

# Bristol Archives

## Maps and plans: sources for research

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*Map of Bristol by John Plumley and George C Ashmead, 1828 (ref. [04481](#))*

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**Online catalogue**

[archives.bristol.gov.uk](http://archives.bristol.gov.uk)

**Website**

[www.bristolmuseums.org.uk/bristol-archives](http://www.bristolmuseums.org.uk/bristol-archives)

**Email**

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## Introduction

Bristol Archives holds a large range of maps, plans and similar sources, covering the city, surrounding areas and further afield.

This guide highlights some key collections and individual items, but it is not a comprehensive list. Maps and plans have been created for many purposes and can be found across our collections, from the records of Bristol City Council (and its predecessors) to the archives of private estates and companies.

You can find further material listed on our [online catalogue](#). To search the catalogue thoroughly:

- Try various search terms, such as ‘map’, ‘plan’ and ‘survey’
- Add an asterisk to your search term to find all results that start with those letters - for example, searching for ‘map\*’ will show entries that include the words ‘map’, ‘maps’ and ‘mapping’.

### Consulting original maps and plans

You can consult the documents listed in this guide in our public searchroom. To protect the original versions, we have made facsimiles of the most popular items.

For more information about visiting Bristol Archives, please [visit our website](#).

**Resources which are available online are highlighted in blue boxes like this**

## The Know Your Place website

Historic maps of Bristol are available free of charge via the [Know Your Place website](#), which is supported by Bristol City Council. This digital mapping resource for the south west region also provides access to heritage collections and the council's Historic Environment Record data.

[Bristol's Know Your Place site](#) contains thousands of images from the city's collections, including images from Bristol Archives, the museum collections and the local studies section at Bristol Central Library.

# Maps, plans and surveys of the city of Bristol

## Early city plans

The earliest plan of Bristol appears in the **Mayor's Calendar**, written by the Town Clerk, Robert Ricart (ref. [CC/2/7](#)). Dating from 1479, it is one of the earliest such plans in the country. It depicts the ancient town centre, featuring the High Cross at the junction of High Street and Wine Street and the four town gates.

Two other early plans of Bristol are by **William Smith**, dated 1568 (ref. [9389/5](#)) and **George Hoefnagle** (ref. [282](#)), which appears in the third volume of *Civitates Orbis Terrarum* (1581) by Braun and Hogenberg. These plans look very similar, showing the castle and the Redcliffe and Temple area (to the south of the River Avon) connected to the main part of the town by Bristol Bridge. Hoefnagle is known to have copied from Smith's plan and made some errors and omissions, notably the Chapel of the Assumption on Bristol Bridge.

A map of Gloucestershire by John Speed in 1610 includes a small plan of Bristol and we have a copy available in our searchroom. The earliest detailed plans are those by **James Millerd** from the 1670s (ref. [40875](#) and other copies available). His 1671 plan is the first measured plan of the city. Drawn shortly after the destruction of Bristol castle, it shows the site nearly covered with houses. His 1673 plan is larger, on a scale of 24½ inches to 1 mile, with twenty small views of public buildings and other objects in the margins. Both plans include a key to the churches, town gates and some public buildings.

The next detailed plan was drawn by **John Rocque** in 1742 (ref. [07770/1](#)), on a scale of 26 inches to 1 mile. This plan is orientated west to east, rather than north to south, and it is the second largest plan of the city. A smaller version published in 1750 contains ten views in the margin and three more editions followed.

You can see Rocque's 1750 plan on the **1746-1803 basemap** on [Know Your Place](#).

**Benjamin Donne** (librarian of the old city library in King Street in 1765), compiled maps of the countryside around Bristol and, in 1773, a plan of the city. The plan is set out in one-inch squares, with a reference key to the churches and public buildings showing their location in those squares (similar to a modern A-Z map). Several later editions of the plan were produced (refs. [P.St J/Pl/8/f](#), [08192](#) and others).

A plan of the city engraved by **Richard Benning**, originally published in 1780, is included in William Barrett's *History of Bristol* (ref. [Bk/769](#)). Benning acquired the copper plate of Rocque's 1759 edition, which included many additions, and used it in his work. Barrett's book, published in 1789, was the first written history of the city.

**William Mathews** published a plan of the city in his first guide to Bristol in 1794 (ref. [3811/24](#)), as well as issuing it separately. His plan includes a key to the numbered churches and public buildings. It covers a wider area than earlier city plans, including Hotwells and Clifton. The next edition, published in 1815 (ref. [Dir/8](#)), shows the diversion of the Avon into the New Cut (completed 1809). Later editions also followed.

**Benjamin Donne**, son of Benjamin Donne who produced the 1773 plan, published his own version in 1800 (ref. [11168/65a](#)). It follows his father's style, set out in squares with a reference key to churches and public buildings. Published in eight editions, it extends from Hotwells to the Feeder Canal in St Philip's Marsh, and includes the areas of Clifton and Kingsdown.

Donne the younger also surveyed and produced another plan in 1826 (ref. [20894/70](#)). In the usual Donne style, it contains numerous street and building names and also a small illustration of Clifton and Hotwells. It is a larger plan, extending north to the developing areas of Durdham Down, Redland, Cotham and Montpelier, and south to Cumberland Road and Coronation Road.

## **Ashmead's plans and Board of Health maps**

The largest plan of the city was produced by John Plumley and George Ashmead. Although usually dated as 1828, Plumley started work in 1813 and Ashmead completed it in 1828 after Plumley's death (ref. [04481](#)).

On a scale of 26 inches to 1 mile, it covers the same area as Donne's 1826 plan, though extending further south (including North Street, East Street and St John's church in Bedminster) and east (including Lawrence Hill, Barton Hill and Baptist Mills). Coloured shading shows the area covered by each parish and the map includes reference keys to churches and public buildings. It also contains a small plan of ancient Bristol.

Ashmead issued smaller-scale versions in 1833, 1846, 1871 and 1882 and various copies can be found on our online catalogue.

### **Board of Health maps**

Ashmead was also commissioned to produce maps for the city. As a response to national concern about the spread of diseases such as cholera, the Public Health Act of 1848 established local Boards of Health.

These boards were responsible for ensuring proper drainage and sewage systems, which needed large-scale maps. Some boards had plans drawn up by the Ordnance Survey. Bristol Corporation, as the city's Board of Health, commissioned maps from the local surveyors, Ashmead.

Ashmead produced two series of maps in 1855 and 1874, on a scale of 1:500 (1 inch to 50 feet, or 10.6 feet to 1 mile). These maps cover the smaller old city area (before the city boundaries were extended in 1897) and do not include St George, much of Bedminster and areas north of the Downs.

You can view a black and white version of the **1828 Ashmead plan** as a basemap on [Know Your Place](#) and the Board of Health plans on the **1855 Ashmead** and **1874 Ashmead** basemaps.

## Bristol Blitz maps

We hold several maps documenting the bombing of Bristol during the Second World War. Maps produced by the German army show sites of strategic interest (ref. [38005](#), [BristolPlans/arranged/194](#)). There are maps annotated in Bristol to show bombs dropped on the city (ref. [33779/7](#), [33779/8](#)) and unexploded bombs (ref. [33779/9](#)). We also hold a series of maps used for planning post-war reconstruction (ref. [40267](#)).

A basemap on [Know Your Place](#) shows a **1946 aerial photographic survey** by the RAF. These images, supplied by Historic England, show the extent of bomb damage in Bristol. This can be viewed with the **World War II** information layers, which provide pinpoint data showing where bombs fell in the 1940 Good Friday air raid (from ref. [33779/7](#)) and bomb damage photographs from our collections ([41969/1](#)).

## Maps, plans and surveys of Bristol and surrounding areas

### Enclosure maps

Enclosure was the process by which open fields, common land and waste land were redistributed into individual ownership, with land divided into small fields 'enclosed' by hedgerows.

Enclosure has occurred since medieval times, but early enclosures were usually made by private agreement. Even when there was a written agreement, there was usually no accompanying map.

The term most often describes the Parliamentary enclosures introduced from about 1760 to the early 19th century. As improved agricultural techniques made it possible and profitable to cultivate grazing and waste land, local promoters began to pursue Enclosure Acts in Parliament. These acts allowed promoters to arrange for the property

of all the landowners to be re-allocated and new hedges or walls provided. The agreed changes were recorded in an 'enclosure award', with a map of the new layout.

Although enclosure maps are concerned with land rather than buildings, houses are marked on most maps. These may be the earliest map evidence of the existence of a property. Most enclosure maps date from 1780 to 1820.

Bristol Archives holds a number of enclosure maps, including for Kingswood Common, 1781 (ref. [BristolPlans/arranged/196](#)). The records of the surveyors JP Sturge & Sons include enclosure maps for Westbury-on-Trym and several parishes in Somerset and Gloucestershire (refs. [31965](#), [37959](#)).

To find further records, search our online catalogue for both 'enclosure' and 'inclosure'.

## Tithe maps

The main series of tithe and apportionment records is within the Diocese of Bristol collection held by Bristol Archives (ref. [EP/A/32](#)). There are also copies in the records of several parishes.

Tithes were a tax of one-tenth, originally paid in produce from the land (the tenth pig, tenth sheaf of corn and so on) to maintain the church. The Tithe Commutation Act of 1836 changed this to a money payment based on the price of grain.

To calculate the payments owed, large-scale maps were made of each tithe district (usually a parish). These were accompanied by schedules of apportionment, also known as awards, which named the owner and occupier of each tithe area (plot of land, usually a field) and described it and its state of cultivation.

As tithes were only paid in rural areas, there are no tithe maps for central Bristol parishes, other than St Philip & Jacob, which was still semi-rural in the early 19th century. However, there are tithe maps for parishes beyond the city centre, including Bedminster, Brislington, Clifton, Henbury, Horfield and St George, and for the other parishes in the Archdeaconry of Bristol.

Tithe maps are usually very large. They vary in scale from one to twelve chains to the inch, with most being on the three, four or six-chain scales (26.7, 20 or 13 inches to the mile). They were drawn up from 1836-1854 and many 'second class' tithe maps were based on earlier surveys. Only around 12% of tithe maps, the 'first class' maps, were sufficiently accurate as legal evidence of boundaries and areas.

Tithe maps may not show all land in an area, as they exclude land exempt from tithes, or where tithes were already paid in cash before the Tithe Commutation Act.



You can view Bristol's tithe records on [Know Your Place](#). The **tithe maps** appear as a basemap, while apportionment information can be found by clicking on parishes in the **historic parishes** information layer.

Know Your Place also includes tithe maps for [some surrounding counties](#).

Useful guides available in our searchroom include:

- *An Introduction to tithe maps and apportionments*, in our microfiche ringbinders
- Harry Lane's *Heritage maps*, a series of artist's impressions of the tithe maps, which provide a quick reference and overview of the maps
- A name index of apportionment records, by Bristol & Avon Family History Society.

## Ordnance Survey maps

Various Ordnance Survey maps are listed on our online catalogue and available in our searchroom.

You can access various Ordnance Survey maps from 1844 onwards on [Know Your Place](#).

The [National Library of Scotland's maps site](#) also provides free access to OS maps, with more detail on precise survey and publication dates for each map sheet, plus guides to OS abbreviations and symbols.

## Title deed plans

We hold a large volume of title deeds (including conveyances, mortgages and leases) which sometimes contain a small plan of the property in question. These records are listed on our online catalogue and the entries usually indicate if a plan is included.

For more information, see our separate guide to [building and house history](#).

## Estate and industrial maps of Bristol and surrounding areas

### Corporation of Bristol/Bristol City Council

The Corporation of Bristol (the predecessor of Bristol City Council) owned a number of estates and administered others on behalf of city charities. The estates were situated both in the city and in neighbouring counties and Bristol Archives holds maps and plans,



surveys, rentals, deeds and leases from the 17th century onwards. These can be found by searching our online catalogue.

Relatively few maps of these properties date from before 1750, although there is one volume of maps from 1736-1743 drawn by John Jacob de Wilstar (ref. [04480](#)). He was employed to survey the manors and lands which Bristol Corporation owned or managed.

## Bristol Municipal Charities

Following reform of local government in Bristol in 1936, individual charities previously controlled by Bristol Corporation were amalgamated into the Bristol Municipal Charities (today called Bristol Charities).

This new organisation became responsible for managing properties owned by these funds and administering the income they raised. The charities held property in Bristol and neighbouring counties, as well as estates in Bradwell and Hockley in Essex. Their records therefore include maps and plans, rentals and surveys (ref. [33041](#)).

## Society of Merchant Venturers

Another substantial landowner was the Society of Merchant Venturers. It acquired the manor of Clifton in the late 17th century and also administered estates outside Bristol as a trustee for the Colston charities and St Monica Home of Rest, including the manors of Monkton Stogursey and Locking. Amongst the Society's records are maps and plans, deeds and rentals for these lands (ref. [SMV](#)).

A 1746 survey of Clifton (made by John Jacob de Wilstar for the Society of Merchant Venturers) can be seen on the **1746-1803 basemap** on [Know Your Place](#).

## Church of England

The Church of England was a major landowner and many collections of parish records include deeds dating from the Middle Ages to the 19th century. Parish collections ([see list](#)) may also contain maps and plans of the parish (including copies of enclosure and tithe maps) and of its property holdings.

The Bishop and the Dean and Chapter of Bristol (ref. [DC/E](#)) held property in the city, surrounding counties and as far afield as Great Marlow in Buckinghamshire and Penarth in Glamorganshire. Records date from the 14th century onward and include maps and plans, rentals and leases.

## Family estates

Bristol Archives holds records of several Bristol families who owned country estates.

The largest collection belonged to the **Smyth family of Ashton Court** (ref. [AC](#)) who owned widespread estates in north Somerset and south Gloucestershire. Their estate records include rentals, surveys, valuations and accounts. There are also maps, some of which are accompanied by terriers (recording the type of cultivation and measure of each plot, plus names of tenants) and plans of some properties owned by the estate.

Two plans from this collection appear on the **1746-1803 basemap** on [Know Your Place](#):

- A plan of the parish of St George and Kingswood, produced by William Maule in 1803 (ref. [AC/PL/60a-b](#))
- A plan of lands at Stapleton dated 1767 (ref. [AC/PL/88](#))

The **Southwell family** were also local landowners. They lived at **Kingsweston House**, which they owned for over 150 years. Edward Southwell commissioned Sir John Vanbrugh to design a new house in the early 18th century. We hold drawings produced by his office which include some for Kingsweston House (ref. [33746](#)). There is also a volume of maps of several estates owned by Edward Southwell (grandson of the above), in the parishes of Henbury and Westbury-on-Trym, drawn by Isaac Taylor in 1772 (ref. [26570](#)).

Isaac Taylor's plan of lands at Kingsweston can be seen on the **1746-1803 basemap** on [Know Your Place](#).

## Coal and colliery maps

We hold maps of coalfields and collieries in and around the Bristol area. These include a volume of coloured maps of Bristol coalfields surveyed by William Sanders in 1862 (ref. [44432](#)) and a large collection of late 19th /early 20th century plans (ref. [39398](#)).

Others can be found within collections by searching our online catalogue.

## General building plans

### Building plan books

Under the Public Health Acts of 1848/1849, the Corporation of Bristol became a Local Board of Health. To improve sanitation, anyone proposing a new building (or altering an existing one) had to submit plans to the City Engineer for approval.

The plans, dating from 1851 to 1948, are mounted in very large volumes. They cover residential properties as well as buildings such as cinemas and theatres. They include a ground floor outline showing drainage outlets and sometimes complete plans also showing upper floors and elevations.

The main series covers properties within the old city boundary. There are separate series covering the Barton Regis, Bedminster, Bishopsworth, Horfield, St George and Stapleton local authority areas, before these became part of the city.

The plans are listed in our online catalogue (ref. [Building plan](#)) and you can consult written indexes in our searchroom. Please note that many of these records are very fragile and some may not be available for consultation.

## **Goad insurance plans**

From the late 18th century, commercial plan books were produced to inform fire insurance underwriters about the characteristics of buildings. After around 1880, Charles E Goad's company dominated the market until production stopped in 1970.

The Goad plans cover central urban areas and contain numerous details about buildings, such as dimensions, construction materials, number of floors, types of doors and windows, and how buildings were used. They also give incidental information such as street widths and names, rights of way, property boundaries, boilers, engines and hydrants and other details needed by insurance companies. The scale was usually 1 inch to 40 feet.

The books of plans were leased to insurance companies. Periodically, they would be returned to Goad's to be updated. Often, only certain parts of a plan were reprinted and then pasted onto the original, which obscured earlier details and resulted in maps of multiple dates.

Bristol Archives holds four sets of Goad plans. Each contains basemaps dating from 1887-1896, with later amendments dated c1930-1942 (ref. [40860/6](#)), c1930-1948 (ref. [40904](#)), c1930-1960 (ref. [43885](#)) and c1930-1961 (ref. [35033](#)). These mainly cover central Bristol and areas of Bedminster, St Philips and Avonmouth docks.

You can see some **Goad insurance plans** for 1887-1896 on [Know Your Place](#). These versions come from the British Library and their website has a useful guide to the [symbols used on the maps](#).

# Maps and plans of Bristol City Council/Bristol Corporation properties

## City plan books

This series contains plans of properties owned by Bristol City Council and its predecessors. The books were compiled from 1792 to 1885, with some plans in the first volume dating from 1707. The plans are listed in our online catalogue (ref. [Plan Book](#)).

## Housing, public buildings and school plans

We hold three series of architects' plans for buildings constructed by the Corporation of Bristol in the early to mid-20th century. The 'red label' series covers council housing developments (including some plans of prefabs), the 'yellow label' plans cover public buildings (including toilets, swimming baths, health clinics etc) and the 'green label' plans cover school buildings.

The red and yellow label plans are listed in our catalogue (refs. [Red Label Plans](#), [Yellow Label Plans](#)). Printed catalogues for all three series are available in our searchroom.

A selection of council housing plans from the red label series can be found on the **inter-war housing** and **inter-war housing estate** information layers on [Know Your Place](#).

## Highway adoption notices

These records were created whenever Bristol City Council took on responsibility for a previously private street. They contain a notice and a plan showing its position and numbers/names of buildings. They also include other information needed to look after the street, such as measurements, gradients and locations of sewers and pavements. The records are catalogued by street name and cover roughly 1874-1970 (ref. [40287](#)).

## Aerial photographic surveys

Our online catalogue contains details of aerial photographs in various collections. These include images produced for the City Valuer's Office in the 1920s-1930s (ref. [44819/3](#)) and commissioned by the former Avon County Council in 1991 (ref. [45535/13](#)).

The photos from the City Valuer's Office are available on the **Bristol from above** information layer on Know Your Place

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## Sources in other collections

- Bristol Museum & Art Gallery also has a collection of historic maps and perspectives of the city and surrounding areas, from 1581 onwards. These documents are listed on the museums' online catalogue and can be consulted for research. A selection is also displayed on the first floor balcony at the museum.
  - Bristol Reference Library (at the Central Library) holds a range of Bristol maps. These include (on microfilm) copies of tithe maps for all Gloucestershire parishes and copies of apportionments for parishes in the former county of Avon.
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