. Concerned in his mature years with social and moral reform, Colston gave generous benefactions to many institutions in Bristol and elsewhere. His fortune was based on business acuity acquired as a merchant, including an interest in the slave trade, but these commercial transactions were mainly conducted in London rather than Bristol. In recent times, Colston's links with the slave trade have become controversial. Attention has been drawn to the fact that he donated none of his money to the cause of black people even though he had benefited from the traffic in enslaved Africans to the Americas. Who was this man who gave so generously to his native city even though he lived most of his life in London? And is it correct to regard his business activities as mainly channelled into the slave trade? Answers to these questions are ultimately elusive because Colston left few written records and gave few hints about his outlook on life. But enough evidence is available to attempt answers to the questions posed, something that is worthwhile given that no reliable, detailed account of Colston's life has appeared for over seventy years.[1]

Edward Colston was born into an established Bristol merchant family that appears to have settled in the city around 1340. The good standing of the family was reflected in its having a coat of arms, with a pair of dolphins as their crest.[2] William Colston (1608-1681), Edward's father, had served an apprenticeship with Robert Aldworth, the wealthiest Bristol merchant of the early Stuart period, and had prospered as a merchant. In 1634 he became a member of the Society of Merchant Venturers, the leading mercantile organisation in Bristol, which leased the local wharves and quays from the city corporation. On 23 January 1636 William Colston married Sarah Batten, the daughter of Edward Batten, a barrister-at-law of the Inner Temple. Their

first son, Edward, was born in Temple Street on 2 November 1636 and baptised at Temple church six days later, the eldest of probably eleven children (six boys and five girls). Edward spent his childhood and youth living in the family home in Wine Street, Bristol and probably at Winterbourne, a small village six miles to the north-east of the city, where his father had an estate.[3] William Colston, an active member of the Church of England and staunch Royalist, was deprived of his office as alderman and sheriff of Bristol in 1645, two years after becoming a member of the city Corporation. This occurred during the English Civil War after the Cromwellian forces gained the upper hand in Bristol, leading to Prince Rupert surrendering the city to them in 1645.[4] The family moved to London in the mid-1640s and Edward received his education there. It is possible that he enrolled as a private pupil at Christ's Hospital, then located in the city of London; but this has not been proven definitively.[5] In 1654 Edward Colston was apprenticed to Humfray Aldington, a member of the Mercers' Company of London. His exact whereabouts after the end of his apprenticeship are unknown. One source states that he became a factor in Spain, something conceivable for a young man bent on a mercantile career; but no supporting evidence is available to substantiate this suggestion.[6]

Edward Colston's young adulthood has left virtually no trace in the historical record; the next reference to him comes in 1673, when he was enrolled into the Mercers' Company. His father had returned to Bristol in 1661 after the restoration of the Stuart monarchy and had resumed his mercantile career and civic position there. He conducted an extensive wine and oil trade with Spain and Portugal, becoming probably the largest importer of Levantine fruits at Bristol; he also imported sugar from the New World.[7] Edward Colston remained in London and initially followed the same lines of trade that his father had pursued. From 1672 to 1674 he sent small shipments of goods from London to Tangier, Lisbon, the Canary Islands, Cadiz and Rotterdam, exporting textiles such as double bays, perpets and serges, and importing wine. Between 1675 and 1679 he continued to trade in these branches of commerce, with particular emphasis on importing wine and sherry from Spain and the Canaries and exporting woollen cloth to Cadiz and Venice. He even made one shipment of wrought silk to Virginia. Once established as a merchant, he continued to trade in the commodities and to the destinations already mentioned. In 1686, he was still exporting textiles and importing wine, and had begun trading with various Mediterranean ports. By that time he had become a regular trader in Newfoundland cod to Naples.[8]

Colston's early career as a merchant seems to have followed the pattern charted by his father. During the 1670s, however, several of his immediate family became involved with the Royal African Company and this was to be a channel of trade that he himself pursued. A chartered joint-stock company, with headquarters in London, the Royal African Company was the leading purveyor of slaves in English vessels from the west coast of Africa to the

Americas in the latter half of the seventeenth century; indeed from 1672 until 1698 it had a monopoly of that trade.[9] It operated in the period when the English were beginning to ship slaves from Africa to provide the labour force for their plantations in North America and the Caribbean. Edward's brother Thomas undertook business for the Royal African Company, providing beads for buying slaves. Edward himself became a member of the company on 26 March 1680. Over the next dozen years, in addition to his other business activities, he served on the Court of Assistants of the Royal African Company (1681-3, 1686-8, 1691), attending meetings in London and sitting on various committees. He was deputy governor of the Royal African Company in 1689-90. Many of the meetings he attended discussed the goods needed to purchase slaves in Africa, the wages paid to ship captains, the dispatch of the Company's ships, the quality of sugar sent back to London by West Indian factors, and commercial conditions in west Africa and the Caribbean.[10]

To what extent Colston received money from the sale of slaves in the New World is unknown. He was undoubtedly remunerated for his work on the committees of the Royal African Company, but whether this money was the basis of his fortune remains conjectural. It is feasible that he accrued most of his wealth from the normal commodity trades with Europe mentioned above, which he had conducted successfully for several years before his involvement with the Royal African Company. Colston had inherited a modest legacy from his father, but this was insufficient to account for his own wealth. It is likely that he made profits out of careful financial dealings and accumulating savings, and he certainly gained income through money lending. Evidence for this surfaces in legal cases where disputes were recorded about him not receiving payment. Thus, for instance, Colston advanced £2,500 to the Earl of Westmorland to buy a rectory and parsonage in Kent; he lent £2,000 to John Walter of Monmouthshire to purchase land at St. Bride's; he loaned £5,500 to Edmund Wyndham of Somerset; and he advanced thousands of pounds to other men in counties as far apart as Glamorgan and Essex.[11] It is likely that he made shrewd investments to augment his capital, but he has left no personal papers and so it is impossible to estimate, even roughly, what proportion of his wealth was gained from different business and financial ventures.

During the 1680s, after an absence of thirty years, Edward Colston began to take an active interest in his native city, where his parents had resettled. His father died in 1681 and shortly afterwards Edward visited Bristol to see his widowed mother. He returned to the city again in 1683, when his brother Thomas was fatally ill. During this visit, on 10 December 1683, he became a free burgess of Bristol and, a week later, a member of the Society of Merchant Venturers by election. He was then described as a 'mere merchant,' a term used to describe those who were large-scale dealers in overseas commerce.[12] Colston revisited Bristol in 1684 and became a member of the vestry of St Werburgh parish church that year.[13] He was entitled as a freeman

to trade in Bristol and his father and his brother Thomas had left him property and business in the city. William Colston's will left Edward £1,000 in cash, one third of the rents and profits of two houses in Bristol, a warehouse in St Peter's parish, a cottage in Hambrook, south Gloucestershire, and one third of William's goods and chattels after the death of his wife. Thomas Colston bequeathed his brother a house in Small Street and apparently a mercantile business. In addition to these inheritances, Edward Colston became for a time a partner in a sugar refinery at St Peter's churchyard, Bristol.[14]

Edward Colston lived in Bristol for a while during the 1680s and for a few years imported goods there in ships owned by his father and brother; but by 1689 he had taken up residence at Mortlake, Surrey, which was his home for the rest of his life. His house, located near the riverside, was called Cromwell House, probably in honour of the Tudor politician Thomas Cromwell, who once held the Manor of Mortlake. Living as a comfortably-off bachelor, his everyday household needs were taken care of by a handful of servants and his sister Ann and, after her death, by one of his nieces. He had a fine garden surrounding the house at Mortlake, and planted orange trees, evergreens and shrubs. To continue his business affairs in London, he had a horse and carriage to take him from Mortlake, then a country area on the south-western fringe of London. He continued his overseas trading activities, mainly in London ventures, apparently making substantial profits, and was busy with parish affairs in Mortlake, where he was often mentioned in the local vestry minutes. He retired from business in 1708 at the age of seventy-two.[15] It seems, however, that he retained an interest in finance and commerce, for in 1711 he was a commissioner taking subscriptions for the South Sea Company.[16]

In middle age Edward Colston became one of Bristol's most famous benefactors. When friends urged him to marry, his response was apparently to say that 'every helpless widow is my wife and her distressed orphans my children.'[17] His gifts were extensive and his occasional surviving writings illuminate his personality and the motives underpinning these charitable bequests. They reveal him to be a proud, stubborn, determined man who insisted on strict rules and regulations for the observance of his charities; and as someone who had sufficient standing to challenge local political decisions. Colston's role as a prominent Anglican Tory informed his decisions on social and moral reform and led to him being elected an M.P. for Bristol in his old age. He lived through an unusually turbulent political era, notably after the Glorious Revolution, when firm divisions emerged locally and nationally between the Whigs and the Tories. The Whigs supported the parliamentary checks to monarchical power ushered in after 1689; they approved of the succession of William of Orange to the English throne; and, even though most Whigs were Anglicans, many were sympathetic to the freedom of worship desired by protestant dissenters. The Tories, by contrast, were torn between support for the Act of Settlement (1701), which guaranteed the

Colston in his later years

Protestant succession to the monarchy in England and Scotland, and loyalty to the exiled Catholic monarch James II, who many regarded as the rightful ruler on the grounds of hereditary and divine right. Tories were nevertheless firm upholders of the bond between the Church of England and the state; thus they were concerned to curb toleration for dissenters. These divisions were never far from the surface of political life in Bristol and throughout the nation in the period 1689-1714.[18] Bristol's Corporation was dominated by the Whigs from c.1695 until the end of the Stuart age, while many of the city's parishes were controlled by Tories.[19] Colston's concern for the poor and his establishment of schools reflected the Tories' attempt to gain the upper hand over the Whigs in promoting social reform in Bristol.[20]

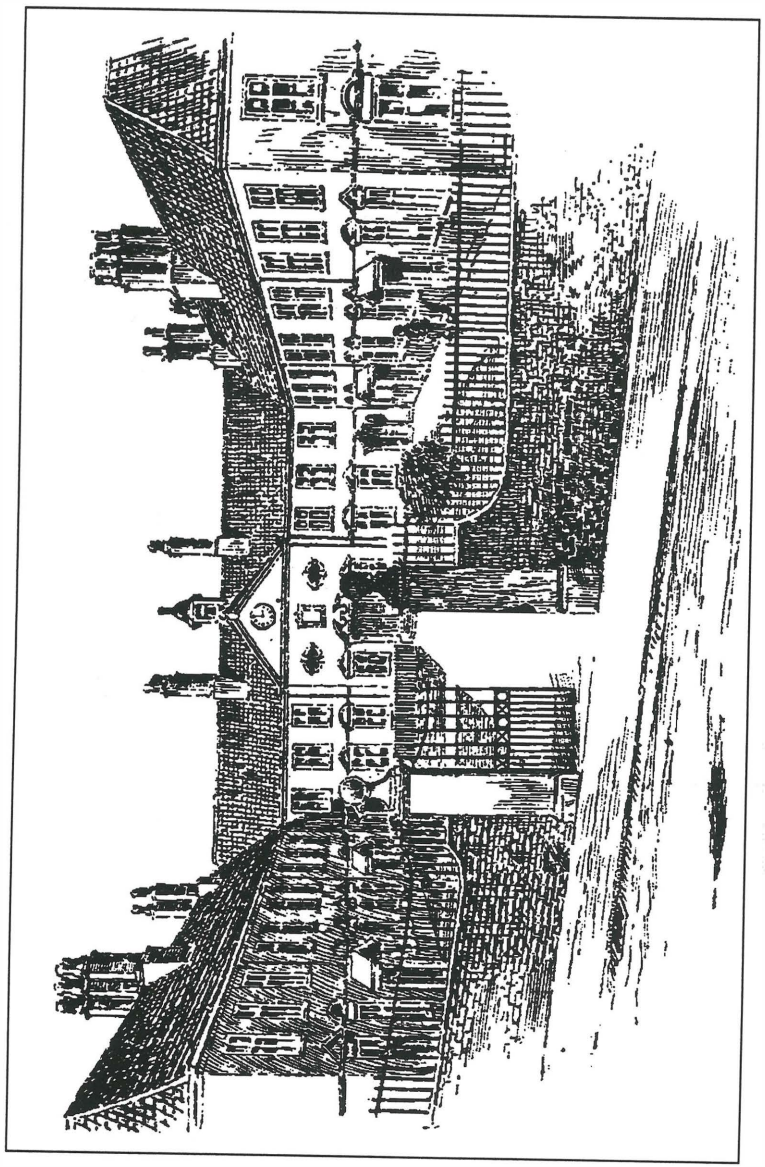
Colston's religious and political position underpinned his philanthropic work. His first attempt to assist Bristol charitably revealed his determination to have his own way. In June 1682 he visited Bristol and loaned £1,800 to the city Corporation at 5 per cent interest. In 1685 he increased the advance to £4,000.[21] The purpose of the loan is not known. In 1686, however, Colston requested that it be repaid, but only received his money back after putting pressure on the Corporation. H. J. Wilkins suggested that 'it was characteristic of him to have no dealings with those who disagreed with him, and particularly if it happened to be a religious difficulty.'[22] We do not know for certain what led to the disagreement; the Bristol Corporation records simply stated that Colston requested the repayment.[23] But it seems likely that it was a reaction to the Corporation's acceptance of James II's Declaration of Indulgence, which, in its tolerance for Roman Catholicism, offended Colston's High Anglican principles.[24]

Despite this dispute, a few years later Colston began his series of charitable bequests to the poor and needy in Bristol; he also gave money to schools in the city. In doing so he continued a thriving tradition of charity in a trading city whereby the mercantile class demonstrated their munificence in donating part of their wealth to local worthy causes.[25] In 1696 Colston and his partners sold his sugar refining business (later a Mint) to the Bristol Corporation of the Poor, which had been influenced by John Cary, a Bristol merchant, economic thinker and Whig, to tackle the problem of providing maintenance and employment for the poor. The building was used as a workhouse for indoor paupers of the city employed in weaving and pinmaking.[26] The new poor house soon found that its expenditure exceeded the money collected from ratepayers; subscriptions from supporters were therefore raised and Colston contributed £100, along with other Bristolians, who became guardians of the poor.[27] In 1700 and 1701 Colston attended meetings of this group along with his agent Thomas Edwards.[28] He may have been connected through Edwards with the short-lived movement for the Reformation of Manners in Bristol between 1700 and 1705. This body aimed to maintain moral order and Sabbath observance in an urban context where begging, unruliness and the vices of swearing and gambling appeared to be

threatening the cohesion of the social fabric; it also aimed to stem the tide of crime and idleness in towns.[29]

Colston extended his interest in providing for the poor in Bristol by becoming involved with the establishment of almshouses. To further this aim, he was regularly in contact with the Society of Merchant Venturers. In October 1695 he proposed maintaining six poor sailors in the Merchant Venturers' almshouse in King street, provided the Society built rooms to house them.[30] In the same year, Colston paid £2,500 for the building of the St Michael's Hill almshouse for twelve men and twelve women, and in January 1696 he conveyed it to Sir Richard Hart and twenty-seven others, mainly Merchant Venturers, to manage it and appoint their successors.[31] He set down firm rules for the operation of the almshouse, and these provide insight into his personality and values; they illustrate his strict adherence to rules that reflected his piety as a committed member of the Church of England and his careful application to business affairs. Thus in a letter to the Society of Merchant Venturers, dated 5 December 1695, he noted the need for some men to fill the almshouse but insisted that 'none be admitted that are drunkards, nor of a vicious life or turbulent spirit - lest the quiet and order the inhabitants at present live in, be thereby interrupted.'[32] In a subsequent letter of 6 October 1696, Colston informed the Merchant Venturers of his almshouse rules. Common prayer was to be taken twice daily and attended by all the almsmen and almswomen. Absentees had to pay a fine of sixpence. Four of the almsfolk were to be from Temple parish. Only those who were freemen of Bristol or had been born in the city, or the sons and daughters of such people, or those who had lived in the city for twenty years, were eligible to live in the almshouse. They were each to receive three shillings a week for their maintenance. Colston also paid attention to the auditing of the accounts.[33] The almshouses soon provided a comfortable abode for a select few who complied with the philanthropist's rules. Celia Fiennes, on a visit to Bristol in 1698, commented that the St Michael's Hill almshouse was 'more like a gentleman's house' intended for 'decayed tradesmen and wives that have lived well.'[34]

Colston's political position was that of a Tory who accepted the Glorious Revolution. He was part of a 'broad anti-Jacobite alliance' in Bristol by the late 1690s.[35] His Anglicanism married well with his Tory political views but he faced a city where the Whigs provided both M.P.'s in the period 1696-1710.[36] Colston attempted to combine his religious and political principles with his concern for the poor in various schemes to improve schooling in Bristol. In 1695 he paid for six boys to be added to Queen Elizabeth's Hospital, the city's main school for orphan boys, and was duly thanked by the mayor and aldermen. In 1702 he added four more boys. He offered to convey houses and some land in Yatton and Congresbury, Somerset, to the governors of the school to help the education, lodging and apprenticeship of these pupils.[37] In 1702 he sketched an elaborate scheme for rebuilding and



Colston's Almshouses, St. Michael's Hill (S. Loxton)

increasing Queen Elizabeth's Hospital and donated £500 for this purpose. He also secured donations from the city Corporation worth £1,400. In 1705 he offered to increase the number of endowed places at the school from forty-four to ninety if the Corporation would pay for suitable accommodation.[38] But the Whig-dominated Bristol Corporation appears to have disliked his plans, probably because of his Anglican views and his insistence on apprenticeship, and so they turned down the offer: Colston's political and religious beliefs did not match their intentions.[39] Colston, unimpressed by the Corporation's stance, wrote that if he had made a similar offer to the City of London, the money would have been gratefully accepted to benefit Christ's Hospital.[40]

In 1706 Colston approached the Society of Merchant Venturers with a new offer. Noting that 'since I drew my first breath in your city, I rather incline that the poor children born there should partake thereof,'[41] he wanted the Merchant Venturers to administer a new city school for fifty poor boys. Colston thought this would cost £600 per year. The Society of Merchant Venturers agreed and in doing so concerned itself more fully with education in Bristol than it had ever done previously.[42] In 1707 Colston bought a site, the Great House on St Augustine's Back, for £1,300; but it took several years of negotiations with the Society over complex financial and management arrangements before the school opened. Colston keenly watched the building of the school and, as ever, was financially prudent; he enquired whether the cellars could be let and at what price. As an opponent of Catholicism, Dissent and Whiggism, he insisted that the boys should be Anglicans, be in good health, and prepared for apprenticeships. He increased the number of boys intended for the school to 100, and the establishment, called Colston's Hospital, duly opened in July 1710 with a special thanksgiving service in Bristol Cathedral that Colston attended.

The school had a master and two ushers; the boys received instruction in reading, writing, spelling and arithmetic up to the age of fourteen plus £10 each as their apprenticeship fee (apprenticeship normally lasting for seven years until the age of twenty-one). The boys attended church twice every Sunday and holiday. Colston provided that each boy should have a suit of clothes, a cap, band, shirt, stockings, shoes, buckles, spoon and porringer. The estimated cost of building the school was £40,000. The daily round required pupils to rise before six in the morning; to attend prayers in the school room and read from Scripture and sing Psalms before breakfast; to have school lessons from 7 a.m. until 5 p.m., with a two-hour lunch break; and to read the Bible, sing Psalms and say prayers before bed time at 8 p.m. The boys were catechised on Saturday afternoon and on Sunday after evening prayer.[43]

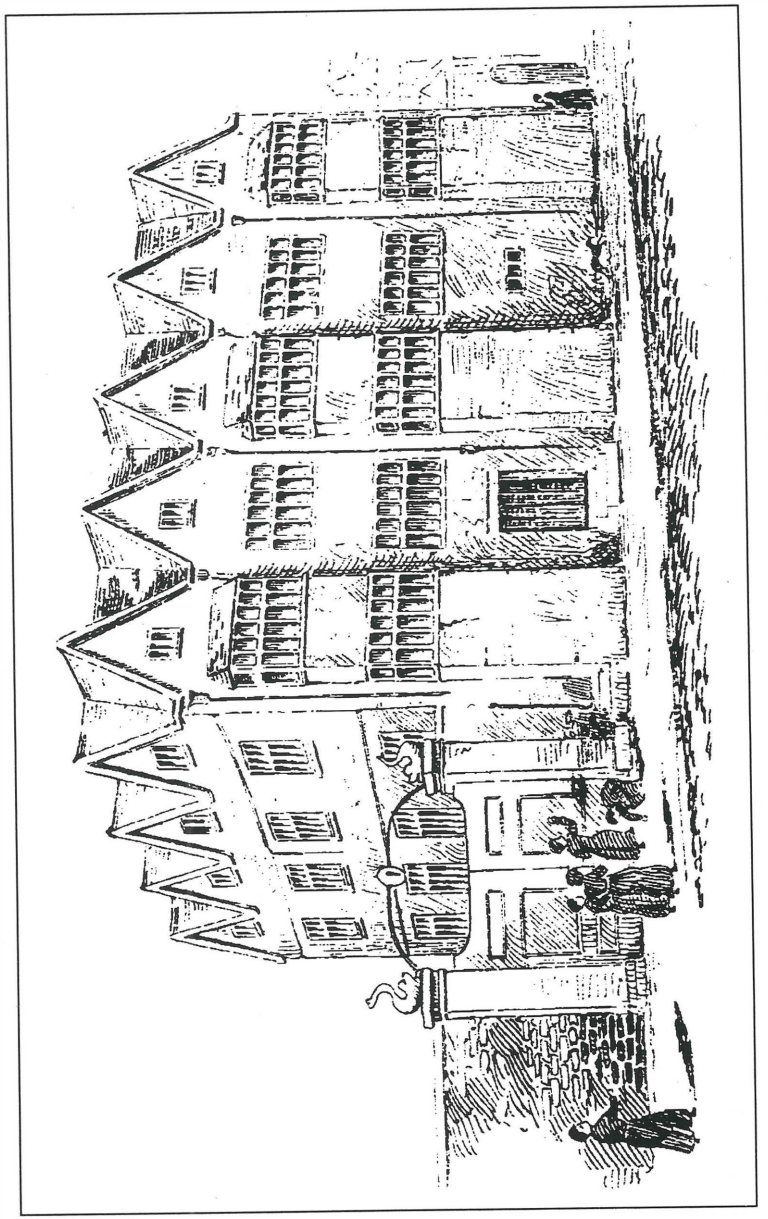
In a conveyance dated 1708 Colston reserved to himself the right to nominate the boys at the school during his lifetime and specified that after his death one half should be nominated by the Society of Merchant Venturers and the other half by his executors (who would be replaced after their decease by nominees whom Colston had appointed).[44] He emphasised the Merchant

Venturers' important role in his educational schemes when, in 1711, he hoped that the new master of the Society would oversee the school in such a way as to justify Colston's intentions, 'because thereon depends ye welfare or ruine of so many poor boys who may in time be made usefull as well as to your City as ye Nation by their future honest Endeavours.'[45]

Colston made further provisions for the school. In 1712 he requested that a minimum of eight boys from Temple parish - the site of his birth - be included among the 100 poor boys accommodated in the school. He soon became dissatisfied with the way in which the Society of Merchant Venturers ran the school, complaining that the standards of instruction, religious education and food were inadequate. In 1717 he requested the Merchant Venturers to ensure that none of the boys were educated other than according to the doctrines of the established church, and that none were placed as apprentices to men from the communion who were dissenters.[46] The boys' dress, consisting of a long blue coat and yellow stockings, was closely modelled on that of Christ's Hospital, where Colston had probably received his education, later donating money to the school and becoming a governor.[47] Colston's Hospital remained in its original premises until 1861. Then, under its new name Colston's School, it moved from its site where the modern Colston Hall stands to a new home with more substantial grounds and accommodation at Stapleton. It was complemented by a sister school when the Colston trustees opened Colston Girls' School in Cheltenham Road in 1891.[48]

In 1710 Colston donated money to found Temple School for Boys. This opened in December 1711. It was intended 'for the educating in reading, writing, cyphering, and perfecting in the church catechism, as it is now established by law, and also for clothing forty-four boys of this parish for ever.'[49] Colston was pleased with the care given by the trustees to the boys at this school, approving of their rules and teaching methods that would fit the boys, as he put it, 'for apprentices, and also qualify them to be staunch sons of the church, provided such books are procured for them as have no tincture of Whiggism.'[50] In 1715 Colston secured an endowment for the school, to be spent clothing forty poor boys from the parish. The master was to be a member of the Church of England.[51] The boys were to be catechised once in each quarter of the year. Four nominated clergymen were to visit the school four times a year to check on its management and teaching proficiency. Colston's educational donations gave impetus to the founding of other charity schools in poorer Bristol parishes between 1708 and 1722.[52]

Colston lost his last close relative when his mother died, aged ninety-three, on 22 December 1701. He was present at her funeral sermon and subsequently dedicated a monument to his parents and six of his deceased siblings in All Saints' church, in Corn Street in the city centre.[53] In 1703 he donated £100 for the seating and embellishment of the church, and in 1713 subscribed £250 towards the cost of rebuilding its tower.[54] In addition to



The original Colston School, St. Augustine's (S. Loxton)

churches and schools mentioned above that benefited from Colston's generosity, his extensive public charities and benefactions in Bristol included gifts to the workhouse run by the local Corporation for the Poor at St Peter's churchyard; money for the repair and beautifying of many of the city's churches, such as St Michael, St Mary Redcliffe, St Werburgh, St James and Bristol Cathedral; and bequests to support the reading of sermons and prayers at Newgate, the city gaol, and All Saints'.[55] Colston's example was followed by a spate of legacies and subscriptions to Bristol's parish churches by other Anglicans.[56]

Underpinning these philanthropic endeavours were his dual regard for caring for the poor and promoting the stabilising role of the Church of England in society. In 1708 Colston was elected a member of the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (SPCK), four years after he had become a member of the newly-created Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG). He was encouraged to accept these positions by his friend the Reverend Arthur Bedford, vicar of Temple parish, with whom he was in contact via Thomas Edwards, who sat on the board of the Bristol Society for the Reformation of Manners.[57] In 1710, possibly with an eye on posterity, Colston inaugurated a series of Lenten lectures intended as sermons for the public good that, in his own words, might 'revive the primitive zeal for the church government as by law established'[58] - words that seem to reflect a distaste for the latitudinarianism then common in the Anglican church. Under Colston's instructions, fourteen sermons were to be preached every Wednesday and Friday in Lent in the parish churches of St Werburgh and St Peter on specified subjects, including the excellence of the Church of England, the errors of the Roman church, the Lenten fast, public and private absolution and repentance, and the dangers of 'enthusiasm.' The preachers were to be generally drawn from the incumbents of Bristol churches.[59] In addition to the Lenten lectures, which continued until c.1732, Colston established a monthly sermon to Newgate prisoners and a yearly sermon on his birthday in Bristol Cathedral, at which his hospital boys were to be present.[60]

In the general election of 1710 Colston was elected a Tory M.P. for Bristol. He had wanted to decline this honour on account of his age - he was seventy-four - but local Tories saw him as having popular appeal at a time of High Church enthusiasm.[61] He severed his links with Arthur Bedford, who did not vote in the Bristol election but instead cast his vote as a Gloucestershire freeholder in the shire election, supporting the Whig candidate, who was a low churchman. Colston, who became the first Tory M.P. in Bristol since 1695, was appalled that Bedford should support the Whigs, whom he regarded as fanatics and sympathetic to Dissent. He also considered Bedford's action an insult to his patronage of the school in Temple parish.[62] These thoughts would have struck home particularly at this time because of Whig support for the impeachment of the fiery High Tory Anglican preacher Dr

Henry Sacheverell, who attacked the revolution settlement of 1689 which favoured the Whigs rather than the Tories. In Bristol a mob that supported Sacheverell attacked meeting houses and dissenters' property.[63] As a consequence, Colston declined all future dealings with Bedford. In a letter dated 23 November 1710, Colston wrote to the trustees of Temple Charity School that Bedford had scandalised the clergy of Bristol by participating in the Gloucester election, 'heading some of the most violent Sectaries and Enemies to it [i.e. the established church], whereby he hath Confirmed them in their former Opinion, that he is no Sound Son of the Church, but rather inclined to, and a Favourer of Phanaticism.' He added 'therefore if I decline all future Correspondence with him he may easily guess at the Reason of it.'[64]

Colston's election as M.P. led to the establishment of the Loyal Society, a Tory Club with High Church leanings set up to celebrate his birthday. The Loyal Society began to hold annual dinners in his honour soon after he was returned as a Tory member for Bristol. The occasions were noisy and celebratory. Continuing each year until 1715, they included a procession by hundreds of high churchmen to hear sermons at Bristol Cathedral and St Mary Redcliffe church before and after dinner. The Loyal Society seems to have lapsed, however, after several of its leading members were arrested on suspicion of Jacobitism in 1715-16. In this brief period, the Loyal Society was probably more active in politics than Colston himself; before it was forced to curtail meetings, it had managed to organise two electoral contests and had been implicated in serious riots in Bristol in 1714.[65]

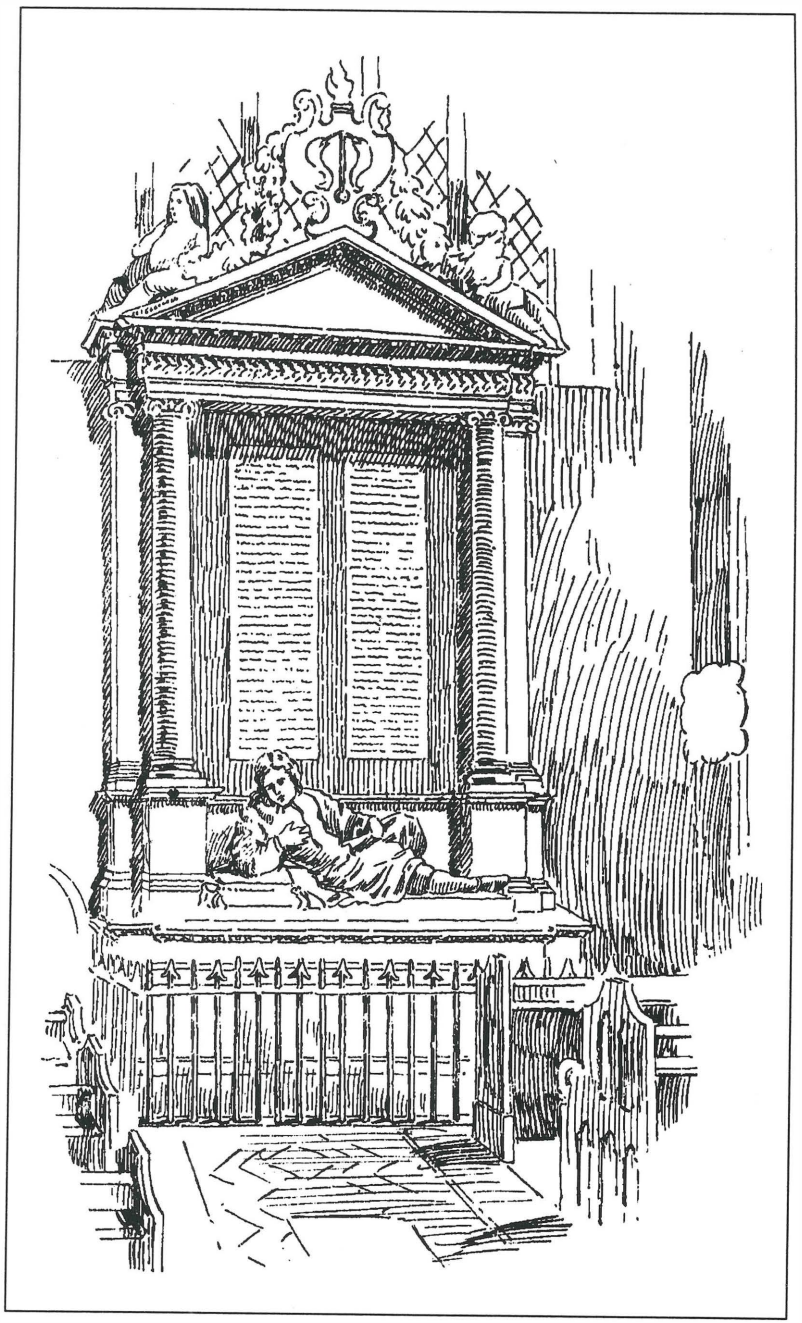
Colston only served as M.P. until 1713. He made few speeches but occasionally helped to present petitions to parliament on behalf of his constituency, including one, drawn up in 1711, requesting that the trade to Africa should be open to all her majesty's subjects.[66] Yet overall Colston made little mark in the Commons; possibly the position had come too late in life, four years after his retirement, for him to be an active parliamentarian. Certainly, he was quite frail by this time, being too infirm to attend the Loyal Society dinner in November 1713. He did not seek re-election in the dissolution that followed Queen Anne's death. He had lived through several years of bitter political battles between Tories and Whigs in Bristol and had been branded by the Whigs as a non-juror and as a Jacobite sympathiser (which might have had some substance in the early 1690s when he was listed as a citizen of London 'inclined' towards James II, but not a decade later).[67] Even after the Hanoverian Succession, when the Whigs gained political ascendancy, Colston was still serving on the Somerset bench at the end of 1715; the Whigs did not generally purge the commissions of the peace of Tories.[68]

After he retired from business in 1708, Colston was mainly preoccupied with furthering his charitable benefactions to institutions in Bristol and with ensuring that he left his mark on future generations. In July 1712 he set down in his will detailed instructions about his funeral and estimated its cost. He

was to be interred 'in the grave of my ancestors in the evening without any manner of pomp or ostentation save only that my corpse shall be met at Lawford's Gate by the poor men and women of my almshouse on St Michael's Hill and also by the poor boys of my hospital on St Augustine's Back together with the six old seamen maintained by me in the merchant's almshouse in the Marsh as likewise by all the boys of the charity school in Temple Street cloathed and taught by me and from thence accompanyed by them to the aforesaid church directly and there interred with the whole Burial Service contained in the now Common Prayer book.' The funeral cortege was to include a hearse and six horses hired for seven days at a total cost of £12 and 5 shillings; three mourning coaches and six horses hired for eight days totalling £36 and 15 shillings; forty-eight escutcheons verged with silver, twenty-four shields, and twelve men for the hearse and horses, calculated to cost £10 and 10 shillings; sixteen mourning cloaks for the coachmen and horsemen, at a cost of £5 and 12 shillings; and a long, precise list of other necessities.[69]

After his death at Mortlake, on 11 October 1721, these instructions were carried out to the letter except that his desire for a modest burial did not occur. Colston's body was carried in a hearse from London to Bristol, and accompanied by people who had benefited from his Bristol charities to his burial on 27 October amid much pomp and ceremony at All Saints' church. The procession to the church was sombre and impressive. At Lawford's Gate there gathered the merchants who had come from their hall, thirty people from the almshouses supported by Colston, and 146 boys from Temple and Colston schools. They marched while chanting the 90th Psalm and reached All Saints', which was hung entirely in black. The funeral sermon preached the following day by the Reverend James Harcourt before a packed audience took as its text Psalm 112, verse 9: 'He hath dispersed abroad, and given to the poor, and his righteousness remaineth for ever; his horn shall be exalted with honour.'[70]

A few years later, Colston was remembered with the erection of a tomb at All Saints'. The effigy on his tomb, designed by James Gibbs, was executed in 1729 by Michael Rysbrack from Richardson's portrait of him in the Council House, Bristol.[71] The following words were inscribed at the base of the tomb: 'To the memory of Edward Colston, Esq., who was born in the City of Bristol, and was one of the representatives in Parliament for the said City, in the reign of Queen Anne. His extreme Charity is well known to many parts of this kingdom, but more particularly to this City, where his benefactions have exceeded all others, a list of which is on his monument as followeth. He lived 84 years, 11 months, and 9 days, and then departed this life 11th October 1721, at Mortlake, in Surrey, and lieth buried in a vault by his ancestors, in the first cross alley under the reading desk of this Church.'[72] The tablet continued: 'The great and pious Benefactor was known to have done many other excellent Charities, and what he did in secret is believed to be not inferior to what he did in public.'[73]



Edward Colston's Tomb, All Saints', Corn Street (S. Loxton)

In his will Colston bequeathed £100,000 to his relatives - nephews, nieces and cousins - and some £71,000 to public charities. Among the latter was money for the maintenance of 100 poor boys to be educated in his hospital on St Augustine's Back and modest sums for the support of seventeen charity schools throughout the country.[74] Colston's Hospital, as always, took pride of place; around £40,000 out of the £63,940 worth of benefactions given in his lifetime went to that school.[75] Colston's bequests extended to other parts of England, including churches, workhouses and almshouses in London, Surrey (notably at Mortlake and East Sheen), Devon and Lancashire; but these did not match the extent of his charitable gifts to Bristol.[76] To appreciate the extent of his munificence, one should convert the £171,000 that he left for posterity into modern prices. As of 1991, this money would be worth £13.5 million.[77]

Colston wanted his memory to be preserved with a yearly sermon on his birthday in Bristol Cathedral at which his Hospital boys were to be present.[78] Immediately after his death sermons extolled his charitable work.[79] Later in the eighteenth century, a local directory underscored his beneficence and thought his memory deserved something more than a peal of bells to celebrate the anniversary of his birth.[80] His memory was indeed maintained in Bristol through other means. A number of societies devoted to his legacy sprang up during the eighteenth century. These had a wide range of social and sometimes political functions. The first to be founded (in 1726) was the Colston Society, later known as the Parent Society, which used its funds, in the spirit of its namesake, to assist education, the sick and the poor of Bristol. It gave particular support to those intending to follow a literate profession. In 1740 nine out of the seventeen apprenticeships sponsored by the Colston Society were in literate or bookish trades such as bookmaking and bookkeeping; and all five of the Bristol scrivener's apprentices supported by charitable aid were sponsored by the Colston Society.[81] The members of this society rose from twenty-three at its founding to seventy-three in 1778. They appear to have been committed Tories; the society was in fact referred to in 1752-53 as the Loyal Society.

Three further societies in honour of Colston were formed in 1749, 1759 and 1769. In order of founding, they were the Dolphin Society, the Grateful Society and the Anchor Society. The Dolphin Society, named after Colston's crest, functioned as a political society for the Tories but also gave annuities to the aged and deserving poor. It began with eighteen members in 1749; thereafter the numbers fluctuated, rising steadily to eighty-three in 1755, falling to between fifty and sixty until 1775, and then rising again. The leading members appear to have been Tories. They included lawyers, doctors, shopkeepers and manufacturers. The Grateful Society was a non-political organisation set up to solicit support from those educated at Colston's Hospital for money to relieve distress among the poor and to pay for the apprenticeship of freemen's sons. The Grateful Society grew much more

rapidly than the Dolphin Society. It extended its original reasons for collecting and distributing funds to include, in 1771, providing assistance to lying-in women married to Bristol freemen and, in the following year, to the wives of non-freemen as well. The membership again consisted of people in middling occupations - linendrapers, distillers, skilled craftsmen, schoolmasters and attorneys. The Anchor Society, established by the Whigs as a counterpart to the Dolphin Society, devoted its attention to lying-in women and poor females, notably orphans, attempting to save them from prostitution by fitting them for domestic service. It gathered subscriptions and held monthly suppers and an annual dinner. Although it was apparently Whig, it insisted on its political neutrality and in 1774 all three candidates for Bristol at the general election attended its dinner. All these societies gathered substantial funds by the time of the American Revolution but not as much as the various county societies that also flourished in Georgian Bristol.[82]

The eighteenth-century Colston societies gathered on his birthday, 13 November, according to the new style calendar of 1752, for dinners, speeches and discussions about raising charitable donations. They collected subscriptions from their members and disbursed the funds to the poor. They were accompanied by a regular display of civic ritual in which the societies paraded through the city, held their service, and distributed money as part of the ceremony. These occasions reached their height in the late Victorian period. In the 1880s and 1890s each of the four parades attracted between sixty and seventy of Bristol's leading civic bourgeoisie. Apparently, these were mainly men born outside the city who capitalised on the mythology of Colston as a self-made entrepreneur to stress their links with Bristol's mercantile past. This enabled them to be accepted as the legitimate heirs of such a history, as people who had continued the philanthropic endeavours epitomised by Colston's bequests.[83] Sermons praising Colston's philanthropy were frequently heard in Bristol's churches during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[84] In one example, the message of Job xxix.16 ('I was a Father to the Poor') illustrated the philanthropist's benevolence.[85] In another address, an audience at Bristol Cathedral heard a sermon on 1 Corinthians.xiii.13 ('Faith, Hope, and Charity') that praised Colston as 'a remarkable example of devotion himself, and a great encourager of it in others.'[86] Later societies were founded in honour of Colston. They included the Colston Fraternal Association and Old Boys' Society, established in 1853 to assist with the university education of boys who had been scholars at Colston's School; and the Bristol University Colston Society, founded in 1899 with funds earmarked for scientific research.[87]

Colston's reputation in the twentieth century has been preserved by variants of these societies. They, together with his architectural presence in Bristol and the streets and institutions named after him, have helped to preserve his memory. But he has also become a figure of controversy in more recent times because of his involvement with the slave trade. Leaders of the

black community in Bristol have condemned Colston as someone who gained much of his fortune from the slave trade but singularly failed to do anything to aid the plight of black slaves. In fact, John Cassidy's statue of 1895 in Colston Avenue, which supplies Colston's vital dates and no other information, was defaced with the slogan 'slave trader' in January 1998.[88] This is not the place to enter into polemics about whether such action was justified. But it does highlight a problem in dealing with Colston's career: namely that the historical record of his activities does not allow us to pin down for certain the sources of his wealth, although his membership of the Royal African Company was indubitably one significant channel; nor do available records tell us much about the personality of this mysterious man.

There are nevertheless two strands of collective memory about Colston's role in Bristol's history that cannot be honestly reconciled. One is the image of a slave trader who left few traces in Bristol of the sources of his wealth, someone who made money out of people who were literally invisible to him, in the sense that he never ventured to Africa and could have had little, if any, direct interaction with Africans, given that the black communities in London and Bristol were comparatively small at this time.[89] The fact that he was linked to slave trading casts a shadow over his philanthropic reputation, but he was following what many other merchants did at a time when slavery was generally condoned in England - indeed, throughout Europe - by churchmen, intellectuals and the educated classes; no less a figure than John Locke, the philosopher of liberty, was a shareholder in the Royal African Company.[90] The other lasting impression of Colston is of a philanthropic bachelor who tried to benefit the poor and the educational institutions of his native city by munificence, under strict rules, in a way that emphasised his Anglican and High Tory beliefs. The celebration of Colston's life by societies named after him and by commemoration of his birthday both signal the respect with which he was remembered in Bristol. Even today, Colston's Boys' School and Colston's Girls' School hold separate services at Bristol Cathedral to celebrate their founder's birthday. On these occasions pupils dress in full uniform, old boys and girls attend, and the Chair of the Governors reads from Colston's Settlements. These services remind us that Colston's endowments, which were continued by his trustees after his death, still benefit charitable organisations today and provide educational support for people in modern Bristol irrespective of their racial background.

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